

*Ups and
Downs*

Stacy Aumonier

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UPS AND DOWNS

A Collection of Stories by
STACY AUMONIER

With a Foreword by
JOHN GALSWORTHY

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FOREWORD

I write this Foreword with enthusiasm, for these are the assembled tales of a real master of the short story. The word "great" has been so overdone, and the word "genius" is so fly-blown, that I shall use neither. Suffice it to say that Stacy Aumonier is one of the best short-story writers of all time, and that there is certainly no one more readable. And yet he, so untimely gone from us, has not yet attained the full eminence which is his due, and which I believe this volume will secure for him. It is for all and every; it will not date; it is gay reading, yet has the depth of a queer truth and wisdom. In it we find the cream of his literary output, for he was essentially a short-story writer rather than a novelist. I have re-read all the stories in this volume, and have been rejoiced and amazed, afresh, at the ease of the style, the richness and precision of the observation, the poignancy of the irony, and the humane breadth and tolerance of the feeling and philosophy. It is not an exaggeration to say that from first sentence to last my interest has never for a moment flagged. This was a temperament singularly fitted for the recreation of life's little comedies and tragedies.

The first essential in a short-story writer is the power of interesting sentence by sentence. Aumonier had this power in prime degree. You do not have to "get into" his stories. He is especially notable for investing his figures with the breath of life within a few sentences. Take a short story like "The Funny Man's Day"—how wonderfully well we know that funny man not as a type only but as a human being! How remarkably Miss Bracegirdle, in twenty minutes of our time, becomes a permanent acquaintance! How dreadfully intimate we get with the "Two Friends"! That story, by the way, first of Aumonier's I ever read, first, I believe, ever published, was never surpassed by him for power, and sardonic grip on type and circumstance. It is as fine in its way as "Boule de Suif," and that is to say almost as much as can be said in praise of a short tale. There was, indeed, something Gallic in Aumonier's temperament, or at least in his talent—not in his style, which is very English, but in his way of envisaging his subjects. This is not remarkable, considering his name and his face; but in spite of his French look and his Huguenot origin, he was truly English in his humour and attitude to life. French in mind, he was English in heart; for no Frenchman—not even Monsieur André Maurois—could have conceived Alfred Codling—"the man of letters," or "the Great Unimpressible," or "The Grayles," or the waitress in "Overheard," or written "The Match," that perfect piece of English atmosphere.

A short-story writer is always beset by the temptation to be inventive rather than creative or even recreative. This is a temptation to which Aumonier rarely if ever succumbed. He was profoundly in love with life, and impregnated through and through by curiosity about life and its manifestations, whether simple or queer. All types were fish to his net; and he has given us the fruits of his passion for and his curiosity about existence with a deft and always interesting fidelity. And with what sympathy he can hit off character! Take "The Happy Man," or the hero in "Old Iron"—he feels and he can touch us with his feeling. He had faith, too, in the unbelievable, and he could make it real, as the unbelievable so often is in life. His humour is sly and dry and frequent and wholly delightful. And how he puts his finger on weak spots! Yet with what restraint he satirizes!

Stacy Aumonier is never heavy, never boring, never really trivial; interested himself, he keeps us interested. At the back of his tales there is belief in life and a philosophy of life, and of how many short-story writers can that be said? He understands the art of movement in a tale, he has the power of suggestion, he has a sense of line that most of us should envy; he is wholly uninfluenced by the dreary self-consciousness of novelty for novelty's sake. He is not tricky. He follows no fashion and no school. He is always himself. And can't he write? Ah! far better than far more pretentious writers. Nothing escapes his eye, but he describes without affectation or redundancy, and you sense in him a feeling for beauty that is never obtruded. He gets values right, and that is to say nearly everything. The easeful fidelity of his style has militated against his reputation in these somewhat posturing times. But his shade may rest in peace, for in this volume, at least, he will outlive nearly all the writers of his day.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

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Ups and Downs

WHERE WAS WYCH STREET?

In the public bar of the “Wagtail,” in Wapping, four men and a woman were drinking beer and discussing diseases. It was not a pretty subject, and the company was certainly not a handsome one. It was a dark November evening, and the dingy lighting of the bar seemed but to emphasise the bleak exterior. Drifts of fog and damp from without mingled with the smoke of shag. The sanded floor was kicked into a muddy morass not unlike the surface of the pavement. An old lady down the street had died from pneumonia the previous evening, and the event supplied a fruitful topic of conversation. The things that one could get! Everywhere were germs eager to destroy one. At any minute the symptoms might break out. And so—one foregathered in a cheerful spot amidst friends and drank forgetfulness.

Prominent in this little group was Baldwin Meadows, a sallow-faced villain with battered features and prominent cheek-bones, his face cut and scarred by a hundred fights. Ex-seaman, ex-boxer, ex-fish-porter—indeed, to everyone’s knowledge, ex-everything. No one knew how he lived. By his side lurched an enormous coloured man who went by the name of Harry Jones. Grinning above a tankard sat a pimply faced young man who was known as “the Agent.” Silver rings adorned his fingers. He had no other name, and most emphatically no address, but he “arranged things” for people, and appeared to thrive upon it in a scrambling, fugitive manner. The other two people were Mr. and Mrs. Dawes. Mr. Dawes was an entirely negative person, but Mrs. Dawes shone by virtue of a high whining, insistent voice, keyed to within half a note of hysteria.

Then, at one point, the conversation suddenly took a peculiar turn. It came about through Mrs. Dawes mentioning that her aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work in a corset shop in Wych Street. When she said that, “the Agent,” whose right eye appeared to survey the ceiling, whilst his left eye looked over the other side of his tankard, remarked:

“Where was Wych Street, ma?”

“Lord!” exclaimed Mrs. Dawes. “Don’t you know, dearie? You must be a young ’un, you must. Why, when, I was a gal everyone knew Wych Street.

It was just down there where they built the Kingsway, like.”

Baldwin Meadows cleared his throat and said:

“Wych Street used to be a turnin’ runnin’ from Long Acre into Wellington Street.”

“Oh, no, old boy,” chipped in Mr. Dawes, who always treated the ex-man with great deference. “If you’ll excuse me, Wych Street was a narrow lane at the back of the old Globe Theatre, that used to pass by the church.”

“I know what I’m talkin’ about,” growled Meadows.

Mrs. Dawes’s high nasal whine broke in:

“Hi, Mr. Booth, you used ter know yer wye abaht. Where was Wych Street?”

Mr. Booth, the proprietor, was polishing a tap, He looked up. “Wych Street? Yus, of course I knoo Wych Street. Used to go there with some of the boys when I was Covent Garden way. It was at right angles to the Strand, just east of Wellington Street.”

“No, it warn’t. It were alongside the Strand, before yer come to Wellington Street.”

The coloured man took no part in the discussion, one street and one city being alike to him, provided he could obtain the material comforts dear to his heart; but the others carried it on with a certain amount of acerbity.

Before any agreement had been arrived at three other men entered the bar. The quick eye of Meadows recognised them at once as three of what was known at that time as “The Gallows Ring.” Every member of “The Gallows Ring” had done time, but they still carried on a lucrative industry devoted to blackmail, intimidation, shop-lifting, and some of the clumsier recreations. Their leader, Ben Orming, had served seven years for bashing a Chinaman down at Rotherhithe.

“The Gallows Ring,” was not popular in Wapping, for the reason that many of their depredations had been inflicted upon their own class. When Meadows and Harry Jones took it into their heads to do a little wild prancing they took the trouble to go up into the West End. They considered “The Gallows Ring” an ungentlemanly set; nevertheless, they always treated them with a certain external deference—an unpleasant crowd to quarrel with.

Ben Orming ordered beer for the three of them, and they leant against the bar and whispered in sullen accents. Something had evidently miscarried

with the Ring. Mrs. Dawes continued to whine above the general drone of the bar. Suddenly she said:

“Ben, you’re a hot old devil, you are. We was just ’aving a discussion like. Where was Wych Street?”

Ben scowled at her, and she continued:

“Some sez it was one place, some sez it was another. I *know* where it was, ’cors my aunt what died from blood p’ison, after eatin’ tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop . . .”

“Yus,” barked Ben, emphatically. “I know where Wych Street was—it was just sarth of the river, afore yer come to Waterloo Station.”

It was then that the coloured man, who up to that point had taken no part in the discussion, though fit to intervene.

“Nope. You’s all wrong, cap’n. Wych Street were alongside de church, way over where de Strand takes a side line up west.”

Ben turned on him fiercely.

“What the blazes does a blanketty nigger know abaht it? I’ve told yer where Wych Street was.”

“Yus, and I know where it was,” interposed Meadows. “Yer both wrong. Wych Street was a turning running from Long Acre into Wellington Street.”

“I didn’t ask yer what *you* thought,” growled Ben.

“Well, I suppose I’ve a right to an opinion?”

“You always think you know everything, you do.”

“You can just keep yer mouth shut.”

“It ’ud take more’n you to shut it.”

Mr. Booth thought it advisable at this juncture to bawl across the bar.

“Now, gentlemen, no quarrelling—please.”

The affair might have subsided at that point, but for Mrs. Dawes. Her emotions over the death of the old lady in the street had been so stirred that she had been, almost unconsciously, drinking too much gin. She suddenly screamed out:

“Don’t you take no lip from ’im, Mr. Medders. The dirty, thieving devil, ’e always thinks ’e’s goin’ to come it over everyone.”

She stood up threateningly, and one of Ben's supporters gave her a gentle push backward. In three minutes the bar was in a complete state of pandemonium. The three members of "The Gallows Ring" fought two men and a woman, for Mr. Dawes merely stood in a corner and screamed out:

"Don't! Don't!"

Mrs. Dawes stabbed the man, who had pushed her, through the wrist with a hatpin. Meadows and Ben Orming closed on each other and fought savagely with the naked fists. A lucky blow early in the encounter sent Meadows reeling against the wall, with blood streaming down his temple. Then the coloured man hurled a pewter tankard straight at Ben and it hit him on the knuckles. The pain maddened him to a frenzy. His other supporter had immediately got to grips with Harry Jones, and picked up one of the high stools and, seizing an opportunity, brought it down crash on to the coloured man's skull.

The whole affair was a matter of minutes. Mr. Booth was bawling out in the street. A whistle sounded. People were running in all directions.

"Beat it! Beat it, for God's sake!" called the man who had been stabbed through the wrist. His face was very white, and he was obviously about to faint.

Ben and the other man, whose name was Toller, dashed to the door. On the pavement there was a confused scramble. Blows were struck indiscriminately. Two policemen appeared. One was laid *hors de combat* by a kick on the knee-cap from Toller. The two men fled into the darkness, followed by a hue-and-cry. Born and bred in the locality, they took every advantage of their knowledge. They tacked through alleys and raced down dark mews, and clambered over walls. Fortunately for them, the people they passed, who might have tripped them up or aided in the pursuit, merely fled indoors. The people in Wapping are not always on the side of the pursuer. But the police held on. At last Ben and Toller slipped through the door of a house in Aztec Street barely ten yards ahead of their nearest pursuer. Blows rained on the door, but they slipped the bolts, and then fell panting to the floor. When Ben could speak, he said:

"If they cop us, it means swinging."

"Was the nigger done in?"

"I think so. But even if 'e wasn't, there was that other affair the night before last. The game's up."

The ground floor rooms were shuttered and bolted, but they knew that the police would probably force the front door. At the back there was no escape, only a narrow stable yard, where lanterns were already flashing. The roof only extended thirty yards either way, and the police would probably take possession of it. They made a round of the house, which was sketchily furnished. There was a loaf, a small piece of mutton, and a bottle of pickles, and—the most precious possession—three bottles of whisky. Each man drank half a glass of neat whisky, then Ben said: “We’ll be able to keep ’em quiet for a bit, anyway,” and he went and fetched an old twelve-bore gun and a case of cartridges. Toller was opposed to this last desperate resort, but Ben continued to murmur: “It means swinging, anyway.”

And thus began the notorious siege of Aztec Street, It lasted three days and four nights. You may remember that, on forcing a panel of the front door Sub-Inspector Wraith, of the V Division, was shot through the chest. The police then tried other methods. A hose was brought into play, without effect. Two policemen were killed and four wounded. The military was requisitioned. The street was picketed. Snipers occupied windows of the houses opposite. A distinguished member of the Cabinet drove down in a motor-car, and directed operations in a top-hat. It was the introduction of poison gas which was the ultimate cause of the downfall of the citadel. The body of Ben Orming was never found, but that of Toller was discovered near the front door, with a bullet through his heart.

The medical officer to the court pronounced that the man had been dead three days, but whether killed by a chance bullet from a sniper or whether killed deliberately by his fellow-criminal was never revealed. For when the end came Orming had apparently planned a final act of venom. It was known that in the basement a considerable quantity of petrol had been stored. The contents had probably been carefully distributed over the most inflammable materials in the top rooms. The fire broke out, as one witness described it, “almost like an explosion.” Orming must have perished in this. The roof blazed up, and the sparks carried across the yard and started a stack of light timber in the annex of Messrs. Morrel’s piano factory. The factory and two blocks of tenement buildings were burnt to the ground. The estimated cost of the destruction was one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. The casualties amounted to seven killed and fifteen wounded.

At the inquiry held under Justice Pengammon, various odd, interesting facts were revealed. Mr. Lowes-Parlby, the brilliant young K.C., distinguished himself by his searching cross-examination of many witnesses. At one point a certain Mrs. Dawes was put in the box.

“Now,” said Mr. Lowes-Parlby, “I understand that on the evening in question, Mrs. Dawes, you, and the victims, and these other people who have been mentioned, were all seated in the public bar of the ‘Wagtail,’ enjoying its no doubt excellent hospitality and indulging in a friendly discussion. Is that so?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, will you tell his lordship what you were discussing?”

“Diseases, sir.”

“Diseases! And did the argument become acrimonious?”

“Pardon?”

“Was there a serious dispute about diseases?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, what was the subject of the dispute?”

“We was arguin’ as to where Wych Street was, sir.”

“What’s that?” said his lordship.

“The witnesses states, my lord, that they were arguing as to where Wych Street was.”

“Wych Street? Do you mean W-Y-C-H?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You mean the narrow old street that used to run across the site of what is now the Gaiety Theatre?”

Mr. Lowes-Parlby smiled in his most charming manner.

“Yes, my lord, I believe the witness refers to the same street you mention, though, if I may be allowed to qualify your lordship’s description of the locality, may I suggest that it was a little farther east—at the side of the old Globe Theatre, which was adjacent to St. Martin’s in the Strand? That is the street you were all arguing about, isn’t it, Mrs. Dawes?”

“Well, sir, my aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop. I ought to know.”

His lordship ignored the witness. He turned to the counsel rather peevishly:

“Mr. Lowes-Parlby, when I was your age I used to pass through Wych Street every day of my life. I did so for nearly twelve years. I think it hardly necessary for you to contradict me.”

The counsel bowed. It was not his place to dispute with a justice, although that justice be a hopeless old fool; but another eminent K.C., an elderly man with a tawny beard, rose in the body of the court, and said:

“If I may be allowed to interpose, your lordship, I also spent a great deal of my youth passing through Wych Street. I have gone into the matter, comparing past and present ordnance survey maps. If I am not mistaken, the street the witness was referring to began near the hoarding at the entrance to Kingsway and ended at the back of what is now the Aldwych Theatre.”

“Oh, no, Mr. Backer!” exclaimed Lowes-Parlby.

His lordship removed his glasses and snapped out:

“The matter is entirely irrelevant to the case.”

It certainly was, but the brief passage-of-arms left an unpleasant tang of bitterness behind. It was observed that Mr. Lowes-Parlby never again quite got the prehensile grip upon his cross-examination that he had shown in his treatment of the earlier witnesses. The coloured man, Harry Jones, had died in hospital, but Mr. Booth, the proprietor of the “Wagtail,” Baldwin Meadows, Mr. Dawes and the man who was stabbed in the wrist, all gave evidence of a rather nugatory character. Lowes-Parlby could do nothing with it. The findings of this special inquiry do not concern us. It is sufficient to say that the witnesses already mentioned all returned to Wapping. The man who had received the thrust of a hatpin through his wrist did not think it advisable to take any action against Mrs. Dawes. He was pleasantly relieved to find that he was only required as a witness of an abortive discussion.

In a few weeks' time the great Aztec Street siege remained only a romantic memory to the majority of Londoners. To Lowes-Parlby the little dispute with Justice Pengammon rankled unreasonably. It is annoying to be publicly snubbed for making a statement which you know to be absolutely true, and which you have even taken pains to verify. And Lowes-Parlby was a young man accustomed to score. He made a point of looking everything up, of being prepared for an adversary thoroughly. He liked to give the appearance of knowing everything. The brilliant career just ahead of him at

times dazzled him. He was one of the darlings of the gods. Everything came to Lowes-Parlby. His father had distinguished himself at the Bar before him, and had amassed a modest fortune. He was an only son. At Oxford he had carried off every possible degree. He was already being spoken of for very high political honours.

But the most sparkling jewel in the crown of his successes was Lady Adela Charters, the daughter of Lord Vermeer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. She was his *fiancée*, and it was considered the most brilliant match of the season. She was young and almost pretty, and Lord Vermeer was immensely wealthy and one of the most influential men in Great Britain. Such a combination was irresistible. There seemed to be nothing missing in the life of Francis Lowes-Parlby, K.C.

One of the most regular and absorbed spectators at the Aztec Street inquiry was old Stephen Garrit. Stephen Garrit held a unique but quite inconspicuous position in the legal world at that time. He was a friend of judges, a specialist at various abstruse legal rulings, a man of remarkable memory, and yet—an amateur. He had never taken silk, never eaten the requisite dinners, never passed an examination in his life; but the law of evidence was meat and drink to him. He passed his life in the Temple, where he had chambers. Some of the most eminent counsel in the world would take his opinion, or come to him for advice. He was very old, very silent and very absorbed. He attended every meeting of the Aztec Street inquiry, but from beginning to end he never volunteered an opinion.

After the inquiry was over, he went and visited an old friend at the London Survey Office. He spent two mornings examining maps. After that he spent two mornings pottering about the Strand, Kingsway and Aldwych; then he worked out some careful calculations on a ruled chart. He entered the particulars in a little book which he kept for purposes of that kind, and then retired to his chamber to study other matters. But, before doing so, he entered a little apophthegm in another book. It was apparently a book in which he intended to compile a summary of his legal experiences. The sentence ran:

“The basic trouble is that people make statements without sufficient data.”

Old Stephen need not have appeared in this story at all, except for the fact that he was present at the dinner at Lord Vermeer’s, where a rather

deplorable incident occurred. And you must acknowledge that in the circumstances it is useful to have such a valuable and efficient witness.

Lord Vermeer was a competent, forceful man, a little quick-tempered and autocratic. He came from Lancashire, and before entering politics had made an enormous fortune out of borax, artificial manure, and starch.

It was a small dinner-party, with a motive behind it. His principal guest was Mr. Sandeman, the London agent of the Ameer of Bakkan. Lord Vermeer was very anxious to impress Mr. Sandeman and to be very friendly with him: the reasons will appear later. Mr. Sandeman was a self-confessed cosmopolitan. He spoke seven languages and professed to be equally at home in any capital in Europe. London had been his headquarters for over twenty years. Lord Vermeer also invited Mr. Arthur Toombs, a colleague in the Cabinet, his prospective son-in-law, Lowes-Parlby, K.C., James Trolley, a very tame Socialist M.P., and Sir Henry and Lady Breyd, the two latter being invited, not because Sir Henry was of any use, but because Lady Breyd was a pretty and brilliant woman who might amuse his principal guest. The sixth guest was Stephen Garrit.

The dinner was a great success. When the succession of courses eventually came to a stop, and the ladies had retired, Lord Vermeer conducted his male guests into another room for a ten minutes' smoke before rejoining them. It was then that the unfortunate incident occurred. There was no love lost between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman. It is difficult to ascribe the real reason of their mutual animosity, but on the several occasions when they had met there had invariably passed a certain sardonic by-play. They were both clever, both comparatively young, each a little suspect and jealous of the other; moreover, it was said in some quarters that Mr. Sandeman had had intentions himself with regard to Lord Vermeer's daughter, that he had been on the point of a proposal when Lowes-Parlby had butted in and forestalled him.

Mr. Sandeman had dined well, and he was in the mood to dazzle with a display of his varied knowledge and experiences. The conversation drifted from a discussion of the rival claims of great cities to the slow, inevitable removal of old landmarks. There had been a slightly acrimonious disagreement between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman as to the claims of Budapest and Lisbon, and Mr. Sandeman had scored because he extracted from his rival a confession that, though he had spent two months in Budapest, he had only spent two days in Lisbon. Mr. Sandeman had lived for four years in either city. Lowes-Parlby changed the subject abruptly.

“Talking of landmarks,” he said, “we had a queer point arise in that Aztec Street Inquiry. The original dispute arose owing to a discussion between a crowd of people in a pub, as to where Wych Street was.”

“I remember,” said Lord Vermeer. “A perfectly absurd discussion. Why, I should have thought that any man over forty would remember exactly where it was.”

“Where would you say it was, sir?” asked Lowes-Parlby.

“Why, to be sure, it ran from the corner of Chancery Lane and ended at the second turning after the Law Courts, going west.”

Lowes-Parlby was about to reply, when Mr. Sandeman cleared his throat and said, in his supercilious, oily voice:

“Excuse me, my lord. I know my Paris, and Vienna, and Lisbon, every brick and stone, but I look upon London as my home. I know my London even better. I have a perfectly clear recollection of Wych Street. When I was a student I used to visit there to buy books. It ran parallel to New Oxford Street on the south side, just between it and Lincoln’s Inn Fields.”

There was something about this assertion that infuriated Lowes-Parlby. In the first place, it was so hopelessly wrong and so insufferably asserted. In the second place, he was already smarting under the indignity of being shown up about Lisbon. And then there suddenly flashed through his mind the wretched incident when he had been publicly snubbed by Justice Pengammon about the very same point; and he knew that he was right each time. Damn Wych Street! He turned on Mr. Sandeman.

“Oh, nonsense! You may know something about these—eastern cities; you certainly know nothing about London if you make a statement like that. Wych Street was a little farther east of what is now the Gaiety Theatre. It used to run by the side of the old Globe Theatre, parallel to the Strand.”

The dark moustache of Mr. Sandeman shot upward, revealing a narrow line of yellow teeth. He uttered a sound that was a mingling of contempt and derision; then he drawled out:

“Really? How wonderful—to have such comprehensive knowledge!”

He laughed, and his small eyes fixed his rival. Lowes-Parlby flushed a deep red. He gulped down half a glass of port and muttered just above a whisper: “Damned impudence!” Then, in the rudest manner he could display, he turned his back deliberately on Sandeman and walked out of the room.

In the company of Adela he tried to forget the little contretemps. The whole thing was so absurd—so utterly undignified. As though *he* didn't know! It was the little accumulation of pinpricks all arising out of that one argument. The result had suddenly goaded him to—well, being rude, to say the least of it. It wasn't that Sandeman mattered. To the devil with Sandeman! But what would his future father-in-law think? He had never before given way to any show of ill-temper before him. He forced himself into a mood of rather fatuous jocularly. Adela was at her best in those moods. They would have lots of fun together in the days to come. Her almost pretty, not too clever, face was dimpled with kittenish glee. Life was a tremendous rag to her. They were expecting Toccata, the famous opera singer. She had been engaged at a very high fee to come on from Covent Garden. Mr. Sandeman was very fond of music.

Adela was laughing and discussing which was the most honourable position for the great Sandeman to occupy. There came to Lowes-Parlby a sudden abrupt misgiving. What sort of wife would this be to him when they were not just fooling? He immediately dismissed the curious, furtive little stab of doubt. The splendid proportions of the room calmed his senses. A huge bowl of dark red roses quickened his perceptions. His career. . . . The door opened. But it was not La Toccata. It was one of the household flunkies. Lowes-Parlby turned again to his inamorata.

“Excuse me, sir. His lordship says will you kindly go and see him in the library?”

Lowes-Parlby regarded the messenger, and his heart beat quickly. An uncontrollable presage of evil racked his nerve centres. Something had gone wrong; and yet the whole thing was so absurd, trivial. In a crisis—well, he could always apologise. He smiled confidently at Adela, and said:

“Why, of course; with pleasure. Please excuse me, dear.”

He followed the impressive servant out of the room. His foot had barely touched the carpet of the library when he realised that his worst apprehensions were to be plumbed to the depths. For a moment he thought Lord Vermeer was alone, then he observed old Stephen Garrit, lying in an easy chair in the corner like a piece of crumpled parchment. Lord Vermeer did not beat about the bush. When the door was closed, he bawled out, savagely:

“What the devil have you done?”

“Excuse me, sir. I’m afraid I don’t understand. Is it Sandeman . . .?”

“Sandeman has gone.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“Sorry! By God, I should think you might be sorry! You insulted him. My prospective son-in-law insulted him in my own house!”

“I’m awfully sorry. I didn’t realise . . .”

“Realise! Sit down, and don’t assume for one moment that you continue to be my prospective son-in-law. Your insult was a most intolerable piece of effrontery, not only to him, but to me.”

“But I . . .”

“Listen to me. Do you know that the Government were on the verge of concluding a most far-reaching treaty with that man? Do you know that the position was just touch-and-go? The concessions we were prepared to make would have cost the State thirty million pounds, and it would have been cheap. Do you hear that? It would have been cheap! Bakkan is one of the most vulnerable outposts of the Empire. It is a terrible danger zone. If certain Powers can usurp our authority—and, mark you, the whole blamed place is already riddled with this new pernicious doctrine—you know what I mean—before we know where we are the whole East will be in a blaze. India! My God! This contract we were negotiating would have countered this outward thrust. And you, you blockhead, you come here and insult the man upon whose word the whole thing depends.”

“I really can’t see, sir, how I should know all this.”

“You can’t see it! But, you fool, you seemed to go out of your way. You insulted him about the merest quibble—in my house!”

“He said he knew where Wych Street was. He was quite wrong. I corrected him.”

“Wych Street! Wych Street be damned! If he said Wych Street was in the moon, you should have agreed with him. There was no call to act in the way you did. And you—you think of going into politics!”

The somewhat cynical inference of this remark went unnoticed. Lowes-Parlby was too unnerved. He mumbled:

“I’m very sorry.”

“I don’t want your sorrow. I want something more practical.”

“What’s that, sir?”

“You will drive straight to Mr. Sandeman, find him, and apologise. Tell him you find that he was right about Wych Street after all. If you can’t find him to-night, you must find him to-morrow morning. I give you till midday to-morrow. If by that time you have not offered a handsome apology to Mr. Sandeman, you do not enter this house again, you do not see my daughter again. Moreover, all the power I possess will be devoted to hounding you out of that profession you have dishonoured. Now you can go.”

Dazed and shaken, Lowes-Parlby drove back to his flat at Knightsbridge. Before acting he must have time to think. Lord Vermeer had given him till to-morrow midday. Any apologising that was done should be done after a night’s reflection. The fundamental purposes of his being were to be tested. He knew that. He was at a great crossing. Some deep instinct within him was grossly outraged. Is it that a point comes when success demands that a man shall sell his soul? It was all so absurdly trivial—a mere argument about the position of a street that had ceased to exist. As Lord Vermeer said, what did it matter about Wych Street?

Of course he should apologise. It would hurt horribly to do so, but would a man sacrifice everything on account of some fooling argument about a street?

In his own rooms, Lowes-Parlby put on a dressing-gown, and, lighting a pipe, he sat before the fire. He would have given anything for companionship at such a moment—the right companionship. How lovely it would be to have—a woman, just the right woman, to talk this all over with; someone who understood and sympathised. A sudden vision came to him of Adela’s face grinning about the prospective visit of La Toccata, and again the low voice of misgiving whispered in his ears. Would Adela be—just the right woman? In very truth, did he really love Adela? Or was it all—a rag? Was life a rag—a game played by lawyers, politicians, and people?

The fire burned low, but still he continued to sit thinking, his mind principally occupied with the dazzling visions of the future. It was past midnight when he suddenly muttered a low “Damn!” and walked to the bureau. He took up a pen and wrote:

“DEAR MR. SANDEMAN,

“I must apologise for acting so rudely to you last night. It was quite unpardonable of me, especially as I since find, on going into

the matter, that you were quite right about the position of Wych Street. I can't think how I made the mistake. Please forgive me.

Yours cordially,
"FRANCIS LOWES-PARLBY."

Having written this, he sighed and went to bed. One might have imagined at that point that the matter was finished. But there are certain little greedy demons of conscience that require a lot of stilling, and they kept Lowes-Parlby awake more than half the night. He kept on repeating to himself, "It's all positively absurd!" But the little greedy demons pranced around the bed, and they began to group things into two definite issues. On the one side, the great appearances; on the other, something at the back of it all, something deep, fundamental, something that could only be expressed by one word—truth. If he had *really* loved Adela—if he weren't so absolutely certain that Sandeman was wrong and he was right—why should he have to say that Wych Street was where it wasn't?

"Isn't there, after all," said one of the little demons, "something which makes for greater happiness than success? Confess this, and we'll let you sleep."

Perhaps that is one of the most potent weapons the little demons possess. However full our lives may be, we ever long for moments of tranquillity. And conscience holds before our eyes the mirror of an ultimate tranquillity. Lowes-Parlby was certainly not himself. The gay, debonair, and brilliant egoist was tortured, and tortured almost beyond control; and it had all apparently arisen through the ridiculous discussion about a street. At a quarter past three in the morning he arose from his bed with a groan, and, going into the other room, he tore the letter to Mr. Sandeman to pieces.

Three weeks later old Stephen Garrit was lunching with the Lord Chief Justice. They were old friends, and they never found it incumbent to be very conversational. The lunch was an excellent but frugal meal. They both ate slowly and thoughtfully, and their drink was water. It was not till they reached the dessert stage that his lordship indulged in any very informative comment, and then he recounted to Stephen the details of a recent case in which he considered that the presiding judge, by an unprecedented paralogy, misinterpreted the Law of Evidence. Stephen listened with absorbed attention. He took two cob-nuts from the silver dish, and turned them over

meditatively, without cracking them. When his lordship had completely stated his opinion and peeled a pear, Stephen mumbled:

“I have been impressed, very impressed indeed. Even in my own field of—limited observation—the opinion of an outsider, you may say—so often it happens—the trouble caused by an affirmation without sufficiently established data. I have seen lives lost, ruin brought about, endless suffering. Only last week, a young man—a brilliant career—almost shattered. People make statements without——”

He put the nuts back on the dish and then, in an apparently irrelevant manner, he said abruptly:

“Do you remember Wych Street, my lord?”

The Lord Chief Justice grunted.

“Wych Street! Of course I do.”

“Where would you say it was, my lord?”

“Why, here, of course.”

His lordship took a pencil from his pocket and sketched a plan on the tablecloth.

“It used to run from there to here.”

Stephen adjusted his glasses and carefully examined the plan. He took a long time to do this, and when he had finished his hand instinctively went toward a breast pocket where he kept a notebook with little squared pages. Then he stopped and sighed. After all, why argue with the law? The law was like that—an excellent thing, not infallible, of course (even the plan of the Lord Chief Justice was a quarter of a mile out), but still an excellent, a wonderful thing. He examined the bony knuckles of his hands and yawned slightly.

“Do you remember it?” said the Lord Chief Justice.

Stephen nodded sagely, and his voice seemed to come from a long way off:

“Yes, I remember it, my lord. It was a melancholy little street.”

ONE SUNDAY MORNING

The iron fingers of habit probed his consciousness into the realisation that it was seven-thirty, the hour to rise. He sighed as he pushed his way to the surface through the pleasant obscurity of tangled dreams. And then, oh, joy! his conscious brain registered the abrupt reflection that it was Sunday. Oh, happy thought. Oh, glorious and soporific reflection! He sunk back again, like a deep sea monster plunging into the dark waters of its natural environment. There passed a long untroubled passage of time, in which his subconscious mind dallied with ecstatic emotions. Then slowly and reluctantly he blinked once more into the light of day and knowingness. This re-entry was accompanied by the pleasant sound of running water. His wife was in the bathroom, already getting up. Her activity and the sound of her ablutions added a piquance to the luxury of his own state. Oh, Sunday, glorious and inactive day!

His mind became busy with the anticipations of his own inactivity.

Breakfast in bed! When he won the Calcutta Sweepstake he would always have breakfast in bed. There was something irresistibly luxurious about sitting up snugly in the warmed bed, eating toast and bacon and drinking hot tea that someone else, pottering about in the cold, had had to prepare. And when one had had breakfast one was a man, fortified for anything, even to the extent of getting up.

His wife came back into the bedroom, wearing—oh, those funny things that women wear underneath deceptive frocks. He had been married for sixteen years and the vision of his wife in these habiliments did not produce in him any great manifestation of interest. He realised that he wanted his tea, and his interests were more nearly concerned with the estimate of how long it would take her to finish dressing and go downstairs and make it. And after breakfast—oh, that first cigarette and the indolent stimulus of reading the Sunday newspaper from cover to cover. His wife was chatting away about the cook-general, who was ill, and he boomed out a lethargic yes or no according to the decision which he believed that she expected. Oh, luxurious and delicious indifference!

She bustled away at last, and he listened entranced to the distant sound of rattling plates and teacups. A pity that Jenny had to get the breakfast herself, but there! she didn't have to go to the city every day in the week, and besides—it was the woman's sphere. His conscience was serene and

satisfied, his senses aroused almost to exultation by the sudden and insidious smell of frying bacon.

When she brought the tray he roused himself valiantly to say the gracious thing, for he realised that the situation was a little dangerous. His wife was not in too good a temper over this affair of the fool of a cook. If he was not careful, she would want him to do something, chop wood or bring up coals, some angular and disturbing abrasion upon the placidity of his natural rights. However, she left the breakfast tray without any such disquieting threats.

He stared at the tray, when she had gone, as a cat may look at a mouse which she has cornered, realising that the great charm of the situation lies in the fact that there is no hurry. At last he poured himself out a large cup of tea, and drunk it in gulps. He then got busy on the bacon and the toast. He ate up all the bacon carefully and thoughtfully, cleaning up the liquid fat with a piece of bread. He began to feel good. He drank more tea, and ate slice after slice of buttered toast, piled up with marmalade. At last he sank back on the pillow replete. Then he reached out and took his cigarette-case out of his coat pocket. He lighted a cigarette and opened the Sunday newspaper. Then indeed did he reach the culmination of all his satisfactions. Strange how much more interesting and readable a Sunday newspaper is than a daily paper. A daily paper is all rush and headlines, designed entirely for the strap-hanger. The Sunday paper was conceived in the interest of breakfasters in bed. It is all slow-going and familiar. You know just where to look for everything, and you almost know what will be printed there. He first of all read carefully the results of all the previous day's football. Queer that he should do so, for he had not played football for twenty-five years, and then very indifferently. But he had sneaking affections for certain clubs and he looked eagerly to see how they were faring. Then he read the General news. Everything seemed interesting; even political speeches were not too dull, but divorce and criminal cases were thrilling. He took no interest in literature, drama or music, but sayings of the week, police court news, foreign intelligence, even Court chat, absorbed him. He read the advertisements and then the football news again, knocking the ash off his cigarette into the teacup. Sometimes his arms would get cold holding the paper, and he would put it down and tuck them under him. He would stare around the room, and glow with proprietorial delight. Then he would pick up the paper and start all over again. His splendid reveries were eventually disturbed by the voice of his wife calling from below:

“Jim, are you going to get up to-day or to-morrow?”

Dear, oh dear! Disturbing and alarming creatures, women. No sense of repose, no appreciation of real tranquillity. However, it must be getting late, and the morning constitutional to give one an appetite for lunch must not be disregarded. He devoted another ten minutes to an inert contemplation of the function of rising and dressing, and then rolled out of bed. He went into the bathroom, and lighted the geyser for his weekly bath. When the water was hot enough he drew off some for shaving, and returned to the bedroom for his new packet of safety razors. He caught sight of himself in the long mirror which his wife used. The reflection was so familiar that it produced in him no emotion whatever. He felt no misgiving about the puffy modelling of the face, the dishevelled strands of disappearing hair, the taut line made by the cord of his dressing-gown where it met around his middle. He was just himself, getting up. Besides, no man looks his best first thing in the morning.

When he returned to the bathroom he was in gay spirits. During the operation of shaving he made curious volcanic noises meant to represent the sound of singing. Running water always affected him like that. The only disquieting element in this joyous affair was the fact that steam from the bath kept on clouding the mirror. He kept on rubbing it with a towel, shaving a little bit, then rubbing again, to the accompaniment of many damns and confounds. When that was over he pondered for some moments on the question of whether he should clean his teeth first, or have his bath. As the room was beginning to get full of steam, he decided on the latter course. He got in and let himself down slowly, for the water was very hot, and though his legs could stand it, other portions of his anatomy were more sensitive. He let in some cold water and settled down with a plomp. He soaped himself, and rubbed himself, and lay on his back, splashing gently. Glorious and delightful sensation. If he had time he would like to have a hot bath every day, but how could you expect a fellow to when he had to be in the city every day at nine-thirty? He got out of the bath, hot and pink and shiny. He dried himself, and cleaned his teeth. There! all the serious side of getting up was accomplished. During the performance of dressing he smoked another cigarette. He dressed very slowly, and deliberately, putting on a clean shirt, vest, socks and collar. Golly! he felt good. He puffed out his chest, opened the window, and brushed his hair. He was rather pleased with his general appearance of respectability.

Now came the dangerous moment. He had to go downstairs. Would he be able to escape without being ordered to perform some unpleasant task by his wife? He went down, humming soulfully. In the sitting-room the fire was burning brightly, but Jennie was not there. He could hear her bustling about

in the kitchen, already preparing the solemn rites affecting the Sunday joint . . . no insignificant ritual. He wandered about the room, touching things, admiring their arrangement. He picked up two letters, which had come by the last post the previous night, and read them again. One was from his wife's sister at Ramsgate, full of details about the illness of her husband. The other was from a gentleman offering to lend him any sum of money from £5 to £10,000 on note of hand alone, without security. He tried to visualise £10,000, what he could do with it, the places he could visit, the house he could rent on the top of Hampstead Heath, a few dinners at the Savoy perhaps, a month in Paris (he had never been abroad). Then he tore the letter up and went into the kitchen.

“Er—anything I can do, my dear?”

“No, except to get out of the way.”

She was obviously on edge. Women were like that, especially first thing in the morning . . . curious creatures. He picked his teeth with a broken match, which happened to be conveniently in a waistcoat pocket. Anyway, he had done his duty. He had faced the music.

“Well, I'll just go for a stroll round,” he murmured ingratiatingly. He had escaped! A pallid sun was trying to penetrate a nebulous bank of clouds. The air was fresh and stimulating. A muffin man came along, ringing his bell. He passed two anaemic women carrying prayer books. At the corner of the road was a man with a impromptu kiosk of newspapers. He hesitated as to whether he should buy another newspaper. His wife wouldn't approve. She would say it was extravagant. Well, he could read on a seat on the top of the heath, and leave it there. But still—he resisted the temptation and walked on. The streets had their definitely Sunday look. You could tell it was Sunday in a glance . . . milk, prayer books, newspapers, muffins, wonderful! Dear England! A crowd of hatless young men on bicycles came racing along the Finchley Road, swarms of them, like gnats, and in the middle a woman riding behind a man on a tandem. They were all laughing and shouting with rather common voices . . . enjoying themselves though, off to the country for the day.

“The woman looks like the queen gnat,” he reflected. “They are pursuing her. The race to the swift, the battle to the strong.” He was pleased with the luminance of this reflection. A boy asked him for a cigarette picture. He shook his head and passed on. Then he wondered whether . . . well, he had several in his pocket, but somehow he felt it would look silly to be giving cigarette pictures to a boy in the street. He didn't like that kind of thing. It

made him conspicuous. Passers-by might look at him and say: “Look at that fat man giving a boy cigarette pictures.” And they might laugh. It was all very curious, foolish perhaps, but there it was.

He knew he was going to walk up to the top of the heath, and along the Spaniards’ Road, but he never liked to make up his mind to. He walked there by instalments, sometimes almost deciding to turn back, but he invariably got there in the end. Besides, what else could he do? Dinner was not till half-past one. He couldn’t go home, and there was nowhere to sit down. Going up the hill he was conscious of the disturbance of his pulmonary organs . . . heart not too good, either, you know. The day would come when this would be too much for him. He enjoyed it when he got there. Oh, yes, this was a joyous place . . . heartening. He liked the noise, and bustle, and sense of space and light. Nearly every Sunday for twenty years he had walked up here. It was where the Cockney came to peep out of London, and regard the great world, the unexplored vista of his possessions. He was a little shy of it. He didn’t look at the view much, but he liked to feel it was there. He preferred to watch boys sailing miniature yachts on the round pond, or to listen to a Socialist lecturer being good-humouredly heckled by a crowd. Every Sunday he had pondered an identical problem—why these public lecturers always choose the very noisiest spot on the whole heath, near the pond, amidst the yelping of dogs, the tooting of motor horns, the back-firing of motor bikes, and the din of a Salvation Army band. But there it was! This was England, perhaps the most English thing in all England. There were the young men in plus fours, without hats, old men with their dogs, red-cheeked women riding astride brown mares . . . cars, bicycles, horses, dogs, even yachts! There were the fat policemen in couples, talking lazily, their mission being apparently to see that the fiery gentleman by the pond was allowed free speech. . . . There were boys with kites, and boys with scooters, boys with nursemaids. Oh, a man’s place this. Many more men than women. Did not the predominance signify something vital, something pertinent to the core of English life—the Sunday joint? It was only the women with cooks who were allowed to adorn this gay company. And even then—could a cook be trusted? Wasn’t the wife’s or mother’s true place basting the sirloin, or regulating the gas-stove so that the roast shoulder should be done to a turn?

These reflections caused him to focus his attention upon the personal equation. What was to be the Sunday joint to-day? He was already beginning to feel those first delightful pangs of hunger, the just reward of exercise in fresh air. The Sunday joint? Why, yes, of course, he had heard Jenny say that she had ordered a loin of pork. Pork! delicious and seductive

word. He licked his lips, and visualised the set board. It was not entirely a misfortune that the cook was ill, for Jenny was a much better cook. The pork would be done to a turn, with its beautiful brown encasement of crackling. There would be applesauce, Brussels sprouts, and probably lovely brown potatoes. He would carve. It was only right of course that the master of the house—the breadwinner—should control this ceremonial. There were little snippy brown bits—and that little bit of kidney underneath—that—well, one didn't give to a servant for instance.

He passed the orator once more, and overhead this remark:

“The day is coming when these blood-suckers will be forced to disgorge. They will be made to stew in their own juice. Look at Russia!”

Nobody appeared to be looking at Russia. With their pipes in the corner of their mouths they were looking stolidly at the speaker, or at the boys and their yachts. Dogs were barking furiously, and motor horns drowned any further declamation till he was out of hearing. The two fat policemen were talking about horse-racing. Oh, wonderful and imperishable country!

He had heard men talk in that strain before—but only in the city or in stuffy tea-shops. They spoke with fear in their hearts. Something was always going to happen. They didn't quite know what, but it was always something awful, and the country was just on the eve of it. But up here, amidst these dogs and bikes and horses you knew that nothing could ever happen to England. Everybody just went on doing things, making the best of things. The air was sweet and good. There was the Sunday joint in the offing, and the Cup Final next Sunday to be discussed.

He looked at his watch and proceeded to walk slowly homewards. It cannot be said that he thought about anything very definite on the way back, but his mind was pleasantly attacked by fragmentary thoughts, half-fledged ambitions to make more money, anticipations of a masonic dinner the following week, the dim vision of an old romance with a girl in a tobacconist shop at Barnes. But at the back of his mind there loomed the solid assurance of the one thing that mattered—pork! He played with the vision, not openly but secretly. After the pork there would be pudding. He didn't care much about pudding, but there was a very good old gorgonzola to follow, and then a glass of port. After dinner a cigar, and then the Sunday newspaper again until he fell into that delightful doze in front of the fire. Oh, blessed day!

His timing was superb. He arrived at “The Dog and Dolphin” at exactly one o'clock, in accordance with a time-honoured tradition—the gin and

bitters to put the edge on one's appetite for dinner. The bar was filled with the usual Sunday morning crowd, some who had risen just in time for the bar to open, other stalwarts like himself, who had earned their appetiser through walking.

He was just ordering a gin and bitters when a voice said:

"Hullo, old boy, have this with me."

He turned and beheld Beeswax, a fellow city man. They had known each other for fifteen years, meeting nearly every day, but neither had ever visited the other's house. He said:

"No, go on, you have it with me."

They went through the usual formula of arguing who should pay for the first drink, both knowing quite well that the other would inevitably have to stand another drink in return. They stood each other two drinks, making four in all. In the meantime they discussed old so-and-so and old thingummy, trade, dogs, tobacco and females. Then he looked at his watch again. Just five-and-twenty past—perfect!

"Well, old boy, I must be off or I shall get into trouble with the missus."

He walked quite briskly up the street, feeling good. Life wasn't such a bad business to a normal man, if he—looked after himself, and on the bright side of things. Pork, eh?

He knocked his pipe out against the parapet in the front garden, walked up the steps, and let himself in. He hung up his coat and hat, and was about to enter the sitting-room, when he became abruptly sensitive to disaster. It began in the realisation that there was no smell of roasting pork, no smell of anything cooking. He felt angry. Fate was going to cheat him in some way or other. He did not have long to wait. His wife came screaming down the stairs, her face deadly white, her hair awry.

"Jim! Jim!" she shouted, "rush to the corner quick. Fetch a policeman!"

"What?" he said.

"Fetch a policeman!"

"What for?"

"Moyna. She's dead. I went upstairs an hour ago and found her lying fully dressed on the floor. The gas-stove was turned on. She looked awful, but she wasn't quite dead. I dragged her into our room, and fetched a doctor.

He did what he could, but she died. She's lying dead on our bed. The doctor's up there now."

"Yes, but——"

"Don't argue. Fetch a policeman. The doctor says we must."

He fumbled his way out into the hall, and put on his hat and coat again. He knew it was no good arguing with his wife when she was like that. Damn! How wretched and disturbing and—inconvenient. He walked slowly up the street. What a disgusting and unpleasant job—fetching a policeman—beastly! He found a ripe specimen at the corner, staring at nothing. He explained the situation apologetically to the officer. The latter turned the matter over in his mind and made a noise that sounded like: "Huh-huh."

Then the two strolled back to the house at the law's pace, and talked about the weather. He found his wife in the sitting-room, sobbing and carrying on, and the doctor was there too, and another woman from next door.

"I believe these women rather enjoy this kind of thing," he reflected, the fires of hunger and anger burning within him. They all went upstairs and left him to ruminate. What a confounded and disgusting nuisance! Anyway, what did Jenny want to carry on like that for about a servant. Who was she? She hadn't been there long, about two weeks. She was an Irish girl, not bad-looking in that dark way. He seemed to remember that Jenny said she was married or something. Some man had been cruel to her, cruel and callous, she had said. She used to cry. Confound it! Why was it so difficult to get a good servant? But there it was. Jenny would carry on and be hysterical all the afternoon. There would be no dinner. Perhaps a snack of cheese or something on the quiet. Women were absurd, impossible. You couldn't cope with them. They had no reasoning power, no logic, no sense of fatality, no repose. It was enough to make one boil . . . pork, too!

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

Ned Picklekin was a stolid chunk of a young man, fair, blue-eyed, with his skin beaten to a uniform tint of warm red by the sun and wind. For he was the postman at the village at Ashalton. Except for two hours in the little sorting-office, he spent the whole day on his bicycle, invariably accompanied by his Irish terrier, Toffee. Toffee was as well-known on the countryside as Ned himself. He took the business of delivering letters as seriously as his master. He trotted behind the bicycle with his tongue out, and waited panting outside the gates of gardens while the important government business was transacted. He never barked, and had no time for fighting common, unofficial dogs. When the letters were delivered, his master would return to his bicycle, and say: "Coom ahn, boy!" and Toffee would immediately jump up, and fall into line. They were great companions.

Ned lived with his mother, and also he walked out with a young lady. Her name was Ettie Skinner, and she was one of the three daughters of old Charlie Skinner, the corn-merchant. Charlie Skinner had a little establishment in the station-yard. He was a widower, and he and his three daughters lived in a cottage in Neap's Lane. It was very seldom necessary to deliver letters at the Skinners' cottage, but every morning Ned had to pass up Neap's Lane, and so, when he arrived at the cottage, he dismounted, and rang his bicycle bell. The signal was understood by Ettie, who immediately ran out to the gate, and a conversation somewhat on this pattern usually took place:

"Hulloa!"

"Hulloa!"

"All right?"

"Ay."

"Busy?"

"Ay. Mendin' some old cla'es."

"Oo-ay!"

"Looks like mebbe a shower."

"Mebbe."

"Comin' along to-night?"

“Ay, if it doan’t rain.”

“Well, so long!”

“So long, Ned.”

In the evenings the conversation followed a very similar course. They waddled along the lanes side by side, and occasionally gave each other a punch. Ned smoked his pipe all the time, and Toffee was an unembarrassed cicerone. He was a little jealous of this unnecessary female, but he behaved with a resigned acquiescence. His master could do no wrong. His master was a god, a being apart from all others.

It cannot be said that Ned was a romantic lover. He was solemn, direct, imperturbable. He was a Saxon of Saxons, matter-of-fact, incorruptible, unimaginative, strong-willed, conscientious, not very ambitious, and suspicious of the unusual and the unknown. When the war broke out, he said:

“Ay, but this is a bad business!”

And then he thought about it for a month. At the end of that time he made up his mind to join. He rode up Neap’s Lane one morning and rang his bell. When Ettie appeared the usual conversation underwent a slight variant:

“Hulloa!”

“Hulloa!”

“All right?”

“Ay.”

“Doin’ much?”

“Oo—mendin’ pa’s nightgown.”

“Oh! I be goin’ to jine up.”

“Oo-oh! Be ’ee?”

“Ay.”

“When be goin’?”

“Monday with Dick Thursby and Len Cotton. An’ I think young Walters, and Binnie Short mebbe.”

“Oh, I say!”

“Ay. Comin’ along to-night?”

“Ay, if it doan’t rain.”

“Well, see you then.”

“So long, Ned.”

On the following Monday Ned said good-bye to his mother, and sweetheart, and to Toffee, and he and the other four boys walked over to the recruiting-office at Carchester. They were drafted into the same unit, and sent up to Yorkshire to train. (Yorkshire being one hundred and fifty miles away was presumably the most convenient and suitable spot).

They spent five months there, and then Len Cotton was transferred to the machine Gun Corps, and the other four were placed in an infantry regiment and sent out to India. They did get an opportunity of returning to Ashalton, but the night before they left Ned wrote to his mother:

“Dear Mother, I think we are off to-morrow. They don’t tell us where we are going but they seem to think it’s India because of the Eastern kit served out and so on. Everything all right, the grub is fine. Young Walters has gone sick with a bile on his neck. Hope you are all right. See Toffee don’t get into Mr. Mears yard for this is about the time he puts down that poison for the rats. Everything all O.K. love from Ned.”

He wrote a very similar letter to Ettie, only leaving out the instructions about Toffee, and adding, “don’t get overdoing it now the warm weathers on.”

They touched at Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria, and Aden. At all these places he merely sent the cryptic postcard. He did not write a letter again until he had been three weeks up in the hills in India. As a matter of fact it had been a terribly rough passage nearly all the way, especially in the Mediterranean, and nearly all the boys had been seasick most of the time. Ned had been specially bad and in the Red Sea had developed a slight fever. In India he had been sent to a rest-camp up in the hills. He wrote:

“Dear mother, everything all right. The grub is fine. I went a bit sick coming out but nothing. Quite all O.K. now. This is a funny place. The people would make you laugh to look at. We beat the 2nd Royal Scots by two goals to one. I wasn’t playing but Binnie played a fine game at half-back. He stopped their centre forward an old league player, time and again. Hope you are

keeping all right. Does Henry Thatcham take Toffee out regler. Everything serene. love from Ned.”

In this letter the words “2nd Royal Scots” were deleted by the censor.

India at that time was apparently a kind of training-ground for young recruits. There were a few recalcitrant hill-tribes upon whom to practise the latest developments of military science, and Ned was mixed up in one or two of these little scraps. He proved himself a good soldier, doing precisely what he was told and being impervious to danger. They were five months in India, and then the regiment was suddenly drafted back to Egypt. Big things were afoot. No one knew what was going to happen. They spent ten days in a camp near Alexandria. They were then detailed for work in connection with the protection of the banks of the Canal, and Ned was stationed near the famous pyramid of Gizeh. He wrote to his mother:

“Dear mother,

“everything all right. Pretty quiet so far. This is a funny place. Young Walters has gone sick again. We had the regimental sports Thursday. Me and Bert Carter won the three-legged race. The grub is fine and we get dates and figs for nuts. Hope your cold is all right by now. Thanks for the parcel which I got on the 27th. Everything all right. Glad to hear about Mrs. Parsons having the twins and that. Glad to hear Toffee all right and so with love your loving son Ned.”

They had not been at Gizeh for more than a week before they were sent back to Alexandria and placed on a transport. In fifteen days after touching at Imbros, Ned and his companions found themselves on Gallipoli peninsula. Heavy fighting was in progress. They were rushed up to the front line. For two days and nights they were in action and their numbers were reduced to one-third their original size. For thirty hours they were without water and were being shelled by gas, harried by flame-throwers, blasted by shrapnel and high-explosive. At the end of that time they crawled back to the beach at night through prickly brambles which poisoned them and set up septic wounds if they scratched them. They lay there dormant for two days, but still under shell-fire, and then were hurriedly re-formed into a new regiment, and sent to another part of the line. This went on continuously for three weeks, and then a terrible storm and flood occurred. Hundreds of men—some alive and some partly alive—were drowned in the ravines. Ned and his company lost all their kit, and slept in water for three nights running. At

the end of four weeks he obtained five days' rest at the base. He wrote to Ettie:

“Dear Ettie,

“A long time since I had a letter from you. Hope all right. Everything all right so far. We had a bad storm but the weather now keeps fine. Had a fine bathe this morning. There was a man in our company could make you laugh. He is an Irish Canadian. He plays the penny whistle fine and sings a bit too. Sorry to say young Walters died. He got enteric and phewmonnia and so on. I expect his people will have heard all right. How is old Mrs. Walters? Dick Thursby got a packet too and Mrs. Quinby's boy I forget his name. How are them white rabbits of yours. I met a feller as used to take the milk round for Mr. Brand up at Bodes farm. Funny wasn't it. Well nothing more now. I hope this finds you as it leaves me your affectionate Ned.”

Ned was three months on Gallipoli peninsula, but he left before the evacuation. During the whole of that time he was never not under shell-fire. He took part in seven attacks. On one occasion he went over the top with twelve hundred others, of whom only one hundred and seven returned. Once he was knocked unconscious by a mine explosion which killed sixty-seven men. At the end of that period he was shot through the back by a sniper. He was put in a dressing-station, and a gentleman in a white overall came and stuck a needle into his chest and left him there in a state of nudity for twelve hours. Work at the field hospitals was very congested just then. He became a bit delirious and was eventually put on a hospital ship with a little tag tied to him. After some vague and restless period he found himself again at Imbros and in a very comfortable hospital. He stayed there six weeks and his wound proved to be slight. The bone was only grazed. He wrote to his mother:

“Dear mother,

“Everything all right. I had a scratch but nothing. I hope you enjoyed the flower show. How funny meeting Mrs. Perks. We have a fine time here. The grub is fine. Sorry to say Binnie Short went under. He got gassed one night when he hadn't his mask on. The weather is mild and pleasant. Glad to hear Henry takes Toffee out all right. Have not heard from Ettie for some time. We had a fine concert on Friday. A chap played the flute lovely. Hope you are now all right again.

“Your loving son, Ned.”

In bed in the hospital at Imbros a bright idea occurred to Ned. He made his will. Such an idea would never have occurred to him had it not been forced upon him by the unusual experiences of the past year. He suddenly realised that of all the boys who had left the village with him only Len Cotton, as far as he knew, remained. So one night he took a blunt-pointed pencil, and laboriously wrote on the space for the will at the end of his pay-book:

“I leave everything I've got to my mother Anne Picklekin including Toffee. I hope Henry Thatcham will continue to look after Toffee except the silver bowl which I won at the rabbit show at Oppleford. This I leave to Ettie Skinner as a memorial of me.”

One day Ned enjoyed a great excitement. He was under discharge from the hospital, and a rumour got round that he and some others were to be sent back to England. They hung about the island for three days, and were then packed into an Italian fruit-steamer—which had been converted into a transport. It was very overcrowded and the weather was hot. They sailed one night and reached another island before dawn. They spent three weeks doing this. They only sailed at night, for the seas about there were reported to be infested with submarines. Every morning they put in at some island in the Greek archipelago, or at some port on the mainland. At one place there was a terrible epidemic of illness, owing to some Greek gentleman having sold the men some doped wine. Fifteen of them died. Ned escaped from this, as he had not had any of the wine. He was practically a teetotaler except for an occasional glass of beer. But he was far from happy on that voyage. The seas were rough and the transport ought to have been broken up years ago, and this didn't seem to be the right route for England.

At length they reached a large port called Salonika. They never went into the town, but were sent straight out to a camp in the hills ten miles away. The country was very wild and rugged, and there was great difficulty with water. Everything was polluted and malarial. There was very little fighting apparently, but plenty of sickness. He found himself in a Scottish regiment. At least, it was called Scottish, but the men came from all parts of the world, from Bow Street to Hong-Kong.

There was to be no Blighty after all, but still—there it was! He continued to drill, and march, and clean his rifle and play the mouth-organ and

football. And then one morning he received a letter from his mother, which had followed him from Imbros. It ran as follows:

“MY DEAR NED,—

“How are you, dear? I hope you keep all right. My corf is now pretty middlin otherwise nothin to complain of. Now dear I have to tell you something which greives me dear. Im afraid its no good keepin it from you ony longer dear. *Ettie is walkin out with another feller.* A feller from the air station called Alf Mullet. I taxed her with it and she says yes it is so dear. Now dear you mustnt take on about this. I told her off I says it was a disgraceful and you out there fightin for your country and that. And she says nothin excep yes there it was and she couldnt help it and her feelins had been changed you being away and that. Now dear you must put a good face on this and remember theres just as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it as they say dear. One of Mr. Beans rabbits died Sunday they think it over-eating you never know with rabbits. Keep your feet warm dear I hope you got them socks I sent. Lizzie was at chapel Sunday she had on her green lawn looked very nice I thought but I wish she wouldnt get them spots on her face perhaps its only the time of year. Toffee is all right he had a fight with a hairdale Thursday Henry says got one of his eres bitten but nothin serous. So now dear I must close as Mrs. Minchin wants me to go and take tea with her has Florrie has gone to the schooltreat at Furley. And so dear with love your lovin Mother.”

When he had finished reading this letter he uttered an exclamation, and a cockney friend sitting on the ground by his side remarked:

“What’s the matter, mate?”

Ned took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and lighted one. Then he said:

“My girl’s jilted me.”

The cockney laughed and said:

“Gawd! is that all? I thought it was somethin’ serious!”

He was cleaning his rifle with an oil rag, and he continued: “Don’t you worry, mate. Women are like those blinkin’ little Greek islands, places to call at but not to stay. What was she like?”

“Oo—all right.”

“Pretty?”

“Ay—middlin’.”

“ ’As she got another feller?”

“Ay.”

“Oh, well, it’s all in the gime. If you *will* go gallivanting about these foreign parts enjoyin’ yerself, what d’yer expect? What time’s kick-off this afternoon?”

“Two o’clock.”

“Reckon we’re goin’ to win?”

“I doan’t know. ’Pends upon whether McFarlane turns out.”

“Yus, ’e’s a wonderful player. Keeps the team together like.”

“Ay.”

“Are you playin’?”

“Ay. I’m playin’ right half.”

“Are yer? Well, you’ll ’ave yer ’ands full. You’ll ’ave to tackle Curly Snider.”

“Ay.”

Ned’s team won the match that afternoon, and he wrote to his mother afterwards:

“DEAR MOTHER,—

“We just had a great game against 15 Royal South Hants. McFarlane played centre half and he was in great form. We lead 2—0 at half-time and they scored one at the beginnin of the second half but Davis got thro towards the end and we beat them by 3—1. I was playin quite a good game I think but McFarlane is a real first class. I got your letter all right, am glad your corf is getting all right. I was sorry about Ettie but of course she knows what she wants I spose. You dont say what Toffee did to the *other dog*. You might tell Henery to let me have a line about this. Fancy Liz being at chapel. I almos forget what shes like. Everything is all right. The grub is fine. This is a funny place all rocks and planes. The

Greeks are a stinkin lot for the most part so must now close with love.

“NED.”

Having completed this letter, Ned got out his pay-book and revised his will. Ettie Skinner was now deleted, and the silver bowl won at the rabbit-show at Oppleford was bequeathed to Henry Thatcham in consideration of his services in taking Toffee out for runs.

They spent a long and tedious eight months on the plains of Macedonia, dodging malaria and bullets, cracking vermin in their shirts, playing football, ragging, quarrelling, drilling, manœuvring, and, most demoralising of all, hanging about. And then a joyous day dawned. This hybrid Scottish regiment were ordered home! They left Salonica in a French liner and ten days later arrived at Malta. But in the meantime the gods had been busy. The wireless operators had been flashing their mysterious signals all over the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. At Malta the order was countermanded. They remained there long enough to coal, but the men were not even given shore leave. The next day they turned Eastwards again and made for Alexandria.

The cockney was furious. He had the real genius of the grouser, with the added venom of the man who in the year of grace had lived by his wits and now found his wits enclosed in an iron cylinder. It was a disgusting anticlimax.

“When I left that filthy ’ole,” he exclaimed, “I swore to God I’d try and never remember it again. And now I’m darned if we ain’t goin’ back there. As if once ain’t enough in a man’s lifetime! It’s like the blooming cat with the blankety mouse!”

“Eh, well, mon,” interjected a Scotsman, “there’s ane thing. They canna keel ye no but once.”

“It ain’t the killing I mind. It’s the blooming mucking about. What d’yer say, Pickles?”

“Ah, well . . . there it is,” said Ned sententiously.

There was considerable “mucking about” in Egypt, and then they started off on a long trek through the desert, marching on wire mesh that had been laid down by the engineers. There was occasional skirmishing, sniping, fleas, delay, and general discomfort. One day, in Southern Palestine, Ned was out with a patrol party just before sundown. They were trekking across

the sand between two oases when shots rang out. Five of the party fell. The rest were exposed in the open to foes firing from concealment on two sides. The position was hopeless. They threw up their hands. Two more shots rang out and the cockney next to Ned fell forward with a bullet through his throat. Then dark figures came across the sands towards them. There were only three left, Ned, a Scotsman, and a boy who had been a clerk in a drapery store at Lewisham before the war. He said:

“Well, are they going to kill us?”

“No,” said the Scotsman. “Onyway, keep your hands weel up and pray to God.”

A tall man advanced, and to their relief beckoned them to follow. They fell into single file.

“These are no Tur-r-ks at all,” whispered the Scotsman. “They’re some nomadic Arab tribe.”

The Scotsman had attended evening continuation classes at Peebles, and was rather fond of the word “nomadic.”

They were led to one of the oases, and instructed to sit down. The Arabs sat round them, armed with rifles. They remained there till late at night, when another party arrived, and a rope was produced. They were handcuffed and braced together, and then by gesticulation told to march. They trailed across the sand for three hours and a half. There was no moon, but the night was tolerably clear. At length they came to another oasis, and were bidden to halt. They sat on the sand for twenty minutes, and one of the Arabs gave them some water. Then a whistle blew, and they were kicked and told to follow. The party wended its way through a grove of cedar-trees. It was pitch-dark. At last they came to a halt by a large hut. There was much coming and going. When they entered the hut, in charge of their guard, they were blinded by a strong light. The hut was comfortably furnished and lighted by electric light. At a table sat a stout, pale-faced man, with a dark moustache—obviously a German. By his side stood a tall German orderly. The German official looked tired and bored. He glanced at the prisoners and drew some papers towards him.

“Come and stand here in front of my desk,” he said in English.

They advanced, and he looked at each one carefully. Then he yawned, dipped his pen in ink, tried it on a sheet of paper, swore, and inserted a fresh nib.

“Now, you,” he said, addressing the Scotchman, when he had completed these operations. “Name, age, profession, regiment. Smartly.”

He obtained all these particulars from each man. Then he got up and came round the table, and looking right into the eyes of the clerk from Lewisham, he said:

“We know, of course, in which direction your brigade is advancing, but from which direction is the brigade commanded by Major-General Forbes Fittleworth advancing?”

The three of them all knew this, for it was common gossip of the march. But the clerk from Lewisham said:

“I don’t know.”

The German turned from him to the Scotsman and repeated the question.

“I don’t know,” answered the Scotsman.

“From which direction is the brigade commanded by Major-General Forbes Fittleworth advancing?” he said to Ned.

“Naw! I doan’t know,” replied Ned.

And then a horrible episode occurred. The German suddenly whipped out a revolver and shot the clerk from Lewisham through the body twice. He gave a faint cry and crumbled forward. Without taking the slightest notice of this horror, the German turned deliberately and held the revolver pointed at Ned’s face. In a perfectly unimpassioned, toneless voice he repeated:

“From which direction is the brigade commanded by Major-General Forbes Fittleworth advancing?”

In the silence which followed, the only sound seemed to be the drone of some machine, probably from the electric-light plant. The face of Ned was mildly surprised but quite impassive. He answered without a moment’s hesitation:

“Naw! I doan’t know.”

There was a terrible moment in which the click of the revolver could almost be heard. It seemed to hover in front of his face for an unconscionable time, then suddenly the German lowered it with a curse, and leaning forward, he struck Ned on the side of his face with the flat of his hand. He treated the Scotsman in the same way, causing his nose to bleed. Both of the men remained quite impassive. Then he walked back to his seat, and said calmly:

“Unless you can refresh your memories within the next two hours you will both share the fate of—that swine. You will now go out to the plantation at the back and dig your graves. Dig three graves.”

He spoke sharply in Arabic to the guards, and they were led out. They were handed a spade each, two Arabs held torches for them to work by, and four others hovered in a circle twelve paces away. The soil was light sand, and digging was fairly easy. Each man dug his own grave, making it about four feet deep. When it came to the third grave the Scotsman whispered:

“Dig deep, mon.”

“Deeper than others?”

“Ay, deep enough to make a wee trench.”

“I see.”

They made it very deep, working together and whispering. When it was practically completed, apparently a sudden quarrel arose between the men. They swore at each other, and the Scotsman sprang out of the trench and gripped Ned by the throat. A fearful struggle began to take place on the edge of the grave. The guard ran up and tried to separate them. And then, during the brief confusion there was a sudden dramatic development. Simultaneously they snatched their spades. Both the men with the torches were knocked senseless, and one of them fell into the third grave. The torches were stamped out and a rifle went off. It was fired by a guard near the hut, and the bullet struck another Arab who was trying to use his bayonet. Ned brought a fourth man down with his spade and seized his rifle, and the Scotsman snatched the rifle of the man who had been shot, and they both leapt back into their purposely prepared trench.

“We shallna be able to hold this long, but we’ll give them a grand run for their money,” said the Scotsman.

The body of one Arab was lying on the brink of their trench and the other in the trench itself. Fortunately they both had bandoliers, which Ned and his companion instantly removed.

“You face east and I’ll take west,” said the Scotsman, his eyes glittering in the dim light. “I’m going to try and scare that Boche devil.”

He peppered away at the hut, putting bullets through every window and smashing the telephone connection, which was a fine target at the top of a post against the sky. Bullets pinged over their heads from all directions, but there was little chance of them being rushed while their ammunition held

out. However, it became necessary to look ahead. It was the Scotsman's idea in digging the graves to plan them in zig-zag formation. The end of the furthest one was barely ten paces from a clump of aloes. He now got busy with his spade whilst Ned kept guard in both directions, occasionally firing at the hut and then in the opposite direction into the darkness. In half-an-hour the Scotsman had made a shallow connection between the three graves, leaving just enough room to crawl through. They then in turn donned the turbans of the two fallen Arabs, who were otherwise dressed in a kind of semi-European uniform.

They ended up with a tremendous fusillade against the hut, riddling it with bullets; then they crept to the end of the furthest grave, and leaving their rifles, they made a sudden dash across the open space to the group of aloes, bending low and limping like wounded Arabs. They reached them in safety, but there were many open spaces to cover yet. As they emerged from the trees Ned stumbled on a dark figure. He kicked it and ran. They both ran zig-zag fashion, and tore off their turbans as they raced along. They covered nearly a hundred yards, and then bullets began to search them out again. They must have gone nearly a mile before the Scotsman gave a sudden slight groan.

"I'm hit," he said.

He stumbled on into a clump of bushes, and fell down.

"Is it bad?" asked Ned.

"Eh, laddie, I'm doon," he said quietly. He put his hand to his side. He had been shot through the lungs. Ned stayed with him all night, and they were undisturbed. Just before dawn the Scotsman said:

"Eh, mon, but yon was a bonny fight," and he turned on his back and died.

Ned made a rough grave with his hands, and buried his companion. He took his identification disc and his pocket-book and small valuables, with the idea of returning them to his kin if he should get through himself. He also took his water-flask, which still fortunately contained a little water. He lay concealed all day, and at night he boldly donned his turban, issued forth and struck a caravan-trail. He continued this for four days and nights, hiding in the daytime and walking at nights. He lived on figs and dates, and one night he raided a village and caught a fowl, which also nearly cost him his life.

On the fourth night his water gave out, and he was becoming light-headed. He stumbled on into the darkness. He was a desperate man. All the chances were against him, and he felt unmoved and fatalistic. He drew his clasp-knife and gripped it tightly in his right hand. He was hardly conscious of what he was doing, and where he was going. The moon was up, and after some hours he suddenly beheld a small oblong hut. He got it into his head that this was the hut where his German persecutor was. He crept stealthily towards it.

“I’ll kill that swine,” he muttered.

He was within less than a hundred yards of the hut, when a voice called out:

“ ’Alt! Who goes there?”

“It’s me,” he said. “Doan’t thee get in my way. I want to kill him. I’m going to kill him. I’m going to stab him through his black heart.”

“What the hell——!”

The sentry was not called upon to use his rifle, for the turbaned figure fell forward in a swoon.

Three weeks later Ned wrote to his mother from Bethlehem (where Christ was born), and this is what he said:

“DEAR MOTHER,—

“Everything going on all right. I got three parcels here altogether as I had been away copped by some black devils an unfriendly tribe. I got back all right though. The ointment you sent was fine and so was them rock cakes. What a funny thing about Belle getting lost at the picnick. We got an awful soaking from the Mid-Lancs Fusiliers on Saturday. They had two league cracks playing one a wonderful centreforward. He scored three goals. They beat us by 7—0. The weather is hot but quite plessant at night. We have an old sergeant who was born in America does wonderful tricks with string and knots and so on. He tells some very tall yarns. You have to take them with a pinch of salt. Were getting fine grub here pretty quiet so far. Hope Henry remembers to wash Toffee with that stuff every week or so. Sorry to hear Len Cotton killed. Is his sister still walking out with that feller at Aynham. I never think he was much class for her getting good money though. Hope you have not had any more trouble with the

boiler. That was a good price to get for that old buck rabbit. Well there's nothing more just now and so with love your loving son.

“NED.”

Ned went through the Palestine campaign and was slightly wounded in the thigh. After spending some time in hospital he was sent to the coast and put on duty looking after Turkish prisoners. He remained there six months and was then shipped to Italy. On the way the transport was torpedoed. He was one of a party of fifty-seven picked up by French destroyers. He had been for over an hour in the water in his life-belt. He was landed in Corsica and there he developed pneumonia. He only wrote his mother one short note about this:

“DEAR MOTHER,—

“Have been a bit dicky owing to falling in the water and getting wet. But going on all right. Nurses very nice and one of the doctors rowed for Cambridge against Oxford. I forget the year but Cambridge won by two and a half lengths. We have very nice flowers in the ward. Well not much to write about and so with love your loving son,

“NED.”

Ned was fit again in a few weeks and he was sent up to the Italian front. He took part in several engagements and was transferred to the French front during the last months of the war. He was in the great retreat in March, 1918, and in the advance in July. After the armistice he was with the army of occupation on the banks of the Rhine. His mother wrote to him there:

“MY DEAR NED,—

“Am glad that the fightin us now all over dear. How relieved you must be. Mr. Filter was in Sunday. He thinks there will be no difficulty about you gettin your job back when you come back dear. Miss Siffkins as been deliverin but as Mr. Filter says its not likely a girl is going to be able to deliver letters not like a man can and that dear. So now you will be comin home soon dear. That will be nice. We had a pleasant afternoon at the Church needlewomens gild. Miss Barbary Banstock sang very pleasantly abide with me and the vicar told a very amusing story about a little girl and a prince she didn't know he was a prince and talked to

him just as though he was a man it was very amusin dear. I hear Ettie is goin to get married next month they wont get me to the weddin was it ever so I call it disgraceful and I have said so. Maud Bean is expectin in April that makes her forth in three years. Mr. Bean as lost three more rabbits they say its rats this time. The potaters are a poor lot this time but the runners and cabbidge promiss well. So now dear I will close. Hoppin to have your back dear soon.

“Your loving mother.”

It was, however, the autumn before Ned was demobilised. One day in early October he came swinging up the village street carrying a white kit-bag slung across his left shoulder. He looked more bronzed and perhaps a little thinner, but otherwise little altered by his five years of war experiences. The village of Ashalton was quite unaltered, but he observed several strange faces; he only met two acquaintances on the way to his mother’s cottage, and they both said:

“Hullo, Ned! Ye’re home agen then!”

In each case he replied:

“Ay,” and grinned, and walked on.

He entered his mother’s cottage, and she was expecting him. The lamp was lighted and a grand tea was spread. There was fresh boiled beetroot, tinned salmon, salad, cake, and a large treacle tart. She embraced him and said:

“Well, Ned! Ye’re back then.”

He replied: “Ay.”

“Ye’re lookin’ fine,” she said. “What a fine suit they’ve given ye!”

“Ay,” he replied.

“I expect you want yer tea?”

“Ay.”

He had dropped his kit-bag, and he moved luxuriously round the little parlour, looking at all the familiar objects. Then he sat down, and his mother brought the large brown teapot from the hob and they had a cosy tea. She told him all the very latest news of the village, and all the gossip of the countryside, and Ned grinned and listened. He said nothing at all. The tea

had progressed to the point when Ned's mouth was full of treacle tart, when his mother suddenly stopped, and said:

"Oh, dear, I'm afraid I have somethin' distressin' to tell ye, dear."

"O-oh? what's that?"

"Poor Toffee was killed."

"What!"

Ned stopped suddenly in the mastication of the treacle tart. His eyes bulged and his cheeks became very red. He stared at his mother wildly, and repeated:

"What's that? What's that ye say, Mother?"

"Poor Toffee, my dear. It happened right at the crossroads. Henry was takin' him out. It seems he ran round in front of a steam-roller, and a motor came round the corner sudden. Henry called out, but too late. Went right over his back. Poor Henry was quite upset. He brought him home. What's the matter, dear?"

Ned had pushed his chair back, and he stood up. He stared at his mother like a man who has seen horror for the first time.

"Where is—where was——" he stammered.

"We buried 'im, dear, under the little mound beyond the rabbit hutches."

Ned staggered across the room like a drunken man, and repeated dismally:

"The little mound beyond the rabbit hutches!"

He lifted the latch, and groped his way into the garden. His mother followed him. He went along the mud path, past the untenanted hutches covered with tarpaulin. Some tall sunflowers stared at him insolently. A fine rain was beginning to fall. In the dim light he could just see the little mound—signifying the spot where Toffee was buried. He stood there bare-headed, gazing at the spot. His mother did not like to speak. She tiptoed back to the door. But after a time she called out:

"Ned! . . . Ned!"

He did not seem to hear, and she waited patiently. At the end of several minutes she called again:

"Ned! . . . Ned dear, come and finish your tea."

He replied quite quietly:

“All right, Mother.”

But he kept his face averted, for he did not want his mother to see the tears which were streaming down his cheeks.

OVERHEARD

It was nearly two o'clock. The tea-shop was at its busiest. Clerks, salesmen, typists, shoppers from the suburbs jostled against each other in the scramble for buns, tea, sausages, fried fish, ham or coffee. Everyone seemed hungry and hurried. The atmosphere reeked with the varied odours of cooked food. Some were eating greedily, others calling impatiently for their bills or grumbling at the slackness of the service, or about a draught which came from undiscoverable places. The slim girl who served some thirty odd customers in the annexe moved hither and thither with an overladen tray, which she had to carry twenty yards backwards and forwards to the serving-hatch. Her movements were languid and listless, but her memory seemed surprising. She would take seven or eight orders of such varied nature as "large coffee, Cambridge sausages, roll and butter, and plum jam," to "poached eggs on toast and a small tea," and she remembered them all correctly and brought the refreshment to the right persons. She was of indeterminate age, somewhere round about the thirties, with fair pretty hair, and a face that at one time might have been almost beautiful.

"Hurry up with my scrambled eggs on toast, miss, I'm going to a matinée."

"Yes, madam."

She was studiously polite to everyone, polite but inert. She seemed to be performing her duties as though mesmerized. Gradually the crowd began to thin. The clerks and typists had to be back at their offices, the lady had gone to her matinée, the salesmen to their clients. As they poured out, queuing up at the pay-desk, a few late comers straggled in. Among the latter came a young man of somewhat florid appearance. He was wearing a well-cut blue serge suit, with a yellow woollen waistcoat, and a felt hat. He had a red, rather coarse face, a little clipped moustache, and splendid teeth which flashed as he grinned. And he grinned a good deal, as a man well-satisfied with himself and life in general. He found a seat in the corner of the annexe and sat down. The slim waitress came along with her heavily laden tray. She glanced round and her eye alighted on the young man. Her face betrayed no recognition, but she put her tray down on the marble slab of an adjoining table with an abrupt bump. She said "Sorry!" and as she handed plates and cups round she mumbled:

“Fried plaice, sir? Thank you, sir. Coffee, madam? Thank you, madam. Two hard-boiled eggs, sir? Thank you, sir,” and so on till the table was served. Then she passed on to the table where the young man sat. She still carried her tray, for there were two people there waiting to be served. She put down her tray again and said:

“Tea, roll and butter, madam? Thank you, madam. Cold roast beef, sir? Thank you, sir.”

The young man looked at her and grinned, but she did not look at him. Her lips were tight and drawn, and pale. A woman at the table exclaimed:

“Are my kidneys never coming?”

The young man said: “Well, Florrie?”

Without looking at him she said: “What do you want to eat?” To the lady she said: “Your kidneys will be ready in two minutes, madam.”

The young man, a little sheepish at his reception, said quietly:

“Oh, well. I’ll have some cold tongue and coffee.”

“Large or small?”

“Large.”

She moved away with her tray, collecting orders as she went, while the young man picked his splendid teeth with a tram ticket. After an interval she returned. The weary lines of her face seemed to be concealing the fires of tremulous emotion. She placed the kidneys in front of the lady, and the coffee and tongue in front of the young man. Quite mechanically she repeated:

“Large coffee and tongue, sir? Thank you, sir.”

She took three more orders, and again vanished.

The young man devoured his tongue and coffee in silence. The grin on his face became sardonic. It was as though he were saying to himself: “Oh, well, I don’t care.” More people went out and fewer came in. The time was rapidly approaching that sparse half hour or so that is too late for lunch and too early for tea. The lady finished her kidneys, powdered her nose, and departed. The slim waitress was less occupied. She drifted up and down, her tense pale face expressing nothing. There was only one other person at the young man’s table, a man at the further end reading an evening paper. At last she came to him. Bending over a cruet which she pretended to be adjusting she whispered hoarsely:

“Oh, why didn’t you come last night?”

The uneasy grin flittered across the young man’s face. He answered in the same key:

“I couldn’t. I couldn’t get away.”

“What were you doing? Spending the evening with Lily?”

“No. I swear I wasn’t.”

“What then?”

“I had to go and see my uncle——”

“Miss Harrison, there’s a customer over there asking for stewed prunes and rice.” It was a tall angular manageress, in a black frock, speaking.

“Coming, madam.”

The mission in search of stewed prunes and rice occupied some time. And further time was wasted by a customer who said that his bill was wrong. It was quite true. She had charged eightpence-halfpenny instead of sevenpence-halfpenny for sardines on toast. The man with the newspaper disappeared. There was no one else at the young man’s table. Once again she leant over the cruet.

“You don’t love her, do you, Harry?”

The young man laughed self-consciously.

“Lord, no. I wanted to tell you, Florrie. I’ve had a bit of luck. My uncle’s coming to the rescue.”

“How do you mean?”

“He’s paying off that debt. And he’s going to pay my fare to Canada.”

“Canada!”

She caught her breath, and scraped crumbs into a little pile with the end of a knife. “Canada! but you——”

“I’m going to start all over again.”

“But don’t you want me to go to Canada with yer?”

“You? How could you?”

“I could work my way out—stewardess or something. I’d go with you. You’re not going to marry Lily, are you, Harry?”

“Not likely.”

“She’s not good enough for you, Harry. Oh, God! I believe it’s her what got you going wrong, mixing with all them racing chaps and that——”

“You’re too good for me, Florrie.”

“Hi, miss, order me a boiled egg. And look here, tell ’em it’s to be soft—not more than three minutes.”

“Yes, sir.”

While she was away the young man fidgetted with his moustache. He looked like a man eager to escape from an awkward situation. He gave a jaunty thrust to his hat, which he had never removed. He drew things on the marble top with a spoon. At last she came back.

“You say I’m too good for you, Harry. P’raps in some ways I am. I go straight, in any case, which is more than you ever do. But I don’t put much stock by that. I love yer, and that’s enough for me. I’m willing to go with yer——”

“Perhaps one day when I get on——”

“Oh, go on! Once you get out there, and you’ll forget all about me. You never did reely love me—and now that Lily——”

“I tell you there’s nothing in it about Lily.”

“Oh, don’t let her lead you astray, Harry.”

“What do you mean—lead me astray?”

The tall manageress swept down the room.

“Now then, Miss Harrison, get them cruets together. We shall have the teas coming in soon.”

“Yes, madam.”

The room seemed to get dimmer. A queer party of country people strolled in, the kind of people who demand eggs and bacon at a quarter past three in the afternoon. What meal is this? breakfast, lunch or high tea? What did it matter? Outside was the roar of traffic; inside the low hum of desultory talk. A big man was leaning across the table, shaking a fat finger in the face of a doleful individual with a sandy beard, and declaiming:

“I ses to ’im that’s not the right and proper way to lay a floor joist.”

Someone wanted to know the right time, and someone else the best way to get to the Horticultural Show. She thought suddenly of flowers . . . great masses of prize blossoms, purple, blue, and white, and the perfume of them and the memories. . . .

“What fish have you got to-day, miss?”

“Only filleted plaice left, sir.”

The young man was getting up, and stretching himself indolently. She left an order and went across to him. With a little catch in her voice she said:

“You’re going then?”

“Yes. What’s the good?”

“When will I see you?”

“I’m sailing Saturday.”

“Saturday! That’s only four days. You’ll see me before you go?”

“Oh, yes,” the young man whispered unconvincingly. “I’ll either drop you a line or call in.”

“Promise?”

The promise was given in the same key.

“You’ll want your bill. It comes to tenpence-halfpenny.”

“Thanks, so long, old girl.”

There was a break in the wall half-way down the room. When he reached it they were comparatively alone for a brief moment. She said fiercely:

“Harry, I’ve loved yer all these years. Don’t be cruel. When I was—when I was younger you did care for me a tiny bit. I’ve worked my fingers out for you. I’ve given you my savings. I wasn’t bad-looking once before I came into this business. It hasn’t done me any good. I get tired. The days seem long. You won’t—you won’t——”

The man holding forth indignantly about the right way to lay floor joists, called out:

“Hi, miss, bring me another cup of corfee.”

“Yes, sir. Coming, sir. . . . You won’t——”

The young man's grin struggled desperately to assert itself. He mumbled something like:

"There, there. It'll be all right. You'll see."

He walked self-consciously to the pay-desk. She went to collect her tray. Down below in the smoke-room could be heard the sound of youths noisily playing dominoes and laughing. "There's nothing to laugh about," she thought at random. The tray was filled with soiled plates, and cups and saucers, egg shells and sausage skins. When she emerged once more into the main room, the young man had gone. She vanished with her tray and in a few minutes returned with it re-laden. She went to the table where the country people were.

"Eggs and bacon, madam? Thank you, madam. Eggs and bacon, sir? Thank you, sir. Eggs and bacon, miss? Thank you, miss."

The man of the floor joists bawled out:

"Hi, have you got my corfee, miss?"

She looked at him a little startled, the vexatious expression of one who takes a pride in work and is found wanting. She said:

"I'm sorry, sir. I forgot. I'll go and fetch it."

"Damn these waitresses!" growled the man of the floor joists.

A SOURCE OF IRRITATION

To look at old Sam Gates you would never suspect him of having nerves. His sixty-nine years of close application to the needs of the soil had given him a certain earthy stolidity. To observe him hoeing, or thinning out a broad field of turnips, hardly attracted one's attention. He seemed so much part and parcel of the whole scheme. He blended into the soil like a glorified swede. Nevertheless, the half-dozen people who claimed his acquaintance knew him to be a man who suffered from little moods of irritability.

And on this glorious morning a little incident annoyed him unreasonably. It concerned his niece Aggie. She was a plump girl with clear blue eyes and a face as round and inexpressive as the dumplings for which the county was famous. She came slowly across the long sweep of the downland and putting down the bundle wrapped up in a red handkerchief which contained his breakfast and dinner, she said:

“Well, Uncle, is there any noos?”

Now this may not appear to the casual reader to be a remark likely to cause irritation, but it affected old Sam Gates as a very silly and unnecessary question. It was, moreover, the constant repetition of it which was beginning to anger him. He met his niece twice a day. In the morning she brought his bundle of food at seven, and when he passed his sister's cottage on the way home to tea at five she was invariably hanging about the gate. And on each occasion she always said, in exactly the same voice:

“Well, Uncle, is there any noos?”

“Noos!” What “noos” should there be? For sixty-nine years he had never lived further than five miles from Halvesham. For nearly sixty of those years he had bent his back above the soil. There were indeed historic occasions: once, for instance, when he had married Annie Hachet. And there was the birth of his daughter. There was also a famous occasion when he had visited London. Once he had been to a flower show at Market Roughborough. He either went or didn't go to church on Sundays. He had had many interesting chats with Mr. James at “The Cowman,” and three years ago had sold a pig to Mrs. Waig. But he couldn't always have interesting “noos” of this sort up his sleeve. Didn't the silly gaffir know that for the last three weeks he had been thinning out turnips for Mr. Dodge on this very same field? What “noos” could there be?

He blinked at his niece, and didn't answer. She undid the parcel, and said:

“Mrs. Goping's fowl got out again last night.”

He replied, “Ah!” in a non-committal manner, and began to munch his bread and bacon. His niece picked up the handkerchief, and humming to herself, walked back across the field. It was a glorious morning, and a white sea-mist added to the promise of a hot day. He sat there munching, thinking of nothing in particular, but gradually subsiding into a mood of placid content. He noticed the back of Aggie disappear in the distance. It was a mile to the cottage, and a mile and a half to Halvesham. Silly things, girls! They were all alike. One had to make allowances. He dismissed her from his thoughts and took a long swig of tea out of a bottle. Insects buzzed lazily. He tapped his pocket to assure himself that his pouch of shag was there, and then he continued munching. When he had finished, he lighted his pipe and stretched himself comfortably. He looked along the line of turnips he had thinned, and then across the adjoining field of swedes. Silver streaks appeared on the sea below the mist. In some dim way he felt happy in his solitude amidst this sweeping immensity of earth and sea and sky.

And then something else came to irritate him. It was one of “these dratted airypplanes.” “Airypplanes” were his pet aversion. He could find nothing to be said in their favour. Nasty, noisy, vile-smelling things that seared the heavens, and make the earth dangerous. And every day there seemed to be more and more of them. Of course “this old war” was responsible for a lot of them, he knew. The war was “a plaguey noosance.” They were short-handed on the farm. Beer and tobacco were dear, and Mrs. Stevens' nephew had been and got wounded in the foot.

He turned his attention once more to the turnips. But an “airypplane” has an annoying genius for gripping one's attention. When it appears on the scene, however much we dislike it it has a way of taking stage-centre; we cannot help constantly looking at it. And so it was with old Sam Gates. He spat on his hands, and blinked up at the sky. And suddenly the aeroplane behaved in a very extraordinary manner. It was well over the sea when it seemed to lurch in a drunken manner, and skimmed the water. Then it shot up at a dangerous angle and zigzagged. It started to go farther out, and then turned and made for the land. The engines were making a curious grating noise. It rose once more, and then suddenly dived downwards and came plump down right in the middle of Mr. Dodge's field of swedes!

Finally, as if not content with this desecration, it ran along the ground, ripping and tearing up twenty-five yards of good swedes, and then came to a stop. Old Sam Gates was in a terrible state. The aeroplane was more than a hundred yards away, but he waved his arms, and called out:

“Hi! you there, you mustn’t land in they swedes! They’re Mister Dodge’s.”

The instant the aeroplane stopped a man leapt out, and gazed quickly round. He glanced at Sam Gates, and seemed uncertain whether to address him or whether to concentrate his attention on the flying-machine. The latter arrangement appeared to be his ultimate decision. He dived under the engine, and became frantically busy. Sam had never seen anyone work with such furious energy. But all the same, it was not to be tolerated. It was disgraceful. Sam started out across the field, almost hurrying in his indignation. When he approached within earshot of the aviator, he cried out again:

“Hi! you mustn’t rest your old airyplane here. You’ve kicked up all Mr. Dodge’s swedes. A nice thing you’ve done!”

He was within five yards when suddenly the aviator turned and covered him with a revolver! And, speaking in a sharp, staccato voice, he said:

“Old Grandfather, you must sit down. I am very occupied. If you interfere or attempt to go away, I shoot you. So!”

Sam gazed at the horrid glittering little barrel, and gasped. Well he never! To be threatened with murder when you’re doing your duty in your employer’s private property! But, still, perhaps the man was mad. A man must be more or less mad to go up in one of those crazy things. And life was very sweet on that summer morning, in spite of sixty-nine years. He sat down among the swedes.

The aviator was so busy with his cranks and machinery that he hardly deigned to pay him any attention, except to keep the revolver handy. He worked feverishly, and Sam sat watching him. At the end of ten minutes he seemed to have solved his troubles with the machine, but he still seemed very scared. He kept on glancing round and out to sea. When his repairs were completed, he straightened his back and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was apparently on the point of springing back into the machine and going off, when a sudden mood of facetiousness, caused by relief from the strain he had endured, came to him. He turned to old Sam, and smiled; at the same time remarking:

“Well, old grandfather, and now we shall be all right, isn’t it?”

He came close up to Sam, and then suddenly started back.

“Gott!” he cried. “Paul Jouperts!”

Sam gazed at him, bewildered, and the madman started talking to him in some foreign tongue. Sam shook his head.

“You no right,” he remarked, “to come bargin’ through they swedes of Mr. Dodge’s.”

And then the aviator behaved in a most peculiar manner. He came up and examined his face very closely, and gave a gentle tug at his beard and hair, as if to see whether it were real or false.

“What is your name, old man?” he said.

“Sam Gates.”

The aviator muttered some words that sounded something like “mare vudish!” and then turned to his machine. He appeared to be dazed and in a great state of doubt. He fumbled with some cranks, but kept glancing at old Sam. At last he got into the car and started the engine. Then he stopped, and sat there deep in thought. At last he suddenly sprang out again, and, approaching Sam, he said very deliberately:

“Old grandfather, I shall require you to accompany me.”

Sam gasped.

“Eh?” he said. “What be talkin’ about? ’company? I got these here lines o’ tarnips—I be already behoid——”

The disgusting little revolver once more flashed before his eyes.

“There must be no discussion,” came the voice. “It is necessary that you mount the seat of the car without delay. Otherwise I shoot you like the dog you are. So!”

Old Sam was hale and hearty. He had no desire to die so ignominiously. The pleasant smell of the downland was in his nostrils. His foot was on his native heath. He mounted the seat of the car, contenting himself with a mutter:

“Well, that be a nice thing, I must say! Flyin’ about the country with all they tarnips on’y half thinned——”

He found himself strapped in. The aviator was in a fever of anxiety to get away. The engines made a ghastly splutter and noise. The thing started running along the ground. Suddenly it shot upwards, giving the swedes a last contemptuous kick. At twenty minutes to eight that morning old Sam found himself being borne right up above his fields and out to sea! His breath came quickly. He was a little frightened.

“God forgive me!” he murmured.

The thing was so fantastic and sudden, his mind could not grasp it. He only felt in some vague way that he was going to die, and he struggled to attune his mind to the change. He offered up a mild prayer to God, Who, he felt, must be very near, somewhere up in these clouds. Automatically he thought of the vicar at Halvesham, and a certain sense of comfort came to him at the reflection that on the previous day he had taken a “cooking of runner beans” to God’s representative in that village. He felt calmer after that, but the horrid machine seemed to go higher and higher. He could not turn in his seat and he could see nothing but sea and sky. Of course the man was mad, mad as a March hare. Of what earthly use could *he* be to anyone? Besides, he had talked pure gibberish, and called him Paul Something, when he had already told him that his name was Sam. The thing would fall down into the sea soon, and they would both be drowned. Well, well! He had reached the three-score years and ten.

He was protected by a screen, but it seemed very cold. What on earth would Mr. Dodge say? There was no one left to work the land but a fool of a boy named Billy Whitehead at Deric’s Cross. On, on, on they went at a furious pace. His thoughts danced disconnectedly from incidents of his youth, conversations with the vicar, hearty meals in the open, a frock his sister wore on the day of the postman’s wedding, the drone of a psalm, the illness of some ewes belonging to Mr. Dodge. Everything seemed to be moving very rapidly, upsetting his sense of time. He felt outraged and yet at moments there was something entrancing in the wild experience. He seemed to be living at an incredible pace. Perhaps he was really dead, and on his way to the Kingdom of God? Perhaps this was the way they took people?

After some indefinite period he suddenly caught sight of a long strip of land. Was this a foreign country? or were they returning? He had by this time lost all feeling of fear. He became interested, and almost disappointed. The “airplane” was not such a fool as it looked. It was very wonderful to be right up in the sky like this. His dreams were suddenly disturbed by a fearful noise. He thought the machine was blown to pieces. It dived and ducked through the air, and things were bursting all round it and making an awful

din; and then it went up higher and higher. After a while these noises ceased, and he felt the machine gliding downwards. They were really right above solid land, trees, and fields, and streams, and white villages. Down, down, down they glided. This was a foreign country. There were straight avenues of poplars and canals. This was not Halvesham. He felt the thing glide gently and bump into a field. Some men ran forward and approached them, and the mad aviator called out to them. They were mostly fat men in grey uniforms, and they all spoke this foreign gibberish. Someone came and unstrapped him. He was very stiff, and could hardly move. An exceptionally gross-looking man punched him in the ribs, and roared with laughter. They all stood round and laughed at him, while the mad aviator talked to them and kept pointing at him. Then he said:

“Old grandfather, you must come with me.”

He was led to a zinc-roofed building, and shut in a little room. There were guards outside with fixed bayonets. After a while the mad aviator appeared again, accompanied by two soldiers. He beckoned him to follow. They marched through a quadrangle and entered another building. They went straight into an office where a very important-looking man, covered with medals, sat in an easy chair. There was a lot of saluting and clicking of heels.

The aviator pointed at Sam and said something, and the man with the medals started at sight of him, and then came up and spoke to him in English.

“What is your name? Where do you come from? Your age? The name and birthplace of your parents?”

He seemed intensely interested, and also pulled his hair and beard to see if they came off. So well and naturally did he and the aviator speak English that after a voluble cross-examination they drew apart, and continued the conversation in that language. And the extraordinary conversation was of this nature:

“It is a most remarkable resemblance,” said the man with medals. “*Unglaublich!* But what do you want me to do with him, Hausemann?”

“The idea came to me suddenly, excellency,” replied the aviator, “and you may consider it worthless. It is just this. The resemblance is so amazing. Paul Jouperts has given us more valuable information than anyone at present in our service. And the English know that. There is an award of twenty-five thousand francs on his head. Twice they have captured him, and each time

he escaped. All the company commanders and their staff have his photograph. He is a serious thorn in their flesh.”

“Well?” replied the man with the medals.

The aviator whispered confidently:

“Suppose, your excellency, that they found the dead body of Paul Jouperts?”

“Well?” replied the big man.

“My suggestion is this. To-morrow, as you know, the English are attacking Hill 701, which we have for tactical reasons decided to evacuate. If after the attack they find the dead body of Paul Jouperts in, say, the second lines, they will take no further trouble in the matter. You know their lack of thoroughness. Pardon me, I was two years at Oxford University. And consequently Paul Jouperts will be able to—prosecute his labours undisturbed.”

The man with the medals twirled his moustache and looked thoughtfully at his colleague.

“Where is Paul at the moment?” he asked.

“He is acting as a gardener at the Convent of St. Eloise at Mailleton-en-haut, which, as you know, is one hundred metres from the headquarters of the British central army staff.”

The man with the medals took two or three rapid turns up and down the room. Then he said:

“Your plan is excellent, Hausemann. The only point of difficulty is that the attack started this morning.”

“This morning?” exclaimed the other.

“Yes. The English attacked unexpectedly at dawn. We have already evacuated the first line. We shall evacuate the second line at eleven-fifty. It is now ten-fifteen. There may be just time.”

He looked suddenly at old Sam in the way that a butcher might look at a prize heifer at an agricultural show, and remarked casually:

“Yes, it is a remarkable resemblance. It seems a pity not to . . . do something with it.”

Then, speaking in German, he added:

“It is worth trying, and if it succeeds, the higher authorities shall hear of your lucky accident and inspiration, Herr Hausemann. Instruct Oberleutnant Schutz to send the old fool by two orderlies to the east extremity of trench 38. Keep him there till the order of evacuation is given. Then shoot him, but don’t disfigure him, and lay him out face upwards.”

The aviator saluted and withdrew, accompanied by his victim. Old Sam had not understood the latter part of the conversation, and he did not catch quite all that was said in English, but he felt that somehow things were not becoming too promising, and it was time to assert himself. So he remarked when they got outside:

“Now, look’ee here, mister, when be I goin’ back to my tarnips?”

And the aviator replied with a pleasant smile:

“Do not be disturbed, old grandfather; you shall . . . get back to the soil quite soon.”

In a few moments he found himself in a large grey car, accompanied by four soldiers. The aviator left him. The country was barren and horrible, full of great pits and rents, and he could hear the roar of artillery and the shriek of shells. Overhead, aeroplanes were buzzing angrily. He seemed to be suddenly transported from the Kingdom of God to the Pit of Darkness. He wondered whether the vicar had enjoyed the runner beans. He could not imagine runner beans growing here, runner beans, ay! or anything else. If this was a foreign country, give him dear old England.

Gr-r-r—Bang! Something exploded just at the rear of the car. The soldiers ducked, and one of them pushed him in the stomach and swore.

“An ugly-looking lout,” he thought. “If I was twenty years younger I’d give him a punch in the eye that ’ud make him sit up.”

The car came to a halt by a broken wall. The party hurried out and dived behind a mound. He was pulled down a kind of shaft and found himself in a room buried right underground, where three officers were drinking and smoking. The soldiers saluted and handed a typewritten despatch. The officers looked at him drunkenly, and one came up and pulled his beard and spat in his face, and called him “an old English swine.” He then shouted out some instructions to the soldiers, and they led him out into the narrow trench. One walked behind him and occasionally prodded him with the butt-end of a gun. The trenches were half-full of water, and reeked of gases, powder, and decaying matter. Shells were constantly bursting overhead, and in places the trenches had crumbled and were nearly blocked up. They

stumbled on, sometimes falling, sometimes dodging moving masses, and occasionally crawling over the dead bodies of men. At last they reached a deserted-looking trench, and one of the soldiers pushed him into the corner of it and growled something, and then disappeared round the angle. Old Sam was exhausted. He lay panting against the mud wall, expecting every minute to be blown to pieces by one of those infernal things that seemed to be getting more and more insistent. The din went on for nearly twenty minutes, and he was alone in the trench. He fancied he heard a whistle amidst the din. Suddenly one of the soldiers who had accompanied him came stealthily round the corner. And there was a look in his eye old Sam did not like. When he was within five yards the soldier raised his rifle and pointed it at Sam's body. Some instinct impelled the old man at that instant to throw himself forward on his face. As he did so, he was conscious of a terrible explosion, and he had just time to observe the soldier falling in a heap near him, when he lost consciousness.

His consciousness appeared to return to him with a snap. He was lying on a plank in a building, and he heard someone say:

“I believe the old boy's English.”

He looked round. There were a lot of men lying there, and others in khaki and white overalls were busy amongst them. He sat up and rubbed his head, and said:

“Hi, mister, where be I now?”

Someone laughed, and a young man came up and said:

“Well, old thing, you were very nearly in hell. Who the devil are you?”

Someone else came up, and the two of them were discussing him. One of them said:

“He's quite all right. He was only knocked out. Better take him to the colonel. He may be a spy.”

The other came up, and touched his shoulder, and remarked:

“Can you walk, uncle?”

He replied:

“Ay, I can walk all right.”

“That's an old sport!”

The young man took his arm and helped him out of the room, into a courtyard. They entered another room, where an elderly, kind-faced officer was seated at a desk. The officer looked up, and exclaimed:

“Good God! Bradshaw, do you know who you’ve got there?”

The younger one said, “No. Who, sir?”

“By God! it’s Paul Jouperts!” exclaimed the colonel.

“Paul Jouperts! Great Scott!”

The older officer addressed himself to Sam. He said:

“Well, we’ve got you once more, Paul. We shall have to be a little more careful this time.”

The young officer said:

“Shall I detail a squad, sir?”

“We can’t shoot him without a court-martial,” replied the kind-faced senior.

Then Sam interpolated:

“Look’ee, here, sir. I’m fair sick of all this. My name bean’t Paul. My name’s Sam. I was a-thinnin’ a line of tarnips——”

Both officers burst out laughing, and the younger one said:

“Good! damn good! Isn’t it amazing, sir, the way they not only learn the language, but even take the trouble to learn a dialect?”

The older man busied himself with some papers.

“Well, Sam,” he remarked, “you shall be given a chance to prove your identity. Our methods are less drastic than those of your Boche masters. What part of England are you supposed to come from? Let’s see how much you can bluff us with your topographical knowledge.”

“Oi was a-thinnin’ a loine o’ tarnips this morning at ’alf-past seven on Mr. Dodge’s farm at Halvesham, when one o’ these ’ere airypalanes come right down among the swedes. I tells e’ to get clear o’ that, when the feller gets out o’ the car, ’e drahs a revowlver and e’ says, ‘You must ’company—I ___,’”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted the senior officer; “that’s all very good. Now, tell me—Where is Halvesham? What is the name of the local vicar? I’m sure you’d know that.”

Old Sam rubbed his chin.

“I sits under the Reverend David Pryce, mister, and a good God-fearin’ man he be. I took him a cookin’ o’ runner beans only yesterday. I works for Mr. Dodge what owns Greenway Manor and ’as a stud farm at Newmarket they say.”

“Charles Dodge?” asked the younger officer.

“Ay, Charlie Dodge. You write and ask ’un if he knows old Sam Gates.”

The two officers looked at each other, and the older one looked at Sam more closely.

“It’s very extraordinary,” he remarked.

“Everybody knows Charlie Dodge,” added the younger officer.

It was at that moment that a wave of genius swept over old Sam. He put his hand to his head, and suddenly jerked out:

“What’s more, I can tell ’ee where this yere Paul is. He’s acting a gardener in a convent at——”

He puckered up his brow and fumbled with his hat, and then got out:

“Mighteno.”

The older officer gasped:

“Mailleton-en-haut! Good God! What makes you say that, old man?”

Sam tried to give an account of his experience, and the things he had heard said by the German officers. But he was getting tired, and he broke off in the middle to say:

“Ye haven’t a bite o’ somethin’ to eat, I suppose, mister, and a glass o’ beer? I usually ’as my dinner at twelve o’clock.”

Both the officers laughed, and the older said:

“Get him some food, Bradshaw, and a bottle of beer from the mess. We’ll keep this old man here. He interests me.”

While the younger man was doing this, the chief pressed a button and summoned another junior officer.

“Gateshead,” he remarked, “ring up G.H.Q. and instruct them to arrest the gardener in that convent at the top of the hill, and then to report.”

The officer saluted and went out, and in a few minutes a tray of hot food and a large bottle of beer was brought to the old man, and he was left alone in the corner of the room to negotiate this welcome compensation. And in the execution he did himself and his county credit. In the meanwhile the officers were very busy. People were coming and going and examining maps and telephone-bells were ringing furiously. They did not disturb old Sam's gastronomic operations. He cleaned up the mess tins and finished the last drop of beer. The senior officer found time to offer him a cigarette, but he replied:

"Thank 'ee kindly, but I'd rather smoke my pipe."

"Oh, all right. Smoke away."

He lighted up, and the fumes of the shag permeated the room. Someone opened another window, and the young officer who had addressed him at first suddenly looked at him and exclaimed:

"Innocent, by God! You couldn't get snag like that anywhere but in Norfolk."

It must have been over an hour later when another officer entered, and saluted.

"Message from G.H.Q., sir," he said.

"Well?"

"They have arrested the gardener at the convent of St. Eloise, and they have every reason to believe that he is the notorious Paul Jouperts."

The colonel stood up, and his eyes beamed. He came over to old Sam and shook his hand.

"Mr. Gates," he said, "you are an old brick. You will probably hear more of this. You have probably been the means of delivering something very useful into our hands. Your own honour is vindicated. A loving government will probably award you five shillings or a Victoria Cross, or something of that sort. In the meantime, what can I do for you?"

Old Sam scratched his chin.

"Oi want to get back 'ome," he said.

"Well, even that might be arranged."

"Oi want to get back 'ome in toime for tea."

"What time do you have tea?"

“Foive o’clock or thereabouts.”

“I see.”

A kindly smile came into the eyes of the colonel. He turned to another officer standing by the table, and said:

“Raikes, is anyone going across this afternoon with despatches?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the other officer. “Commander Jennings is leaving at three o’clock.”

“You might ask him to come and see me.”

Within ten minutes a young man in a flight-commander’s uniform entered.

“Ah, Jennings,” said the colonel, “here is a little affair which concerns the honour of the British army. My friend here, Sam Gates, has come over from Halvesham in Norfolk in order to give us valuable information. I have promised him that he shall get home to tea at five o’clock. Can you take a passenger?”

The young man threw back his head and laughed.

“Lord!” he exclaimed. “What an old sport! Yes, I expect I could just manage it. Where is the Godforsaken place?”

A large ordnance-map of Norfolk (which had been captured from a German officer) was produced, and the young man studied it closely.

At three o’clock precisely old Sam, finding himself something of a hero and quite glad to escape from the embarrassment which this position entailed, once more sped skywards in an “airplane.”

At twenty minutes to five he landed once more amongst Mr. Dodge’s swedes. The breezy young airman shook hands with him and departed inland. Old Sam sat down and surveyed the field.

“A noice thing, I must say,” he muttered to himself, as he looked along the lines of unthinned turnips. He still had twenty minutes, and so he went slowly along and completed a line which he had commenced in the morning. He then deliberately packed up his dinner-things and his tools, and started out for home.

As he came round the corner of Stillway’s Meadow, and the cottage came in view, his niece stepped out of the copse with a basket on her arm.

“Well, Uncle,” she said, “is there any noos?”

It was then that old Sam became really irritated.

“Noos!” he said. “Noos! drat the girl! What noos should there be? Sixty-nine year I live in these here parts, hoein’ and weedin’ and thinnin’ and mindin’ Charlie Dodge’s sheep. Am I one o’ these here story-book folk havin’ noos ’appen to me all the time? Ain’t it enough, ye silly dab-faced zany, to earn enough to buy a bite o’ some’at to eat, and a glass o’ beer, and a place to rest a’s head o’night, without always wantin’ noos, noos, noos! I tell ’ee, it’s this that leads ’ee to ’alf the troubles in the world. Devil take the noos!”

And turning his back on her, he went fuming up the hill.

MISS BRACEGIRDLE DOES HER DUTY

“This is the room, madame.”

“Ah, thank you . . . thank you.”

“Does it appear satisfactory to madame?”

“Oh, yes, thank you . . . quite.”

“Does madame require anything further?”

“Er—if not too late, may I have a hot bath?”

“*Parfaitement*, madame. The bathroom is at the end of the passage on the left. I will go and prepare it for madame.”

“There is one thing more. . . . I have had a very long journey. I am very tired. Will you please see that I am not disturbed in the morning until I ring.”

“Certainly, madame.”

Millicent Bracegirdle was speaking the truth—she *was* tired. In the sleepy cathedral town of Easingstoke, from which she came, it was customary for everyone to speak the truth. It was customary, moreover, for everyone to lead simple, self-denying lives—to give up their time to good works and elevating thoughts. One had only to glance at little Miss Bracegirdle to see that in her was epitomized all the virtues and ideals of Easingstoke. Indeed, it was the pursuit of duty which had brought her to the Hotel de l’Oest at Bordeaux on this summer’s night. She had travelled from Easingstoke to London, then without a break to Dover, crossed that horrid stretch of sea to Calais, entrained for Paris, where she of necessity had to spend four hours—a terrifying experience—and then had come on to Bordeaux, arriving at midnight. The reason of this journey being that some one had to come to Bordeaux to meet her young sister-in-law, who was arriving the next day from South America. The sister-in-law was married to a missionary in Paraguay, but the climate not agreeing with her, she was returning to England. Her dear brother, the dean, would have come himself, but the claims on his time were so extensive, the parishioners would miss him so . . . it was clearly Millicent’s duty to go.

She had never been out of England before, and she had a horror of travel, and an ingrained distrust of foreigners. She spoke a little French—

sufficient for the purposes of travel and for obtaining any modest necessities, but not sufficient for carrying on any kind of conversation. She did not deplore this latter fact, for she was of opinion that French people were not the kind of people that one would naturally want to have conversation with; broadly speaking, they were not quite “nice,” in spite of their ingratiating manners.

The dear dean had given her endless advice, warning her earnestly not to enter into conversation with strangers, to obtain all information from the police, railway officials—in fact, any one in an official uniform. He deeply regretted to say that he was afraid that France was not a country for a woman to travel about in *alone*. There were loose, bad people about, always on the lookout. . . . He really thought perhaps he ought not to let her go. It was only by the utmost persuasion, in which she rather exaggerated her knowledge of the French language and character, her courage, and indifference to discomfort, that she managed to carry the day.

She unpacked her valise, placed her things about the room, tried to thrust back the little stabs of homesickness as she visualized her darling room at the deanery. How strange and hard and unfriendly seemed these foreign hotel bedrooms—heavy and depressing, no chintz and lavender and photographs of . . . all the dear family, the dean, the nephews and nieces, the interior of the cathedral during harvest festival, no samplers and needlework or coloured reproductions of the paintings by Marcus Stone. Oh dear, how foolish she was! What did she expect?

She disrobed and donned a dressing-gown; then, armed with a sponge-bag and towel, she crept timidly down the passage to the bathroom, after closing her bedroom door and turning out the light. The gay bathroom cheered her. She wallowed luxuriously in the hot water, regarding her slim legs with quiet satisfaction. And for the first time since leaving home there came to her a pleasant moment—a sense of enjoyment in her adventure. After all, it *was* rather an adventure, and her life had been peculiarly devoid of it. What queer lives some people must live, travelling about, having experiences! How old was she? Not really old—not by any means. Forty-two? Forty-three? She had shut herself up so. She hardly ever regarded the potentialities of age. As the world went, she was a well-preserved woman for her age. A life of self-abnegation, simple living, healthy walking and fresh air, had kept her younger than these hurrying, pampered city people.

Love? yes, once when she was a young girl . . . he was a schoolmaster, a most estimable kind gentleman. They were never engaged—not actually, but it was a kind of understood thing. For three years it went on, this pleasant

understanding and friendship. He was so gentle, so distinguished and considerate. She would have been happy to have continued in this strain for ever. But there was something lacking. Stephen had curious restless lapses. From the physical aspect of marriage she shrunk—yea, even with Stephen, who was gentleness and kindness itself. And then one day . . . one day he went away—vanished, and never returned. They told her he had married one of the country girls—a girl who used to work in Mrs. Forbes's dairy—not a very nice girl, she feared, one of these fast, pretty, foolish women. Heigho! well, she had lived that down, destructive as the blow appeared at the time. One lives everything down in time. There is always work, living for others, faith, duty. . . . At the same time she could sympathize with people who found satisfaction in unusual experiences.

There would be lots to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him on the morrow—nearly losing her spectacles on the restaurant car; the amusing remarks of an American child on the train to Paris; the curious food everywhere, nothing simple and plain; the two English ladies at the hotel in Paris who told her about the death of their uncle—the poor man being taken ill on Friday and dying on Sunday afternoon, just before tea-time; the kindness of the hotel proprietor who had sat up for her; the prettiness of the chambermaid. Oh, yes, everyone was really very kind. The French people, after all, were very nice. She had seen nothing—nothing but was quite nice and decorous. There would be lots to tell the dean to-morrow.

Her body glowed with the friction of the towel. She again donned her night attire and her thick, woollen dressing-gown. She tidied up the bathroom carefully in exactly the same way she was accustomed to do at home, then once more gripping her sponge-bag and towel, and turning out the light, she crept down the passage to her room. Entering the room she switched on the light and shut the door quickly. Then one of those ridiculous things happened—just the kind of thing you would expect to happen in a foreign hotel. The handle of the door came off in her hand.

She ejaculated a quiet “Bother!” and sought to replace it with one hand, the other being occupied with the towel and sponge-bag. In doing this she behaved foolishly, for thrusting the knob carelessly against the steel pin—without properly securing it—she only succeeded in pushing the pin farther into the door and the knob was not adjusted. She uttered another little “Bother” and put her sponge-bag and towel down on the floor. She then tried to recover the pin with her left hand, but it had gone in too far.

“How very foolish!” she thought, “I shall have to ring for the chambermaid—and perhaps the poor girl has gone to bed.”

She turned and faced the room, and suddenly the awful horror was upon her. *There was a man asleep in her bed!*

The sight of that swarthy face on the pillow, with its black tousled hair and heavy moustache, produced in her the most terrible moment of her life. Her heart nearly stopped. For some seconds she could neither think nor scream, and her first thought was—"I mustn't scream!"

She stood there like one paralyzed, staring at the man's head and the great curved hunch of his body under the clothes. When she began to think she thought very quickly, and all her thoughts worked together. The first vivid realization was that it wasn't the man's fault; it was *her* fault. *She was in the wrong room.* It was the Man's room. The rooms were identical, but there were all his things about, his clothes thrown carelessly over chairs, his collar and tie on the wardrobe, his great heavy boots and the strange yellow trunk. She must get out somehow, anyhow.

She clutched once more at the door, feverishly driving her finger-nails into the hole where the elusive pin had vanished. She tried to force her fingers in the crack and open the door that way, but it was of no avail. She was to all intents and purposes locked in—locked in a bedroom in a strange hotel alone with a man . . . a foreigner . . . *a Frenchman!* She must think. She must think. . . . She switched off the light. If the light was off he might not wake up. It might give her time to think how to act. It was surprising that he had not awakened. If he *did* wake up what would he do? How could she explain herself? He wouldn't believe her. No one would believe her. In an English hotel it would be difficult enough, but here where she wasn't known, where they were all foreigners and consequently antagonistic . . . merciful heavens!

She *must* get out. Should she wake the man? No, she couldn't do that. He might murder her. He might. . . . Oh, it was too awful to contemplate! Should she scream? ring for the chambermaid? But no, it would be the same thing. People would come rushing. They would find her there in the strange man's bedroom after midnight—she Millicent Bracegirdle, sister of the Dean of Easingstoke! Easingstoke!

Visions of Easingstoke flashed through her alarmed mind. Visions of the news arriving, women whispering around tea-tables: "Have you heard, my dear? . . . Really no one would have imagined! Her poor brother! He will of course have to resign, you know, my dear. Have a little more cream, my love."

Would they put her in prison? She might be in the room for the purpose of stealing or . . . She might be in the room for the purpose of breaking every one of the ten commandments. There was no explaining it away. She was a ruined woman, suddenly and irretrievably, unless she could open the door. The chimney? Should she climb up the chimney? But where would that lead to? And then she visualized the man pulling her down by her legs when she was already smothered in soot. Any moment he might wake up. . . .

She thought she heard the chambermaid going along the passage. If she had wanted to scream, she ought to have screamed before. The maid would know she had left the bathroom some minutes ago. Was she going to her room? Suddenly she remembered that she had told the chambermaid that she was not to be disturbed until she rang the next morning. That was something. Nobody would be going to her room to find out that she was not there.

An abrupt and desperate plan formed in her mind. It was already getting on for one o'clock. The man was probably a quite harmless commercial traveller or business man. He would probably get up about seven or eight o'clock, dress quickly and go out. She would hide under his bed until he went. Only a matter of a few hours. Men don't look under their beds, although she made a religious practice of doing so herself. When he went he would be sure to open the door all right. The handle would be lying on the floor as though it had dropped off in the night. He would probably ring for the chambermaid or open it with a penknife. Men were so clever at those things. When he had gone she would creep out and steal back to her room, and then there would be no necessity to give any explanation to anyone. But heavens! What an experience! Once under the white frill of that bed she would be safe till the morning. In daylight nothing seemed so terrifying.

With feline precaution she went down on her hands and knees and crept toward the bed. What a lucky thing there was that broad white frill! She lifted it at the foot of the bed and crept under. There was just sufficient depth to take her slim body. The floor was fortunately carpeted all over, but it seemed very close and dusty. Suppose she coughed or sneezed! Anything might happen. Of course . . . it would be much more difficult to explain her presence under the bed than to explain her presence just inside the door. She held her breath in suspense. No sound came from above, but under this frill it was difficult to hear anything. It was almost more nerve-racking than hearing everything . . . listening for signs and portents. This temporary escape in any case would give her time to regard the predicament detachedly. Up to the present she had not been able to visualize the full

significance of her action. She had in truth lost her head. She had been like a wild animal, consumed with the sole idea of escape . . . a mouse or a cat would do this kind of thing—take cover and lie low. If only it hadn't all happened *abroad*! She tried to frame sentences of explanation in French, but French escaped her. And then—they talked so rapidly, these people. They didn't listen. The situation was intolerable. Would she be able to endure a night of it?

At present she was not altogether uncomfortable, only stuffy and . . . very, very frightened. But she had to face six or seven or eight hours of it—perhaps even then discovery in the end! The minutes flashed by as she turned the matter over and over in her head. There was no solution. She began to wish she had screamed or awakened the man. She saw now that that would have been the wisest and most politic thing to do; but she had allowed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to elapse from the moment when the chambermaid would know that she had left the bathroom. They would want an explanation of what she had been doing in the man's bedroom all that time. Why hadn't she screamed before?

She lifted the frill an inch or two and listened. She thought she heard the man breathing but she couldn't be sure. In any case it gave her more air. She became a little bolder, and thrust her face partly through the frill so that she could breathe freely. She tried to steady her nerves by concentrating on the fact that—well, there it was. She had done it. She must make the best of it. Perhaps it would be all right after all.

“Of course I shan't sleep,” she kept on thinking, “I shan't be able to. In any case it will be safer not to sleep. I must be on the watch.”

She set her teeth and waited grimly. Now that she had made up her mind to see the thing through in this manner she felt a little calmer. She almost smiled as she reflected that there would certainly be something to tell the dear Dean when she wrote to him to-morrow. How would he take it? Of course he would believe it—he had never doubted a single word that she had uttered in her life, but the story would sound so . . . preposterous. In Easingstoke it would be almost impossible to envisage such an experience. She, Millicent Bracegirdle, spending a night under a strange man's bed in a foreign hotel! What would those women think? Fanny Shields and that garrulous old Mrs. Rusbridger? Perhaps . . . yes, perhaps it would be advisable to tell the dear Dean to let the story go no further. One could hardly expect Mrs. Rusbridger to . . . not make implications . . . exaggerate.

Oh dear! What were they all doing now? They would all be asleep, everyone in Easingstoke. Her dear brother always retired at ten-fifteen. He would be sleeping calmly and placidly, the sleep of the just . . . breathing the clear sweet air of Sussex, not this—Oh, it *was* stuffy! She felt a great desire to cough. She mustn't do that. Yes, at nine-thirty all the servants summoned to the library—a short service—never more than fifteen minutes, her brother didn't believe in a great deal of ritual—then at ten o'clock cocoa for everyone. At ten-fifteen bed for everyone. The dear sweet bedroom with the narrow white bed, by the side of which she had knelt every night as long as she could remember—even in her dear mother's day—and said her prayers.

Prayers! Yes, that was a curious thing. This was the first night in her life's experience that she had not said her prayers on retiring. The situation was certainly very peculiar . . . exceptional, one might call it. God would understand and forgive such a lapse. And yet after all, why . . . what was to prevent her saying her prayers? Of course she couldn't kneel in the proper devotional attitude, that would be a physical impossibility, nevertheless, perhaps her prayers might be just as efficacious . . . if they came from the heart. So little Miss Bracegirdle curved her body and placed her hands in a devout attitude in front of her face and quite inaudibly murmured her prayers under the strange man's bed.

“Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven; Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses”

Trespasses! Yes, surely she was trespassing on this occasion, but God would understand. She had not wanted to trespass. She was an unwitting sinner. Without uttering a sound she went through her usual prayers in her heart. At the end she added fervently:

“Please God protect me from the dangers and perils of this night.”

Then she lay silent and inert, strangely soothed by the effort of praying. “After all,” she thought, “it isn't the attitude which matters—it is that which occurs deep down in us.”

For the first time she began to meditate—almost to question—church forms and dogma. If an attitude was not indispensable why—a building, a ritual, a church at all? Of course her dear brother couldn't be wrong, the church was so old, so very old, its root deep buried in the story of human life, it was only that . . . well, outward forms *could* be misleading. Her own present position for instance. In the eyes of the world she had, by one silly

careless little action, convicted herself of being the breaker of every single one of the ten commandments.

She tried to think of one of which she could not be accused. But no—even to dishonouring her father and mother, bearing false witness, stealing, coveting her neighbour's . . . husband! That was the worst thing of all. Poor man! He might be a very pleasant honourable married gentleman with children and she—she was in a position to compromise him! Why hadn't she screamed! Too late! Too late!

It began to get very uncomfortable, stuffy, but at the same time draughty, and the floor was getting harder every minute. She changed her position stealthily and controlled her desire to cough. Her heart was beating rapidly. Over and over again recurred the vivid impression of every little incident and argument that had occurred to her from the moment she left the bathroom. This must, of course, be the room next to her own. So confusing with perhaps twenty bedrooms all exactly alike on one side of a passage—how was one to remember whether one's number was 115 or 116?

Her mind began to wander idly off into her schooldays. She was always very bad at figures. She disliked Euclid and all those subjects about angles and equations—so unimportant, not leading anywhere. History she liked, and botany, and reading about strange foreign lands, although she had always been too timid to visit them. And the lives of great people, *most* fascinating—Oliver Cromwell, Lord Beaconsfield, Lincoln, Grace Darling—*there* was a heroine for you—General Booth, a great good man, even if a little vulgar. She remembered dear old Miss Trimming talking about him one afternoon at the vicar of St. Bride's garden party. She was so amusing. She . . . *Good heavens!*

Almost unwittingly, Millicent Bracegirdle had emitted a violent sneeze!

It was finished! For the second time that night she was conscious of her heart nearly stopping. For the second time that night she was so paralyzed with fear that her mentality went to pieces. Now she would hear the man get out of bed. He would walk across to the door, switch on the light, and then lift up the frill. She could almost see that fierce moustached face glaring at her and growling something in French. Then he would thrust out an arm and drag her out. And then? O God in heaven! What then? . . .

“I shall scream before he does it. Perhaps I had better scream now. If he drags me out he will clap his hand over my mouth. Perhaps chloroform. . . .”

But somehow she could not scream. She was too frightened even for that. She lifted the frill and listened. Was he moving stealthily across the carpet? She thought—no, she couldn't be sure. Anything might be happening. He might strike her from above—with one of those heavy boots perhaps. Nothing seemed to be happening, but the suspense was intolerable. She realized now that she hadn't the power to endure a night of it. Anything would be better than this—disgrace, imprisonment, even death. She would crawl out, wake the man, and try and explain as best she could.

She would switch on the light, cough, and say: "*Monsieur!*"

Then he would start up and stare at her.

Then she would say—what should she say?

"*Pardon, monsieur, mais je—*" What on earth was the French for "I have made a mistake?"

"*J'ai tort. C'est la chambre—er—incorrect. Voulezvous—er—*"

What was the French for "door-knob," "let me go?"

It didn't matter. She would turn on the light, cough and trust to luck. If he got out of bed, and came toward her, she would scream the hotel down. . . .

The resolution formed, she crawled deliberately out at the foot of the bed. She scrambled hastily toward the door—a perilous journey. In a few seconds the room was flooded with light. She turned toward the bed, coughed, and cried out boldly:

"*Monsieur!*"

Then, for the third time that night, little Miss Bracegirdle's heart all but stopped. In this case the climax of the horror took longer to develop, but when it was reached, it clouded the other two experiences into insignificance.

The man on the bed was dead!

She had never beheld death before, but one does not mistake death.

She stared at him bewildered, and repeated almost in a whisper:

"*Monsieur! . . . Monsieur!*"

Then she tiptoed toward the bed. The hair and moustache looked extraordinarily black in that grey wax-like setting. The mouth was slightly

open, and the face, which in life might have been vicious and sensual, looked incredibly peaceful and far away.

It was as though she were regarding the features of a man across some vast passage of time, a being who had always been completely remote from mundane preoccupations.

When the full truth came home to her, little Miss Bracegirdle buried her face in her hands and murmured:

“Poor fellow . . . poor fellow!”

For the moment her own position seemed an affair of small consequence. She was in the presence of something greater and more all pervading. Almost instinctively she knelt by the bed and prayed.

For a few moments she seemed to be possessed by an extraordinary calmness and detachment. The burden of her hotel predicament was a gossamer trouble—a silly, trivial, almost comic episode, something that could be explained away.

But this man—he had lived his life, whatever it was like, and now he was in the presence of his Maker. What kind of man had he been?

Her meditations were broken by an abrupt sound. It was that of a pair of heavy boots being thrown down by the door outside. She started, thinking at first it was someone knocking or trying to get in. She heard the “boots,” however, stamping away down the corridor, and the realisation stabbed her with the truth of her own position. She mustn’t stop there. The necessity to get out was even more urgent.

To be found in a strange man’s bedroom in the night is bad enough, but to be found in a dead man’s bedroom was even worse. They would accuse her of murder, perhaps. Yes, that would be it—how could she possibly explain to these foreigners? Good God! they would hang her. No, guillotine her, that’s what they do in France. They would chop her head off with a great steel knife. Merciful heavens! She envisaged herself standing, blindfold by a priest and an executioner in a red cap, like that man in the Dicken’s story—what was his name? . . . Sydney Carton, that was it, and before he went on the scaffold he said:

“It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done.”

But no, she couldn’t say that. It would be a far, far worse thing that she did. What about the dear Dean? Her sister-in-law arriving alone from Paraguay to-morrow? All her dear people and friends in Easingstoke? Her

darling Tony, the large grey tabby cat? It was her duty not to have her head chopped off if it could possibly be avoided. She could do no good in the room. She could not recall the dead to life. Her only mission was to escape. Any minute people might arrive. The chambermaid, the boots, the manager, the gendarmes. . . . Visions of gendarmes arriving armed with swords and note-books vitalised her almost exhausted energies. She was a desperate woman. Fortunately now she had not to worry about the light. She sprang once more at the door and tried to force it open with her fingers. The result hurt her and gave her pause. If she was to escape she must *think*, and think intensely. She mustn't do anything rash and silly, she must just think and plan calmly.

She examined the lock carefully. There was no keyhole, but there was a slip-bolt, so that the hotel guest could lock the door on the inside, but it couldn't be locked on the outside. Oh, why didn't this poor dead man lock his door last night? Then this trouble could not have happened. She could see the end of the steel pin. It was about half an inch down the hole. If any one was passing they must surely notice the handle sticking out too far the other side! She drew a hairpin out of her hair and tried to coax the pin back, but she only succeeded in pushing it a little farther in. She felt the colour leaving her face, and a strange feeling of faintness come over her.

She was fighting for her life, she mustn't give way. She darted round the room like an animal in a trap, her mind alert for the slightest crevice of escape. The window had no balcony and there was a drop of five stories to the street below. Dawn was breaking. Soon the activities of the hotel and the city would begin. The thing must be accomplished before then.

She went back once more and stared at the lock. She stared at the dead man's property, his razors, and brushes, and writing materials. He appeared to have a lot of writing materials, pens and pencils and rubber and sealing-wax. . . . Sealing-wax!

Necessity is truly the mother of invention. It is in any case quite certain that Millicent Bracegirdle, who had never invented a thing in her life, would never have evolved the ingenious little device she did, had she not believed that her position was utterly desperate. For in the end this is what she did. She got together a box of matches, a candle, a bar of sealing-wax, and a hair pin. She made a little pool of hot sealing-wax, into which she dipped the end of the hairpin. Collecting a small blob on the end of it she thrust it into the hole, and let it adhere to the end of the steel pin. At the seventh attempt she got the thing to move. It took her just an hour and ten minutes to get that steel pin back into the room, and when at length it came far enough through

for her to grip it with her finger-nails, she burst into tears through the sheer physical tension of the strain. Very, very carefully she pulled it through and holding it firmly with her left hand she fixed the knob with her right, then slowly turned it. The door opened!

The temptation to dash out into the corridor and scream with relief was almost irresistible, but she forbore. She listened; she peeped out. No one was about. With beating heart, she went out, closing the door inaudibly. She crept like a little mouse to the room next door, stole in and flung herself on her bed. Immediately she did so it flashed through her mind that *she had left her sponge-bag and towel in the dead man's room!*

In looking back upon her experience she always considered that that second expedition was the worst of all. She might have left the sponge-bag and towel there, only that the towel—she never used hotel towels—had neatly inscribed in the corner “M.B.”

With furtive caution she managed to retrace her steps. She re-entered the dead man's room, reclaimed her property and returned to her own. When this mission was accomplished she was indeed well-nigh spent. She lay on her bed and groaned feebly. At last she fell into a fevered sleep. . . .

It was eleven o'clock when she awoke and no one had been to disturb her. The sun was shining, and the experiences of the night appeared a dubious nightmare. Surely she had dreamt it all?

With dread still burning in her heart she rang the bell. After a short interval of time the chambermaid appeared. The girl's eyes were bright with some uncontrollable excitement. No, she had not been dreaming. This girl had heard something.

“Will you bring me some tea, please?”

“Certainly, madame.”

The maid drew back the curtains and fussed about the room. She was under a pledge of secrecy but she could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she approached the bed and whispered excitedly:

“Oh, madame, I have promised not to tell . . . but a terrible thing has happened. A man, a dead man, has been found in room 117—a guest. Please not to say I tell you. But they have all been there, the gendarmes, the doctors, the inspectors. Oh, it is terrible . . . terrible.”

The little lady in the bed said nothing. There was indeed nothing to say. But Marie Louise Laucrat was too full of emotional excitement to spare her.

“But the terrible thing is. . . . Do you know who he was, madame? They say it is Boldhu, the man wanted for the murder of Jean Carreton in the barn at Vincennes. They say he strangled her, and then cut her up in pieces and hid her in two barrels which he threw into the river. . . . Oh, but he was a bad man, madame, a terrible bad man . . . and he died in the room next door . . . suicide they think or was it an attack of the heart? . . . Remorse, some shock perhaps. . . . Did you say a *café complet*, madame?”

“No, thank you, my dear . . . just a cup of tea . . . strong tea . . .”

“*Parfaitement*, madame.”

The girl retired, and a little later a waiter entered the room with a tray of tea. She could never get over her surprise in this. It seemed so—well, indecorous for a man—although only a waiter—to enter a lady’s bedroom. There was no doubt a great deal in what the dear Dean said. They were certainly very peculiar, these French people—they had most peculiar notions. It was not the way they behaved at Easingstoke. She got farther under the sheets, but the waiter appeared quite indifferent to the situation. He put the tray down and retired.

When he had gone she sat up and sipped her tea, which gradually warmed her. She was glad the sun was shining. She would have to get up soon. They said that her sister-in-law’s boat was due to berth at one o’clock. That would give her time to dress comfortably, write to her brother, and then go down to the docks. Poor man! So he had been a murderer, a man who cut up the bodies of his victims . . . and she had spent the night in his bedroom! They were certainly a most—how could she describe it?—people. Nevertheless she felt a little glad that at the end she had been there to kneel and pray by his bedside. Probably nobody else had ever done that. It was very difficult to judge people. . . . Something at some time might have gone wrong. He might not have murdered the woman after all. People were often wrongly convicted. She herself. . . . If the police had found her in that room at three o’clock that morning. . . . It is that which takes place in the heart which counts. One learns and learns. Had she not learnt that one can pray just as effectively lying under a bed as kneeling beside it? . . . Poor man!

She washed and dressed herself and walked calmly down to the writing-room. There was no evidence of excitement among the other hotel guests. Probably none of them knew about the tragedy except herself. She went to a writing table, and after profound meditation wrote as follows:

MY DEAR BROTHER,

“I arrived late last night after a very pleasant journey. Everyone was very kind and attentive, the manager was sitting up for me. I nearly lost my spectacle case in the restaurant car! But a kind old gentleman found it and returned it to me. There was a most amusing American child on the train. I will tell you about her on my return. The people are very pleasant, but the food is peculiar, nothing *plain and wholesome*. I am going down to meet Annie at one o’clock. How have you been keeping, my dear? I hope you have not had any further return of the bronchial attacks.

“Please tell Lizzie that I remembered in the train on the way here that that large stone jar of marmalade that Mrs. Hunt made is behind those empty tins in the top shelf of the cupboard next to the coach house. I wonder whether Mrs. Butler was able to come to evensong after all? This is a nice hotel, but I think Annie and I will stay at the ‘Grand’ to-night, as the bedrooms here are rather noisy. Well, my dear, nothing more till I return. Do take care of yourself.—Your loving sister,

“MILLICENT.”

Yes, she couldn’t tell Peter about it, neither in the letter nor when she went back to him. It was her duty not to tell him. It would only distress him; she felt convinced of it. In this curious foreign atmosphere the thing appeared possible, but in Easingstoke the mere recounting of the fantastic situations would be positively . . . indelicate. There was no escaping that broad general fact—she had spent a night in a strange man’s bedroom. Whether he was a gentleman or a criminal, even whether he was dead or alive, did not seem to mitigate the jar upon her sensibilities, or rather it would not mitigate the jar upon the peculiarly sensitive relationship between her brother and herself. To say that she had been to the bathroom, the knob of the door-handle came off in her hand, she was too frightened to awaken the sleeper or scream, she got under the bed—well, it was all perfectly true. Peter would believe her, but—one simply could not conceive such a situation in Easingstoke deanery. It would create a curious little barrier between them, as though she had been dipped in some mysterious solution which alienated her. It was her duty not to tell.

She put on her hat, and went out to post the letter. She distrusted an hotel letter-box. One never knew who handled these letters. It was not a proper official way of treating them. She walked to the head post office in Bordeaux.

The sun was shining. It was very pleasant walking about amongst these queer excitable people, so foreign and different-looking—and the cafés already crowded with chattering men and women, and the flower stalls, and the strange odour of—what was it? Salt? Brine? Charcoal? . . . A military band was playing in the square . . . very gay and moving. It was all life, and movement, and bustle . . . thrilling rather.

“I spent a night in a strange man’s bedroom.”

Little Miss Bracegirdle hunched her shoulders, murmured to herself and walked faster. She reached the post office and found the large metal plate with the slot for letters and “R.F.” stamped above it. Something official at last! Her face was a little flushed—was it the warmth of the day or the contact of movement and life?—as she put her letter into the slot. After posting it she put her hand into the slot and flicked it round to see that there were no foreign contraptions to impede its safe delivery. No, the letter had dropped safely in. She sighed contentedly and walked off in the direction of the docks to meet her sister-in-law from Paraguay.

THE ACCIDENT OF CRIME

Every seaman who makes the city of Bordeaux a port of call knows the Rue Lucien Faure. It is one of those irregular streets which one finds in the neighbourhood of docks in every city in the world. Cord wainers, ships stores, cafés and strange foreign eating-houses jostle each other indiscriminately. At the farther end of the Rue Lucien Faure, and facing Bassin à Flot No. 2, is a little cul-de-sac known as Place Duquesne, an obscure honeycomb of high dingy houses. It had often been pointed out to the authorities that the Place Duquesne was a scandal to the neighbourhood; not that the houses themselves were either better or worse than those of adjoining streets, but that the inhabitants belonged almost entirely to the criminal classes. A murderer, an apache, a blackmailer, a coiner, hardly ever appeared in the Court of Justice without his habitation being traced to this unsavoury retreat.

And the authorities did nothing. Indeed, Chief Inspector Tolozan, who had that neighbourhood under his special supervision, said that he preferred it as it was. He affirmed—not unreasonably—that it was better to have all one's birds in one nest rather than have them scattered all over the wood. Tolozan, although a practical man, was something of a visionary. He was of that speculative turn of mind which revels in theories. The contemplation of crime moved him in somewhat the same way that a sunset will affect a landscape painter. He indulged in broad generalities, and it always gave him a mild thrill of pleasure when the actions or behaviour of his protégés substantiated his theories.

In a detached way, he had quite an affection for his "birds," as he called them. He knew their record, their characteristics, their tendencies, their present occupation, if any, their place of abode—which was generally the Place Duquesne. If old Carros, the forger, moved from the attic in No. 17 to the basement in No. 11, Monsieur Tolozan would sense the reason of this change. And he never interfered until the last minute. He allowed Carros to work three months on that very ingenious plan for counterfeiting one franc notes. He waited till the plates were quite complete before he stepped in with his quiet: . . .

"Now, *mon brave*, it distresses me to interfere . . ."

He admired the plates enormously, and in the van on the way to the police court he sighed many times, and ruminated upon what he called "the

accident of crime.” One of his pet theories was that no man was entirely criminal. Somewhere at some time it had all been just touch and go. With better fortune the facile Carros might now be the director of an insurance company, or perhaps an eminent pianist. Another saying of his, which he was very fond of repeating, was this:

“The law does not sit in judgment on people. Laws are only made for the protection of the citizen.”

His colleagues were inclined to laugh at “Papa Tolozan,” as they called him, but they were bound to respect his thoroughness and conscientiousness, and they treated his passion for philosophic speculation as merely the harmless eccentricity of an urbane and charming character. Perhaps in this attitude toward crime there have always been two schools of thought, the one which regards it—like Tolozan—as “the accident,” the other, as represented by the forceful Muguet of the Council of Jurisprudence at Bayonne, who insists that crime is an ineradicable trait, an inheritance, a fate. In spite of their divergence of outlook these two were great friends, and many and long were the arguments they enjoyed over a glass of vermouth and seltzer at a quiet café they sometimes favoured in the Cours du Pavé, when business brought them together. Muguet would invariably clinch the argument with a staccato:

“Well, come now, what about old Laissac?”

Then he would slap his leg and laugh. Here, indeed, was a hard case. Here, indeed, was an irreconcilable, an *intransigent*, an ingrained criminal, and as this story principally concerns old Laissac it may be as well to describe him a little in detail at once. He was at that time fifty-seven years of age. Twenty-one years and ten months of that period had been passed in penitentiaries, prisons, and convict establishments. He was already an old man, but a wiry, energetic old man, with a battered face seamed by years of vicious dissipations and passions.

At the age of seventeen he had killed a Chinaman. The affair was the outcome of a dockside *mêlée*, and many contended that Laissac was not altogether responsible. However that may be, the examining magistrate at that time was of opinion that there had been rather too much of that sort of thing of late, and that an example must be made of someone. Even the Chink must be allowed some show of protection. Laissac was sent to a penitentiary for two years. He returned an avowed enemy of society. Since that day, he had been convicted of burglary, larceny, passing of counterfeit coins, assault, and drunkenness. These were only the crimes of which he had actually been

convicted, but everyone knew that they were only an infinitesimal fraction of the crimes of which he was guilty.

He was a cunning old man. He had bashed one of his pals and maimed him for life, and the man was afraid to give evidence against him. He had treated at least two women with almost unspeakable cruelty. There was no record of his ever having done a single action of kindness or unselfishness. He had, moreover, been a perverter and betrayer of others. He bred crime with malicious enjoyment. He trained young men in the tricks of the trade. He dealt in stolen property. He was a centre, a focus, of criminal activity. One evening, Muguet remarked to Tolozan, as they sipped their coffee:

“The law is too childish. That man has been working steadily all his life to destroy and pervert society. He has a diseased mind. Why aren’t we allowed to do away with him? If, as you say, the laws were made to protect citizens, there’s only one way to protect ourselves against a villain like Laissac—the guillotine.”

Tolozan shook his head slowly. “No, the law only allows capital punishment in the case of murder.”

“I know that, my old cabbage. What I say is, why should society bother to keep an old ruffian like that?”

Tolozan did not answer, and Muguet continued:

“Where is he now?”

“He lives in an attic in the Place Duquesne, No. 33.”

“Are you watching him?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Been to call on him?”

“I was there yesterday.”

“What was he doing?”

“Playing with a dog.”

Muguet slapped his leg, and threw back his head. Playing with a dog! That was excellent! The greatest criminal in Bordeaux—playing with a dog! Muguet didn’t know why it was so funny. Perhaps it was just the vision of his old friend, Tolozan, solemnly sitting there and announcing the fact that Laissac was playing with a dog, as though it were a matter of profound significance. Tolozan looked slightly annoyed and added:

“He’s very fond of dogs.”

This seemed to Muguet funnier still, and it was some moments before he could steady his voice to say:

“Well, I’m glad he’s fond of something. Was there nothing you could lay your hands on?”

“Nothing.”

It is certainly true that Muguet had a strong case in old Laissac to confute his friend’s theories. Where was “the accident of crime” in such a confirmed criminal?

It is also true old Laissac was playing with a dog, and at that very moment. Whilst the representatives of law and order were discussing him in the Café Basque he was tickling the ribs of his beloved Sancho, and saying:

“Up, soldier. Courage, my old warrior.”

Sancho was a strange, forlorn-looking beast, not entirely retriever, not wholly poodle, indeed not necessarily dog at all. He had large sentimental eyes, and he worshipped his master with unquestioning adoration. When his master was out, as he frequently was on strange nocturnal adventures, he would lie on the mat by the door, his nostrils snuggled between his paws, and watch the door. Directly his master entered the house, Sancho would be aware of it. He would utter one long whine of pleasure, and his skin would shake and tremble with excitement. The reason of his perturbations this morning was that part of the chimney had fallen down with a crash. The brickwork had given way, and a little way up old Laissac could see a narrow opening, revealing the leads on the adjoining roof. It was summer time and such a disaster did not appal him unduly.

“Courage,” he said, “to-morrow that shall be set right. To-day and to-night we have another omelette in the pan, old comrade. To-morrow there will be ham bones for Sancho, and a nice bottle of fine champagne for the breadwinner, eh? Lie down, boy, that’s only old Grogard!”

The dog went into his corner, and a most strange-looking old man entered the room. He had thin white hair, a narrow horse-like face with prominent eyes. His face appeared much too thin and small for the rest of his body, which had unexpected projections and convolutions. From his movements it was immediately apparent that his left side was paralysed. On the left breast of his shabby green coat was a medal for saving lives. The medal recorded that, at the age of twenty-six, he had plunged into the

Garonne, and saved the lives of two boys. He sat down and produced a sheet of dirty paper.

“Everything is in order,” he said dolefully.

“Good,” said Laissac. “Show us the plan.”

“This is the garage and the room above where you enter. The chauffeur left with Madame Delannelle and her maid for Pau this morning. They will be away three weeks or more. Monsieur Delannelle sleeps in this room on the first floor; but as you know, he is a drug fiend. From eleven o’clock till four in the morning he is in a coma. Lisette and the other maid sleep on the top floor. Lisette will see that this other woman gets a little of the white powder in her cider before she retires. There is no one else in the house. There is no dog.”

“It appears a modest enterprise.”

“It is as easy as opening a bottle of white oil. The door of the room above the garage, connecting with the first landing in the house, is locked and the key taken away, but it is a very old-fashioned lock. You could open it with a bone toothpick, master.”

“H’m. I suppose Lisette expects something out of this?”

The old man sniggered, and blew his nose on a red handkerchief.

“She’s doing it for love.”

“You mean—young Leon Briteuil?”

“Yes, now this is the point, master. Are you going to crack this crib yourself, or would you like young Briteuil to go along? He’s a promising lad, and he would be proud to be in a job with you.”

“What stuff is there, there?”

“In the second drawer on the left-hand side in a bureau in the salon is a cash box, where Monsieur keeps the money from his rents. He owns a lot of small property. There ought to be about ten thousand francs. Madame has taken most of her jewels, but there are a few trinkets in a jewel case in the bedroom. For the rest, there is a collection of old coins in a cabinet, some of them gold. That is in the library, here, see? And the usual silver plate and trinkets scattered about the house. Altogether a useful haul, too much for one man to carry.”

“Very well, I’ll take the young——, tell him to be at the Place du Pont, the other side of the river, at twelve-thirty. If he fails or makes the slightest

slip, I'll break his face. Tell him that. That's all."

"Right you are, master."

Young Briteuil was not quite the lion-hearted person he liked to pose as, and this message frightened him. Long before the fateful hour of the appointment, he was dreading the association of the infamous Laissac more than the hazardous adventure upon which he was committed. He would have rather made the attempt by himself. He was neat with his fingers and had been quite successful pilfering little articles from the big stores, but he had never yet experienced the thrill of housebreaking.

Moreover, he felt bitterly that the arrangement was unjust. It was he who had manœuvred the whole field of operations, he with his spurious love-making to the middle-aged coquettish Lisette. There was a small fortune to be picked up, but because he was pledged to the gang of which Laissac was the chief, his award would probably amount to a capful of sous. Laissac had the handling of the loot, and he would say that it realised anything he fancied. Grogard had to have his commission also. The whole thing was grossly unfair. He deeply regretted that he had not kept the courting of Lisette a secret. Visions of unholy orgies danced before his eyes. However, there it was, and he had to make the best of it. He was politeness and humility itself when he met old Laissac at the corner of the Place du Pont punctually at the hour appointed. Laissac was in one of his sullen moods and they trudged in silence out to the northern suburb where the villa of Monsieur Delannelle was situated.

The night was reasonably dark and fine. As they got nearer and nearer to their destination, and Laissac became more and more unresponsive, the younger man's nerves began to get on edge. He was becoming distinctly jumpy, and, as people will in such a condition, he carried things to the opposite extreme. He pretended to be extremely light-hearted, and to treat the affair as a most trivial exploit. He even assumed an air of flippancy, but in this attitude he was not encouraged by his companion, who on more than one occasion told him to keep his ugly mouth shut.

"You won't be so merry when you get inside," he said.

"But there is no danger, no danger at all," laughed the young man unconvincingly.

"There's always danger in our job," growled Laissac. "It's the things you don't expect that you've got to look out for. You can make every preparation, think of every eventuality, and then suddenly, presto! a bullet

from some unknown quarter. The gendarmes may have had wind of it all the time. Monsieur Delannelle may not have indulged in his dope for once. He may be sitting up with a loaded gun. The girl Lisette may be an informer. The other girl may have heard and given the game away. Madame and the chauffeur may return at any moment. People have punctures sometimes. You can even get through the job and then be nabbed at the corner of the street, or the next morning, or the following week. There's a hundred things likely to give you away. Inspector Tolozan himself may be hiding in the garden with a half-dozen of his thick-necks. Don't you persuade yourself it's a soft thing, my white-livered cockerel."

This speech did not raise Leon's spirits. When they reached the wall adjoining the garage, he was trembling like a leaf, and his teeth began to chatter.

"I could do with a nip of brandy," he said sullenly in a changed voice.

The old criminal looked at him contemptuously, and produced a flask from some mysterious pocket. He took a swig, and then handed it to his companion. He allowed him a little gulp, and then snatched the flask away.

"Now, up you go," he said. Leon knew then that escape was impossible. Old Laissac held out his hands for him to rest his heel upon. He did so, and found himself jerked to the top of the wall. The old man scrambled up after him somehow. They then dropped down quietly on to some sacking in the corner of the yard. The garage and the house were in complete darkness. The night was unnaturally still, the kind of night when every little sound becomes unduly magnified. Laissac regarded the dim structure of the garage with a professional eye. Leon was listening for sounds, and imagining eyes peering at them through the shutters . . . perhaps a pistol or two already covering them. His heart was beating rapidly. He had never imagined it was going to be such a nerve-racking business. Curse the old man! Why didn't he let him have his full whack at the brandy?

A sudden temptation crept over him. The old man was peering forward. He would hit him suddenly on the back of the head and then bolt. Yes, he would. He knew he would never have the courage to force his way into that sinister place of unknown terrors. He would rather die out here in the yard.

"Come on," said Laissac, advancing cautiously toward the door of the garage.

Leon slunk behind him, watching for his opportunity. He had no weapon, nothing but his hands, and he knew that in a struggle with Laissac

he would probably be worsted. The tidy concrete floor of the yard held out no hope of promiscuous weapons. Once he thought: "I will strike him suddenly on the back of the head with all my might. As he falls I'll strike him again. When he's on the ground I'll kick his brains out . . ."

To such a desperate pass can fear drive a man! Laissac stood by the wood frame of the garage door looking up and judging the best way to make an entrance of the window above. While he was doing so Leon stared round, and his eye alighted on a short dark object near the wall. It was a piece of iron piping. He sidled toward it, and surreptitiously picked it up. At that exact instant Laissac glanced round at him abruptly and whispered:

"What are you doing?"

Now must this desperate venture be brought to a head. He stumbled toward Laissac, mumbling vaguely:

"I thought this might be useful."

Leon was left-handed and he gripped the iron piping in that hand. Laissac was facing him, and he must be put off his guard. He mumbled:

"What's the orders, master?"

He doubtless hoped from this that Laissac would turn round and look up again. He made no allowance for that animal instinct of self-preservation which is most strongly marked in men of low mentality. Without a word old Laissac sprang at him. He wanted to scream with fear, but instead he struck wildly with the iron. He felt it hit something ineffectually. A blow on the face staggered him. In the agony of recovery he realised that his weapon had been wrenched from his hands! Now, indeed, he would scream, and rouse the neighbourhood to save him from this monster. If he could only get his voice! If he could only get his voice! Curse this old devil! Where is he? Spare me! Spare me! Oh, no, no . . . oh, God!

Old Laissac stuffed the body behind a bin where rubbish was put, in the corner of the yard. The struggle had been curiously silent and quick. The only sound had been the thud of the iron on his treacherous assistant's skull, a few low growls and blows. Fortunately, the young man had been too paralysed with fear to call out. Laissac stood in the shadow of the wall and waited. Had the struggle attracted any attention? Would it be as well to abandon the enterprise? He thought it all out dispassionately. An owl, with a deep mellow note, sailed majestically away toward a neighbouring church. Perhaps it was rather foolish. If he were caught, and the body discovered—that would be the end of Papa Laissac! That would be a great misfortune.

Everyone would miss him so, and he still had life and fun in him. He laughed bitterly. Yes, perhaps he had better steal quietly away. He moved over to the outer wall.

Then a strange revulsion came over him, perhaps a deep bitterness with life, or a gambler's lure. Perhaps it was only professional vanity. He had come here to burgle this villa, and he disliked being thwarted. Besides it was such a soft thing, all the dispositions so carefully laid. He had already thought out the way to mount to the bedroom above the door. In half an hour he might be richer by many thousand francs, and he had been getting rather hard up of late. That young fool would be one less to pay. He shrugged his broad shoulders, and crept back to the garage door.

In ten minutes time he had not only entered the room above the garage but had forced the old-fashioned lock, and entered the passage connecting with the house. He was perfectly cool now, his senses keenly alert. He went down on his hands and knees and listened. He waited some time focussing in his mind the exact disposition of the rooms as shown in the plan old Grognard had shown him. He crawled along the corridor like a large gorilla. At the second door on the left he heard the heavy, stentorian breathing of a man inside the room. Monsieur Delannelle, good! It sounded like the breathing of a man under the influence of drugs or drink.

After that, with greater confidence, he made his way downstairs to the salon. With unerring precision he located the drawer in the bureau where the cash box was kept. The box was smaller than he expected and he decided to take it away rather than to indulge in the rather noisy business of forcing the lock. He slipped it into a sack. Guided by his electric torch, he made a rapid round of the reception-rooms. He took most of the collection of old coins from the cabinet in the library and a few more silver trinkets. Young Briteuil would certainly have been useful carrying all this bulkier stuff. Rather unfortunate, but still it served the young fool right. He, Laissac, was not going to encumber himself with plate . . . a few small and easily negotiable pieces were all he desired, sufficient to keep him in old brandy, and Sancho in succulent ham bones for a few months to come. A modest and simple fellow, old Laissac.

The sack was soon sufficiently full. He paused by the table in the dining-room and helped himself to another swig of brandy, then he blinked his eyes. What else was there? Oh, yes, Grognard had said that there were a few of Madame's jewels in the jewel case. But that was in the bedroom where Monsieur Delannelle was sleeping, that was a different matter, and yet after all, perhaps, a pity not to have the jewels!

H'm, Monsieur Delannelle was in one of his drug stupours. It must be about two o'clock. They said he never woke till five or six. Why not? Besides what was a drugged man? He couldn't give any trouble. If he tried to, Laissac could easily knock him over the head as he had young Briteuil—might just as well have those few extra jewels. His senses tingled rather more acutely as he once more crept upstairs. He pressed his ear to the keyhole of Monsieur Delannelle's bedroom. The master of the house was still sleeping.

He turned the handle quietly, listened, then stole into the room, closing the door after him. Now for it. He kept the play of his electric torch turned from the bed. The sleeper was breathing in an ugly, irregular way. He swept the light along the wall, and located the dressing-table—satinwood and silver fittings. A new piece of furniture—curse it! The top right-hand drawer was locked. And that was the drawer which the woman said contained the jewel case. Dare he force the lock? Was it worth it? He had done very well. Why not clear off now? Madame had probably taken everything of worth. He hesitated and looked in the direction of the sleeper. Rich guzzling old pig! Why should he have all these comforts and luxuries whilst Laissac had to work hard and at such risk for his living? Be damned to him. He put down his sack and took a small steel tool out of his breast pocket. It was necessary to make a certain amount of noise, but after all the man in the bed wasn't much better than a corpse. Laissac went down on his knees and applied himself to his task.

The minutes passed. Confound it! It was a very obstinate lock. He was becoming quite immersed in its intricacy when something abruptly jarred his sensibilities. It was a question of silence. The sleeper was no longer snoring or breathing violently. In fact he was making no noise at all. Laissac was aware of a queer tremor creeping down his spine for the first time that evening. He was a fool not to have cleared out after taking the cash box. He had overdone it. The man in bed was awake and watching him! What was the best thing to do? Perhaps the fool had a revolver! If there was any trouble he must fight. He couldn't allow himself to be taken, with that body down below stuffed behind the dust-bin. Why didn't the tormentor call out or challenge him? Laissac crept lower and twisted his body into a crouching position.

By this action he saved his life, for there was a sudden blinding flash, and a bullet struck the dressing-table just at the place where his head had been. This snapping of the tension was almost a relief. It was a joy to revert to the primitive instincts of self-preservation. At the foot of the bed an

eidern down had fallen. Instinct drove him to snatch this up. He crumpled it up into the rough form of a body and thrust it with his right hand over the end of the bed. Another bullet went through it and struck the dressing-table again. But as this happened, Laissac, who had crept to the left side of the bed sprang across it and gripped the sleeper's throat. The struggle was of momentary duration. The revolver dropped to the floor. The man addicted to drugs gasped, spluttered, then his frame shook violently and he crumpled into an inert mass upon the bed. A blind fury was upon Laissac. He struck the still, cold thing again and again, then a revulsion of terror came over him. He crouched in the darkness, sweating with fear.

"They'll get me this time," he thought. "Those shots must have been heard. Lisette, the other maid, the neighbours, the gendarmes . . . two of these disgusting bodies to account for. I'd better leave the swag and clear." He drained the rest of the brandy and staggered uncertainly toward the door. The house was very still. He turned the handle and went into the passage. Then one of those voices which were always directing his life said:

"Courage, old man, why leave the sack behind? You've worked for it. Besides, one might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb!"

He went quietly back and picked up the sack. But his hands were shaking violently. As he was returning, the sack with its metallic contents struck the end of the brass bed. This little accident affected him fantastically. He was all fingers and thumbs to-night. What was the matter? Was he losing his nerve? Getting old? Of course, the time must come when—God! What was that? He stood dead still by the jamb of the door. There was the sound of the stealthy tread on the stairs, the distinct creak of a board. How often in his life had he not imagined that! But there was no question about it to-night. He was completely unstrung.

"If there's another fight I won't be able to face it. I'm done."

An interminable interval of time passed, and then—that quiet creaking of another board, the person, whoever it was, was getting nearer. He struggled desperately to hold himself together, to be prepared for one more struggle, even if it should be his last. Suddenly a whisper came down the stairs:

"Leon!"

Leon! What did they mean? Eh? Oh, yes—Leon Briteuil! Of course that fool of a woman, the informer—Lisette. She thought it was Leon. Leon, her lover. He breathed more easily. Women have their uses and purposes after

all. But he must be very circumspect. There must be no screaming. She repeated:

“Leon, is that you?”

With a great effort he controlled his voice.

“It’s all right. I’m Leon’s friend. He’s outside.”

The woman gave a little gasp of astonishment.

“Oh! I did not know——”

“Very quietly, mademoiselle. Compose yourself. I must now rejoin him. Everything is going well.”

“But I would see him. I wish to see him to-night. He promised——”

Laissac hurried noiselessly down the stairs, thankful for the darkness. He waited till he had reached the landing below. Then he called up in a husky voice:

“Wait till ten minutes after I have left the house, mademoiselle, then come down. You will find your Leon waiting for you behind the dust-bin in the yard.”

And fortunately for Lisette’s momentary peace of mind, she could not see the inhuman grin which accompanied this remark.

From the moment of his uttering it till four hours later, when his mangled body was discovered by a gendarme on the pavement just below the window of the house in which he lived in the Place Duquesne, there is no definite record of old Laissac’s movements or whereabouts.

It exists only in those realms of conjecture in which Monsieur Tolozan is so noted an explorer.

Old Laissac had a genius for passing unnoticed. He could walk through the streets of Bordeaux in broad daylight with stolen clocks under each arm and it never occurred to any one to suspect him, but when it came to travelling in the dark he was unique. At the inquest, which was held five days later, not a single witness could come forward and say that they had seen anything of him either that evening or night.

That highly eminent advocate Maxim Colbert, president of the court, passed from the cool mortuary into the stuffy courthouse with a bored, preoccupied air. Dead bodies did not greatly interest him, and he had had too much experience of them to be nauseated by them—besides, an old

criminal! It appeared to him, a tedious and unnecessary waste of time. The old gentleman had something much more interesting occupying his mind. He was expecting his daughter-in-law to present his son with a child. The affair might happen now, any moment, indeed, it might already have happened. Any moment a message might come with the good tidings. A son! Of course it must be a son! The line of Colbert tracing their genealogy back to the reign of Louis XIV—must be perpetuated. A distinguished family of advocates, generals, rulers of men. A Son! It annoyed him a little in that he suspected that his own son was anxious to have a daughter. Bah! Selfishness.

Let us see what is this case all about? Oh, yes, an old criminal named Theodore Laissac, aged fifty-seven, wanted by the police in connection with a mysterious crime at the villa of Monsieur and Madame Delannelle. The body found by a printer's devil, named Adolph Roger, at 4.15 o'clock on the morning of the ninth, on the pavement of the Place Duquesne. Witness informed police. Sub-inspector Floquette attested to the finding of body as indicated by witness. The position of body directly under attic window, five stories high, occupied by deceased, suggesting that he had fallen or thrown himself therefrom. Good! Quite clear. A life of crime, result—suicide. Will it be a boy or girl? Let us have the deceased's record. . . .

A tall square-bearded inspector stood up in the body of the court, and in a sepulchral voice read out the criminal life record of Theodore Laissac. It was not pretty reading. It began at the age of seventeen with the murder of the Chinaman, Ching Loo, and from thence onward it revealed a deplorable story of villainy and depravity. The record of evil doings and the award of penalties became monotonous. The mind of Maxim Colbert wandered back to his son, and to his son's son. He had already seen the case in a nutshell and dismissed it. It would give him a pleasant opportunity a little later on. A homily on the wages of sin . . . a man whose life was devoted to evil-doing, in the end driven into a corner by the forces of justice, smitten by the demons of conscience, dies the coward's death. A homily on cowardice, quoting a passage from Thomas à Kempis, excellent! . . . Would they send him a telegram? Or would the news come by hand? What was that the Counsel for the Right of the Poor was saying? Chief Inspector Tolozan wished to give evidence. Ah, yes, why not? A worthy fellow, Inspector Tolozan. He had known him for many years, worked with him on many cases, an admirable, energetic officer, a little given to theorising—an interesting fellow, though. He would cross-examine him himself.

Inspector Tolozan took his place in the witness box, and bowed to the president. His steady grey eyes regarded the court thoughtfully as he tugged at his thin grey imperial.

“Now, Inspector Tolozan, I understand that you have this district in which this—unfortunate affair took place, under your own special supervision?”

“Yes, *monsieur le président*.”

“You have heard the evidence of the witnesses Roger and Floquette with regard to the finding of the body?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Afterward, I understand, you made an inspection of the premises occupied by the deceased?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“At what time was that?”

“At six-fifteen, monsieur.”

“Did you arrive at any conclusions with regard to the cause or motive of the—er accident?”

“Yes, *monsieur le président*.”

“What conclusions did you come to?”

“I came to the conclusion that the deceased, Theodore Laissac, met his death trying to save the life of a dog.”

“A dog! Trying to save the life of a dog!”

“Yes, monsieur.”

The president looked at the court, the court looked at the president and shuffled with papers, glancing apprehensively at the witness between times. There was no doubt that old Tolozan was becoming cranky, very cranky indeed. The president cleared his throat—was he to be robbed of his homily on the wages of sin?

“Indeed, Monsieur Tolozan, you came to the conclusion that the deceased met his death trying to save the life of a dog! Will you please explain to the court how you came to these conclusions?”

“Yes, *monsieur le président*; the deceased had a dog to which he was very devoted.”

“Wait one moment, Inspector Tolozan, how do you know that he was devoted to this dog?”

“I have seen him with it. Moreover, during the years he has been under my supervision he has always had a dog to which he was devoted. I could call some of his criminal associates to prove that, although he was frequently cruel to men, women, and even children, he would never strike or be unkind to a dog. He would never burgle a house guarded by a dog in case he had to use violence.”

“Proceed.”

“During that day or evening there had apparently been a slight subsidence in the chimney place of the attic occupied by Laissac. Some brickwork had collapsed, leaving a narrow aperture just room enough for a dog to squeeze its body through, and get out on the sloping leads of the house next door. The widow Forbin, who occupies the adjoining attic, complains that she was kept awake for three hours that night by the whining of a dog on the leads above. This whining ceased about three-thirty, which must have been the time that the deceased met his death. There was only one way for a man to get from his attic to these leads and that was a rain-water pipe, sloping from below the window at an angle of forty-five degrees to the roof next door. He could stand on this water pipe, but there was nothing to cling to except small projections of brick till he could scramble hold of the gutter above. He never reached the gutter.”

“All of this is pure conjecture, of course, Inspector Tolozan?”

“Not entirely, *monsieur le président*. My theory is that after Laissac’s departure, the dog became disconsolate and restless, as they often will, knowing by some mysterious instinct that its master is in danger. He tried to get out of the room and eventually succeeded in forcing his way through the narrow aperture in the fireplace. His struggle getting through brought down some more brickwork and closed up the opening. This fact I have verified. Out on the sloping roof the dog naturally became terrified. There was no visible means of escape; the roof was sloping, and the night cold. Moreover, he seemed more cut off from his master than ever. As the widow, Forbin, asserts, he whined pitiably. Laissac returned some time after three o’clock. He reached the attic. The first thing he missed was the dog. He ran to the window and heard it whining on the roof above. Probably he hesitated for some time as to the best thing to do. The dog leaned over and saw him. He called to it to be quiet, but so agitated did it appear, hanging over the edge of that perilous slope, that Laissac thought every moment that it would jump.

Monsieur le président, nearly every crime has been lain at the door of the deceased, but he has never been accused of lack of physical courage. Moreover, he was accustomed to climbing about buildings. He dropped through that window and started to climb up.”

“How do you know this?”

“I examined the water pipe carefully. The night was dry and there had not been rain for three days. Laissac had removed his boots. He knew that it would naturally be easier to walk along a pipe in his socks. There are the distinct marks of stockinged feet on the dusty pipes for nearly two metres of the journey. The body was bootless and the boots were found in the attic. But he was an old man for his age, and probably he had had an exhausting evening. He never quite reached the gutter.”

“Are the marks on the gutter still there?”

“No, but I drew the attention of three of my subordinates to the fact, and they are prepared to support my view. It rained the next day. The body of the dog was found by the side of its master.”

“Indeed! Do you suggest that the dog—committed suicide as it were?”

Tolozan shrugged his shoulders and bowed. It was not his business to understand the psychology of dogs. He was merely giving evidence in support of his theories concerning the character of criminals—“birds”—and the accident of crime.

Maxim Colbert was delighted. The whole case had been salvaged from the limbo of dull routine. He even forgave Tolozan for causing him to jettison those platitudes upon the wages of sin. He had made it interesting. Besides, he felt in a good humour—it would surely be a boy! The procedure of the court bored him, but he was noticeably cheerful, almost gay. He thanked the inspector profusely for his evidence. Once he glanced at the clock casually, and said in an impressive voice:

“Perhaps we may say of the deceased—he lived a vicious life, but he died not ingloriously.”

The court broke up and he passed down into a quadrangle at the back where a pale sun filtered. Lawyers, ushers, court functionaries and police officials were scattering or talking in little groups. Standing outside a group he saw the spare figure of Inspector Tolozan. He touched his arm and smiled.

“Well, my friend, you established an interesting case. I feel that the verdict was just, and yet I cannot see that it in any way corroborates your theory of the accident of crime.”

Tolozan paused and blinked up at the sun.

“It did not corroborate, perhaps, but it did nothing to——”

“Well? This old man was an inveterate criminal. The fact that he loved a dog—it’s not a very great commendation. Many criminals do.”

“But they would not give their lives, monsieur. A man who would do that is capable of—I mean to say it was probably an accident that he was not a better man.”

“Possibly, possibly! But the record, my dear Tolozan!”

“One may only conjecture.”

“What is your conjecture?”

Tolozan gazed dreamily up at the Gothic tracery of the adjoining chapel. Then he turned to Monsieur Colbert and said very earnestly:

“You must remember that there was nothing against Laissac until the age of seventeen. He had been a boy of good character. His father was an honest wheelwright. At the age of seventeen the boy was to go to sea on the sailing ship *La Turenne*. Owing to some trouble with the customs authorities the sailing of the ship was delayed twenty-four hours. The boy was given shore leave. He hung about the docks. There was nothing to do. He had no money to spend on entertainment. My conjecture is this. Let us suppose it was a day like this, calm and sunny with a certain quiet exhilaration in the air. Eh? The boy wanders around the quays and stares in the shops. Suddenly at the corner of the Rue Bayard he peeps down into a narrow gally and beholds a sight which drives the blood wildly through his veins.”

“What sight, Monsieur Tolozan?”

“The Chinaman, Chong Loo, being cruel to a dog.”

“Ah! I see your implication.”

“The boy sees red. There is the usual brawl and scuffle. He possibly does not realise his own strength. Follow the lawcourt and the penitentiary. Can you not understand how such an eventuality would embitter him against society? To him in the hereafter the dog would stand as the symbol of patient suffering, humanity as the tyrant. He would be at war for ever, an outcast, a derelict. He was raw, immature, uneducated. He was at the most

receptive stage. His sense of justice was outraged. The penitentiary made him a criminal.”

“Then from this you mean——”

“I mean that if the good ship *La Turenne* had sailed to time, or if he had not been given those few hours’ leave, he might by this time have been a master mariner, or in any case a man who could look the world in the face. That is what I mean by the accident——”

“Excuse me.”

A messenger had handed Monsieur Colbert a telegram. He tore it open feverishly and glanced at the contents. An expression of annoyance crept over his features. He tore the form up in little pieces and threw it petulantly upon the ground. He glanced up at Tolozan absently as though he had seen him for the first time. Then he muttered vaguely:

“The accident, eh? Oh, yes, yes. Quite so, quite so.”

But he did not tell Inspector Tolozan what the telegram contained.

THE FRIENDS

White and Mapleson often tried to recall the occasion when their friendship began, but neither succeeded. Perhaps it had its origin in some moment when the memory was to some extent blurred. Certain it is that they drifted together across the miasma of commercial London, and founded a deep and lasting friendship that found its chief expression in the chinking of glasses in the saloon and luncheon bars of various hostelries off Oxford Street and Bloomsbury.

White acted as an agent for a firm of wire-mattress manufacturers in Old Street in the City, and as his business was conducted principally among the furnishing and upholstering outfitters in the West End, and as Mapleson was the manager of the brass-bed department at Taunton's, the large furnishing emporium in Bloomsbury, it is not surprising that they came in contact and that they had many interests in common. There is, alas! no doubt that the most absorbing interest of both was the consumption of liquid refreshment, and there is also, alas! no doubt that the friendship was quickened by the curious coincidence of their mental vision when stimulated by alcoholic fumes. And it is here that one or two curious facts relating to the personalities of the two men should be noted. During the day it would be no uncommon thing for either man to consume anything between ten and fifteen whiskies and sodas, and sometimes even more; yet of neither man could it be said that he was ever really drunk. On the other hand, of neither man could it be said that he was ever really sober. White was a man of medium height, rather pale and slight. He had a dark moustache, and was always neatly dressed in a dark-blue suit, with well-fitting boots and gloves. He was extremely quiet and courteous in manner, and his manner varied but little. The effect of alcohol upon him was only to accentuate his courtesy and politeness. Toward the evening his lips would tremble a little, but he would become more and more ingratiating. His voice would descend to a refined gentle croon, his eyes would just glow with a sympathetic light, and he would listen with his head slightly on one side and an expression that conveyed the idea that the remarks of the speaker were a matter of great moment to him. Not that he did not speak himself; on the contrary, he spoke well, but always with a deferential timbre, as though attuning himself to the mood and mental attitude of his companion.

On the other hand, Mapleson always started the day badly. He was a large, florid man, with a puffy face and strangely colourless eyes. He wore a

ponderous frockcoat that was just a little out of date, with a waistcoat that hung in folds, and the folds never seemed free from sandwich crumbs and tobacco-ash. He had an unfortunate habit with his clothes of never being quite complete. That is to say, that if he had on a new top-hat, his boots were invariably shabby; or if his boots were a recent acquisition, his top-hat would seem all brushed the wrong way. As I say, he always started the day badly. He would be very late and peevish, and would fuss about with pills and cloves. He would complain of not being quite “thumbs up.” Eleven-fifteen would invariably find him round at the Monitor, leaning against the mahogany bar and asking Mrs. Wylde to mix him “a whisky and peppermint,” or some other decoction that between them they considered would be just the thing for his special complaint that morning. “In the way of business,” he would treat and be treated by several other pals in “the sticks,” as this confraternity called the furnishing trade. It would be interesting to know what proportion of Mapleson’s and White’s income was devoted to this good cause. When Mapleson would arrive home sometimes late at night, breathing heavily, and carrying with him the penetrating atmosphere of the tap-room, he would say in response to the complaints of his tired wife:

“I hate the stuff, my dear. You have to do it, though. It’s all in the way of business.”

A sociologist might have discovered, if he were searching for concrete instances, that White and Mapleson spent on each other every year very nearly eighty pounds, although the business they did together amounted to rather less than thirty, a somewhat unsound premium.

As the day wore on, Mapleson would improve. And it was one of the assets of the White-Mapleson friendship that they usually did not meet till luncheon-time. Then the two friends would chink glasses and stroll arm in arm into Polati’s, in Oxford Street, for, as Mapleson would say, “When a man works hard he needs feeding,” and White would agree with him deferentially, and they would secure a seat not too near the band, and after thoroughly considering the menu, they would order a “mixed grill,” as being “something English and that you can get your teeth into.” During the interval of waiting for the mixed grill, which took fifteen minutes to prepare, Mapleson would insist on standing White a gin and bitters, and of course it was only right and courteous of White to return the compliment. The mixed grill would be washed down with a tankard of ale or more often with whisky and soda, after which the friends would sometimes share a Welsh rabbit or a savoury, and it was Mapleson who introduced the plan of finishing the meal

with a coffee and liqueur. "It stimulates one's mind for the afternoon's business," he would explain, and White flattered him on his good sense, and insisted on standing an extra liqueur, "just to give value to one's cigar." Under the influence of these good things, Mapleson would become garrulous, and White even more soothing and sympathetic. This luncheon interval invariably lasted two hours or two hours and a half. They would then part, each to his own business, while making an appointment to meet later in the afternoon at the Duke of Gadsburg.

And here a notable fact must be recorded: for an hour or two in the afternoon each man *did* do some work. And it is a remarkable point that Taunton's, the great house in Bloomsbury, always considered Mapleson a good salesman, as indeed he was. The vast lapses of time that he spent away from business were explained away on the score of active canvassing. His "turnover" for the year compared favourably with that of the other managers at Taunton's. While of White strange rumours of the enormous fortune that he was accumulating were always current. The natural reserve of the wire-mattress agent, and his remarkable lucidity on matters of finance, added to the fact that he took in and studied *The Statist*, gave him a unique position in the upholstering world. Men would whisper together over their glasses and say, "Ah, old White! He knows a thing or two," and grave speculations would go on as to whether his income ran into four figures, and in what speculations he invested his money. Considerable profundity was given to these rumours by the fact that White always *had* money and that he was always willing to lend it. He carried a sovereign purse that seemed inexhaustible.

Mapleson, on the other hand, though natively lavish, had periods of "financial depression." At these periods he would drink more and become maudlin and mawkish, and it was invariably White who helped him out of his troubles. The two friends would meet later in the afternoon "to take a cup of tea," and it often happened that Mapleson felt that tea would not be just the thing for his nervous constitution; so White would prescribe a whisky and soda, and they would adjourn to a place where such things may be procured. It is remarkable how quickly the time passed under these conditions; but just before six Mapleson would "run back to the shop to see if any orders had come in." With studious consideration White would wait for him. It was generally half-past six or seven before Mapleson returned, thoroughly exhausted with his day's work.

It was then that the suavity and charm of White's manner was most ingratiating. He would insist on Mapleson having a comfortable seat by the

fire in the saloon, and himself carrying across the drinks from the bar. Mapleson soon became comforted, and would suggest “a game of pills before going home.” Nothing appealed to White more than this, for he was a remarkable billiard-player. Young Charlie Maybird, who was a furniture draughtsman and an expert on sport, used to say that “White could give any pub marker in London forty in a hundred and beat him off the mark.” He had a curious feline way of following the balls round the table; he seemed almost to purr over them, to nurse them and stroke them, and make them perform most astounding twists and turns. And every time he succeeded, he would give a sort of self-depreciatory croon, as much as to say: “I’m so sorry! I really don’t know how the balls happen to do all this.” And yet it is remarkable how often White lost, especially against Mapleson.

Mapleson was one of those players who give one the impression of being an expert on an off-day. As a matter of fact, he never had an “on” day. He was just a third-rate player; only he would attempt most difficult shots, and then give vent to expressions of the utmost surprise and disgust that they didn’t come off.

The billiards would last till eight o’clock or half-past, when a feeling of physical exhaustion would prompt the arrangement that “a chop would be a good idea.” They would then adjourn once more to the dining-room at the Monitor, and regale themselves with chops, cheese, and ale, by which time Mapleson would arrive at the conclusion that it wasn’t worth while going home; so an adjournment would be made once more to the bar, and the business of the evening would begin.

It might be worth while to recall one or two features of the Monitor bar, which was invariably crowded by salesmen and assistants from Taunton’s, and was looked upon as a sort of headquarters of the upholstering trade at that time. It was a large room, fitted in the usual way with glittering mahogany and small glass mirrors. Two long seats upholstered in green leather were set about a cheerful fireplace of blue tiles. There were also four small circular tables with marble tops, and on each side of the fireplace two enormous bright blue pots of hideous design containing palms. On the side facing the bar was a florid staircase with a brass hand-rail leading up to the dining and billiard-rooms.

The only difference that a stranger might have felt between this and any other place of similar description at that time lay perhaps in its mental atmosphere. There was always a curious feeling of freemasonry. In addition to Mrs. Wylde there were two other barmaids, Nancy and Olive, who was also sometimes called “the Titmouse.” Both were tall, rather thin girls, with

a wealth of wonderful flaxen hair. They seemed to spend a considerable amount of time, when not engaged in serving, in brewing themselves cocoa and hot milk. Olive was a teetotaler, and confessed frankly with regard to alcohol that she “hated the muck,” but Nancy would occasionally drink stout.

To be served by Mrs. Wylde was a treat that only occasionally occurred to the more favoured devotees of the Monitor. She was a woman of enormous proportions, with a white-powdered face and also a wealth of flaxen hair. She invariably wore a rather shabby black dress, trimmed with lace, and a huge bunch of flowers, usually lilies and carnations.

Now, everybody who came into the bar of the Monitor seemed not only to know Nancy and Olive and Mrs. Wylde by name, but everybody else by their name or nickname. For instance, this sort of thing would happen: a pale, thin young man, with pointed boots and a sort of semi-sporting suit, would creep furtively in and go up to the bar and lean across and shake hands with Nancy, and after a normal greeting would say:

“Has the Captain been in?” Nancy would reply:

“Yes, he was in with the Rabbit about four o’clock.” Then the young man would say:

“Oh, didn’t he leave nothing for me?” and Nancy would say:

“No. I wouldn’t be surprised if he came in later. ’Ere, I tell you what ——” and she would draw the young man to a corner of the bar, and there would be a whispered conversation for a few moments, and then the young man would go out. All of which would seem very mysterious to a casual visitor.

Of this atmosphere White and Mapleson were part and parcel. They had their own particular little round table near the fire, where, despite Mapleson’s daily avowal to get home, one could rely on finding them nearly every evening. And they gathered about them a small colony of kindred spirits. Here they would sit very often till nearly twelve o’clock, when the Monitor shut, drinking whisky and talking. As the evening advanced, Mapleson expanded. One of his favourite themes was conscription. On this subject he and White were absolutely in accord.

“Every man ought to be made to serve his country,” Mapleson would say, bringing his fist down with a bang on the marble table. “He ought to be made to realize his civil responsibilities and what he owes to the empire. Every man under thirty-five should serve three years.”—Mapleson was

forty-four—"It seems to me we're becoming a nation of knock-kneed, sentimental women."

And White would dilate upon what the Germans were doing and would give precise facts and figures of the strength of the German army, and the cost and probabilities of landing ten army corps on the coast of Suffolk.

Another favourite theme was the action of "these silly women," and Mapleson would set the bar in roars of laughter with a description of what *he* would do if *he* were Home Secretary.

Mapleson was very fond of talking about "his principles." In conversation it seemed that his actions must be hedged in by these iron-bound conventions. In effect they were virtually as follows: Business comes first always; never fail to keep a business appointment; never mix port and whisky; never give anything to a stranger that you might give to a pal.

He had other rules of life, but they were concerned exclusively with questions of diet and drinking, and need not concern us here.

Thoroughly exhausted with the day's business, Mapleson would leave the imperturbable White just before twelve o'clock, and not infrequently would find it necessary to take a cab to Baker Street to catch his last train to Willesden Green, where he lived, and where he would arrive at night, having spent during the day a sum varying between twenty and thirty shillings, which was precisely the amount he allowed his wife every week to keep house for a family of five, and to include food, clothing, and washing.

White lived at Acton, and no one ever quite knew how he arrived there or by what means. But he never failed to report at nine o'clock the next morning at Old Street, with all his notes, orders, and instructions neatly written out. It was remarkable how long the Monitor remained the headquarters of this fraternity, for, as one of them remarked, "the licensing business is very sensitive" in the same way that a flock of crows will simultaneously and without any apparent reason fly from one hill to another; it will be a sort of fashion for a group of men to patronise a certain establishment and then suddenly to segregate elsewhere. It is true that there were one or two attempts at defection—Charlie Maybird once made an effort to establish a headquarters as far away as the Trocadero even—but the birds soon returned to the comforting hostelry of Mrs. Wyld.

And then one summer Mapleson was very ill. He got wet through walking to Baker Street one evening when, after having started, he found he had only three coppers on him. He travelled home in his wet clothes, and

next day developed a bad chill, which turned into pneumonia. For days he lay in a critical state, but, thanks to the attention of Mrs. Mapleson, who did not go to bed for three nights, and a careful doctor, he got over the crisis. But the doctor forbade him to go back to business for a fortnight, and suggested that if it was possible to arrange it, a few days at the seaside might set him up. White called several times, and was most anxious and solicitous, and assured Mrs. Mapleson that he would do anything in his power to help his friend, and sent a large basket of expensive fruits and some bottles of very old port wine.

Mapleson's illness, however, was of more troublesome a nature than appeared at first. After a rather serious relapse the doctor said that his heart was not quite what it should be, and it was nearly a month before the question of moving him could be considered. Taunton's treated Mapleson very well over this, and his salary was paid every week; only, of course, he lost his commission, which in the ordinary way represented the bulk of his income, and it became necessary for Mrs. Mapleson to economize with the utmost skill, especially as the invalid required plenty of good and well-cooked food on regaining his strength. The rest of the family had therefore to go on shorter commons than usual, and matters were not helped by the fact of one of the children developing glands and being in an enfeebled condition. White called one evening, and was drinking a glass of the old port with the invalid, and they were discussing how it could be arranged for Mapleson to get a week at Brighton.

"I think I could travel now," said Mapleson; "only I don't see how the missus is going to leave Flora."

It was then that White had an inspiration. If it would help matters in the Mapleson family he would be pleased to take a week off and go to Brighton with Mapleson. Mapleson hailed this idea with delight, and Mrs. Mapleson was informed, on entering the room a little later, "You need not bother about it any more, my dear; White has been good enough to offer to go to Brighton with me." Mrs. Mapleson was a woman who said very little, and it was difficult on this occasion to know what she thought. In fact, her taciturnity at times irritated Mapleson beyond endurance. She merely paused, drew in her thin pale lips, and murmured, "All right, dear," and then busied herself with preparing Mapleson's evening broth.

The friends were very lucky with the weather. Fresh breezes off the Channel tempered the fierce August sun and made the conditions on the front delightful. It might be hinted that perhaps the weather might have been otherwise for all the interest that they took in it.

For the first day or so, finding his vitality returning to him, Mapleson persuaded his companion that the choicest spot in Brighton was the saloon bar of the Old Ship. And he could not show his gratitude sufficiently. White was given carte blanche to order anything he liked. But White would not listen to such generosity. He knew that the expenses that Mapleson had had to endure must be telling on him, so he insisted on paying at least twice out of three times. Mapleson acknowledged that it was “a hell of a worry and responsibility having a family to keep. They simply eat up the money, my dear chap.”

The week passed quickly enough, and both were soon back at their occupations in town. The friendship pursued the even tenor of its way, and it was fifteen months before any incident came to disturb it.

Then one day in October something happened to White. He fell down in the street, and was taken to a hospital. It was rumoured that he was dead. Consternation prevailed in the upholstering confraternity, and Mapleson made anxious enquiries at the hospital bureau. It was difficult to gather precise details, but it was announced that White was very ill, and that a very serious operation would have to be performed. Mapleson returned to the bar of the Monitor harbouring a nameless dread. A strange feeling of physical sickness crept over him. He sat in the corner of the bar, sipping his whisky, enveloped in a lugubrious gloom. He heard the young sparks enter and laugh and joke about White. It was a subject of constant and cynical mirth. “Hullo,” they would say, “heard about old White? He’s done in at last.” And then there would be whisperings and chucklings, and he would hear: “Drunk himself to death. Doesn’t stand a dog’s chance, my dear chap. My uncle had the same thing. Why, he’s been at it now for about twenty-five years. Can’t think how he’s lasted so long.” And then they would come grinning up to Mapleson, hoping for more precise details. “Sorry to hear about your friend, Mr. Mapleson. How did it happen?”

Mapleson could not stand it. He pushed back his half-filled glass, and stumbled out of the bar. He was not aware of an affection for White, or of any sentiment other than a vast fear and a strange absorbing depression. He crept into the saloon of a small house off the Charing Cross Road, where no one would be likely to know him, and sat silently sipping from his glass. It seemed to have no effect upon him. The vision of White lying there, like death, and perhaps even now the doctors busy with their steel knives——

Mapleson shivered. He ordered more whisky and drank it neat. He stumbled on into other bars all the way to Trafalgar Square, wrestling with his fear, and drinking. The spirits ultimately took their effect, and he sat

somewhere, in some dark corner, he could never remember where, with his mind in a state of trance. He remembered being turned out—it must have been twelve o'clock—and engaging a cab—he could just remember his address—and ordering the man to drive home. In the cab he went sound asleep, hopelessly drunk for the first time in many years. He knew nothing more till the next day. Some one must have come down to help carry him in; he was no light weight. He woke up about one o'clock, feeling very ill and scared. He jumped up and called out:

“What the devil’s the time? What are we all doing? Why haven’t I been called?”

Mrs. Mapleson came in; she put her hand on his forehead and said:

“It’s all right. I sent a telegram to say you were ill. You had better stop here. I’ll get you some tea.”

Mapleson fell back on the pillows, and the sickening recollection of last night came back to him.

Later in the evening Mrs. Mapleson came in again and said:

“I hear that Mr. White has had his operation, and is going on as well as could be expected.”

Beads of perspiration streamed down Mapleson’s face, and he murmured, “My God! my God!” That was all that was said, and the next day Mapleson went back to work.

The officials at the hospital seemed curiously reticent about White. The only information to be gleaned for some days was that he was alive. Mapleson went about his work with nerveless indifference. He drank, but his drinking was more automatic than spontaneous. He drank from habit, but he gained neither pleasure nor profit from doing so.

The nameless fear pursued him. Great bags appeared under his eyes, which were partly blood-shot. He stooped in his walk, and began to make mistakes in his accounts, and to be abstracted in dealing with customers.

He was arraigned before two of the directors of Taunton’s, and one of them finished a harangue by suggesting that “it might be more conformable to business methods if he would remove the traces of yesterday’s breakfast from the folds of his waistcoat.” The large man received these criticisms in a pathetic silence. “Poor old Mapleson!” they said round in the bar of the Monitor. “I’ve never seen a chap cut up so about anything as he is about

White,” and then abstract discussions on friendship would follow, and remarkable instances of friendship formed in business.

Of course White would die—that was a settled and arranged thing, and curiously enough little sympathy was expressed even by those to whom White had lent money. Despite his charm of manner and his generosity, they all felt that there was something about White they didn’t understand. He was too clever, too secretive.

On Friday he was slightly better, but on Saturday he had a relapse, and on Sunday morning, when Mapleson called at the hospital, he was informed that White was sinking, and they didn’t expect him to last forty-eight hours.

Mapleson had inured himself to this thought; he had made up his mind to this conclusion from the first, and this last intimation hardly affected him. He went about like one stunned, without volition, without interest. He was only aware of a vast unhappiness and misery of which White was in some way a factor.

For five days the wire-mattress agent lay on the verge of death, and then he began to rally slightly. The house surgeon said it was one of the most remarkable constitutions he had ever come up against. For three days there was a distinct improvement, followed by another relapse; but still White fought on. At the end of another week he was out of danger, but the convalescence was long and tedious.

When at the end of six weeks he was well enough to leave the hospital, the house surgeon took him to one side and said:

“Now look here, my friend, we’re going to let you out. And there’s no reason why you shouldn’t get fairly well again. Only I want you to understand this: if you touch alcohol again in any form—in any case, for years—well, you might as well put a bullet through your own head.”

In another ten days White was back at business, looking exactly the same as ever, speaking in the same suave voice. He soon appeared in the Monitor, but with the utmost courtesy declined all offers of drinks except ginger-ale. It need hardly be said that to Mapleson such an event seemed a miracle. He had sunk into a low, morbid condition from which he had never hoped to rise.

Out of courtesy the first evening Mapleson insisted on drinking ginger-ale himself, so that his friend should not feel out of it.

And they sat and had a discussion far into the night, White giving luminous and precise details of the whole of his illness and operation,

eulogizing hospital methods, and discussing the whole aspect of society towards therapeutics in a calmly detached way.

But Mapleson was not happy. He was glad to have White back, but the element of fear that White had introduced him to was not eliminated. He felt ill himself, and there somehow seemed a great gap between White in the old days and White drinking ginger-ale and talking medicine. For three nights Mapleson kept this up, and then thought he would have “just a nightcap.”

It gradually developed into the position that Mapleson resumed his whisky and White stuck to his ginger-ale; and it is a curious fact that this arrangement depressed Mapleson more than it did White. He drank copiously and more frequently in order to create an atmosphere of his own; but always there was White looking just the same, talking just the same.

The ginger-ale got on Mapleson’s nerves. He felt that he couldn’t stand it, and a strange and enervating depression began to creep over him again. For days this arrangement held good, White seeming utterly indifferent as to what he drank, and Mapleson getting more and more depressed because White didn’t drink whisky. At length Mapleson suggested one evening that “surely just one” wouldn’t hurt White. But White said with the deepest tone of regret that he was afraid it would be rather unwise; and as a matter of fact, he had got used to doing without it that he really hardly missed it.

From that moment a settled gloom and depression took hold of Mapleson. He just stood there looking at White and listening to him, but hardly troubling to speak himself. He felt utterly wretched. He got into such a state that White began to show a sympathetic alarm, and one evening toward the end of February, as they were sitting at their favourite table in the Monitor, White said, “Well, I’ll just have a whisky and soda with you if you like.”

This was one of the happiest evenings of Mapleson’s life. As soon as his friend began to drink, some chord in his own nature responded; his eyes glowed, he became garrulous and entertaining.

They had another, and then went to a music-hall, into the lounge; but there was such a crowd that they could not see the stage, so they went to the bar at the back and had another drink and a talk. How they talked that night! They talked about business and dogs and conscription and women and the empire and tobacco and the staff of Taunton’s. They had a wild orgy of talk and drink. That night White drank eleven whiskies and sodas, and Mapleson got cheerfully and gloriously drunk.

It was perhaps as well that the friends enjoyed this bacchanalia, for it was the last time they met. By four o'clock the next afternoon White was dead.

Mapleson heard of it the following night. He was leaning against the fireplace in the Monitor, expatiating upon the wonderful improvement in White, and extolling his virtues, when young Howard Aldridge, the junior salesman to Mr. Vincent Pelt of Taunton's, came in to say that White's brother-in-law had just rung up Mr. Pelt to say that White was dead. When Mapleson heard this he muttered, "My Christ!"

These were the last words that Mapleson ever uttered in the bar of the Monitor.

He picked up his hat and went out into the street. It was the same feeling of numbed terror and physical sickness that assailed him. With no plan of action arranged, he surprised his wife by arriving home before ten o'clock and by going to bed. He was shivering. She took him up a hot-water bottle and said, "I'm sorry to hear about White." Mapleson didn't answer, but his teeth chattered. He lay awake half the night thinking of death.

The next day he got up and went to business as usual, but for the second time the head of the firm felt it his duty to point out to him one or two cases of negligence and to warn him that "these things must not happen in the future."

Two days later Mapleson received a postcard signed by "F. Peabody," to say that the funeral of the late G. L. White would take place at such-and-such a church at East Acton, and would leave the "Elms," Castlereach Road, Acton, at twelve o'clock, and it was intimated that a seat for Mr. Mapleson would be found in a carriage.

A fine driving rain out of a leaden sky greeted Mapleson when he set out for White's funeral on the Saturday. His wife tried to persuade him not to go, for he was really ill; but he made no comment. He fiddled about with a timetable, and could come to no satisfactory decision about the way to get there. His wife ultimately looked him up a train to Hammersmith, from which terminus he could get a train. Before reaching Hammersmith a strange revulsion came over him. Why, after all, should he go to this funeral? White wouldn't know about it, and what did he know of White's relatives? A strange choking and giddiness came over him, and at Hammersmith he found a comfortable refreshment-room, where he betook himself, and decided that after refreshing he would go on to business.

After having two whiskies, however, he changed his mind. "No," he muttered to himself, "I'll see it through." He boarded a tram that went in the direction of Acton. He found that he had to change trams at one point. It seemed an interminable journey. He kept wondering how White managed to get home at night from Oxford Street at twelve o'clock. He felt cold and wretched as the effect of the whisky wore off.

At last he reached Acton, and asked for Castlereach Road. Nobody seemed to know it. He was directed first in one direction and then in another; at last a postman put him on the right track, but suggested that as it was some way, he might get a 'bus to Gaddes Green, and then it was only about fifteen-minutes' walk.

Mapleson set off, keeping a sharp lookout for a place of refreshment, for the reactionary spirit was once more upon him. The 'bus put him down at a forlorn-looking corner, where there was only a sort of workman's ale-house. "I expect I'll pass one on the way," he thought, and taking his directions from the assistant of a greengrocer's shop, he set out once more through the rain.

The farther he went, the meaner and more sordid did the streets become. He did not pass a single public-house that he felt he could approach. "I expect the neighbourhood will change soon," he thought; "I expect I've come the wrong way. Why, everyone said White must be making at least eight hundred a year. He wouldn't live in a place like this."

At length he came to a break in the neighbourhood where some newly-built villas crowded one another on the heels of the more ancient squalor. An errand boy told him that "Castlereach Road was the second turning on the right off Goldsmith's Havenue." He found Goldsmith's Avenue, where a barrel-organ was pouring forth lugubrious music to an audience listening from the shelter of their windows, and swarms of dirty children were hurrying through the rain on nameless errands. A piece of bread and jam was thrown from a second-story window to a little boy in the street, and missed Mapleson's hat by inches. His progress was in any case the source of considerable mirth to the inhabitants.

At last he came to Castlereach Road. After the noise and bustle of Goldsmith's Avenue, it seemed like the end of the world. It was a long straight road of buff-coloured villas, with stucco facings and slate roofs, all identically the same. From the end, where Mapleson entered it, it looked interminable and utterly deserted. Doubtless, if it had been a fine day, the

gutters would have been crowded with children; but with the pouring rain, there was not a soul in sight.

Mapleson blundered on in search of Number 227, and as he did so, a thought occurred to him that he and White had a common secret apart. He always had felt in his inmost heart a little ashamed of his red-brick villa in Willesden Green, and that was one reason why he had always kept business well apart from domestic affairs; and White had casually referred to his "place at Acton." His place at Acton! Mapleson entered it, horribly tired, horribly sober, horribly wretched. All the blinds were down. It had taken so long to get there he hoped that he was too late.

A tall, gaunt woman in black, with a slight down on her upper lip, opened the door. She seemed surprised to see him.

He explained who he was.

"Oh, yes. My! you are early. It's only half-past twelve."

"Half-past twelve?" said Mapleson. "But I thought the funeral was to be at twelve."

Then the gaunt woman called into a little side room:

"'Ere, Uncle Frank, what 'ave you been up to? Did you tell Mr. Myple that the funeral was at twelve?"

"Oh, don't sye that; don't sye that!" came a voice from the room, and a small man, with sandy hair and wizened features and small, dark, greedy eyes, came out into the hall. "Oh, don't sye that, Mr. Mypleson! I'm Peabody. I quite thought I said two o'clock."

Mapleson had a wild impulse to whistle for a cab or a fire-engine, and to drive away from this anywhere; but the utter helplessness of his position held him fast. Before he had time to give the matter serious thought he was being shown into the drawing-room, a small stuffy room with a blue floral wallpaper, bamboo furniture, and many framed photographs, and the gaunt woman was saying, "Oh, Uncle Frank, how could you have made that mistyke!" And Uncle Frank was explaining how it might have occurred and at the same time saying that they must make the best of it; that Mr. Mapleson would have a bit of lunch. There was a nice cut of cold leg of mutton, and of course no one, under circumstances like this, would expect an *elaborate* meal; in fact, no one would *feel* like it, apart from anything else. And then the gaunt woman left the room, and Mapleson was alone with Uncle Frank.

Mapleson could not recollect ever having met anyone whom he so cordially hated at sight. He had a sort of smug perpetual grin, a habit of running his hands down his thighs as far as his knees, and giving vent to a curious clicking noise with his cheeks.

“Well, this is a very sad hoccasion, Mr. Mypleson,” he said; “very sad indeed. Poor George! Did you know him well? Eva—his wife, you know—she’s upstairs quite prostrate. That was her sister who showed you in. Yes, yes, well, how true it is that in the midst of life we are in death! I’m afraid poor George was careless, you know. Very careless. Clever, mind you—clever as they make ’em, but careless. Do you know, Mr. Mypleson, he hadn’t even insured his life! And he’s left no will. There isn’t enough to pay his funeral expenses. Fortunately, Eva’s clever; oh, yes, she’s clever with her fingers. They say there’s no one in the neighbourhood to touch her in the millinery. Oh, yes, she’s been at it some time. Why, bless my soul, do you know she’s paid the rent of this ’ouse for the last four years? Oh, she’s a clever woman. Poor soul, though, her great consolation is that George didn’t die in the ’orspital. Yes, Mr. Mypleson, he died upstairs, quiet as a lamb. She was there at the end. It was a great consolation.”

And Uncle Frank nodded his head, and his little eyes sparkled, but the grin never left his lips. Mapleson said nothing, but the two men sat there in a sombre silence. Uncle Frank occasionally nodding his head and muttering, “It’s a sad hoccasion.”

The rain increased, and it seemed unnaturally dark in the blue drawing-room, and Mapleson felt that he had sat there an eternity, consumed by desire to get away, when there was another knock at the door, and a youth was let in.

Uncle Frank called him Chris, and he seemed to be a cousin, or some near relative of White’s. He was a raw youth who had just gone to business, and was very much aware of his collar and cuffs. He seemed to take to Mapleson, and he sat watching him furtively. Mapleson seemed a man of the world, a very desirable personality. The youth made many advances, but Mapleson felt a repugnance for him in only a slightly less degree than in the case of Uncle Frank.

At length the gaunt sister asked them all into the dining-room, which was a room on the other side of the passage that seemed even smaller and stuffier than the drawing-room. It was papered with a dark red paper, and the woodwork was painted chocolate. As they crossed the hall, they passed Mrs. White, who had apparently been persuaded by her sister “to try and take

something.” She was a shrivelled little person, with white cheeks, and her eyes were red with weeping.

She hurried by the men without speaking, and a curious thought struck Mapleson. During the twenty years or so that he had known White he could not recollect him speaking of his wife. He probably had done so, but he could not recollect it. He remembered him talking about his “place at Acton,” but never of his wife. He did not feel entirely surprised. White was probably ashamed.

In the window of the dining-room were several birdcages, containing two canaries, a bullfinch, and a small highly-coloured bird that hopped from the floor of its cage to a perch and kept up a toneless squeak, with monotonous regularity. Uncle Frank went up to the cage and tapped the wires, and called out, “Ah, there he is! *Cheep! cheep!* This is our little Orstrylian bird, Mr. Mapleson. Isn’t he? Yes, yes; he’s our clever little Orstrylian bird.” And during the course of the hurried meal of cold mutton and cheese the birds formed a constant diversion. Uncle Frank would continually jump up and call out, “Oh, yes, he’s our little Orstrylian bird.”

Mapleson tried to recall whether he had ever discussed birds with White, and he felt convinced that he had not. It seemed a strange thing. White apparently had had these birds for some time—three different varieties in his own house! Mapleson would have enjoyed talking about birds with White; he could almost hear White’s voice, and his precise and suave manner of discussing their ways and peculiarities. And the terrible thought came to him that he would never hear White talk about birds, never, never. This breach of confidence on White’s part of never telling him that he kept birds upset Mapleson even more than his breach of confidence in not talking about his wife.

“Oh, yes, he’s a clever little Orstrylian bird.” A terrible desire came to Mapleson to throw Uncle Frank through the window the next time he heard this remark.

Before they had finished the meal, three other male relatives appeared, and a terrible craving came over Mapleson for a drink. Then the sister came down with a decanter of sherry and said that perhaps the gentlemen would like a glass. Uncle Frank poured out a glass all round. It was thin, sickly stuff, and to the brass-bed manager like a thimbleful of dew in a parched desert. A horrible feeling of repugnance came over him—of repugnance against all these people, against the discomfort he found himself in.

After all, who was White? When all was said and done, White was really nothing to him, only a man he'd met in the course of business and had a lot of drinks and talks with. At that moment he felt he disliked White and all his snivelling relatives.

He wanted to go, to get away from it all; but he couldn't see how. There was half a glass of sherry left in the decanter. He unblushingly took it as the funeral cortège arrived. There were two ramshackle carriages and a hearse, and a crowd of dirty children had collected. He tried to mumble to Uncle Frank some excuse for not going, but his words were lost by an intensely painful scene that took place in the hall as the coffin was brought down. He did not notice that the sister with the down on her upper lip became an inspired creature for a few moments, and her face became almost beautiful.

He felt that he was an alien element among all these people, that they were nothing to him, and that he was nothing to them, and he felt an intense, insatiable desire for a drink. If he couldn't get a drink, he felt he would go mad.

Someone touched him on the arm and said, "Will you come with us in the second carriage, Mr. Mapleson?" He felt himself walking out of the house and through a row of dirty children. For a moment he contemplated bolting up the street and out of sight, but the feeling that the children would probably follow him and jeer paralysed this action; and then he was in the carriage, with Chris and another male relative who was patently moved by the solemnity of the occasion.

Chris wriggled about and tried to engage him in banal conversation, with an air that suggested, "Of course, Mr. Mapleson, this is a sad affair, but we men of the world know how to behave."

The dismal cortège proceeded at an ambling trot, occasionally stopping. Chris gave up for the moment trying to be entertaining, and the forlorn relative talked about funeral services and the comfort of sympathy in time of bereavement. They crawled past rows of congested villas and miles of indescribable domesticity of every kind, till as they were turning round a rather broader avenue than usual where there were shops, the forlorn relative said, "We shall be in the cemetery in five minutes."

And then Mapleson had an inspiration. They were ambling along this dreary thoroughfare when his eye suddenly caught sight of a large and resplendent public-house. It was picked out in two shades of green, and displayed a gilt sign-board denoting "The Men of Kent."

Almost without thinking, and certainly in less time than it takes to chronicle, Mapleson muttered something to his two companions, and called out of the window to the driver to stop. He then jumped out, and called out to the driver of the hearse and the other carriage to stop, and then before anyone realized what it was all about, he darted into the saloon bar of The Men of Kent!

The bar was fortunately empty, but through the little glass shutters two women and a man in the private bar watched the performance.

There was a moment of dazed surprise, followed by a high shriek of laughter and a woman's voice in strident crescendo:

"He's stopped the funeral to come in an' 'ave a drink! O my Gawd!" Mapleson's tongue seemed to cling to the roof of his mouth, but he gasped out an order for a whisky and soda. To the barman these incidents were nothing, and he served the drink instantly; but to the three in the private bar it was a matter of intense enjoyment. The other woman took it up.

"Well, that's the first time I've known that 'appen. Gawd! fancy stoppin' a funeral to come and 'ave a drink!" Then the man bawled out: "'Ere, I sye, ain't the others comin' in? Let's make a dye of it."

The women continued shrieking with laughter, and the appalling ignominy of his position came home to him. He knew that he was damned in the eyes of White's friends.

Curiously enough, the thought of White had passed out of his mind altogether. He was a thing in revolt against society, without feelings and without principles.

Yet when the whisky was put in front of him his hand trembled, and he could not drink it. He fumbled with the glass, threw down a sixpence, and darted out of the bar again.

In the meanwhile Uncle Frank and other members of the funeral party had got out of the carriages and were having a whispered consultation on the curb. Instructions had evidently been given for the cortège to proceed, for Uncle Frank was talking to the driver of the hearse when Mapleson appeared.

As all returned to the carriages, the three people came out of the bar and raised a cheer, and one of the women called out, "Oh, I sye, don't go!"

Mapleson lay all of a heap in the corner of the carriage, and he noticed that he was alone with Chris. The forlorn relative had gone into the other

carriage.

In a few minutes they arrived at a church, a large new building with Early Victorian Gothic arches and a profusion of coloured glass. The funeral party huddled together in the gloom of the large church, and somehow the paucity of their numbers seemed even more depressing than the wretchedness of their appearance.

Mapleson sat a little way back, and curiously enough his mind kept reverting during the service to the little birds. He felt a distinct grievance against White on account of the little birds. Why hadn't he told him, especially about the small Australian bird? It would have made a distinctly interesting subject of conversation.

The service seemed interminably long, and it was a relief when the tall, rather good-looking young clergyman led the way out into the cemetery. The rain was still driving in penetrating gusts, and as they stood by the graveside, the relatives looked askance at one another, uncertain whether it was the proper thing to do to hold up an umbrella. As to Mapleson, he was indifferent. For one thing, he had not brought an umbrella; but it seemed frightfully cold.

They lowered the coffin into the grave and earth was sprinkled. For a second it flashed through his mind, "That's White being let down," and then a feeling of indifference and repugnance followed, and the craving desire to get away from all these sordid happenings. Then he suddenly thought of White's wife. "A miserable-looking slattern she was," he thought. "Why, what was *she* snivelling about? What could she have been to White or White to her? Why, he never mentioned her during twenty years!"

He experienced a slight feeling of relief when the service was finished and the party broke up, and he hastily made for the cemetery gates, knowing that White's friends would be as anxious to avoid him as he was to avoid them; but he had not reached them before some one, hurrying up behind, caught him. It was Chris.

"I expect you're going up west, Mr. Mapleson," he said. "If it's not putting myself in the way, I'll come too."

Mapleson gave an inarticulate grunt that conveyed nothing at all; but the young man was not to be put off.

There was something about the bulk of Mapleson and the pendulous lines of his clothes and person that made Chris feel, when he was walking with him, that he was "knocking about town" and "mixing with the world."

He himself was apprenticed to a firm of wallpaper manufacturers and he felt that Mapleson would be able to enlighten him on the prospects and the outlook of the furnishing and decorating trade. He talked gaily of antique furniture till they came to a gaunt yellow-brick station.

On enquiry, there seemed to be no trains that went from it to any recognizable or habitable spot, but outside were two melancholy hackney-carriages. By this time Mapleson was desperate, and a strange feeling of giddiness possessed him.

He got in, and told the driver vaguely "to drive up to London." Chris came to the rescue, and explained to him that he might drive to Shepherd's Bush first. They started off, and rattled once more through the wilderness of dreary villas.

The young man accepted the position he found himself in with perfect composure. He attributed Mapleson's silence to an expansive boredom, and he talked with discretion and with a sort of callow tact. Before they reached Shepherd's Bush, however, Mapleson muttered something about feeling faint, and Chris immediately suggested that they should go and have a drink. "You might bring me something in," said Mapleson. "I'll have a brandy neat." They drove helplessly through neat avenues and roads for nearly ten minutes without passing anything in the way of a public-house. At last they came to a grocer's shop licensed to sell spirits not to be consumed on the premises. "Go and buy me a bottle of brandy," said Mapleson. The young man got out, and soon returned with a six-and-sixpenny bottle of brandy and a corkscrew. He paid for it himself, relying on the natural honour of Mapleson to settle up afterwards; but the matter was never mentioned again.

He drew the cork, and Mapleson took a long drink, and then wiped the mouth of the bottle and offered it to Chris. Chris behaved like a man, and also took a draught, but spluttered rather.

For the rest of the journey Mapleson at regular intervals took thoughtful and meditative drinks, and gradually began to revive. He went so far as to ask Chris if he knew anything about the little birds, and how long White had had them. Chris said he knew he had had the canaries for four or five years and the bullfinch for two years. He didn't know much about the little Australian bird. This information seemed to cause Mapleson to revert to his former gloom.

When they reached Shepherd's Bush the cabman refused to go farther. So they got out, and entered another cab, Mapleson carrying the brandy-bottle under his arm. He took it upon himself to tell the cabman—this time a

taxi—to “drive round the Outer Circle of Hyde Park, and to take the hood down.”

It was about half-past four when they reached Hyde Park, and the rain had ceased a little. It was the fashionable hour for the afternoon drive. Magnificent motors and two-horse phaetons were ambling round well within the regulation limit. Their cab was soon almost hemmed in by the equipages of the great world. But after they had completed the circle once, and Mapleson lay back, with his feet on the opposite seat and his hat brushed the wrong way, and without the slightest compunction held the large brandy-bottle to his lips every few yards, Chris began to feel that there was a limit to his desire to “mix with the world.”

He got the cab to stop near the Marble Arch, and explained to Mapleson that he must get out and take the Tube to business.

And then there was a scene. Mapleson, who up to that time had not addressed a personal word to Chris, suddenly became maudlin. He cried, and said that he had never taken to anyone as he had to Chris. He was the dearest fellow in the world; he mustn't leave him; now that White was dead, he was the only friend he had.

But people began to collect on the side-walk, and Chris simply ran off. The taxi-driver began to be suspicious about his fare, which was registered fourteen shillings. But Mapleson gave him a sovereign on account, and told him to drive to Cleopatra's Needle, on the Embankment.

By the time they reached there, the brandy-bottle was three-quarters empty, and tears were streaming down his cheeks. He offered the driver a drink, but the driver was “not one of that sort,” and gruffly suggested that Mapleson “had better drive 'ome.” So he got out of the cab pathetically, settled with the driver, and sat on a seat of the Embankment, hugging his bottle and staring at the river.

Now, it is very difficult to know exactly what Mapleson did the rest of that afternoon between the time when he dismissed the cabman and half-past eight, when he turned up in the bar of the Monitor.

It is only known that he struggled in there at that time, looking as white as a sheet. He was wet through, and his clothes were covered with mud. He struggled across to the corner where he and White used to sit, and sat down. The bar was fairly crowded at the time, and young Chris made his *début* there. He felt that he would be a person of interest. When Mapleson

appeared, he went up to him, but Mapleson didn't know him, and said nothing.

Several others came up and advised Mapleson to go home and change his clothes and have a drink first; but he just stared stupidly ahead and made no comment. Someone brought some whisky and put it before him, but he ignored it. They then came to the conclusion that he was ill, so they sent for a cab, and two of them volunteered to see him home.

Just as they were about to lead him out he stood up. He then stretched out his arms and waved them away. He picked up the glass of whisky and raised it slowly to his lips; but before it reached them, he dropped it, and fell backward across the table.

“Women, you know,” said Charlie Maybird some months later, addressing two friends in the Monitor, “are silly creatures. They think love and friendship is all a question of kissin' and cuddlin'. They think business is all buyin' and sellin'; they don't think men can make friendships in business. Crikey! I reckon there's more friendships made in business—real friendships, I mean—than ever there is outside. Look at the case of White and Mapleson. I tell you, those two men loved each other. For over twenty years they were inseparable; there was nothing they would not have done for each other; hand and glove they was over everything. I've never seen a chap crumple up so as Mapleson did when White died, in fact from the very day when White was took ill. He went about like a wraith. I'll never forget that night when he came in here after the funeral. He sat over there—look—by the fireplace. He looked as though his 'eart was broken. Suddenly he stood up and lifted his glass, and then dropped it, and then fell backwards crash on to the floor. They took him to the 'orspital, but he never regained consciousness. The doctors said it was fatty degeneration of the 'eart, 'elped on by some kidney trouble; but I know better. He died of a broken 'eart. Lord, yes; I tell you, there's a lot of romance in the furnishing trade.”

“Did he leave any money?” asked one of the friends.

“My word, yes; more than White,” answered the genial Charles. “White never left a bean, and it seems his missus had not only been paying the rent out of her millinery, but allowed White some. White was a card, he was.”

“And what did Mapleson leave?”

“Mapleson left nearly four pounds.”

“Is that all?”

“Four pounds and a wife and five kids, the eldest twelve.”

“A wife and five kids! How the hell does she manage to keep things going?”

“Oh, Gawd knows! Come, let’s go over to the Oxford and see what’s on.”

THE LANDLORD OF “THE LOVE-A-DUCK”

I forget the name of the wag in our town who first called him Mr. Seldom Right, but the name caught on. His proper name was James Selden Wright, and the inference of this obvious misnomer was too good to drop. James was invariably wrong, but so lavishly, outrageously, magnificently wrong that he invariably carried the thing through with flying colours. He was a kind of Tartarin of Tibbelsford, which was the name of the town.

Everything about Mr. Seldom Right was big, impressive, expansive. He himself was an enormous person, with fat, puffy cheeks with no determinate line between them and his innumerable chins. His large grey eyes with their tiny pupils seemed to embrace the whole universe in a glance. Upon his pendulous front there dangled thick gold chains with signets and seals like miniature flat-irons. His fingers were ribbed with gold bands like curtain-rings. His wife was big; his daughter was big; the great shire horses which worked on his adjoining farm seemed quite normal creatures in this Gargantuan scheme of things.

Above all, “The Love-a-duck” was big. It appeared to dominate the town. It was built at the top of the hill, with great rambling corridors, bars, coffee-rooms, dilapidated ball-rooms, staircases of creaking deal, bedrooms where a four-post bed was difficult to find, a cobbled courtyard with a covered entrance drive where two brewer’s drays could have driven through abreast. There was no social function, no town council, no committee of importance that was not driven to meet at “The Love-a-duck.” But the biggest thing in Tibbelsford was the voice of the landlord. At night amidst the glittering taps and tankards he would “preside.” By this you must understand that the word be taken liberally. He was no ordinary potman to hand mugs of ale across the bar to thirsty carters, or nips of gin to thin-lipped clerks. He would not appear till the evening was well advanced, and then he would stroll in and lean against the bar, his sleepy eyes adjusting the various phenomena of this perspective to a comfortable focus.

And then the old cronies and characters of Tibbelsford would touch their hats and say:

“ ’Evening, Mr. Wright!”

And he would nod gravely, like an Emperor receiving the fealty of his serfs. And a stranger might whisper:

“Who is this fat old guy?”

And the answer would be “H’sh!” for the eyes of Mr. Seldom Right missed nothing. Bumptious strangers were treated with complete indifference. If they addressed him, he looked right through them, and breathed heavily. But for the cronies and characters there was a finely-adjusted scale of treatment, a subtle undercurrent of masonry. To get into favour with Mr. Seldom Right one had to work one’s way up, and any bad mistake would land one back among the strangers. In which case one would be served fairly and squarely, but there the matter would end. For it should be stated at this point that everything about “The Love-a-duck” was good in quality, and lavish in quantity, and the rooms, in spite of their great size, were always spotlessly clean.

Having carefully considered the relative values of this human panorama, the landlord would single out some individual fortunate enough to catch his momentary favour, and in a voice which seemed to make the glasses tremble and the little Chelsea figures on the high mantelshelf gasp with surprise, he would exclaim:

“Well, Mr. Topsmith, and how are we? Right on the top o’ life? Full of beans, bone, blood and benevolence, eh? Ha, ha, ha!”

And the laugh would clatter among the tankards, twist the gas-bracket, go rolling down the corridor, and make the dogs bark in the kennels beyond the stables. And Mr. Topsmith would naturally blush, and spill his beer, and say:

“Oh, thank you, sir, nothin’ to grumble about; pretty good goin’ altogether.”

“That’s right! that’s RIGHT!”

There were plenty of waitresses and attendants at “The Love-a-duck,” but however busy the bars might be, the landlord himself always dined with his wife and daughter, at seven-thirty precisely, in the oblong parlour at the back of the saloon bar. And they dined simply and prodigiously. A large steaming leg of mutton would be carried in, and in twenty minutes’ time would return a forlorn white fragment of bone. Great dishes of fried potatoes, cabbages, and marrow, would all vanish. A Stilton cheese would come back like an over-explored ruin of some ancient Assyrian town. And Mine Host would mellow these simple delicacies with three or four tankards

of old ale. Occasionally some of the cronies and characters were invited to join the repast, but whoever was there, the shouts and laughter of the landlord rang out above everything, only seconded by the breezy giggles of Mrs. Wright, whose voice would be constantly heard exclaiming:

“Oh, Jim, you are a fule!”

It was when the dinner was finished that the landlord emerged into the president. He produced a long churchwarden and ambled hither and thither, with a pompous, benevolent, consciously proprietary air. The somewhat stilted formality of his first appearance expanded into a genial but autocratic courtliness. He was an Edwardian of Edwardians. He would be surprisingly gracious, tactful and charming, and he also had that Hanoverian faculty of seeing right through one—a perfectly crushing mannerism.

By slow degrees he would gently shepherd his favourite flock around the fire in the large bar-parlour, decorated with stags’ heads, pewter and old Chelsea. Then he would settle himself in the corner of the inglenook by the right side of the fire. Perhaps at this time I may be allowed to enumerate a few of the unbreakable rules which the novice had to learn by degrees. They were as follows:

You must always address the landlord as “sir.”

You must never interrupt him in the course of a story.

You must never appear to disbelieve him.

You must never tell a bigger lie than he has just told.

If he offers you a drink you must accept it.

You must never, under any circumstances, offer to stand him a drink in return.

You may ask his opinion about anything, but never any question about his personal affairs.

You may disagree with him, but you must not let him think that you’re not taking him seriously.

You must not get drunk.

These were the broad, abstract rules. There were other bye-laws and covenants allowing for variable degrees of interpretation. That, for instance, which governed the improper story. A story could be suggestive but must never be flagrantly vulgar or profane. Also one might have had enough to

drink to make one garrulous, but not enough to be boisterous, or maudlin, or even over-familiar.

I have stated that the quality of fare supplied at “The Love-a-duck” was excellent; and so it was. Beyond that, however, our landlord had his own special reserves. There was a little closet just off the central bar where on occasions he would suddenly disappear, and when in the humour produce some special bottle of old port or liqueur. He would come toddling with it back to his seat and exclaim:

“Gentlemen, this is the birthday of Her Imperial Highness the Princess Eulalie of Spain. I must ask you to drink her good health and prosperity!”

And the bar, who had never heard of the Princess Eulalie of Spain, would naturally do so with acclamation.

Over the little glasses he would tell most impressive and incredible stories. He had hunted lions with the King of Abyssinia. He had dined with the Czar of Russia. He had been a drummer-boy during the North and South war in America. He had travelled all over Africa, Spain, India, China and Japan. There was no crowned head in either of the hemispheres with whom he was not familiar. He knew everything there was to know about diamonds, oil, finance, horses, politics, Eastern religions, rattling, dogs, geology, women, political economy, tobacco, corn or rubber. He was a prolific talker, but he did not object to listening, and he enjoyed an argument. In every way he was a difficult man to place. Perhaps in thinking of him one was apt not to make due allowance for the rather drab background against which his personality stood out so vividly. One must first visualise the company of “The Love-a-duck.”

There was old Hargreaves, the local estate agent: a snuffy, gingery, pinched old ruffian, with a pretty bar-side manner, an infinite capacity for listening politely; one whose nature had been completely bowdlerised by years of showing unlikely tenants over empty houses, and keeping cheerful in draughty passages. There was Mr. Bean, the corn-merchant, with a polished red-blue face and no voice. He would sit leaning forward on a thin gold-knobbed cane, and as the evening advanced he seemed to melt into one vast ingratiating smile. One dreaded every moment that the stick would give way and that he would fall forward on his face. There was an argumentative chemist, whose name I have forgotten; he was a keen-faced man, and he wore gold-rimmed spectacles which made him look much cleverer than he really was. There was old Phene Sparfitt. Nobody knew how he lived. He was very old, much too old to be allowed out at night, but quite the most

regular and persistent customer. He drank quantities of gin and water, his lower lip was always moist, and he professed an intimate knowledge of the life of birds. Dick Toom, the owner of the local livery-stables, was a spasmodic visitor. He generally came accompanied by several horsey-looking gentlemen. He always talked breezily about some distressing illness he was suffering from, and would want to make a bet with anyone present about some quite ridiculous proposition: for instance, that the distance from the crossroads to the stone wall by Jenkins' black-pig farm was greater than the distance from the fountain in the middle of Piccadilly Circus to the tube station in Dover Street. A great number of these bets took place in the bar, and the fact that the landlord always lost was one of the reasons of his nickname.

It cannot be said that the general standard of intelligence reached a very high level, and against it it was difficult to tell quite how intelligent the landlord was. If he were not a well-educated man he certainly had more than a veneer of education. In an argument he was seldom extended. Sometimes he talked brilliantly for a moment, and then seemed to talk out of his hat. He had an extravagant theatrical way of suddenly declaiming a statement, and then sinking his voice and repeating it. Sometimes he would be moodish and not talk at all. But at his best he was very good company.

It would be idle to pretend that the frequenters of the bar believed the landlord's stories. On the contrary, I'm afraid we were a very sceptical lot. Most of us had never been further than London or the seaside, and our imagination shied at episodes in Rajahs' palaces and receptions in Spanish courts. It became a byword in the town: "Have you heard old Seldom Right's latest?" Nevertheless he was extremely popular. At the time of which I write the landlord must have been well over sixty years of age, and his wife was possibly forty-five. They appeared to be an extremely happy and united family.

And then Septimus Stourway appeared on the scene. He was an acid, angular, middle-aged man, with sharp features, a heavy black moustache, and eyes too close together. He was a chartered accountant and he came to the town to audit the books of a large brewery near by, and one or two other concerns. He brought his wife and his son, who was eleven years old. He was a man whom everybody disliked from the very beginning. He was probably clever at his job, quick-thinking, self-opinionated, precise, argumentative, aggressively assertive, and altogether objectionable.

The very first occasion on which he visited "The Love-a-duck" he broke every rule of the masonic ring except the one which concerned getting

drunk. The company was in session under its president, and he bounced into the circle and joined in the conversation. He interrupted the landlord in the middle of a story, and plainly hinted that he didn't believe him. He called him "old chap," and offered to stand him a drink. He then told a long, boring story about some obscure episode in his own life. The effect of this intrusion was that the landlord, who never replied to him at all, rose heavily from his seat and disappeared. The rest of the company tried to show by their chilling unresponsiveness that they disapproved of him. But Mr. Stourway was not the kind of person to be sensitive to this. He rattled on, occasionally taking tiny sips of his brandy-and-water. He even had the audacity to ask old Hargreaves who the fat disagreeable old buffer was! And poor old Hargreaves was so upset that he nearly cried. He could only murmur feebly:

"He's the landlord."

"H'm! a nice sort of landlord! Now, I know a landlord at——"

The company gradually melted away and left the stranger to sip his brandy-and-water alone.

Everybody hoped, of course, that the first visit would also be the last. But oh, no! The next evening, at the same time, in bounced Mr. Septimus Stourway, quite uncrushed. Again the landlord disappeared, and the company melted away. The third night some of them tried snubbing him and being rude, but it had no effect at all. At every attempt of this sort he merely laughed in his empty way, and exclaimed:

"My dear fellow, just listen to me——"

Before a week was out Mr. Septimus Stourway began to get on the nerves of the town. He swaggered about the streets as though he was doing us a great honour by being there at all. His wife and son were also seen. His wife was a tall, vinegary looking woman in a semi-fashionable, semi-sporting get-up. She wore a monocle and a short skirt, and carried a cane. The boy was a spectacled, round-shouldered, unattractive-looking youth, more like the mother than the father in appearance. He never seemed to leave his mother's side for an instant.

It appeared that his name was Nick, and that he was the most remarkable boy for his age who had ever lived. He knew Latin, and Greek, and French, and history, and mathematics, and philosophy, and science. Also he had a beautiful nature. Mr. Stourway spent hours boring anyone he could get to listen, with the narration of his son's marvellous attributes. If the *habitués* of

“The Love-a-duck” tired of Mr. Stourway, they became thoroughly fed up with his son.

It was on the following Wednesday evening that the dramatic incident happened in the bar-parlour of the famous inn. The landlord had continued his attitude of utter indifference to the interloper. He had been just as cheerful and entertaining, only when Mr. Stourway entered the bar he simply dried up. But during the last two days he appeared to be thinking abstractedly about something. He was annoyed.

On this Wednesday evening the usual company had again assembled, and the landlord appeared anxious to resume his former position of genial host, when in came Mr. Septimus Stourway again. He had not been in the previous evening, and everyone was hoping that at last he had realised that he was not wanted. Up rose the landlord at once, and went away. There was an almost uncontrolled groan from the rest. Mr. Stourway took his seat, and began to talk affably.

It was then observed that the landlord instead of going right away, was hovering about behind the bar. I don't know how the conversation got round to poetry, but after a time, Mr. Stourway started talking about his son's marvellous memory for poetry.

“That boy of mine, you know,” he said, “he would simply astound you. He remembers everything. The poetry he's learnt off by heart! Miles and miles of it! I don't suppose there's another boy of his age in the country who could quote half as much.”

It was then that the bombshell fell. The landlord was leaning across the bar, and suddenly his enormous voice rang out:

“I'll bet you five pounds to one that I know a little boy of five who could quote twice as much poetry as your son!”

There was a dead silence, and everybody looked from the landlord to Mr. Stourway. That gentleman grinned superciliously, then he rubbed his hands together and said:

“Well, well, that's interesting. I can't believe it. My son's eleven. A boy of five? Ha, ha! I'd like to get a wager like that!”

The landlord's voice, louder than ever, exclaimed:

“I'll bet you a hundred pounds to five!”

Mr. Stourway looked slightly alarmed, but his eyes glittered.

“A hundred pounds to five! I’m not a betting man, but, by God! I’ll take that.”

“Is your son shy?”

“Oh, no, he enjoys reciting poetry.”

“Would he come here and have an open competition?”

“H’m. Well, well, I don’t know. He might. I should have to ask his mother. Who is this wonderful boy you speak of?”

“My nephew over at Chagham. They could drive him over in the dog-cart.”

It need hardly be said that the members of “The Love-a-duck” fraternity were worked up to a great state of excitement over this sudden challenge. What did it all mean? No one knew that old Seldom Right had any relatives in the country. But then he was always such a secretive old boy about his own affairs. Could a little boy of five possibly remember and repeat more poetry—twice as much!—than this phenomenal Nick Stourway? How was it all to be arranged?

It became evident, however, that the landlord was very much in earnest. He had apparently thought out all the details. It should be an open competition. It could take place in the ball-room of the hotel. The two boys should stand on the platform with their parents, and should recite poems or blank verse in turn. A small committee of judges should count the lines. When one had exhausted his complete *répertoire* the other, of course, would have won; but it would be necessary for Stephen—that was the name of old Wright’s nephew—to go on for double the number of lines that Nick had spoken to win the wager for his uncle.

When it was first put to him, Mr. Stourway looked startled but on going into the details he soon became eager. It was the easiest way of making a hundred pounds he had ever encountered. Of course the little boy might be clever and have a good memory, but that he could possibly recite *twice* as much as the wonderful Nick was unthinkable. Moreover his back was up, and he hated the landlord. He knew that he snubbed him on every occasion, and this would be an opportunity to score. There was just the mild risk of losing a fiver, and his wife to be talked over, but—he thought he could persuade her. The rumour of the competition spread like wildfire all over the town.

It was not only the chief topic of conversation at “The Love-a-duck” but at all places where men met and talked. It cannot be denied that a

considerable number of bets were made. Mr. Seldom Right's tremendous optimism found him many supporters, but the great odds and the fact that he invariably lost in wagers of this sort drove many into the opposing camp of backers.

A committee of ways and means was appointed the following night after Mrs. Septimus Stourway had given her consent and Nick had signified his willingness to display his histrionic abilities to a crowd of admirers.

Old Hargreaves, Mr. Bean, and a schoolmaster named McFarlane were appointed the judges. The ball-room was to be open to anyone, and there was to be no charge for admission. The date of the competition was fixed for the following Saturday afternoon, at five o'clock.

I must now apologise for intruding my own personality into this narrative. I would rather not do so, but it is inevitable. It is true my part in the proceedings was only that of a spectator, but from your point of view—and from mine—it was an exceedingly important part. I must begin with the obvious confession that I had visited "The Love-a-duck" on occasions, and that is the kind of adventure that one naturally doesn't make too much of. Nevertheless I can say with a clear conscience that I was not one of the inner ring. I had so far only made the most tentative efforts to get into the good graces of the landlord. But everyone in Tibbelsford was talking of the forthcoming remarkable competition, and I naturally made a point of turning up in good time.

I managed to get a seat in the fourth row, and I was very fortunate, for the ball-room was packed, and a more remarkable competition I have never attended. The three judges sat in the front row, facing the platform. The Stourway party occupied the right side of the platform and the Wrights the left. The landlord sat with his party, but in the centre, so that he could act as a kind of chairman. He appeared to be in high good-humour, and he came on first and made a few facetious remarks before the performance began. In the first place, he apologised for the lighting. It was certainly very bad. There originally had been footlights, but it was so long since they had been used that they were out of repair. The large room was only lighted by a gas chandelier in the centre, so that the stage was somewhat dim, but, as he explained, this would only help to obscure the blushes of the performers when they received the plaudits of such a distinguished gathering.

The Stourway party entered first. They came in from a door at the back of the platform, Mr. Stourway noisily nonchalant, talking to everyone at random, in a tailcoat, with grey spats; his wife in a sports skirt and a small

hat, looking rather bored and disgusted; and the boy in an Eton jacket and collar with a bunchy tie, and his hair neatly brushed. He looked very much at home and confident. It was obvious that he was out to enjoy himself. Numerous prize-distributions at which he had played a conspicuous part had evidently inured him to such an ordeal.

And then the other party entered, and the proceedings seemed likely to end before they had begun. Mrs. Wright came on first, followed by a lady dressed in black, leading a most diminutive boy. They only reached the door when apparently the sight of the large audience frightened the small person, and he began to cry. The landlord and his wife rushed up and with the mother tried to encourage him, and after a few minutes they succeeded in doing so. The lady in black, however—who was presumably the widowed mother—picked him up and carried him in and sat him on her knee.

The audience became keenly excited, and everyone was laughing and discussing whether the affair would materialise or not. At length they seemed to be arranged, and the landlord came forward and said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to the competitors—Master Nick Stourway, Master Stephen Wright. Good gracious! It sounds as though I were announcing the competitors in a prize-ring. But this is to be a very peaceful competition—at least, I hope so! I think you all know the particulars. We’re simply going to enjoy ourselves, aren’t we, Nick? Aren’t we, Stephen?”

Nick smiled indulgently, and said, “Yes, sir.”

Stephen glanced up at him for a second, and then buried his face in his mother’s lap.

“Well, well,” said the landlord, “I will now call on Master Nick to open the ball.”

Master Nick was nothing loth. He stood up and bowed, and holding his right arm stiff, and twiddling a button of his waistcoat with his left, he declaimed in ringing tones:

“It was the schooner *Hesperus*
That sailed the wintry sea;
And the skipper had taken his little daughter
To bear him company.”

There were twenty-two verses of this, of four lines each, and the audience were somewhat impatient, because they had not come there to hear Master Nick recite. They had come for the competition, and it was still an

open question whether there would be any competition. They were anxiously watching Master Stephen. He spent most of the period of his rival's recitation of this long poem with his face buried in his mother's lap, in the dark corner of the platform. His mother stroked his hair and kept on whispering a word to him, and occasionally he would peer round at Nick and watch him for a few seconds; then he glanced at the audience, and immediately ducked out of sight again.

When Nick had finished, he bowed and sat down, and there was a mild round of applause. The judges consulted, and agreed that he had scored 88 lines.

Now, what was going to happen?

The small boy seemed to be shaking his head and stamping his feet, and his mother was talking to him. The landlord coughed. He was obviously a little nervous. He went over to the group and said in a cheerful voice:

“Now, Stephen, tell us a poem!”

A little piping voice said, “No!” and there were all the wriggles and shakes of the recalcitrant youngster. Murmurs ran round the room, and a lot of people were laughing. The Stourway party was extremely amused. At length the landlord took a chair near him, and produced a long stick of barley-sugar.

“Now, Stephen,” he said, “if you won't talk to these naughty people, tell *me* a poem. Tell me that beautiful ‘Hymn to Apollo’ that you told me last winter.”

The little boy looked up at him and grinned; then he looked at his mother. Her widow's veil covered the upper part of her face. She kissed him, and said:

“Go on, dear; tell Uncle Jim.”

There was a pause; the small boy looked up and down, and then, fixing his eyes solemnly on the landlord's face, he suddenly began in a queer little lisping voice:

God of the golden bow,
And of the golden lyre,
And of the golden hair,
And of the golden fire;
Charioteer
Round the patient year,
Where—where slept thine ire?

It was a short poem, but its rendering was received with vociferous applause. There was going to be a competition, after all! People who had money at stake were laughing and slapping their legs, and people who hadn't were doing the same. Everyone was on the best of terms with each other. There was a certain amount of trouble with the judges, as they didn't know the poem, and they didn't grasp the length of the lines. Fortunately the schoolmaster had come armed with books, and after some discussion the poem was found to have been written by Keats, and Master Stephen was awarded thirty-six lines. He was cheered, clapped, and kissed by the landlord, and his aunt, and his mother.

Master Nick's reply to this was to recite "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," a performance which bored everyone to tears, especially as he would persist in gesticulating and doing it in a manner as though he thought that the people had simply come to hear his performance. "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" is 195 lines. This made his score 283.

The small boy was still very shy, and seemed disinclined to continue, but the landlord said:

"Now come on, Stephen; I'm sure you remember some more beautiful poetry."

At last, to everyone's surprise, he began to lisp:

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more—"

It was screamingly funny. He went right through the speech, and when he got to:

"Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'"

the applause was deafening. People were calling out, and some of the barrackers had to be rebuked by the landlord. King Henry's speech was only 35 lines, so Master Stephen's total was 71. Nick then retaliated with an appalling poem, which commenced:

She stood at the bar of Justice,
A creature wan and wild,
In form too small for a woman,
In feature too old for a child.

Fortunately, it was not quite as long as the other two, and only brought him 60 lines, making a total of 343.

Stephen, who seemed to be gaining a little more confidence and entering into the spirit of the thing, replied with Robert Herrick's "Ode to a Daffodil," a charming little effort, although it only brought in 20 lines.

Master Nick now broke into Shakespeare, and let himself go on:

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."

He only did twenty-three lines, however, before he broke down and forgot. The committee had arranged for this. It was agreed, that in the event of either competitor breaking down, he should still score the lines up to where he broke down, and at the end he should be allowed to quote odd lines, provided there were more than one.

At this point there was a very amusing incident. Master Stephen hesitated for some time, and then *he* began "Friends Romans, countrymen," etc., and he went right through the same speech without a slip! It was the first distinct score for the landlord's party, and Master Stephen was credited with 128 lines. The scores, however, were still 366 to 219 in Nick's favour, and he proceeded to pile on the agony by reciting "Beth Gelert." However, at the end of the twelfth verse he again forgot, and only amassed 48 lines.

Balanced against his mother's knee, and looking unutterably solemn—as far as one could see in the dim light—and only occasionally glancing at the audience, Stephen then recited a charming poem by William Blake called "Night," which also contained 48 lines.

Nick then collected 40 lines with "Somebody's Darling," and as a contrast to this sentimental twaddle Stephen attempted Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality." Unfortunately it was his turn to break down, but not till he had notched 92 lines. It was quite a feature of the afternoon that whereas Nick's contributions for the most part were the utmost trash, Stephen only did good things.

It would perhaps be tedious to chronicle the full details of the poems attempted and the exact number of lines scored, although, as a matter of fact, at the time I did keep a careful record. But on that afternoon it did not appear

tedious, except when Nick let himself go rather freely over some quite commonplace verse. Even then there was always the excitement as to whether he would break down. The audience indeed found it thrilling, and it became more and more exciting as it went on, for it became apparent that both boys were getting to the end of their tether. They both began to forget, and the judges were kept very busy, and the parents were as occupied as seconds in a prize-ring. It must have been nearly half-past six when Master Nick eventually gave out. He started odds and ends, and forgot, and his parents were pulled up for prompting. He collected a few odd lines, and amassed a total of 822, a very considerable amount for a boy of his age.

At this point he was leading by 106 lines. So for Stephen to win the wager for the landlord he would not only have to score that odd 106 but he would have to remember an additional 822 lines! And he already gave evidence of forgetting! There was a fresh burst of betting in odd parts of the hall, and Dick Toom was offering 10 to 1 against the landlord's *protégé* and not getting many takers. The great thing in his favour was that he seemed to have quite lost his nervousness. He was keen on the job, and he seemed to realise that it *was* a competition, and that he had got to do his utmost. The landlord's party were allowed to talk to him and to make suggestions, but not to prompt if he forgot. There was a short interval, in which milk and other drinks were handed round. The landlord had one of the other drinks, and then he said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to ask your indulgence to be as quiet as possible. My small nephew has to recall 928 lines, to win the competition, and he is going to try to do it.”

The announcement was received with cheers. And then Stephen started again. He began excellently with Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," and scored 80 lines, and without any pause went on to Milton's "L'Allegro," of which he delivered 126 lines before breaking down. He paused a little, and then did odds and ends of verses, some complete, and some not. Thomas Hood's "Departure of Summer" (14 lines), Shelley's "To Night" (35) and a song by Shelley commencing:

Rarely, rarely comest thou
Spirit of Delight! (48 lines)

I will not enumerate all these poems but he amassed altogether 378 lines in this way. Then he had another brief rest, and reverted once more to Shakespeare. In his little sing-song voice, without any attempt at dramatic expression, he reeled off 160 lines of the Balcony Scene from *Romeo and*

Juliet; 96 lines of the scene between Hamlet and the Queen; 44 lines of the Brutus and Cassius quarrel; 31 of Jaques' speech on "All the world's a stage." It need hardly be said that by this time the good burghers of Tibbelsford were in a state of the wildest excitement.

The schoolmaster announced that Master Stephen had now scored 689 of the requisite 928, so that he only wanted 240 more to win. Mr. Stourway was biting his nails and looking green. Mrs. Stourway looked as though she was disgusted with her husband for having brought her among these common people. Nick sneered superciliously.

But, in the meantime, there was no question but that Master Stephen himself was getting distressed. His small voice was getting huskier and huskier, and tears seemed not far off. I heard Mrs. Rusbridger, sitting behind me, remark:

"Poor little mite! I calls it a shime!"

It was also evident that he was getting seriously to the end of his quoting *répertoire*. He had no other long speeches. The landlord's party gathered round him and whispered. He tried again, short stanzas and odd verses, sometimes unfinished. He kept the schoolmaster very busy but he blundered on. By these uncertain stages he managed to add another 127 lines; and then he suddenly brought off a veritable *tour de force*. It was quite uncanny. He quoted 109 lines of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*! The matter was quite unintelligible to the audience, and they were whispering to each other and asking what it was. When he broke down, the schoolmaster announced that it was quite in order, and that Master Stephen's total lines quoted now amounted to 1640, and therefore he only required four lines to win!

Even then the battle was apparently not over. Everyone was cheering and making such a noise that the small boy could not understand it, and he began crying. A lot of people in the audience were calling out "Shame!" and there was all the appearance of a disturbance. The landlord's party were very occupied. It was several minutes before order was restored, and then the landlord rapped on the table and called out "Order! Order!"

He drank a glass of water, and there was dead silence. Stephen's mother held the little boy very tight, and smiled at him. At last, raising his voice for this last despairing effort, he declaimed quite loudly:

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the two Worlds so wisely—they are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

The cheers which greeted this triumphant climax were split by various disturbances, the most distressing coming from Stephen himself for almost as he uttered the last word he gave a yell, and burst into sobs. And he sobbed, and sobbed, and sobbed. And his mother picked him up and rocked him, and the landlord and his wife did what they could. But it was quite hopeless. Stephen was finished. His mother picked him up and hurried out of the door at the back with him. The Stourway party melted away. There were no more speeches, but people crowded on to the platform, and a lot of the women wanted to just kiss Stephen before he went away; but Mrs. Wright came back and said the poor child was very upset. She was afraid they ought not to have let him do it. His mother was putting him to bed in one of the rooms, and they were giving him some sal volatile. He would be all right soon. Of course it was a tremendous effort—such a tiny person, too!

Someone offered to go for the doctor, but Mrs. Wright said they would see how he was, and if he wasn't better in half-an-hour's time they'd send over to Dr. Winch.

Everyone was congratulating the landlord, and he was clasping hands and saying:

“A marvellous boy! a marvellous boy! I knew he would do it!”

The party gradually broke up.

I must now again revert to myself. I was enormously impressed by what I had seen and heard, and for the rest of the evening I could think of nothing else. After dinner I went out for a stroll. It was early March, and unseasonably cold. When I got down to the bridge, over which the high-road runs across the open country to Tisehurst, large snow-flakes were falling. I stood there for some time, looking at our dim little river, and thinking of the landlord and Stephen. And as I gazed around me I began to wonder what it was about the snow-flakes which seemed to dovetail with certain subconscious movements going on within me.

And suddenly a phrase leapt into my mind. It was:

“Rotten cotton gloves!”

Rotten cotton gloves! What was the connection? The snow, the mood, something about Stephen's voice quoting “The Faerie Queene.” Very slowly

the thing began to unfold itself. And when I began to realise it all, I said to myself, "Yes, my friend, it was the *Faerie Queene* which gave the show away. The rest might have been possible. You were getting rather hard put to it!" The snow was falling heavily. It was Christmas-time—good Lord! I did not like to think how long ago. Thirty years? Forty years? My sister and I at Drury Lane pantomime. "Rotten cotton gloves!" Yes, that was it! I could remember nothing at all of the performance. But who was that great man they spoke of? The star attraction?—Some name like "The Great Borodin," the world's most famous humourist and ventriloquist. We were very excited, Phyllis and I, very small people then, not, surely, much older than Stephen himself. I could not remember the great Borodin, but I remembered that one phrase. There was a small lay figure which said most amusing things. It was called— No, I have forgotten. It was dressed in an Eton suit and it wore rather dilapidated-looking white cotton gloves. And every now and then, in the middle of a dialogue or discourse, it broke off, looked at its hands, and muttered:

"Rotten cotton gloves!"

It became a sort of catch-phrase in London in those days. On 'buses and trains people would murmur "Rotten cotton gloves!" A certain vague something about the way that Stephen recited Spenser's *Faerie Queen*. . . . Was it possible?

And then certain very definite aspects of the competition presented themselves to my mind's eye. It had all been very cleverly stage-managed. It must be observed that Stephen neither walked on nor walked off. He did not even stand. He hardly looked at the audience. And then the lighting was inexcusably bad. Even some of the lights in the central chandelier had unaccountably failed. And the landlord's party had chosen the darkest side of the stage. No one had spoken to the boy. No one had seen him arrive, and immediately after the competition he had gone straight to bed.

I tried to probe my memory for knowledge of "The Great Borodin," but at eight or nine one does not take great interest in these details. I know there was something. . . . I remember hearing my parents talking about it—some great scandal soon after I had seen him. He was disgraced, I am sure. I have a vague idea he was in some way well-connected. He was to marry a great lady, and then perhaps he eloped with a young barmaid? I cannot be certain. It was something like that. I know he disappeared from public life, for in after years, when people had been to similar performances I had heard our parents say:

“Ah, but you should have seen ‘The Great Borodin.’”

These memories, the peculiar thrill of the competition, the cold air, the lazy snow-flakes drifting hither and thither, all excited me. I walked on further and further into the country trying to piece it all together. I liked the landlord, and I shared the popular dislike of Mr. Stourway.

After a time I returned, and making my way towards the north of the town, I started to walk quickly in the direction of “The Love-a-duck.” If I hurried I should be there ten minutes or so before closing time.

When I entered the large bar-parlour the place was very crowded. I met old Hargreaves by the door. I’m afraid a good many of the rules of the society had been broken that evening. Old Hargreaves was not the only one who had had quite enough liquid refreshment. Everybody was in high spirits, and they were still all talking about the competition. I met Mr. Bean near the fireplace, and I said:

“Well, Mr. Bean, and have you heard how the boy is?”

“Oh, ay,” he replied. “He soon got all right. Mrs. Wright says he were just a bit upset. He went off home not an hour since.”

“Did you see him?”

“Eh? Oh, no, I didn’t see’m. Mrs. Wright says he looked quite hisself.”

The landlord was moving ponderously up and down behind the bar. I thought he looked tired and there were dark rims round his eyes. I moved up towards the bar, and he did not notice me. The noise of talking was so loud that one could speak in a normal voice without being heard. Everything had apparently gone off quite successfully. Mr. Stourway had sent along his cheque for five pounds and it was not reckoned that he would ever show his face in “The Love-a-duck” again. I waited.

At last I noticed that the landlord was quite alone. He was leaning against the serving-hatch, flicking some crumbs from his waistcoat, as though waiting for the moment of release. I took my glass and sidled up to him. I leant forward as though to speak. He glanced at me, and inclined his head with a bored movement. When his ear was within a reasonable distance, I said quietly:

“Rotten cotton gloves!”

I shall never forget the expression on the face of the landlord as he slowly raised his head. I was conscious of being a pinpoint in a vast perspective. His large, rather colourless eyes appeared to sweep the whole

room. They were moreover charged with a perfectly controlled expression of surprise, and a kind of uncontrolled lustre of ironic humour. I had a feeling that if he laughed it would be the end of all things. He did not laugh; he looked lugubriously right through my face, and breathed heavily. Then he swayed slightly from side to side, and looking at my hat, said:

“I’ve got some cherry-brandy here you’d like. You must have a glass, Mr.——”

Now, I do not wish to appear to you either as a prig, a traitor, or a profiteer. I am indeed a very ordinary, perhaps over-human member of Tibbelsford society. If I have taken certain advantages of the landlord, you must at any rate give me the credit of being the only member of a large audience who had the right intuitions at the right moment. In all other respects you must acknowledge that I have treated him rather well.

In any case, I became prominent in the inner circle without undergoing the tortuous novitiateship of the casual stranger.

The landlord and I are the best of friends to-day, although we exchange no confidences. I can break all the rules of the masonic understanding without getting into trouble. Some of the others are amazed at the liberties I take.

And in these days, when licensing restrictions are so severe, when certain things are not to be got (officially), and when I see my friends stealing home to a bone-dry supper, I only have to creep into the bar of “The Love-a-duck” and whisper “Rotten cotton gloves!” and lo! all these forbidden luxuries are placed at my disposal! Can you blame me?

I have said that we exchange no confidences, and indeed I feel that that would be going too far, taking too great an advantage of my position. There is only one small point I would love to clear up, and I dare not ask. Presuming my theory to be right about “The Great Borodin”—which was he?

The landlord? Or the widow?

AN ADVENTURE IN BED

There was something essentially Chinese about the appearance of George as he lay there propped up against the pillows. His large flabby face had an expression of complete detachment. His narrowing eyes regarded me with a fatalistic repose. Observing him, I felt that nothing mattered, nothing ever had mattered, and nothing ever would matter. And I was angry. Pale sunlight filtered through the curtains.

“Good Lord!” I exclaimed. “Still in bed! Do you know it’s nearly twelve o’clock?”

An almost inaudible sigh greeted my explosion. George occupied the maisonette below me. Some fool of an uncle had left him a small private income, and he lived alone, attended by an old housekeeper. He did nothing absolutely nothing at all, not even amuse himself, and whenever I went in to see him he was invariably in bed. There was nothing wrong with his health. It was sheer laziness. But not laziness of a negative kind, mark you, but the outcome of a calm and studied policy. I knew this, and it angered me the more.

“What would happen if the whole world went on like you?” I snapped.

He sighed again, and then replied in his thin, mellow voice:

“We should have a series of ideal states. There would be no wars, no crimes, no divorce, no competition, no greed, envy, hatred or malice.”

“Yes, and no food.”

He turned slightly on one side. His accents became mildly expostulating, the philosopher fretted by an ignorant child.

“How unreasonable you are, dear boy. How unthinking! The secret of life is complete immobility. The tortoise lives four hundred years; the fox-terrier wears itself out in ten. Wild beasts, fishes, savages, and stockbrokers fight and struggle and eat each other up. The only place for a cultivated man is—bed. In bed he is supreme—the arbiter of his soul. His limbs and the vulgar carcase of his being constructed for purely material functioning are concealed. His head rules him. He is the autocrat of the bolster, the gallant of fine linen, the master of complete relaxation. Believe me, there are a thousand tender attitudes of repose unknown to people like you. The four corners of a feather-bed are an inexhaustible field of luxurious adventure. I

have spent more than half my life in bed, and even now I have not explored all the delectable crannies and comforts that it holds for me.”

“No,” I sneered, “and in the meantime other people have to work to keep you there.”

“That is not my fault. A well-ordered state should be a vast caravanseraï of dormitories. Ninety-nine per cent. of these activities you laud so extravagantly are gross and unnecessary. People should be made to stay in bed till they have found out something worth doing. Who wants telephones, and cinemas, and safety-razors? All that civilisation has invented are vulgar luxuries and time-saving devices. And when they have saved the time, they don’t know what to do with it. All that is required is bread, and wine, and fine linen. I—even I would not object to getting up for a few hours every week to help to produce these things.”

He stroked the three-weeks’ growth on his chin, and smiled magnanimously. Then he continued:

“The world has yet to appreciate the real value of passivity. In a crude form the working classes have begun to scratch the edge of the surface. They have discovered the strike. Now, observe, that the strike is the most powerful political weapon of the present day. It can accomplish nearly everything it requires, and yet it is a condition of immobility. So you see already that immobility may be more powerful than activity. But this is only the beginning. When the nations start going to bed, and stopping there, then civilisation will take a leap forward. You can do nothing with a man in bed—not even knock him down. My ambition is to form a League of Bedfellows. So that if one day some busy-body or group of busybodies says: ‘We’re going to war with France, or Germany, or America,’ we can reply, ‘Very well. Then I’m going to bed.’ Then after a time, they would have to go to bed too. And they would eventually succumb to the gentle caresses of these sheets and eiderdowns. All their evil intentions would melt away. The world should be ruled not by Governments or Soviets, but by national doss-houses.”

He yawned, and I pulled up the blind.

“What about the good activities?” I replied.

For a moment I thought I had stumped him, or that he was not going to deign to reply. Then the thin rumble of his voice reached me from across the sheets.

“What you call the good activities can all be performed in bed. That is to say, they can be substituted by a good immobility. The activities of man are essentially predatory. He has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. He is a hunter and slayer and nothing else at all. All his activities are diversions of this instinct. Commerce is war, capital is a sword, labour is a stomach. Progress means either filling the stomach or chopping someone else’s head off with the sword. Science is an instrument that speeds up the execution. Politics is a game. Colonisation is straightforward daylight burglary.”

“I’m not going to waste my morning talking to a fool like you,” I said. “But what about art, and beauty, and charity, and love?”

“In bed,” he mumbled. “All in bed. . . . They are all spiritual things. Bed is the place for them. Was Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ any finer because he got up and wrote it down and sent it off to a fool of a publisher? Charity! Give a man a bed, and charity ceases to have any significance. Love! What a fool you are! Is a bed a less suitable place for love than a County Council tramcar?”

His voice died away above the coverlet. I was about to deliver a vitriolic tirade against his ridiculous theories, but I did not know where to begin, and before I had framed a suitable opening, the sound of gentle snoring reached me.

I record this conversation as faithfully as I can recollect because it will help you to share with me the sense of extreme surprise at certain events which followed, two months later. Of course George did occasionally get up. Sometimes he went for a gentle stroll in the afternoon, and he belonged to a club down town where he would go and dine in the evening. After dinner he would watch some of the men play billiards, but he invariably returned to his bed about ten o’clock. He never played any game himself, neither did he apparently write or receive letters. Occasionally he read in bed, but he never looked at a newspaper or a magazine. He once said to me that if you read the newspapers you might as well play golf, and the tremulous shiver of disgust in his voice when he uttered the word “golf” is a thing I shall never forget.

I ask you, then, to imagine my amazement when, two months later, George shaved himself, got up to breakfast, reached a city office at nine o’clock, worked all day, and returned at seven in the evening. You will no doubt have a shrewd idea of the reason, and you are right. She was the prettiest little thing you can imagine, with chestnut hair and a solemn, babyish pucker of the cheeks. She was as vital as he was turgid. Her name was Maisie Brand. I don’t know how he met her, but Maisie, in addition to

being pretty and in every way attractive, was a practical modern child. George's two hundred a year might be sufficient to keep him in bed, but it wasn't going to be enough to run a household on. Maisie had no use for this bed theory. She was a daughter of sunshine and fresh air, and frocks and theatres, and social life. If George was to win her he must get up in the morning.

On the Sunday after this dramatic change I visited him in his bedroom. He was like a broken man. He groaned when he recognised me.

"I suppose you'll stop in bed all day to-day?" I remarked jauntily.

"I've got to get up this afternoon," he growled. "I've got to take her to a concert."

"Well, how do you like work?" I asked.

"It's torture . . . agony, hell. It's awful. Fortunately, I found a fellow-sufferer. He works next to me. We take it in turn to have twenty-minute naps, while the other keeps watch."

I laughed, and quoted: "Custom lies upon us with a weight, heavy as frost and deep almost as night." Then I added venomously: "Well, I haven't any sympathy for you. It serves you right for the way you've gone on all these years."

I thought he was asleep again, but at last his drowsy accents proclaimed:

"What a perfect fool you are! You always follow the line of least resistance."

I laughed outright at that, and exclaimed: "Well, if ever there was a case of the pot calling the kettle black!"

There was a long interval, during which I seemed to observe a slow, cumbrous movement in the bed. Doubtless he was exploring. When he spoke again, there was a faint tinge of animation in his voice.

"You are not capable I suppose, of realising the danger of it all. You fool! Do you think I follow the line of least resistance in bed? Do you think I haven't often wanted to get up and do all those ridiculous things you and your kind indulge in? Can't you see what might happen? Suppose these dormant temptations were thoroughly aroused! Good God! It's awful to contemplate. Habit, you say? Yes, I know. I know quite well the risk I am running. Am I to sacrifice all the epic romance of this life between the sheets for the sordid round of petty actions you call life? I was a fool to get up that day. I had a premonition of danger when I awoke at dawn. I said to myself,

‘George, restrain yourself. Do not be deceived by the hollow sunlight. Above all things, keep clear of the park.’ But, like a fool, I betrayed my sacred trust. The premonitions which come to one in bed are always right. I got up. And now. . . . My God! it’s too late.”

Smothered sobs seemed to shake the bed.

“Well,” I said, “if you feel like that about it; if you think more of your bed than of the girl, I should break it off. She won’t be missing much.”

He suddenly sat up, and exclaimed:

“Don’t you dare——”

Then he sank back on the pillow, and added dispassionately:

“There you see, already the instinct of activity. A weak attitude. I could crush you more successfully with complete immobility. But these movements are already beginning. They shake me at every turn. Nothing is secure.”

Inwardly chuckling at his discomfiture, I left him.

During the months that followed I did not have the opportunities of studying George to the extent that I should have liked, as my work carried me to various parts of the country, but what opportunities I did have I found intriguing. He certainly improved in health. A slight colour tinged his cheeks. He seemed less puffy and turgid. His movements were still slow, but they were more deliberate than of old. His clothes were neat and brushed. The girl was delightful. She came up and chatted with me, and we became great friends. She talked to me quite frankly about George. She laughed about his passion for bed, but declared she meant to knock all that sort of thing out of him. She was going to thoroughly wake him up. She said laughingly that she thought it was perfectly disgusting the way he had been living. I used to try and visualise George making love to her, but somehow the picture would never seem convincing. I do not think it could have been a very passionate affair. Passion was the last thing you would associate with George. I used to watch them walking down the street, the girl slim and vivid, swinging along with broad strides, George, rather flustered and disturbed, pottering along by her side, like a performing bear that is being led away from its bun. He did not appear to look at her, and when she addressed him vivaciously, he bent forward his head and held his large ear close to her head. It was as though he was timid of her vitality.

At first this spectacle amused me, but after a time it produced in me another feeling altogether.

“This girl is being thrown away on him. It’s horrible. She’s much too good for George.”

And when I was away I was constantly thinking of her, and dreading the day of the wedding, praying that something would happen to prevent it. But to my deep concern nothing did happen to prevent it, and they were duly married the following April. They went for a short honeymoon to Brittany, and then returned and occupied George’s old maisonnette below me. The day after their return I had to face a disturbing realisation. *I was falling hopelessly in love with Maisie myself.* I could not think of George or take any interest in him. I was always thinking of her. Her face haunted me. Her charm and beauty, and the pathos of her position, gripped me. I made up my mind that the only thing to do was to go away. I went to Scotland, and on my return took a small flat in another part of London. I wrote to George and gave him my address, and wished him all possible luck. I said I hoped “some day” to pay them a visit, but if at any time I could be of service, would he let me know.

I cannot describe to you the anguish I experienced during the following twelve months. I saw nothing of George or Maisie at all, but the girl was ever present in my thoughts. I could not work. I lived in a state of feverish restlessness. Time and again I was on the point of breaking my resolve, but I managed to keep myself in hand.

It was in the following June that I met Maisie herself walking down Regent Street. She looked pale and worried. Dark rings encircled her eyes. She gave a little gasp when she saw me, and clutched my hand. I tried to be formal, but she was obviously labouring under some tense emotion.

“My flat is in Baker Street,” I said. “Will you come and visit me?”

She answered huskily, “Yes, I will come to-morrow afternoon. Thank you.”

She slipped away in the crowd. I spent a sleepless night. What had happened? Of course I could see it all. George had gone back to bed. Having once secured her, his efforts had gradually flagged. He had probably left his business—or been sacked—and spent the day sleeping. The poor girl was probably living a life of loneliness and utter poverty. What was I to do? All day long I paced up and down my flat. I dreaded that she might not come. It was just after four that the bell went. I hastened to answer it myself. It was

she. I led her into the sitting-room, and tried to be formal and casual. I made some tea and chatted impersonally about the weather and the news of the day. She hardly answered me. Suddenly she buried her face in her hands, and broke into tears. I sprang to her and patted her shoulder.

“There, there,” I said. “What is it? Tell me all about it, Maisie.”

“I can’t live with him! I can’t live with him any longer!” she sobbed.

I must acknowledge that my heart gave a violent bump, not entirely occasioned by contrition. I murmured as sympathetically as I could, but with prophetic assurance:

“He’s gone back to bed.”

“Oh, no, no,” she managed to stammer. “It’s not that. It’s just the opposite.”

“Just the opposite?”

“He’s so restless, so exhausting. Oh, dear! Yes, please Mr. Wargrave, give me a cup of tea, and I will tell you all about it.”

For a moment I wondered whether the poor girl’s mental balance had been upset. I poured her out the tea in silence. George restless! George exhausting! Whatever did she mean? She sipped the tea meditatively; then she dabbed her beautiful eyes, and told me the following remarkable story:

“It was all right at first, Mr. Wargrave. We were quite happy. He was still—you know, very lazy, very sleepy. It all came about gradually. Every week, however, he seemed to get a little more active and vital. He began to sleep shorter hours and work longer. He liked to be entertained in the evening or go to the theatre. On Sunday he would go for quite long walks. It went on like that for months. Then they raised his position in the firm. He seemed to open out. It was as though during all those years he had spent in bed he had been hoarding up remarkable stores of energy. And suddenly some demon of restlessness got possession of him. He began to work frenziedly. At first he was pleasant to me; then he became so busy he completely ignored me. At the end of six months they made him manager of a big engineering works at Walham Green. One of the directors, a Mr. Sturge, said to me one day, ‘That husband of yours is a remarkable man. He is the most efficient and forceful person we have ever employed. What has he been doing all these years? Why haven’t we heard of him before!’ He would get up at six in the morning, have a cold bath, and study for two hours before he went off to work. He would work all day, like a fury. They say he was a perfect slave-driver in the works. Only last week he sacked a man for taking a nap five

minutes over his lunch hour. He would get home about eight o'clock, have a hurried dinner, and then insist on going to the opera or playing bridge. When we got back he would read till two or three in the morning. Oh, Mr. Wargrave, he has got worse and worse. He never sleeps at all. He terrifies me. On Sunday it is just the same. He works all the morning. After lunch he motors out to Northwood, and plays eighteen holes before tea, and eighteen after."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Golf!"

"Golf, and science, and organisation are his manias. They say he's invented some wonderful labour-saving appliances on the plant, and he's planning all kinds of future activities. The business of the firm is increasing enormously. They pay him well, but he still persists in living in that maisonnette. He says he's too busy to move."

"Is he cruel to you?"

"If complete indifference and neglect is cruelty, he is most certainly cruel. Sometimes he gives me a most curious look, as though he hated me, and yet he can't account for me. He allows me no intimacy of any sort. If I plead with him he doesn't answer. I believe he holds me responsible for all these dormant powers which have got loose and which he cannot now control. I do not think his work gives him any satisfaction. It is as though he were driven on by some blind force. Oh, Mr. Wargrave, I can't go on. It is killing me. I must run away and leave him."

"Maisie!" I murmured, and I took her hand.

The immediate subsequent proceedings are not perhaps entirely necessary to record in relating this story, which is essentially George's story. The story of Maisie and myself could comfortably fill a stout volume, but as it concerns two quite unremarkable people, who were just human and workaday, I do not expect that you would be interested to read it. In any case, we have no intention of writing it, so do not be alarmed. I can only tell you that during that year of her surprising married life, Maisie had thought of me not a little, and this dénouement rapidly brought things to a head. After this confession we used to meet every day. We went for rambles and picnics, and to matinées, and of course that kind of thing cannot go on indefinitely. We both detested the idea of an intrigue. And eventually we decided that we would cut the Gordian knot and make full confession. Maisie left him and went to live with a married sister. That same morning I called on George. I arrived at the maisonnette just before six o'clock as I knew that that was the most likely time to catch him. Without any

preliminary ceremony I made my way into the familiar bedroom. George was in bed. I stood by the door and called out:

“George!”

Like a flash he was out of bed, and standing in his pyjamas, facing me. He had changed considerably. His face was lined and old, but his eyes blazed with a fury of activity. He awed me. I stammered out my confession.

“George, I’m awfully sorry, old chap. I have a confession to make to you. It comes in the first place from Maisie. She has decided that she cannot live with you any longer. She thinks you have neglected her, and treated her badly. She refuses to come back to you under any circumstances. Indeed, she—she and I—er——”

I tailed off dismally, and looked at him. For a moment I thought he was going to bear down on me. I know that if he had I should have been supine. I should have stood there and let him slaughter me. I felt completely overpowered by the force of his personality. I believe I shivered. He hovered by the edge of the bed, then he turned and looked out of the window. He stood there solemnly for nearly a minute; then he emitted a profound sigh. Without more ado, he got back into bed. There was an immense upheaval of the sheets. He seemed to be burrowing down into some vast and as yet unexplored cave of comfort. He rolled and heaved, and at length became inert. I stood there, waiting for my answer. Sparrows twittered outside on the windowbox. I don’t know how long I waited. I felt that I could not go until he had spoken.

At length his voice came. It seemed to reach me across dim centuries of memory, an old, tired, cosy, enormously contented, sleep-encrusted voice.

“’S’ all right,” said the voice. “Tell Mrs. Chase she needn’t bring up my shaving-water this morning.”

THEM OTHERS

I

It is always disturbing to me when things fall into pattern form, when in fact incidents of real life dovetail with each other in such a manner as to suggest the shape of a story. A story is a nice neat little thing with what is called a “working-up” and a climax, and life is a clumsy, ungraspable thing, very incomplete in its periods, and with a poor sense of climax. In fact, death—which is a very uncertain quantity—is the only definite note it strikes, and even death has an uncomfortable way of setting other things in motion. If, therefore, in telling you about my friend Mrs. Ward, I am driven to the usual shifts of the story-teller, you must believe me that it is because this narrative concerns visions: Mrs. Ward’s visions, my visions, and your visions. Consequently I am dependent upon my own poor powers of transcription to mould these visions into some sort of shape, and am driven into the position of a story-teller against my will.

The first vision, then, concerns the back view of the Sheldrake Road, which, as you know, butts on to the railway embankment near Dalston Junction station. If you are of an adventurous turn of mind you shall accompany me, and we will creep up on to the embankment together and look down into these back yards. (We shall be liable to a fine of £2, according to a bye-law of the Railway Company, for doing so, but the experience will justify us.)

There are twenty-two of these small buff-brick houses huddled together in this road, and there is surely no more certain way of judging not only the character of the individual inhabitants but of their mode of life, than by a survey of these somewhat pathetic yards. Is it not, for instance, easy to determine the timid, well-ordered mind of little Miss Porson, the dressmaker at number nine, by its garden of neat mud paths, with its thin patch of meagre grass, and the small bed of skimpy geraniums? Cannot one read the tragedy of those dreadful Alleson people at number four? The garden is a wilderness of filth and broken bottles, where even the weeds seem chary of establishing themselves. In fact, if we listen carefully—and the trains are not making too much noise—we can hear the shrill crescendo of Mrs. Alleson’s voice cursing at her husband in the kitchen, the half-empty gin-bottle between them.

The methodical pushfulness and practicability of young Mr. and Mrs. Andrew MacFarlane is evident at number fourteen. They have actually grown a patch of potatoes, and some scarlet-runners, and there is a chicken run near the house.

Those irresponsible people, the O'Neals, have grown a bed of hollyhocks, but for the rest the garden is untidy and unkempt. One could almost swear they were connected in some obscure way with the theatrical profession.

Mrs. Abbot's garden is a sort of playground. It has asphalt paths, always swarming with small and not too clean children, and there are five lines of washing suspended above the mud. Every day seems to be Mrs. Abbot's washing day. Perhaps she "does" for others. Sam Abbot is certainly a lazy, insolent old rascal, and such always seem destined to be richly fertile. Mrs. Abbot is a pleasant "body," though.

The Greens are the swells of the road. George Green is in the grocery line, and both his sons are earning good money, and one daughter has piano lessons. The narrow strip of yard is actually divided into two sections, a flower-garden and a kitchen-garden. And they are the only people who have flower-boxes in the front.

Number eight is a curious place. Old Mr. Bilge lives there. He spends most of his time in the garden, but nothing ever seems to come up. He stands about in his shirt-sleeves, and with a circular paper hat on his head, like a printer. They say he was formerly a corn-merchant, but has lost all his money. He keeps the garden very neat and tidy, but nothing seems to grow. He stands there staring at the beds, as though he found their barrenness quite unaccountable.

Number eleven is unoccupied, and number twelve is Mrs. Ward's.

We come now to an important vision, and I want you to come down with me from the embankment and to view Mrs. Ward's garden from inside, and also Mrs. Ward as I saw her on that evening when I had occasion to pay my first visit.

It had been raining, but the sun had come out. We wandered round the paths together, and I can see her old face now, lined and seamed with years of anxious toil and struggle; her long bony arms, slightly withered, but moving restlessly in the direction of snails and slugs.

"O dear! O dear!" she was saying. "What with the dogs, and the cats, and the snails, and the trains, it's wonderful anything comes up at all!"

Mrs. Ward's garden has a character of its own, and I cannot account for it. There is nothing very special growing—a few pansies and a narrow border of London Pride, several clumps of unrecognisable things that haven't flowered, the grass patch in only fair order, and at the end of the garden an unfinished rabbit-hutch. But there is about Mrs. Ward's garden an atmosphere. There is something about it that reflects in her placid eye, the calm, somewhat contemplative way she has of looking right through things, as though they didn't concern her too closely. As though, in fact, she were too occupied with her own inner visions.

“No,” she says in answer to my query. “We don't mind the trains at all. In fact, me and my Tom we often come out here and sit after supper. And Tom smokes his pipe. We like to hear the trains go by.”

She gazes abstractedly at the embankment.

“I like to hear things . . . going on and that. It's Dalston Junction a little further on. The trains go from there to all parts, right out into the country they do . . . ever so far. . . . My Ernie went from Dalston.”

She adds the last in a changed tone of voice. And now perhaps we come to the most important vision of all—Mrs. Ward's vision of “my Ernie.”

I ought perhaps to mention that I had never met “my Ernie.” I can only see him through Mrs. Ward's eyes. At the time when I met her, he had been away at the war for nearly a year. I need hardly say that “my Ernie” was a paragon of sons. He was brilliant, handsome, and incredibly clever. Everything that “my Ernie” said was treasured. Every opinion that he expressed stood. If “my Ernie” liked anyone, that person was always a welcome guest. If “my Ernie” disliked anyone they were not to be tolerated, however plausible they might appear.

I had seen Ernie's photograph, and I must confess that he appeared a rather weak, extremely ordinary-looking young man, but then I would rather trust to Mrs. Ward's visions than the art of any photographer.

Tom Ward was a mild, ineffectual-looking old man, with something of Mrs. Ward's placidity but with nothing of her strong individual poise. He had some job in a gasworks. There was also a daughter named Lily, a brilliant person who served in a tea-shop, and sometimes went to theatres with young men. To both husband and daughter Mrs. Ward adopted an affectionate, mothering, almost pitying attitude. But with “my Ernie,” it was quite a different thing. I can see her stooping figure, and her silver-white

hair gleaming in the sun as we come to the unfinished rabbit-hutch, and the curious wistful tones of her voice as she touches it and says:

“When my Ernie comes home. . . .”

The war to her was some unimaginable but disconcerting affair centred round Ernie. People seemed to have got into some desperate trouble, and Ernie was the only one capable of getting them out of it. I could not at that time gauge how much Mrs. Ward realised the dangers the boy was experiencing. She always spoke with conviction that he would return safely. Nearly every other sentence contained some reference to things that were to happen “when my Ernie comes home.” What doubts and fears she had were only recognisable by the subtlest shades in her voice.

When we looked over the wall into the deserted garden next door, she said:

“O dear! I’m afraid they’ll never let that place. It’s been empty since the Stellings went away. Oh, years ago, before this old war.”

II

It was on the occasion of my second visit that Mrs. Ward told me more about the Stellings. It appeared that they were a German family, of all things! There was a Mr. Stelling, and a Mrs. Frow Stelling, and two boys.

Mr. Stelling was a watchmaker, and he came from a place called Bremen. It was a very sad story Mrs. Ward told me. They had only been over here for ten months when Mr. Stelling died, and Mrs. Frow Stelling and the boys went back to Germany.

During the time of the Stellings’ sojourn in the Sheldrake Road it appeared that the Wards had seen quite a good deal of them, and though it would be an exaggeration to say that they ever became great friends, they certainly got through that period without any unpleasantness, and even developed a certain degree of intimacy.

“Allowing for their being foreigners,” Mrs. Ward explained, “they were quite pleasant people.”

On one or two occasions they invited each other to supper, and I wish my visions were sufficiently clear to envisage those two families indulging this social habit.

According to Mrs. Ward, Mr. Stelling was a kind little man with a round fat face. He spoke English fluently, but Mrs. Ward objected to his table manners.

“When my Tom eats,” she said, “you don’t hear a sound—I look after that! But that Mr. Stelling . . . O dear!”

The trouble with Mrs. Stelling was that she could only speak a few words of English, but Mrs. Ward said “she was a pleasant enough little body,” and she established herself quite definitely in Mrs. Ward’s affections for the reason that she was so obviously and so passionately devoted to her two sons.

“Oh, my word, though, they do have funny ways—these foreigners,” she continued. “The things they used to eat! Most peculiar! I’ve known them eat stewed prunes with hot meat!”

Mrs. Ward repeated, “Stewed prunes with hot meat!” several times, and shook her head, as though this exotic mixture was a thing to be sternly discouraged. But she acknowledged that Mrs. Frow Stelling was in some ways a very good cook; in fact, her cakes were really wonderful, “the sort of thing you can’t ever buy in a shop.”

About the boys there seemed to be a little divergence of opinion. They were both also fat-faced, and their heads were “almost shaved like convicts.” The elder one wore spectacles and was rather noisy, but:

“My Ernie liked the younger one. Oh, yes, my Ernie said that young Hans was quite a nice boy. It was funny the way they spoke, funny and difficult to understand.”

It was very patent that between the elder boy and Ernie, who were of about the same age, there was an element of rivalry which was perhaps more accentuated in the attitude of the mothers than in the boys themselves. Mrs. Ward could find little virtue in this elder boy. Most of her criticism of the family was levelled against him. The rest she found only a little peculiar. She said she had never heard such a funny Christian name as Frow. Florrie she had heard of, and even Flora, but not *Frow*. I suggested that perhaps Frow might be some sort of title, but she shook her head and said that that was what she was always known as in the Sheldrake Road, “Mrs. Frow Stelling.”

In spite of Mrs. Ward’s lack of opportunity for greater intimacy on account of the language problem, her own fine imaginative qualities helped her a great deal. And in one particular she seemed curiously vivid. She

gathered an account from one of them—I'm not sure whether it was Mr. or Mrs. Frow Stelling or one of the boys—of a place they described near their home in Bremen. There was a narrow street of high buildings by a canal, and a little bridge that led over into a gentleman's park. At a point where the canal turned sharply eastwards there was a clump of Linden-trees, where one could go in the summertime, and under their shade one might sit and drink light beer, and listen to a band that played in the early part of the evening.

Mrs. Ward was curiously clear about that. She said she often thought about Mr. Stelling sitting there after his day's work. It must have been very pleasant for him, and he seemed to miss this luxury in Dalston more than anything. Once Ernie, in a friendly mood, had taken him into the four-ale bar of "The Unicorn" at the corner of the Sheldrake Road, but Mr. Stelling did not seem happy. Ernie acknowledged afterwards that it had been an unfortunate evening. The bar had been rather crowded, and there was a man and two women who had all been drinking too much. In any case, Mr. Stelling had been obviously restless there, and he had said afterwards:

"It is not that one wishes to drink only . . ."

And he had shaken his fat little head, and had never been known to visit "The Unicorn" again.

Mr. Stelling died quite suddenly of some heart trouble, and Mrs. Ward could not get it out of her head that his last illness was brought about by his disappointment and grief in not being able to go and sit quietly under the Linden-trees after his day's work and listen to a band.

"You know, my dear," she said, "when you get accustomed to a thing, it's *bad* for you to leave it off."

When poor Mr. Stelling died, Mrs. Frow Stelling was heart-broken, and I have reason to believe that Mrs. Ward went in and wept with her, and in their dumb way they forged the chains of some desperate understanding. When Mrs. Frow Stelling went back to Germany they promised to write to each other. But they never did, and for a very good reason. As Mrs. Ward said, she was "no scholar," and as for Mrs. Frow Stelling, her English was such a doubtful quantity, she probably never got beyond addressing the envelope.

"That was three years ago," said Mrs. Ward. "Them boys must be eighteen and nineteen now."

If I have intruded too greatly into the intimacy of Mrs. Ward's life, one of my excuses must be—not that I am “a scholar” but that I am in any case able to read a simple English letter. I was in fact on several occasions “requisitioned.” When Lily was not at home, someone had to read Ernie's letters out loud. The arrival of Ernie's letters was always an inspiring experience. I should perhaps be in the garden with Mrs. Ward, when Tom would come hurrying out to the back, and call out:

“Mother! a letter from Ernie!”

And then there would be such excitement and commotion. The first thing was always to hunt for Mrs. Ward's spectacles. They were never where she had put them. Tom would keep on turning the letter over in his hands, and examining the postmark, and he would reiterate:

“Well, what did you do with them, mother?”

At length they would be found in some unlikely place, and she would take the letter tremblingly to the light. I never knew quite how much Mrs. Ward could read. She could certainly read a certain amount. I saw her old eyes sparkling and her tongue moving jerkily between her parted lips, as though she were formulating the words she read, and she would keep on repeating:

“T'ch! T'ch! O dear, O dear, the *things* he says!”

And Tom impatiently by the door would say:

“Well, what *does* he say?”

She never attempted to read the letter out loud, but at last she would wipe her spectacles and say:

“Oh, you read it, sir. The *things* he says!”

They were indeed very good letters of Ernie's, written apparently in the highest spirits. There was never a grumble, not a word. One might gather that he was away with a lot of young bloods on some sporting expedition, in which football, rags, sing-songs, and strange feeds played a conspicuous part. I read a good many of Ernie's letters, and I do not remember that he ever made a single reference to the horrors of war, or said anything about his own personal discomforts. The boy must have had something of his mother in him in spite of the photograph.

And between the kitchen and the yard Mrs. Ward would spend her day placidly content, for Ernie never failed to write. There was sometimes a lapse of a few days, but the letter seldom failed to come every fortnight.

It would be difficult to know what Mrs. Ward's actual conception of the war was. She never read the newspapers, for the reason, as she explained, that "there was nothing in them these days except about this old war." She occasionally dived into Reynold's newspaper on Sundays to see if there were any interesting law cases or any news of a romantic character. There was nothing romantic in the war news. It was all preposterous. She did indeed read the papers for the first few weeks, but this was for the reason that she had some vague idea that they might contain some account of Ernie's doings. But as they did not, she dismissed them with contempt.

But I found her one night in a peculiarly preoccupied mood. She was out in the garden, and she kept staring abstractedly over the fence into the unoccupied ground next door. It appeared that it had dawned upon her that the war was to do with "these Germans," that in fact we were fighting the Germans, and then she thought of the Stellings. Those boys would now be about eighteen and nineteen. They would be fighting too. They would be fighting against Ernie. This seemed very peculiar.

"Of course," she said, "I never took to that elder boy—a greedy rough sort of boy he was. But I'm sure my Ernie wouldn't hurt young Hans."

She meditated for a moment as though she were contemplating what particular action Ernie would take in the matter. She knew he didn't like the elder boy, but she doubted whether he would want to do anything very violent to him.

"They went out to a music-hall one night together," she explained, as though a friendship cemented in this luxurious fashion could hardly be broken by an unreasonable display of passion.

IV

It was a few weeks later that the terror suddenly crept into Mrs. Ward's life. Ernie's letters ceased abruptly. The fortnight passed, then three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, and not a word. I don't think that Mrs. Ward's character at any time stood out so vividly as during those weeks of stress. It is true she appeared a little feebler, and she trembled in her movements, whilst her eyes seemed abstracted as though all the power in them were concentrated in her ears, alert for the bell or the knock. She started visibly at odd moments, and her imagination was always carrying her tempestuously to the front door only to answer—a milkman or a casual hawker. But she never expressed her fear in words. When Tom came home—he seemed to

have aged rapidly—he would come bustling into the garden, and cry out tremblingly:

“There ain’t been no letter to-day, mother?”

And she would say quite placidly:

“No, not to-day, Tom. It’ll come to-morrow, I expect.”

And she would rally him and talk of little things, and get busy with his supper. And in the garden I would try and talk to her about her clumps of pansies, and the latest yarn about the neighbours, and I tried to get between her and the rabbit-hutch with its dumb appeal of incompleteness. And I would notice her staring curiously over into the empty garden next door, as though she were being assailed by some disturbing apprehensions. Ernie would not hurt that eldest boy . . . but suppose . . . if things were reversed . . . there was something inexplicable and terrible lurking in this passive silence.

During this period the old man was suddenly taken very ill. He came home one night with a high temperature and developed pneumonia. He was laid up for many weeks, and she kept back the telegram that came while he was almost unconscious, and she tended him night and day, nursing her own anguish with a calm face.

For the telegram told her that her Ernie was “missing and believed wounded.”

I do not know at what period she told the father this news, but it was certainly not till he was convalescent. And the old man seemed to sink into a kind of apathy. He sat feebly in front of the kitchen fire, coughing and making no effort to control his grief.

Outside the great trains went rushing by, night and day. Things were “going on,” but they were all meaningless, cruel.

We made enquiries at the War Office, but they could not amplify the laconic telegram.

And then the winter came on, and the gardens were bleak in the Sheldrake Road. And Lily ran away and married a young tobacconist, who was earning twenty-five shillings a week. And old Tom was dismissed from the gasworks. His work was not proving satisfactory. And he sat about at home and moped. And in the meantime the price of foodstuffs was going up, and coals were a luxury. And so in the early morning Mrs. Ward would go off and work for Mrs. Abbot at the wash-tub, and she would earn eight or twelve shillings a week.

It is difficult to know how they managed during those days, but one would see that Mrs. Ward was buoyed up by some poignant hope. She would not give way. Eventually old Tom did get some work to do at a stationer's. The work was comparatively light, and the pay equally so, so Mrs. Ward still continued to work for Mrs. Abbot.

My next vision of Mrs. Ward concerns a certain winter evening. I could not see inside the kitchen, but the old man could be heard complaining. His querulous voice was rambling on, and Mrs. Ward was standing by the door leading into the garden. She had returned from her day's work and was scraping a pan out into a bin near the door. A train shrieked by, and the wind was blowing a fine rain against the house. Suddenly she stood up and looked at the sky; then she pushed back her hair from her brow, and frowned at the dark house next door. Then she turned and said:

“Oh, I don't know, Tom, if we've got to do it, we *must* do it. If them others can stand it, we can stand it. Whatever them others do, we can do.”

And then my visions jump rather wildly. And the war becomes to me epitomised in two women. One in this dim doorway in our obscure suburb of Dalston, scraping out a pan, and the other perhaps in some dark high house near a canal on the outskirts of Bremen. Them others! These two women silently enduring. And the trains rushing by, and all the dark, mysterious forces of the night operating on them equivocally.

Poor Mrs. Frow Stelling! Perhaps those boys of hers are “missing, believed killed.” Perhaps they are killed for certain. She is as much outside “the things going on” as Mrs. Ward. Perhaps she is equally as patient, as brave.

And Mrs. Ward enters the kitchen, and her eyes are blazing with a strange light as she says:

“We'll hear to-morrow, Tom. And if we don't hear to-morrow, we'll hear the next day. And if we don't hear the next day, we'll hear the day after. And if we don't . . . if we don't never hear . . . again . . . if them others can stand it, we can stand it, I say.”

And then her voice breaks, and she cries a little, for endurance has its limitations, and—the work is hard at Mrs. Abbot's.

And the months go by, and she stoops a little more as she walks, and—someone has thrown a cloth over the rabbit-hutch with its unfinished roof. And Mrs. Ward is curiously retrospective. It is useless to tell her of the things of the active world. She listens politely but she does not hear. She is

full of reminiscences of Ernie's and Lily's childhood. She recounts again and again the story of how Ernie when he was a little boy ordered five tons of coal from a coal merchant to be sent to a girls' school in Dalston High Road. She describes the coal carts arriving in the morning, and the consternation of the head-mistress.

"O dear, O dear," she says; "the things he did!"

She does not talk much of the Stellings, but one day she says meditatively:

"Mrs. Frow Stelling thought a lot of that boy Hans. So she did of the other, as far as that goes. It's only natural like, I suppose."

V

As time went on Tom Ward lost all hope. He said he was convinced that the boy was killed. Having arrived at this conclusion he seemed to become more composed. He gradually began to accustom himself to the new point of view. But with Mrs. Ward the exact opposite was the case.

She was convinced that the boy was alive, but she suffered terribly.

There came a time—it was in early April—when one felt that the strain could not last. She seemed to lose all interest in the passing world and lived entirely within herself. Even the arrival of Lily's baby did not rouse her. She looked at the child queerly, as though she doubted whether any useful or happy purpose was served by its appearance.

It was a boy.

In spite of her averred optimism she lost her tremulous sense of apprehension when the bell went or the front door was tapped. She let the milkman—and even the postman—wait.

When she spoke it was invariably of things that happened years ago.

Sometimes she talked about the Stellings, and on one Sunday she made a strange pilgrimage out to Finchley and visited Mr. Stelling's grave. I don't know what she did there, but she returned looking very exhausted and unwell. As a matter of fact, she was unwell for some days after this visit, and she suffered violent twinges of rheumatism in her legs.

I now come to my most unforgettable vision of Mrs. Ward.

It was a day at the end of April, and warm for the time of year. I was standing in the garden with her and it was nearly dark. A goods train had

been shunting, and making a great deal of noise in front of the house, and at last had disappeared. I had not been able to help noticing that Mrs. Ward's garden was curiously neglected for her for the time of year. The grass was growing on the paths, and the snails had left their silver trail over all the fences.

I was telling her a rumour I had heard about the railway porter and his wife at number twenty-three, and she seemed fairly interested, for she had known John Hemsley, the porter, fifteen years ago, when Ernie was a baby. There were two old broken Windsor chairs in the garden, and on one was a zinc basin in which were some potatoes. She was peeling them, as Lily and her husband were coming to supper. By the kitchen door was a small sink. When she had finished the potatoes, she stood up and began to pour the water down the sink, taking care not to let the skins go too. I was noticing her old bent back, and her long bony hands gripping the sides of the basin, when suddenly a figure came limping round the bend of the house from the side passage, and two arms were thrown round her waist, and a voice said:

“Mind them skins don't go down the sink, mother. They'll stop it up!”

VI

As I explained to Ernie afterwards, it was an extremely foolish thing to do. If his mother had had anything wrong with her heart, it might have been very serious. There have been many cases of people dying from the shock of such an experience.

As it was, she merely dropped the basin and stood there trembling like a leaf, and Ernie laughed loud and uproariously. It must have been three or four minutes before she could regain her speech, and then all she could manage to say was:

“Ernie! . . . My Ernie!”

And the boy laughed, and ragged his mother, and pulled her into the house, and Tom appeared and stared at his son, and said feebly:

“Well, I never!”

I don't know how it was that I found myself intruding upon the sanctity of the inner life of the Ward family that evening. I had never had a meal there before, but I felt that I was holding a sort of watching brief over the soul and body of Mrs. Ward. I had had a little medical training in my early youth, and this may have been one of the reasons which prompted me to stay.

When Lily and her husband appeared we sat down to a meal of mashed potatoes and onions stewed in milk, with bread and cheese, and very excellent it was.

Lily and her husband took the whole thing in a boisterous, high comedy manner that fitted in with the mood of Ernie. Old Tom sat there staring at his son, and repeating at intervals:

“Well, I never!”

And Mrs. Ward hovered round the boy’s plate. Her eyes divided their time between his plate and his face, and she hardly spoke all the evening.

Ernie’s story was remarkable enough. He told it disconnectedly and rather incoherently. There were moments when he rambled in a rather peculiar way, and sometimes he stammered, and seemed unable to frame a sentence. Lily’s husband went out to fetch some beer to celebrate the joyful occasion, and Ernie drank his in little sips, and spluttered. The boy must have suffered considerably, and he had a wound in the abdomen, and another in the right forearm which for a time had paralysed him.

As far as I could gather, his story was this:

He and a platoon of men had been ambushed and had had to surrender. When being sent back to a base, three of them tried to escape from the train, which had been held up at night. He did not know what had happened to the other two men, but it was on this occasion that he received his abdominal wound at the hands of a guard.

He had then been sent to some infirmary where he was fairly well treated, but as soon as his wound had healed a little, he had been suddenly sent to some fortress prison, presumably as a punishment. He hadn’t the faintest idea how long he had been confined there. He said it seemed like fifteen years. It was probably nine months. He had solitary confinement in a cell, which was like a small lavatory. He had fifteen minutes’ exercise every day in a yard with some other prisoners, who were Russians he thought. He spoke to no one. He used to sing and recite in his cell, and there were times when he was quite convinced that he was “off his chump.” He said he had lost “all sense of everything” when he was suddenly transferred to another prison. Here the conditions were somewhat better and he was made to work. He said he wrote six or seven letters home from there, but received no reply. The letters certainly never reached Dalston. The food was execrable, but a big improvement on the dungeon. He was only there a few weeks when he and some thirty prisoners were sent suddenly to work on the land at a kind

of settlement. He said that the life there would have been tolerable if it hadn't been for the fact that the Commandant was an absolute brute. The food was worse than in the prison, and they were punished severely for the most trivial offences.

It was here, however, that he met a sailor named Martin, a Royal Naval reservist, an elderly thick-set man with a black beard and only one eye. Ernie said that this Martin "was an artist. He wangled everything. He had a genius for getting what he wanted. He would get a beef-steak out of a stone." In fact, it was obvious that the whole of Ernie's narrative was coloured by his vision of Martin. He said he'd never met such a chap in his life. He admired him enormously, and he was also a little afraid of him.

By some miraculous means peculiar to sailors, Martin acquired a compass. Ernie hardly knew what a compass was, but the sailor explained to him that it was all that was necessary to take you straight to England. Ernie said he "had had enough of escaping. It didn't agree with his health," but so strong was his faith and belief in Martin that he ultimately agreed to try with him.

He said Martin's method of escape was the coolest thing he'd ever seen. He planned it all beforehand. It was the fag-end of the day, and the whistle had gone, and the prisoners were trooping back across a potato-field. Martin and Ernie were very slow. They lingered apparently to discuss some matter connected with the soil. There were two sentries in sight, one near them and the other perhaps a hundred yards away. The potato field was on a slope, at the bottom of the field were two lines of barbed wire entanglements. The other prisoners passed out of sight, and the sentry near them called out something, probably telling them to hurry up. They started to go up the field when suddenly Martin staggered and clutched his throat. Then he fell over backwards and commenced to have an epileptic fit. Ernie said it was the realest thing he'd ever seen. The sentry ran up, at the same time whistling to his comrade. Ernie released Martin's collar-band and tried to help him. Both the sentries approached, and Ernie stood back. He saw them bending over the prostrate man, when suddenly a most extraordinary thing happened. Both their heads were brought together with fearful violence. One fell completely senseless, but the other staggered forward and groped for his rifle.

When Ernie told this part of the story he kept dabbing his forehead with his handkerchief.

“I never seen such a man as Martin I don’t think,” he said. “Lord! He had a fist like a leg of mutton. He laid ’em out neatly on the grass, took off their coats and most of their other clothes, and flung ’em over the barbed wire, and then swarmed over like a cat. I had more difficulty, but he got me across too, somehow. Then we carted the clothes away to the next line.

“We got up into a wood that night, and Martin draws out his compass and he says: ‘We’ve got a hundred and seven miles to do in night shifts, cully. And if we make a slip we’re shot as safe as a knife.’ It sounded the maddest scheme in the world, but I somehow felt that Martin would get through it. The only thing that saved me was that—that I didn’t have to think. I simply left everything to him. If I’d started thinking I should have gone mad. I had it fixed in my mind, ‘either he does it or he doesn’t do it. I can’t help it.’ I reely don’t remember much about that journey. It was all a dream like. We did all our travellin’ at night by compass, and hid by day. Neither of us had a word of German. But Gawd’s truth! that man Martin was a marvel! He turned our trousers inside out, and made ’em look like ordinary labourers’ trousers. He disappeared the first night and came back with some other old clothes. We lived mostly on raw potatoes we dug out of the ground with our hands, but not always. I believe Martin could have stole an egg from under a hen without her noticing it. He was the coolest card there ever was. Of course there was a lot of trouble one way and another. It wasn’t always easy to find wooded country or protection of any sort. We often ran into people and they stared at us, and we shifted our course. But I think we were only addressed three or four times by men, and then Martin’s methods were the simplest in the world. He just looked sort of blank for a moment, and then knocked them clean out, and bolted. Of course they were after us all the time, and it was this constant tacking and shifting ground that took so long. Fancy! he had never a map, you know, nothing but the compass. We didn’t know what sort of country we were coming to, nothing. We just crept through the night like cats. I believe Martin could see in the dark. . . . He killed a dog one night with his hands. . . . It was necessary.”

VII

It was impossible to discover from Ernie how long this amazing journey lasted—the best part of two months, I believe. He was himself a little uncertain with regard to many incidents, whether they were true or whether they were hallucinations. He suffered greatly from his wound and had periods of feverishness. But one morning, he said, Martin began “prancing.” He seemed to develop some curious sense that they were near the Dutch frontier. And then, according to Ernie, “a cat wasn’t in it with Martin.”

He was very mysterious about the actual crossing. I gathered that there had been some “clumsy” work with sentries. It was at that time that Ernie got a bullet through his arm. When he got to Holland he was very ill. It was not that the wound was a serious one, but, as he explained:

“Me blood was in a bad state. I was nearly down and out.”

He was very kindly treated by some Dutch Sisters in a convent hospital. But he was delirious for a long time, and when he became more normal they wanted to communicate with his people in England, but this didn’t appeal to the dramatic sense of Ernie.

“I thought I’d spring a surprise packet on you,” he said, grinning.

We asked about Martin, but Ernie said he never saw him again. He went away while Ernie was delirious, and they said he had gone to Rotterdam to take ship somewhere. He thought Holland was a dull place.

During the relation of this narrative my attention was divided between watching the face of Ernie and the face of Ernie’s mother.

I am quite convinced that she did not listen to the story at all. She never took her eyes from his face, and although her tongue was following the flow of his remarks, her mind was occupied with the vision of Ernie when he was a little boy, and when he ordered five tons of coal to be sent to the girls’ school.

When he had finished she said:

“Did you meet either of them young Stellings?”

And Ernie laughed rather uproariously and said no, he didn’t have the pleasure of renewing their acquaintance.

On his way home, it appeared, he had reported himself at headquarters, and his discharge was inevitable.

“So now you’ll be able to finish the rabbit-hutch,” said Lily’s husband, and we all laughed again, with the exception of Mrs. Ward.

I found her later standing alone in the garden. It was a warm spring night. There was no moon, but the sky appeared restless with its burden of trembling stars. She had an old shawl drawn round her shoulders, and she stood there very silently, with her arms crossed.

“Well, this is splendid news, Mrs. Ward,” I said.

She started a little, and coughed, and pulled the shawl closer round her.

She said, "Yes, sir," very faintly.

I don't think she was very conscious of me. She still appeared immersed in the contemplation of her inner visions. Her eyes settled upon the empty house next door, and I thought I detected the trail of a tear glistening on her cheeks. I lighted my pipe. We could hear Ernie, and Lily, and Lily's husband still laughing and talking inside.

"She used to make a very good puddin'," Mrs. Ward said suddenly, at random. "Dried fruit inside, and that. My Ernie liked it very much . . ."

Somewhere away in the distance—probably outside "The Unicorn"—someone was playing a cornet. A train crashed by and disappeared, leaving a trail of foul smoke which obscured the sky. The smoke cleared slowly away. I struck another match to light my pipe.

It was quite true. On either side of her cheek a tear had trickled. She was trembling a little, worn out by the emotions of the evening.

There was a moment of silence, unusual for Dalston.

"It's all very . . . perplexin' and that," she said quietly.

And then I knew for certain that in that great hour of her happiness her mind was assailed by strange and tremulous doubts. She was thinking of "them others" a little wistfully. She was doubting whether one could rejoice—when the thing became clear and actual to one—without sending out one's thoughts into the dark garden to "them others" who were suffering too. And she had come out into this little meagre yard at Dalston and had gazed through the mist and smoke upwards to the stars, because she wanted peace intensely, and so she sought it within herself, because she knew that real peace is a thing which concerns the heart alone.

And so I left her standing there, and I went my way, for I knew that she was wiser than I.

JUXTAPOSITIONS

“Where we are all mixed up,” said my friend, Samuel Squidge, vigorously scraping down the “portrait of the artist, by himself,” with a palette-knife, “is in our juxtapositions. It’s all nonsense, I tell you. People talk about a bad colour. There’s no such thing as a bad colour. Every colour is beautiful in its right juxtaposition. When you hear a woman say ‘I hate puce,’ or, ‘I love green,’ she might as well say ‘I hate sky,’ or, ‘I love grass.’ If she had seen puce used in a colour-print as Hiroshige the Second used it—green—fancy *loving* green! The idiot! Do you remember what Corot said? He said Nature was too green and too badly lighted. Now the old man was quite right——”

When Squidge starts talking in this strain he is rather apt to go off the deep end. I yawned and murmured sweetly:

“We were talking about Colin St. Clair Chasseloup.”

“Exactly! And I’m trying to point out to you how, with Colin St. Clair Chasseloup, it’s all a question of juxtapositions. You say that Colin is a frozen drunkard, a surly bore, a high-pressure nonentity. Listen to me. We’re all nice people, every one of us. Give a man the right air he should breathe, the right food he should eat, the right work he should do, the right people he should associate with, and he’s a perfect dear, everyone of him. There isn’t a real irreconcilable on the earth. But the juxtaposition——”

“What has Chasseloup to complain of? He has money, a charming wife, children, a place in the country, a flat in town. He does exactly what he likes.”

Squidge surveyed me with amazement.

“You ass! You prize ass! I thought you wrote about people. I thought you were supposed to understand people! And there you go and make a smug, asinine remark like that.”

I blushed, fully conscious that Squidge was being justifiably merciless. It was an asinine statement, but then I was merely putting out a feeler, and I could not explain this to the portrait painter. After all, I did not really know St. Clair Chasseloup. He was only a club acquaintance, and a very unclubbable acquaintance he was. He appeared to dislike club life. To a stranger he seemed to reek of patrician intolerance. He was an aristocrat of

aristocrats. His well set-up, beautifully groomed figure, clean-cut features, well-poised head were all in the classic tradition of a ruling caste. It was only about the rather heavy eyelids and the restless mouth that one detected the cynic, the disappointed man, the disillusioned boor. Why? . . . It was no affair of mine, the secret troubles of this man's heart. But it was his business to behave himself to me decently. To hell with Colin St. Clair Chasseloup! I disliked the man. But then we all dislike people whom we feel nurture an innate sense of superiority to us. Added to this trying exterior of complete self-absorption and superiority, one had also to allow for the vanity of the cripple.

St. Clair Chasseloup had lost his right leg just below the knee. It happened before the war. Indeed, at the time when he was a naval cadet at Osborne, skylarking with other young cadets, he had slipped from a pinnacle on a rough day and his right foot had been crushed against the stone wall of a jetty. The leg had to be amputated. That was the end of his naval career. And his father had been a commodore before him, and his father's father was in the Battle of Trafalgar, and so on right away back to the spacious days of Elizabeth—all naval men. Devilish bad luck, you may say! Of course, one had to allow for the bitterness that this misfortune must have produced. At the same time it doesn't excuse a man not answering when he's spoken to by a fellow-member at the club, or for looking at one—like Chasseloup did!

Squidge's championship of the thwarted seaman amused me. You could not conceive a more remarkable contrast. I was not even aware that they knew each other. In spite of his missing limb, St. Clair Chasseloup was the kind of man who always looked as though he had just had a cold bath, done Swedish drill, and then passed through the hairdresser's on his way to your presence. He was aggressively fit. Squidge looked as though a walk to the end of the street would have brought on valvular disease of the heart. From the centre of a dank beard, limp ends of cigarettes eternally clung. Physically, he was just comic. It was his vivid eyes and his queer excitable voice that told you that he was a person of no mean vitality. He was just as sociable and optimistic as Chasseloup was taciturn and moribund. And yet they met on some old plane, it appeared. Well, well, I could understand Squidge finding merit in Chasseloup, indeed in anyone, but what would Chasseloup's opinion of Squidge be? It made me shudder to contemplate. On the occasion I am recounting it was almost impossible to extract any further intimate details out of Squidge, for he had flown off on one of his pet theoretical tangents.

“It’s a queer rum thing,” he was saying, “why people ever get married at all. You simply can’t get level with it—the most unlikely, most outrageous combinations! The more outrageous the more likely they are to be a success. You see some scraggy goat of a woman and you think to yourself, ‘Poor wretch! whatever sort of chance has she got of getting married?’ and the next thing you hear is that she’s married to some god who adores her, and they have a large family of boys at Harrow and girls at Girton. Queer! Another woman breathes sunlight and the men pursue her, and nothing happens. She’s unhappy. I know a woman who is married to a man she is apparently in love with, and he with her. They have two jolly kids, a boy and a girl. They are a most delightful, happy family. They have money and are bursting with health and good spirits, and yet nearly every year the mother gets fits of melancholia, and has to go away to a nursing home and lie up for months. Some genius has said that when contemplating marriage, what you want to seek in common is not intellectual ambitions and tastes, it’s recreations. It’s quite right. Generally speaking, a man’s at work all day, so is a woman. When they meet in the evening they want to get away from it. It’s the time when they spread their feathers. If they can play and fool around they can be happy. Life for the most part is a drab monologue. It’s when you come to the accents you want each other. . . . If you can share the same tooth-brush with a woman for twenty-five years and she can still surprise you, then you’re all right, both of you——”

“My dear Squidge, what has your disgusting notion with regard to the tooth-brush to do with St. Clair Chasseloup?”

“Nothing. I’m talking.”

“I noticed that. Tell me frankly. Would you say that he and his wife—Aimée, isn’t it?—have recreations in common?”

“Yes.”

“What are they?”

“Bach.”

“Bach! what are you talking about? Colin St. Clair Chasseloup! Bach!”

“It seems funny to you, doesn’t it? You know him and you’ve seen her. You know him, all beef and phlegm, the immovable mass. A man who thinks of nothing but dumbbells and double Scotches. And you’ve seen her, the daughter of a hundred earls, highly-strung, æsthetic, a little queer, passionately devoted to ultra-modern music, Coué, Montessori, anything and everything that crops up. They’ve nothing in common, you might say.

He's out all day, playing a surly game of golf, or loafing in a club. She's playing the piano, Ravel, Debussy, or some of those queer Russian Johnnies. Or else she's inventing cute devices for the upbringing of the precious children. He lets them rip. She spoils them. When you see them together you would say that they were two people who had just missed their last bus and had to walk home, each thinking it was the other's fault. And yet I tell you they are the only two people suitable to each other. They have a mutual appreciation of accents—the same accents. They meet in the solemn tonal climaxes of Bach——”

“I can't believe that Colin likes Bach.”

“I didn't once. I found out through my pal, Paul Furtwangler, the 'cellist. He goes there several nights a week—she pays him well, too—and he just plays Bach. It soothes the savage beast. It keeps him at home, quietens him, stays his hand from the whisky bottle. It's marvellous. He can't abide Chopin, or all the jolly tuneful stuff barbarians like you and I enjoy. There's something about it, I suppose, the orderliness, the precision, the organic building up of solemn structures that just fills the kink in his life made by his tragic defection. She hoiks him to St. Anne's, Soho, to hear the oratorios. They chase the Bach choir hither and thither. She plays it herself, although she's not much of a performer. That's why she gets Furtwangler and sometimes the Stinzel quartette. When they are listening to Bach together, they meet on a plane of complete satisfaction. Of course, the war didn't do him any good. He used to hobble backwards and forwards to Whitehall doing some ridiculous anti-aircraft intelligence stuff, and he used to look bitterly at his pals when he saw them prancing backwards and forwards, with the salt of the North Sea bitten into their faces. He was a good boy in those days, though. He left the bottle alone, and only grouched and grumbled. Weren't we all doing that? . . . That's what I mean about people—married people especially—you can never tell whether they are happy or not. We all have to live our own lives in our own way. The breezy couple who go about singing 'La, too, te rum, tum, tample, rum, tum, tootle, tootle, lay,' and who kiss in public, and say 'darling this' and 'darling that,' you generally find that one or both parties are carrying on a secret liaison with a cook or a chauffeur. Colin has just got to be like that, and the woman understands him. She doesn't want him different. While he is like that she has a more complete grip over him, because she knows that no other woman will understand or tolerate him. And they don't. Of course, they quarrel sometimes, and he goes off and makes no end of a beast of himself. But she knows she is secure. He will come whining back to her like a whipped puppy. And he will grope for her in the darkness, and she will hold his hand,

and they will listen to the solemn chords of a Bach fugue, and will feel horribly melancholy, and tremendously moved, and somehow completely satisfied. That's just people, they're like that. It's no good arguing about it. I must be going. I'm going to have a Turkish bath with Smithers."

The contemplation of Squidge in a Turkish bath talking to Smithers, who is enormously fat, held me for the moment, and then my mind reverted to Chasseloup.

Dash it! you couldn't help being interested in the beast. I had to acknowledge that, in spite of his rudeness and indifference to me, the man had somehow always attracted me. I suppose because I wanted to know him, his rudeness and indifference piqued me all the more. And his wife—well, there it was, I had only seen her in concert-halls and theatres, and riding about in taxis with him, but that peculiarly wistful face would have enslaved anyone. She was slight and fragile, with pale face and very red lips, and that curious gleaming blue-black hair that so often accompanies a pallid complexion. Her eyes were wonderful, large, reflective, dark, with terrific things going on in them all the time. At the same time I shouldn't describe them as altogether unhappy eyes. They reflected too much vital movement for that. The woman was living, and of how many of these hard-bitten society women can you say the same?

It happened that a few nights after my talk with Squidge, I met Chasseloup at the club. He was sitting in a corner of the smoking-room, drinking whisky and being talked to by one of the pet club bores. He occasionally growled a monosyllabic reply. After a time the club bore retired and I was left alone with him. I sat back and smoked, but did not speak. We must have sat like that for nearly twenty minutes. There must have been something about this conspiracy of silence which appealed to Chasseloup. I was aware of him occasionally glancing at me, and at length he actually ventured to address a remark. He said:

"This club whisky gets worse every day."

I believe I must have blushed with pleasure as I hastened to acquiesce.

"Yes, it's awful stuff."

(Did you ever know a club where the members didn't all agree that the food and drink supplied was the worst in town?)

After a few snappy sentences about the club whisky, Chasseloup even went so far as to generalise. He said:

“Fancy reaching the stage of Colonel Robbins, a man who led a brigade in South Africa, and now there’s nothing left for him in life but to serve on wine committees.”

I was startled by this sociable reflection, and before I could reply, he had capped it with:

“Even over that he’s come to the end of his tether. His palate is worn out.”

He rose abruptly and rang the bell and ordered some more of the inferior stuff. This insignificant conversation seemed to form a bond between Chasseloup and myself. From that evening onwards his attitude towards me underwent a change. It was not that he talked much, but I was aware that I was one of the few members who didn’t get on his nerves. It was extremely flattering.

“All right, my friend,” I thought. “I’ll find out all about you yet.”

Nevertheless, there was a long interval of time between that conversation and the eventful Sunday evening, when I met him and his wife at the Minerva Musical Society’s function at the Grafton Galleries.

Now it is not of the slightest importance, except as it affects the chronicle of the events I am about to describe, but I have to say that my own tastes with regard to music are catholic, cosmopolitan, and undistinguished. I like Chopin and Schumann, and most of the Old Masters. I like Bach when I’m in the mood. I even like Jazz music sometimes, and foxtrots, and barrel-organs, and Old Bill playing his mouth-organ. But I must confess that what is known as the modern British composer leaves me cold. Perhaps I’m not educated up to him. And the activities of the Minerva Musical Society are almost entirely concerned with the modern British composer. Crowds of very precious overfed and underfed people meet together, and they sit on little gilt chairs and burble with delight about the productions of Mr. Cyrus P. Q. H. Robinson, or the tone poem of Ananathius K. Smith. I know nothing about it. They may be right. The only thing I have to record is that it bores me. The only reason I went to this particular evening was—and it is a weakness common to many weak-minded creatures like myself—that my wife took me. She is more eclectic about these matters than I am. She knows more, and so probably she is quite right in believing that Cyrus and Ananathius are geniuses. That isn’t the point. The point is, I was frankly bored. And early in the evening, looking round the room, and confessing to myself that I was frankly bored, I suddenly happened to notice that the two people who had just come in and were sitting just behind us were Mr. and

Mrs. Colin St. Clair Chasseloup. Immediately my boredom vanished. Here was a human problem of more interest than the scherzo movement of Mr. Cyrus P. Q. H. Robinson's F minor sonata. I looked round and fidgeted, and my wife said: "Hush!"

And then without any question I heard Chasseloup say in a rather rude, abrupt voice:

"I'm not going to listen to any more of this drivel."

And he got up and walked to the back of the room.

With two per cent. of his aplomb I got up and whispered:

"I don't care for this very much, dear. I'll just go and smoke a cigarette."

I strolled out and found Chasseloup in the corridor. He was looking thoroughly irritable. I went straight up to him and said:

"What about a drink, Chasseloup?"

His face cleared perceptibly. He gave me quite a friendly nod, and muttered:

"Yes."

I must now pay a tribute to that most sound of all social conventions—namely, that of evening dress. It will carry one through almost any difficulty. Chasseloup and I were both in evening dress.

We wandered out into Grafton Street just as we were, without hats or coats. He had gone barely twenty yards when I had to exclaim:

"Good God! It's Sunday night! Everything is shut. We are just five minutes too late. I'm awfully sorry old boy."

It was interesting to watch the play of expression on Chasseloup's face. The jolt of irritation, the attempt to control a recognition of the jolt, and then the sudden ugly thrust of the chin. He merely said:

"Let's see what we can do."

But there was in that thrust all the perverse tendency of a man who meant to get a drink, not because he particularly wanted it, but because he was annoyed at being thwarted.

We took two sharp turns to the left—or the right—and we came to a street, the name of which I mustn't tell you, otherwise the whole story becomes almost libellous. In any case, we were not five minutes' walk from

the Grafton Galleries, and we were going down a world-renowned street, consecrated chiefly to very swell private clubs. Suddenly Chasseloup jerked out:

“That looks a good place. Let’s try it.”

From the exterior it was quite obvious what it was. It was a very select private club, probably an exclusive ornithologists’ club, or a club consecrated to men who had won honours for discovering the secrets of subaqueous plant-life. I don’t know. Chasseloup didn’t know; but without the slightest hesitation we strolled casually into the smoke-room. The commissioner glanced at us questioningly, but one look at Chasseloup convinced him that he was wrong in his doubts. With a proprietary air, Chasseloup flung himself into an easy chair on the right of the fire, and I occupied the left. There were only two old gentlemen in the room, and they were so absorbed in a conversation about goitres they didn’t notice us. An ancient waiter appeared—a man who must have been there at least thirty years—and he came timidly forward. He was about to take orders in a mechanical way, and then he looked at us, and a curious sense, of misgiving seemed to creep over him, not as though he were suspecting us, but as though he were suspecting his own memory. Chasseloup, with his white waistcoat and gilt buttons, his braided trousers and commanding atmosphere, couldn’t be anything but a most distinguished member.

The waiter fumbled clumsily with a tray, and murmured defensively:

“You gentlemen are stopping the night, I presume?”

An expression of unctuous indignation settled on Chasseloup’s features.

“Of course,” he said.

The old waiter almost crawled on the carpet and took our order for two double whiskies. Thus, you may see what a domineering personality, backed up by evening dress, may accomplish. I could not possibly have done this by myself, but in the presence of Chasseloup I felt quite like an old member of this club of which I did not even know the name.

Chasseloup was not by any means a drunkard. But I discovered—at least, I have discovered later—that he considers three double whiskies his right and lawful due for an evening. They do not appear to have the slightest effect on him. We had two in this club—we were in there less than ten minutes—and then he said:

“We’ll have one more somewhere else and then toddle back.”

It appeared to me to have been a sufficient triumph to have broken the laws of the land so successfully and speedily, without challenging Fate further. Indeed, if we wanted one more drink we could easily have obtained it where we were. But it was quite patent that it was the very facility which was the obstacle in Chasseloup's case. It was all too dead easy. There was no fun in having a drink unless you had to fight for it. We had risen and walked to the door. Just as we reached the entrance hall, a man who looked like a butler came stealthily in from the street. He glanced anxiously at us, and then going up to Chasseloup, he whispered:

“Limpo?”

Now Chasseloup naturally had got a limp, and I expected to see this piece of impertinence drastically handled. Whatever was the fool getting at? But Chasseloup gave no sign. He just stared hard at the other, who quickly added:

“Her ladyship says will you come across immediately? I'll show you the way.”

Chasseloup hesitated for a fraction of a second, then, squaring his shoulders, he said:

“Come on, then.”

It was quite apparent that he had not the faintest idea what adventure he was committed to. Crossing the street, I whispered:

“What's it all about?”

And he whispered back:

“I don't know, but I guess we'll get our third drink.”

We went into a palatial block of flats and entered a lift. We were whisked up five floors and ushered into a heavily carpeted hall. The butler left us and did not return for three or four minutes. When he did he seemed all on edge. He said nervously to Chasseloup:

“Er—would you mind your friend waiting outside, sir?”

Chasseloup spoke emphatically:

“No, tell her ladyship that where Limpo goes Blotto follows.”

There was another interval, and then the butler returned and asked us both to follow him.

We went into a large smoking-room, sparsely furnished. The room was occupied by three men. They were all big men, and they were all standing. On the hearthrug stood one of the most sinister-looking individuals I have ever seen. He was very tall, with heavy shoulders and a fierce black moustache and wicked eyes. There was something about the way the men were standing I didn't like. It appeared to be all carefully planned. The big man, whose voice seemed surprisingly thin for his bulk, said banteringly:

"Oh, come in, Mr.—er—Limpo. Julius Lindt, perhaps I should say. It pains me to tell you that her ladyship is not present, unavoidably detained—see?"

Chasseloup bowed formally, and said in an ice-cold voice:

"I regret to hear it."

"Um—um—yes. Yes, quite so. I can quite believe it. I presume you are a great reader of *The Times*, Mr.—er—Limpo, Lindt I should say."

"I always read *The Times*," answered Chasseloup politely.

"Yes, and write for them, advertise, too, Mr—er—Lindt. Nice, friendly, loving little paragraphs, eh?"

He held out a copy of *The Times*, the outside sheet showing. Round one paragraph someone had put a blue pencil line. The big man thrust it in Chasseloup's face and said:

"Just read that out, Mr.—er——"

There was a nasty dangerous tone in his voice. I didn't like it at all. I began to think lovingly of the Minerva Society, the little gilt chairs, and Cyrus P. Q. H. Robinson's F minor sonata. Chasseloup was perfectly calm. He never took his eyes off the other man's face. He said coldly:

"My friend, Blotto, will read it."

The paper was handed to me, and I read out from the agony column:

"Molly. Am yearning for you. Shall be at the Club Sunday night. If the Dragon is away, send over for me. All my love. Limpo."

I was too nervous to see the humour of the situation. Here was the outraged husband and by great guile he had captured the wrong *tertium quid!* How could one explain? Chasseloup's regrettable limp appeared damning evidence. He had gone there, and deliberately put his head through the noose. The situation was appalling. The worst of it was, that under such circumstances men do not stop to think and reason. Passion and mob-law are

old confederates. This fact was brought home during the ensuing seconds. Everything seemed to happen in a flash. I was conscious of the Dragon stretching out his hand towards a short, stocky riding-whip, which had been concealed by the fireplace; of the other two men stealthily closing in on Chasseloup. And then a fourth man—was it the butler?—gripped me by the throat from behind, and I was jerked towards the door. The idea was to get me out of the way whilst the other three men horsewhipped Chasseloup. I fell backwards into the hall, and the door slammed to. At least, it nearly did. It was slammed with terrific violence, but just in the nick of time a leg was thrust through. Now the force with which it was pushed would have broken any ordinary leg, but as it happened the leg that was thrust through was made of wood and steel framing.

The arms above were apparently engaged elsewhere. The sight of that upturned boot spurred me to action. I drove my elbows violently into the ribs of my attacker. I heard him groan, and I leapt forward to the door again. I think he must have been the butler. I never saw him again. When I forced my way back into the room, I think the moral effect of my presence was more valuable to our side than any physical exploit I was likely to offer. Three men against two are not overwhelming odds. The man just in front of the door, who was gripping Chasseloup by the waist, hesitated, and paid the penalty by getting a blow over his left eye. The other two men were closing in, when Chasseloup ducked and got free. It was then that I saw the man as he really was. His eyes were gleaming with exultation. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. With a sudden unexpected swerve he seized a vase and smashed the electric light globes. The room was in darkness.

Now for a mixed body of men to fight in the dark is a dangerous and difficult game. You do not know who is with you or against you. Oaths were exchanged rather than blows. And the Dragon called out:

“Where’s Dawson? Where’s that—— butler?”

Then he gave a curse which showed that he was foolish to reveal his whereabouts. One fool struck a match, which served no better purpose than to reveal the point of his jaw, a fact that was promptly taken advantage of. He went down and out. We were now two against two, and one of them had a black eye that would last many a week. The Dragon was blind with rage. He roared:

“Come out into the hall!”

And he stumbled out there and waved his arms challengingly. We all followed him. The man with the black eye had had enough, and I sat on the

opposite side of the hall also a spectator. For it seemed to be suddenly mutually agreed that this was an affair between the Dragon and Chasseloup. They both wanted to fight. I could have yelled out that the whole thing was a mistake, a misunderstanding, that Chasseloup was not the man who had liaisons with the other man's wife; but if I had done so I felt that Chasseloup would never forgive me. He had already taken his coat off, and so had the Dragon. And they fought. An affair of this nature between two heavyweights seldom lasts long. It depends so much on who gets in the first good blow. And in this case the fight certainly didn't last three minutes. It was horrible. I don't know whether the Dragon was much of a boxer. He certainly seemed to have some knowledge of the game, but he never landed a blow. After a few exchanges he received a punch on the nose, and the blood ran down all over his dress shirt. Then he hit wildly, and suddenly received three terrible blows in rapid succession; one on the chin, one on the jaw, and then a fearful thump over the heart, which laid him out. We were now in complete possession of the field, the man with the black eye being the only conscious enemy in the flat, and he had done with fighting for the day.

"Now, where's that butler?" said Chasseloup.

"Oh, come on, for God's sake!" I exclaimed, foreseeing more blood-letting. "Leave the butler alone. Let's get away."

"I'm not going till I get what I came for."

"What's that?"

"That drink."

The man with the black eye, who appeared to be some sort of hired ruffian grinned in a sickly manner.

"All right, guv'nor," he said; "I can fix that for you."

He went into the dining-room and returned with a tantalus and some glasses.

Chasseloup poured himself out his double whisky, just the exact amount, and no more. Then he put on his coat and readjusted his hair in the mirror. His face was unscratched.

"There's something perfectly disgusting about you," I thought.

When he left the flat the Dragon was partly conscious, and he was mumbling something about the police and firearms and vengeance. We went down in the lift. Just as we were going out through the entrance hall a

typical young-man-about-town came up the steps. He was limping. Chasseloup raised his hat.

“Mr. Lindt, I presume?”

The young man started. Chasseloup smiled quite graciously.

“Her ladyship is expecting you in the smoke-room,” he said.

“Oh! thank you, thank you, sir.”

The dude blushed and hurried on.

“But, good Lord!” I exclaimed, when we were in the street. “It’s a bit unfair. They’ll half murder him.”

“That’s his affair,” said Chasseloup. “Besides, it serves him right—to go fooling about with another man’s wife.”

To look back on it, it seems almost unbelievable, but from the moment when we left the Minerva Musical Society to the moment we returned marks the lapse of rather less than an hour. And when we returned nothing might have happened at all. There they all were, the same people, the same little gilt chairs. Everybody looked quite unconcerned, but nobody looked more unconcerned than Colin St. Clair Chasseloup, lolling indolently on a stuffed settee at the end of the room.

As it happened, they were just finishing some modern work, and then there was an interval. Both our wives joined us and were introduced. Mrs. Chasseloup was charming. She said:

“You bad men! where have you been?”

Without waiting for a reply, she added excitedly:

“Colin, you’ll be pleased. Paul Tingleton’s ill, and he can’t lead his quintette. And I’ve persuaded Mr. Oesler to end up with the Bach fugue you love so much.”

Queer fish, people are. A few minutes later we were drinking lemonade and coffee and talking of such precious intimacies as the colour of a musical phrase, and only a quarter of an hour ago—— Then we were back in the concert hall, Chasseloup and his wife and my wife and I, and the great Mr. Oesler began to play Bach.

And then the queerest thing of all—Chasseloup! Chasseloup, whose face I had seen but a few minutes before ablaze with anger and cruelty, suddenly mellowing, becoming gentle and wistful. And he leaned forward with his

lips parted, and his wife sat beside him with an identical expression on her face. And then I saw his hand steal towards her lap, and she took it in both of hers and gripped it greedily. And they sat there, side by side, perfectly oblivious to their surroundings, perfectly happy, like two children listening to a fairy-tale.

THE FUNNY MAN'S DAY

His round fat little face appeared seraphic in sleep. If only the hair were not greying at the temples and getting very, very thin on top, and the lines about the eyes and mouth becoming rather too accentuated, it might have been the head of one of Donatello's *bambini*. It was not until Mrs. Lamb, his ancient housekeeper, bustled into the room with a can and said: "Your water, Mr. Basingstoke"—the intrusion causing him to open his eyes—that it became apparent that he was a man past middle-age. His eyes were very large—"goose-gog eyes" the children called them. As elderly people will, it took him some few moments to focus his mentality. A child will wake up, and carry on from the exact instant it went to sleep; but it takes a middle-aged man or woman a moment or so to realise where they are, what day in the week it is, what happened yesterday, what is going to happen to-day, whether they are happy or not. Certainly with regard to the latter query there is always a subconscious pressure which warns them. Almost before they have decided which day in the week it is, a voice is whispering: "Something occurred yesterday to make you unhappy," or, "Things are going well. You are happy just now," and then the true realisation of their affairs, and loves, and passions unfolds itself. They continue yesterday's story.

As to James Jasper Basingstoke, it was not his business to indulge in the slightest apprehension with regard to his condition of happiness or unhappiness. He was a funny man. It was his profession, his mission, his natural gift. From early morning, when his housekeeper awakened him, till, playing with the children—all the children adored him—practising, interviewing managers and costumiers, dropping into the club and exchanging stories with some of the other "dear old boys," right on until he had finished his second show at night it was his mission to leave behind him a long trail of smiles and laughter. Consequently, he merely sat up in bed, blinked and called out:

"I am deeply indebted to your Lambship."

"Nibby's got hiccups," replied that lady, who was not unused to this term of address. Nibby was Mrs. Lamb's grandson. His real name was Percy Alexander. The grand-daughter's name was Violetta Gladys, and she was known as Tibby. They lived next door. These names, of course, had been invented by the Funny Man, who lived in a world of make-believe, where no

one at all was known by their real name. He himself was known in the theatrical profession as “Willy Nilly.”

“I am distressed to hear that,” exclaimed Willy Nilly. “Hiccoughs at nine o’clock in the morning! You don’t say so! I always looked upon it as a nocturnal disease. The result of too many hic, hæc, hock cups.”

“You must have your fun, Mr. Basingstoke, but the pore little feller has been very bad ever since he woke up.”

Willy Nilly leapt out of bed and rolled across to the chest of drawers. He there produced a bottle containing little white capsules, two of which he handed to Mrs. Lamb.

“Crunch these up and swallow with a little milk, then lie on his back and think of emerald green parrots flying above a dark forest, where monkeys are hanging by their tails. In our profession the distress of hiccoughs is quite prevalent and we always cure it in this way. A man who can’t conquer hiccoughs can never expect to top the bill. Now tell Master Nibby that, dear lady.”

Mrs. Lamb looked at the white capsules interestingly.

“Do you really mean that, Mr. Basingstoke?”

The little fat man struck a dramatic situation.

“Did you ever find me not a man of my word, Lady Lamb?”

“You are a ONE,” replied the housekeeper, and retired, holding the capsules carefully balanced in the centre of her right palm, as though they contained some secret charm which she was fearful of dispelling by her contact.

The little fat man thrust out his arms in the similitude of some long-forgotten clumsy exercise. Then he regarded himself in the mirror.

“Not too thumbs up, old boy, not too thumbs up. It’s going, you know. All the Apollo beauty—Oh, you little depraved ruffian, go and hold your head under the tap.”

No, no, it was not the business of Willy Nilly to be depressed by these reflections either in the mirror or upon the mind. He seized the strop suspended from a hook on the architrave of the window and began to flash his razor backward and forward whilst he sang:

“Oh, what care I for a new feather bed,
And a sheet turned down so bravely—O.”

The raggle-taggle gypsies accompanied him intermittently throughout the whole operation of shaving, including the slight cut just beneath the lobe of his left ear. The business of washing and dressing was no perfunctory performance with the Funny Man. He had a personality to sustain. Moreover, among the programme of activities for the day included attendance at a wedding. There is nothing at which a funny man can be so really funny as at a wedding. One funny man at least is almost essential for the success of this time-honoured ritual. And this was a very, very special wedding; the wedding of his two dearest and greatest friends, Katie Easebrook the pretty comedienne, and Charlie Derrick, that most brilliant writer of ballads. A swell affair it was to be in Clapham Parish Church, with afterward a reception at the Hautboy Hotel—everything to be done “in the best slap-up style, old boy.”

No wonder Willy Nilly took an unconscionable time folding his voluminous black stock, adorned with the heavy gold pin, removing the bold check trousers from withunder the mattress, tugging at the crisp white waistcoat till it adapted itself indulgently to the curves of his figure, and hesitating for fully five minutes between the claims of seven different kinds of kid gloves. A man who tops the bill at even a suburban music-hall cannot afford to neglect these things. It was fully three quarters of an hour before he presented himself in the dining-room below. Mrs. Lamb appeared automatically with the teapot and his one boiled egg.

“You’d hardly believe it,” she said, “but Nibby took them white pills and his hiccups is abated.”

“Ah! What did you expect, my good woman? Was Willy Nilly likely to deceive an innocent child? Did he think of emerald green parrots and a dark forest?”

“I told him what you said, Mr. Basingstoke. Here’s the letters and the newspaper.”

The Funny Man’s correspondence was always rather extensive, consisting for the most part of letters from unknown people commencing: “Dear Sir,—I wrote the enclosed words for a comic song last Sunday afternoon. I should think set to music you would make them very funny——” or “Dear Sir,—I had a good idea for a funny stunt for you. Why not sing a song dressed up as a curate called: ‘The higher I aspire I espy her,’ and every time you come to the word higher, you trip up over a piece of orange peel. I leave it to you about payment for this idea, but I may say I am

in straightened circumstances, and my wife is expecting another next March.”

There was a certain surprising orderliness about the Funny Man’s methods. Receipts were filed, accounts kept together and paid fairly regularly, suggestions and ideas were carefully considered, begging letters placed together, with a sigh, “in case anything could be done a little later on, old boy.” Occasionally would come a chatty letter from some old friend “on the road,” or from his married sister in Yorkshire. But for the most part his correspondence was not of an intimate nature.

His newspaper this morning remained unopened. The contemplation of his own programme for the day was too absorbing to fritter away nervous energy on public affairs. Whilst cracking the egg, he visualised his timetable. At ten o’clock, Chris Read was coming to try over new songs and stunts. At eleven-fifteen, he had an appointment with Albus, the costumier in Long Acre, to set the stamp of his approval upon the wig and nose for his new song: “I’m one of the Goo-goo boys.” Kate and Charlie’s was at twelve-thirty and the wedding breakfast at “the Hautboy” at one-forty-five. In the meantime, he must write two letters and manage to call on old Mrs. Labbory, his former landlady, who was very, very ill. Poor old soul! She’d been a brick to him in the old days, when he was sometimes “out” for seven months in the year, out and penniless. It was only fair now that he should help her a bit with the rent, and see that she had everything she needed.

Willy Nilly’s life had been passed through an avenue of landladies, but the position of Mrs. Labbory was unique. He had been with her fifteen years and she was intimate with all his intimates.

At three-forty-five was a rehearsal with the Railham Empire orchestra. He must get that gag right where he bluffs the trombone player in his song: “Oh, my in-laws, my in-laws, why don’t you leave me be.” Perhaps a cup of tea somewhere, and then an appointment at five-fifteen with Welsh, to arrange terms about the renewal of contract. Knotty and difficult problems—contracts. Everyone trying to do you down—must have a clear head at five-fifteen. If there’s time, perhaps pop into the club for half an hour, exchange stories with Jimmy Landish, or old Blakeney. A chop at six-thirty—giving him an hour before making-up for the first house. On at eight-twenty. Three songs and an encore—mustn’t forget to speak to Hignet about that spotlight, the operator must have been drunk last night. Between shows interview a local pressman, and a young man who “wants to go on the stage, but has had no experience.” Dash round for a sandwich and a refresher. On again at ten-

twenty-five. Same three songs, same encore, same bluff on the trombone player. Ten-fifty, all clear. Clean up and escape from the theatre if possible.

A last nightcap at the club, perhaps? Oh, but Bird Craft wanted him to toddle along to his rooms and hear a new song he had just acquired, “a real winner,” Bird had said it was, about “The girl and the empty pram.” Must stand by an old pal. Sometime during the day he must send two suits to be cleaned, and order some new underlinen. A beastly boring business, ordering vests and pants. He knew nothing about the qualities of materials—hosiers surely did him over that. Really a woman’s business, women knew about these things. Mrs. Lamb! No, not exactly Mrs. Lamb. He couldn’t ask Mrs. Lamb to go and buy him vest and pants. A woman’s business, a woman

Heigho! Nearly ten o’clock already. Chris Read might arrive any minute. The Funny Man dashed downstairs and ran into the house next door. Tibby had already gone off to school, but Nibby had escaped, because at the moment of departure his attack of hiccoughs had reached its apotheosis. Now he was in trouble because it had left off, and his mother now declared he had been pretending. It took the Funny Man fifteen minutes to calm this family trouble. Nibby, putting it on! Nibby, playing the wag! Oh, come! Fie and for shame! Besides did Nibby’s mother think that he, Dr. Willy Nilly, the eminent specialist of Harley Street, was a quack? Were his remedies spurious remedies?

“Did you think of emerald green parrots in a dark wood, Nibby?”

“Yes.”

“And monkeys hanging by their tails?”

“Yes.”

“There, you see, Mrs. Munro! It was a genuine case, and a genuine cure.”

“If he really had it, Mr. Basingstoke, I don’t believe it was thinking about monkeys what cured him; it was them little white tabloids, and we thank you kindly.”

“Mrs. Munro, here are two tickets for the Railam Empire for the first house to-morrow night. Come, and bring your husband, and then you will see that there are more people cured by thinking of monkeys hanging by their tails than there are by swallowing tabloids. That is my business. I am a monkey hanging by its tail, and now I must be off. Good-bye, Nibby old boy. Why, if this isn’t a sixpence under the mat. Well, well, this is an age of

miracles. No, you keep it, old boy. Good-bye, Mrs. Munro. Come round and see me after the show to-morrow. Toot-a-loo, my dear.”

Chris was waiting on the doorstep, a fresh-complexioned young man inclined to corpulence. His face glowed with a kind of vacant geniality.

“Well, old boy, how goes it?”

“I’ve got a peach this morning, Willy old boy; I think you’ll like it.”

“Good boy, come on in.”

The Funny Man’s drawing-room was comfortably furnished with imitation Carolian furniture, a draped ottoman, and an upright Collard piano. The walls were covered with enlarged photographs of actors and actresses in gold and walnut frames, the majority of them were autographed and contained such inscriptions as: “To my dear old Willy, from yours devotedly, Cora.” “To Uncle Nilly, one of the best, Jimmy Cotswold (The Blue Girl Company, Aug. 1899),” “To Willy Nilly, ‘my heart’s afire,’ Queenie,” and so on.

“Now, let’s see what you’ve got, old boy.”

Chris sat at the piano, and unwrapped a manuscript score.

“I think this ought to win out, old boy,” he said. “It’s by Bert Shore. It’s called ‘The Desert Island.’ You see the point is this. You’re a bit squiffy, old boy. You see, red nose and battered top-hat and your trousers turned up to the knees. You know how when it’s been raining on a tarred road it looks like water. Well, we have a set like that. It’s really a street island—in Piccadilly, or somewhere. You’re on it, and seeing all this shining water, you think you’re on a desert island and the lamppost’s a palm tree. You take off your shoes and stockings and there’s some good business touching the wet road with your bare toes. See, old boy? There’s a thunderin’ good tune. Listen to this—tum-te-too-te tum-te-tum, rum-te-too-te-tum-te-works up, you see to a kind of nautical air—then gets back to the plaintive desert stuff—rum-tum-tum-rum-te-tum. Then here’s the chorus. Listen to this, old boy:

“Lost in the jungle,
Oh, what a bungle,
Eaten by spiders and ants,
Where is my happy home?
Why did they let me roam?
Where are my Sunday pants?”

“Good, eh? What do you think? Make something of it, old boy? Eh?”

The little man's eyes glowed with excitement. Oh, yes, this might assuredly be a winner. It was the kind of song that had made his reputation. The tune of the chorus was distinctly catchy, and his mind was already conceiving various business.

"Let's have a go at it, old boy," he said.

He leant over the other's shoulder and began to sing. He threw back his head and thrust out his fat little stomach, his eyes rolled, and perspiration streamed down his face. He was really enjoying himself. He had just got to

Lost in a jungle,
Oh, what a bungle,
Eaten by spiders and ants.

when there was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Lamb thrust her head in and said: "A telegram for you, Mr. Basingstoke."

"Eh? Oh! Well—er, never mind. Yes, thank you my dear, give it to me."

He opened the telegram absently, his mind still occupied with the song. When he had read it, he exclaimed:

"Good God! Poor old Joe! Yes, no, there's no answer, my dear. I must go out."

Mrs. Lamb retired.

"Poor old Joe! Stranded, eh?"

"What is it, old boy?" said Chris.

"Telegram from Joe Bloom. He says: 'Can you wire me tenner, very urgent, stranded at Dundee?' Poor old Joe! He has no luck. He was out with 'The Queen of the Sea' company. They must have failed. Excuse me Chris, old boy."

The Funny Man hurried out of the room and ran downstairs. He snatched up his hat and went out. When he got round the corner, he ran. He ran as fast as he could to the High Street till he came to the London, City and Midland Bank. He filled up a cheque for fifteen pounds and cashed it. Then he ran out of the bank and trotted puffily across the road to the post office.

"I want to telegraph fifteen pounds, old girl," he said to the fair-haired lady behind the wires. Filling up the forms took an unconscionable time, and there all the while was poor old Joe stranded in Dundee, perhaps without food! Dundee! Dundee of all places, a bleak unsympathetic town, hundreds of miles from civilisation. Well, that would help him out anyway. True, he

had had to do this twice before for Joe, and Joe had not, so far, paid him back, but Joe was a notoriously unlucky devil, and he, Willy Nilly, topping the bill at the Railham Empire, couldn't let a pal in.

When he got back to his own drawing-room, Chris was stretched at full length on the sofa, smoking a cigarette and drinking whiskey and soda.

“Sorry to have kept you, Chris, old boy.”

“It's all right. I've just helped myself to a tot from the sideboard.”

“That's right. That's right. Now let's see, it's a quarter to eleven. I'll have to wash out this trial, old boy. I shall be late for Albus. I like that song. I'd like to have another go at it. Have another tot, Chris, old boy. I'll join you, then I must be off.”

But he didn't get to Albus that morning, because on leaving the house he remembered that he hadn't called on old Mrs. Labbory. He *must* just pop in for a few moments. It was only ten minutes' walk away. He purchased a fowl and a bottle of Madeira and hurried to 27, Radnor Street. He found his old landlady propped up on the pillows, looking gaunt and distant, as though she were already regarding the manifestations of social life from a long way off and would never participate in them again.

“Well, Martha, old girl, how goes it? Merry and bright, eh? Oh, you're looking fine. More colour than last week, eh? . . . eating better, old girl?”

A voice came across the years.

“I'm not so well, Jim. God bless you for coming.”

“Of course I come. I come because I'm a selfish old rascal. I come because I want to, I know where I'm appreciated, eh? Ha, ha, ha, now don't you think you're getting worse. You're getting on fine. We'll soon have you about again, turning out cupboards, hanging wallpapers. Jemimy! Do you remember hanging that convolvulus wallpaper in my bedroom in the Gosport Road, eh?” The Funny Man slapped his leg, and the tears rolled down his cheeks with laughter at the recollection of the episode.

“Do you remember how I helped you? And all I did was to step into a pail of size, nearly broke my leg, and spoilt the only pair of trousers I had! Ha, ha, ha! He, he, he! I had to go to bed for four hours while you washed them out and aired 'em. O dear!”

Old Mrs. Labbory began to laugh, too, in a feeble, distant manner. Then she stopped and looked at him wistfully.

“You going to Katie Easebrook’s wedding, Jim?”

“Eh? Oh, yes, I’m going, old girl. I’m going straight on now.”

He hadn’t meant to mention this. There’s something a little crude in talking about a wedding to a dying woman. He paused and looked uncomfortably at his feet. The voice from the past reached him again.

“You ought to have married Katie Easebrook.”

“Eh? What’s that? Me? Oh, no, old girl, what are you talking about? Me marry Katie Easebrook? Why, I wouldn’t have had the face to ask her. Not when there’s a good fellow like Charlie about.”

Like some discerning oracle came the reply:

“Charlie’s a good feller, a good-looking feller, too—but you would have made her a better husband, Jim.”

With some curious twist of chivalry and affection the little man gripped the old woman’s hand and kissed it.

“You’ve always thought too much of me, Martha, old girl.”

“I’ve had good cause to, Jim. . . . Good-bye.”

He walked a little unsteadily down Radnor Street. A pale October sun filtered through a light mist, and gave to the meagre front gardens a certain glamour. Fat spiders hung in glistening webs between the shrubs and Japanese anemones. Children were playing absorbing games with chalk and stones upon the pavement. Cats looked down sleepily from the security of narrow walls. He had to pat a little girl’s head and arbitrate in a dispute between two girls and a boy regarding the laws of a game called “Snowball.”

“Life is a lovely thing,” he thought as he hurried on. “Poor old Martha! . . . She’s going out.”

He was, of course, late for the service in the church. In some way he did not regret this. He slipped quietly into a seat at the back, unobserved. A hymn was being sung, or was it a Psalm? He didn’t know. There was something about a church service he didn’t like. It disturbed him at some uncomfortable level. Charlie was standing by the altar, looking self-conscious and impatient. Katie was a ghostly unrecognisable figure, like a fly bound up in a spool in a spider’s web. Thirty or forty people were scattered on either side of the central aisle. He could only see their backs. The parson began to drone the service, slowly enunciating the prescribed

purposes of the married state. Willy Nilly felt a flush of discomfort. It somehow didn't seem right that Katie should have to stand there before all these people and have things put to her quite so straight.

"Rather detailed, old boy," he thought. "Perhaps that's why a bride wears a veil."

When it was over, he walked boldly up the aisle and followed a few intimates into the vestry. He was conscious of people indicating him with nudges and whispering: "Look! That's Willy Nilly!"

In the vestry, Katie's mother was weeping, and Katie appeared to be weeping with one eye and laughing with the other. A few relatives were shaking hands, kissing and talking excitedly. Someone said: "Here's Willy Nilly."

Charlie gripped his hand and whispered:

"Come on Willie, old boy, kiss the bride."

The bride looked up at him with her glorious eyes, and held out her arms.

"Dear old Willie . . . so glad you came, old boy."

He kissed the bride all right, and held her from him.

"God bless you, dear old girl. God bless you. May you . . . may all your dreams come true, old girl."

In most weddings there is a streak of pathos, but in theatrical weddings the note is predominant. It is as though the lookers on realise that these people whose life is passed in make-believe are bound to burn their fingers when they begin to touch reality. Perhaps their reactions are too violent to be bound within the four walls of a contract.

Katie's wedding certainly contained a large element of sadness.

"She looks so sweet and fragile. I hope he'll be good to her," women whispered.

The lunch at the Hautboy Hotel was hilarious to an almost artificial degree. A great deal of champagne was drunk, and toasts were prolific. It was here that Willy Nilly came in. The Funny Man excelled himself. He was among the people who knew him and loved him. He made goo-goo eyes at the bridesmaids, he told stories, he imitated all the denisons of a farmyard, he gave a mock conjuring display, and his speech in proposing the health of the bride's father and mother was the hit of the afternoon. (He was not

allowed the principal toast as that had been allocated to Charlie's father, who was a stockbroker). To the waiter who hovered behind chairs with napkined magnums of champagne, he kept on saying:

“Not too much, old boy. I've a rehearsal at three-forty.”

Nevertheless, he drained his glass every time it was filled. The craving to be funny exceeded every other craving. Willy Nilly had knocked about the world in every kind of company. It took a lot to go to his head. It was almost impossible to make him drunk. When at three o'clock it was time for the bride and bridegroom to depart he was not by any means drunk, certainly not so drunk as Charlie, but he was in a slightly detached, comatose state of mind. He kissed the bride once more, and to Charlie he said:

“God bless you, old boy. Be good to her. You've got the dearest woman in the world.”

And Charlie replied:

“I know, old boy. You've been a brick to us. You oughtn't to have sent the cheque as well as all that silver. Good luck, old boy.”

“O my in-laws, my in-laws, why don't you leave me be.” It seemed but a flash from one experience to another, from pressing the girl's dainty shoulders in a parting embrace to stamping about on the draughty stage and calling into the void:

“Now, Mr. Prescott, I want a little more slowing down of this passage. Do you see what I mean, old boy? It gives me more time for the business.”

The gag with the trombone player was considerably improved. Must keep going, doing things—a contract to sign at five-fifteen. He was feeling tired when the rehearsal was over—mustn't get tired before the two shows to-night. Perhaps he could get half an hour's nap after seeing the agent before it was time to feed. Someone gave him a cup of tea in the theatre, and a dresser told him a long story about a disease which his wife's father got through sitting on a churchyard wall, waiting for the village pub to open at six.

There appeared no interval of time between this and sitting in front of the suave furtive-looking gentleman named Welsh who “handled” him on behalf of the United Varieties Agency. He was conscious of not being at his best with Welsh. He believed that he could have got much better terms in his new contract, but somehow the matter did not appear to him to be of great importance. He changed the subject and told Welsh the story about the sea captain and the Irish stewardess. Welsh laughed immoderately. After all,

quite a good fellow—Welsh. He was anxious to get away and see some boys at the club. Jimmy would certainly have a new story ready. He hadn't seen Jimmy for four days.

Jimmy was certainly there, and not only Jimmy, but old Barrow, and Sam Lenning, and a host of others. He had a double Scotch whisky and proceeded to take a hand in the game of swopping improper stories. At one time something seemed to jog at his consciousness and say: "Do you really think much of this kind of thing, old boy?" And another voice replied: "What does it matter? . . . They've just arrived at Brighton railway station. In another ten minutes they'll be at 'The Ship.'"

"I thought you were going to have a chop at six-thirty, Willy," someone remarked to him suddenly.

"So I am, old boy."

"It's seven-fifteen now."

Good gracious! So it was! Well, he didn't particularly want a chop. He would have a couple of sandwiches and another double Scotch. He was quite himself again in his dressing-room at the theatre. He loved the smell of grease paint and spirit gum, the contact of fantastic whiskers and clothes, the rather shabby mirror under a strong light. His first song was going to be "Old Fags," the feckless ruffian who picks up cigarette ends. The dresser, whose name was Flood and who always called him Mr. Nilly, was ready with his three changes.

"Number five's on," came the message down the corridors. Good! There was only "Charlemayne," the equilibrist, between him and "his people."

Willy Nilly had got to love "his people" as he mentally designated them. He knew them, and they knew him—the reward of many years' hard work. He loved stumbling down the corridors, through the iron doors, and groping his way amidst the dim medley of the wings, where gorgeous unreal women, and men in bowler hats patted him as he passed and whispered:

"Hullo, Willy, old boy? Good luck!"

He loved to wait there and hear his number go up; the roar of welcome which greeted it was the music to his soul.

"Number seven!"

The orchestra played the opening bars and then with a queer shuffle he was before them, a preposterous figure with a bright red nose, a miniature

bowler hat, and a fearful old suit with ferns growing out of the seams, and a heavy sack slung across his back.

“Old Fags! Old Gags!
See my collection of fine old fags.
If you want to be happy,
If you want to be gay,
Empty your sack
At the fag-end of the day.”

Oh, yes, you ought to see Willy Nilly in “Old Fags.” The habitués at the Railham Empire will tell you all about him. The doleful wheezy voice, the quaint antics, and then the screamingly funny business when he empties the sack of cigarette ends all over the stage and, of course, at the bottom is a bottle of gin and a complete set of ladies’ undies (apparently new and trimmed in pink). Then the business of finding innumerable cigarette ends in his unmanageable beard.

On that night, Willy Nilly was at his best. A lightning change and he came on as “The Carpet Salesman” in which he brought on a roll of carpet, the opportunities concerning which are obvious. Then followed “The lady who works for the lady next door.” The inevitable encore—prepared for and expected—followed. A terrible Russian—more whiskers, red this time—singing:

“O Mary-vitch,
O Ada-vitch
I don’t know which
Ich lieber ditch;
I told your pa
I’d got the itch;
He promptly hit me
On the snitch.”

It was difficult for Willy Nilly to escape after this valiant satirical digression.

He fled perspiring to his dressing-room.

“Give me a drink, old boy,” he gasped to the lugubrious Flood.

He had smothered his face in cocoa-butter, when there was a knock on the door.

“Mr. Peter Wilberforce, representing the *Railham Mercury*.”

“Ah, yes, come in, old boy.”

Mr. Wilberforce was in no hurry to depart. He had a spot—“just a couple of fingers, old boy” of whisky. He wanted a column of bright stuff for the next issue of the weekly. “Is Railham behind the other suburbs in humour? Interview with the famous Willy Nilly—our local product.”

“You just give me a lead,” said Mr. Wilberforce, “I’ll fill in the padding.”

Willy Nilly found turning out the bright stuff immediately after his performance the most exhausting experience of the day. He was quite relieved when, at the end of forty minutes, there was a knock at the door, and a woman with a lanky son was shown in. This was the young man who wanted to go on the stage. The pressman departed and the mother started forth on a long harangue about what people said about her son’s remarkable genius for acting. Before Willy Nilly knew where he was, he was listening to the boy giving imitations of Beerbohm Tree and Henry Ainley. It was quite easy to tell which was meant to be which, and so Willy grasped the young man’s hand and said:

“Very good, old boy! Very good.”

He promised to do what he could, but by the time the mother had gone all over the same ground three times he found it was too late to pop round to the club again. It was nearly time to make up for the second show. He dozed in the chair for a few moments. Suddenly he thought:

“They’ve had dinner. They’re probably taking a stroll on the front before turning in.”

He poured himself out another tot of whisky and picked up his red nose.

“O God! How tired I feel! . . . Not quite the man you were, old boy.”

He found it a terrible effort to go on that second time. “Old Fags” seemed flat. He began to be subtly aware that the audience knew that he knew that the song wasn’t really funny at all. At the end the applause was mild. “The Carpet Salesman” went even worse.

“Pull yourself together, old boy,” he muttered as he staggered off. It wouldn’t do. A man who tops the bill can’t afford not to bring the house down with every song. He made a superhuman effort with “The lady who works for the lady next door.” It certainly went better than the others, just well enough to take an encore rather quickly. On this occasion he altered his encore. Instead of “Mary-vitch,” he sang a hilarious song with the refrain:

“O my! Hold me down!
My wife’s gone away till Monday!”

At the end of the first verse he felt that he had got them. Success excited him. He went for it for all he was worth. Willy Nilly was himself again. The house roared at him. He had the greatest difficulty in escaping without giving a further encore. As he stumbled up the stone staircase to his dressing-room, he suddenly thought:

“They’ve gone to bed now.”

The imperturbable Flood followed him, laden with properties.

“I’ll just have one more spot, Flood, old boy.”

How tired he was! He cleaned up languidly and got into his normal clothes.

“Well, that’s that, old boy,” he said to Flood. “Now I think we’ll toddle off to our bye-byes.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Nilly, wasn’t you going round to Mr. Bird Crafts?”

Eh? Oh, yes, for sure; he’d forgotten about poor old Bird. Couldn’t exactly let an old pal in. Well, he would have a cab and hang the expense—just stay a few minutes—dear old Bird would understand. But he stayed an hour at Bird Crafts. He listened to three new comic songs and a lot of patter.

“Yes, you’ve got a winner there, old boy,” he remarked at the end of each song.

It was nearly one o’clock when he groped his way up the dim staircase of his own house. The bedroom looked bleak and uninteresting. It had never struck him before in quite that way. He had always liked his bedroom with its heavy mahogany furniture and red plush curtains, but somehow to-night the place seemed forlorn . . . as though something was terribly lacking.

“You’re tired, old boy.”

He undressed and threw his clothes carelessly on chairs and tables. He got into bed and regarded the room, trying with his tired brain, to think what was wrong. His clothes ought not to have been thrown about like that, of course. He felt that they and he were out of place in the large room. A strange feeling of melancholy crept over him.

“It’s badly ordered . . . it’s all badly ordered, old boy.”

He had a great desire to cry, so weak he felt. But no, a man mustn't do that; a funny man certainly mustn't. His mind wandered back to his old mother. He remembered the days when she had taught him to pray. He would give anything for the relief of prayer. But he couldn't do that either. It didn't seem exactly playing the game. He had put all that kind of thing by so long ago. He despised those people who lead unvirtuous lives and then in the end turned religious. He wasn't going to pretend. He turned out the light, and closed his eyes. He would neither weep nor pray, but he must express himself somehow. Perhaps he compromised between these two human frailties. Certainly his voice was very near a sob, and his accents vividly alive with prayer as he cried to the darkness:

“Charlie, old boy, be good to her. . . . For God's sake be good to her.”

THE MATCH

It is all so incredibly long ago that you must not ask me to remember the scores. In fact, even of the result I am a little dubious. I only know that it was just on such a day as this that we were all mooning round Bunty Cartwright's garden after breakfast, smoking, and watching the great bumble-bees hanging heavily on the flowers. Along the flagged pathway to the house were standard rose-trees, the blossoms and perfume of which excited one pleasantly. It was jolly to be in flannels and to feel the sun on one's skin, for the day promised to be hot.

For years it had been a tradition for dear old Bunty to ask us all down for the week. There were usually eight or nine of us, and we made up our team with the doctor and his son and one or two other odds and ends of chaps in the neighbourhood. I know that on this day he had secured the services of Dawkin, a very fast bowler from a town near by, for Celminster, the team we were to play, were reputed to be a very hot lot.

As we stood there laughing and talking, Bunty and Tony Peebles were sitting within the stone porch, I remember, trying to finish a game of chess started the previous evening; there was the crunch of wheels on the road, and the brake arrived, accompanied by the doctor's son, a thin slip of a boy on a bicycle.

Then there was the usual bustle of putting up cricket-bags and going back for things one had forgotten, and the inevitable "chipping" of "Togs," a boy whose real name I have forgotten, but who was always last in everything, even in the order of going in. It must have been fully half an hour before we made a start, and then the doctor hadn't arrived. However, he came up at the last minute, his jolly red face beaming and perspiring. Some of the chaps cycled, and soon left us behind, but I think we were seven on the brake. It was good to be high up and to feel the wind blowing gently on our faces from the sea. We passed villages of amazing beauty nestling in the hollows of the downs, and rumbled on our way to the accompaniment of lowing sheep and the doctor's rich, burring voice talking of cricket, and the song of the lark overhead that sang in praise of this day of festival.

It was good to laugh and talk and watch the white road stretching far ahead, then dipping behind a stretch of woodland. It was good to feel the thrill of excited anticipation as we approached the outskirts of Celminster.

What sort of ground would it be? What were their bowlers like? Who would come off for us?

It was good to see the grinning, friendly faces of the villagers and then to descend from the brake, to nod to our opponents in that curiously self-conscious way we have as a race, and then eagerly to survey the field. And is there in the whole of England a more beautiful place than the Celminster cricket ground?

On one side is a clump of buildings dominated by the straggling yards and outhouses belonging to the “Bull” inn. On the farther side is a fence, and just beyond a stream bordered by young willows. At right angles to the inn is a thick cluster of elms—a small wood, in fact—while on the fourth side a low, grey stone wall separates the field from the road. Across the road may be seen the spire of a church, the fabric hidden by the trees, and away beyond sweeping contours of the downs.

In the corner of the field is a rough pavilion faced with half-timber, and a white flagstaff with the colours of the Celminster Cricket Club fluttering at its summit.

Members of the Celminster Club were practising in little knots about the field, and a crowd of small boys were sitting on a long wooden bench, shouting indescribably, and some were playing mock games with sticks and rubber balls. A few aged inhabitants looked at us with lazy interest and touched their hats.

A little man with a square chin and an auburn moustache came out and grinned at us and asked for Mr. Cartwright. We discovered that he was the local wheelwright and the Celminster captain. He showed us our room in the pavilion and called Bunty “sir.” Of course, Bunty lost the toss. He always did during that week, and this led to considerably more “chipping,” and we turned out to field.

No one who has never experienced it can ever appreciate the tense joy of a cricketer when he comes out to begin a match. The gaiety of the morning, when the light is at its best and all one’s senses are alert; the sense of being among splendid deeds that are yet unborn; and then the jolly red ball! How we love to clutch it with a sort of romantic exultation and toss it to one another! For it is upon it that the story of the day will turn. It is the scarlet symbol of our well-ordered adventure, as yet untouched and virginal, and yet strangely pregnant of unaccomplished actions. What story will it have to tell when the day is done? Who will drop catches with it? Who destroy its virgin loveliness with a fearful drive against the stone wall?

As I have stated, it happened all so long ago that I cannot clearly remember many of the details of that match, but curiously enough I remember the first over that Dawkin sent down very vividly.

A very tall man came in to bat. The first ball he played straight back to the bowler; the second was a “yorker” and just missed his wicket; the third he drove hard to mid-off and Bunty stopped it; the fourth he stopped with his pads; the fifth he played back to the bowler again; and the sixth knocked his leg clean out of the ground.

One wicket for no runs! We flung the scarlet symbol backward and forward in a great state of excitement, with visions of a freak match, the whole side of our opponents being out for ten runs, and so on. I remember the glum face of their umpire, a genial corn-merchant, dressed in a white coat and a bowler hat, with a bewildering number of sweaters tied round his neck, glancing apprehensively at the pavilion. I remember that the next man in was the little wheelwright, and he looked very solemn and tense. The first three balls missed his wicket by inches, then he stopped them. My recollection of the rest of that morning was a vision of the little wheelwright, with his chin thrust forward, frowning at the bowlers. He had a peculiarly uncomfortable stance at the wicket, but he played very straight. He kept Dawkin out for about five overs, then he started pulling him round to leg. The wicket was rather fiery, and Dawkin was very fast. The wheelwright was hit three times on the thigh, twice on the chest, and numberless times on the arms, and one ball got up and glanced off his scalp, but he did not waver. He plodded on, lying in wait for the short ball to hook to leg. I do not remember how many he made, but it was a great innings. He took the heart out of Dawkin and encouraged one or two of the others to hit with courage. He was caught at last by a brilliant catch by Arthur Booth running in from long leg.

One advantage of a village team like Celminster is that they have no “tail,” or, rather, that you never know what the tail will do. You know by the costume that they have a tail, for the first four or five batsmen appear in complete outfits of white flannels and sweaters, and then the costumes start varying in a wonderful degree. Number six appears in a black waistcoat with white flannel trousers, number seven with brown pads and black boots, number eight with a blue shirt and brown trousers, and so on to the last man, who is dressed uncommonly like a verger. But this rallentando of sartorial equipment does not in any way represent the run-getting ability of the team, for suddenly some gentleman inappropriately garbed, who gives the

impression of never having had a bat in his hand before, will lash out and score twenty-five runs off one over.

On this particular occasion I remember one man who came in about ninth, and who wore one brown pad and sand-shoes, and had on a blue shirt with a dicky and a collar, but no tie, and who stood straight in front of his wicket, looked grimly at Dawkin, and then hit him for two sixes, a four, and a five, to the roaring accompaniment of "Good old Jar-r-ge!" from a row of small boys near the pavilion. The fifth ball hit his pad and he was given out l.b.w. He gave no expression of surprise, disappointment or disgust, but just walked grimly back to the pavilion. Celminster were all out before lunch, but I cannot let the last man—the verger—retire (he was bowled first ball off his foot) before speaking of our wicket-keeper, Jimmy Guilsworth.

Jimmy Guilsworth was, in my opinion, an ideal wicket-keeper. He was a little chap and wore glasses, but his figure was solid and homely. He was by profession something of a poet, and wrote lyrics in the celtic-twilight manner. He played cricket rarely, but when he did, he was instinctively made wicket-keeper. He had that curious, sympathetic mothering quality which every good wicket-keeper should have. The first business of a wicket-keeper is to make the opposing batsmen feel at home. When the man comes in trembling and nervous, the wicket-keeper should make some reassuring remark, something that at once establishes a bond of understanding between honourable opponents. When the batsman is struck on the elbow it is the wicket-keeper who should rush up and administer first-aid or spiritual comfort. And when the batsman is bowled or caught, he should say: "Hard luck, sir!"

At the same time it is his business to mother the bowlers on his own side. He must be continually encouraging them and sympathizing with them, but in a subdued voice, so that the batsman does not hear. And, moreover, he must be prepared to act as chief of staff to the captain. He must advise him on the change of bowlers and on the disposition of the field. All of this requires great tact, understanding and perspicacity.

All these qualities Jimmy Guilsworth had in a marked degree. If he sometimes dropped catches and never stood near enough to stump anyone, what was that to the sympathetic way he said, "Oh, hard luck, sir!" to an opposing batsman when he was bowled by a long hop, or the convincing way he would call out, "Oh, well hit, sir!" when another opponent pulled a half-volley for four. What could have been more encouraging than the way he would rest his hand on young Booth's shoulder after he had bowled a disappointing over, and say: "I say, old chap, you're in great form. Could

you pitch 'em up just a wee bit?" When things were going badly for the side, Jimmy would grin and whisper into Cartwright's ear. Then there would be a consultation and a change of bowlers, or some one would come closer up to third-man, and, lo! in no time something would happen.

But it is lunch-time. In the pavilion a long table is set, with a clean cloth and napkins and with gay bowls of salad. On a side-table is a wonderful array of cold joints, hams, cold lamb, and pies. We sit down, talking of the game. Curiously enough, we do not mix with our opponents. We sit at one end, and they occupy the other, but we grin at one another, and the men sitting at the point of contact of the two parties occasionally proffer a remark.

Girls wait on us, and a fat man in shirt-sleeves, who produces ale and ginger-beer from some mysterious corner. And what a lunch it is! Does ever veal-and-ham pie taste so good as it does in the pavilion after the morning chasing a ball? And then tarts and fruit and custard and a large yellow cheese, how splendid it all seems, with the buzz of conversation and the bright sun through the open door! Does anything lend a fuller flavour to the inevitable pipe than such a lunch, mellowed by the rough flavour of a pint of shandy-gaff?

We stroll out again into the sun and puff tranquilly, and some of us gather round old Bob Parsons, the corn-merchant, and listen to his panegyric of cricket as played "in the old days." He's seen a lot of cricket in his time, old Bob. His bony, weatherbeaten face wrinkles, and his clear, ingenuous eyes blink at the heavens as he recalls famous men: "Johnny Strutt, he was a good 'un. Aye, and ye should ha' seen old Tom Kennett bowl in his time. Nine wicket' he took against Kailhurst, hittin' the wood every toime. Fast he were, faster'n they bowl now. Fower bahls he bahl fast, then put up a slow."

He shakes his head meditatively, as though the contemplation of the diabolical cunning of bowling a slow ball after four fast ones was almost too much to believe, as though it was a demonstration of intellectual calisthenics that this generation could not appreciate.

It is now the turn of the opponents to take the field, while we eagerly scan the score-sheet to see the order of going in, and restlessly move about the pavilion, trying on pads, and making efforts not to appear nervous.

And with what a tense emotion we watch our first two men open the innings! It is with a gasp of relief we see Jimmy Guilsworth cut a fast ball for two, and know, at any rate, we have made a more fortunate start than our opponents did.

I do not remember how many runs we made that afternoon, though as we were out about tea-time, I believe we just passed the Celminster total, but I remember that to our joy Bunty Cartwright came off. He had been unlucky all the week, but this was his joy-day. He seemed cheerful and confident when he went in, and he was let off on the boundary off the first ball! After that he did not make a mistake.

It was a joy to watch Bunty bat. He was tall and graceful, and he sprang to meet the ball like a wave scudding against a rock. He seemed to epitomize the dancing sunlight, a thing of joy expressing the fullness of the crowded hour. His hair blew over his face, and one could catch the gleam of satisfaction that radiated from him as he panted on his bat after running out a five.

He was not a great cricketer, none of us were, but he had a good eye, the heart of a lion, and he loved the game.

I believe I made eight or nine. I know I made a cut for four. The recollection of it is very keen to this day, and the satisfying joy of seeing the ball scudding along the ground a yard out of the reach of point. It made me very happy. And then one of those balls came along that one knows nothing about. How remarkable it is that a bowler who appears so harmless from the pavilion seems terrifying and demoniacal when he comes tearing down the crease toward you!

Yes, I'm sure we passed the Celminster total now, for I remember at tea-time discussing the possibilities of winning by a single innings if we got Celminster out for forty.

After tea, for some reason or other, one smokes cigarettes. We strolled into a yard at the back of the "Bull" inn, and there was a wicket gate leading to a lawn where some wonderful old men, whose language was almost incomprehensible, were drinking ale and playing bowls. At the side were some tall sunflowers growing amid piles of manure.

Some one in the pavilion rang a bell, and we languidly returned to take the field once more.

I remember that it was late in the afternoon that a strange thing happened to me. I was fielding out in the long field not thirty yards from the stream. Tony Peebles was bowling from the end where I was fielding. I noted his ambling run to the wicket and the graceful action of his arm as he swung the ball across. A little incident happened, a thing trivial at the time, but which one afterward remembers. The batsman hit a ball rather low on the off side,

which the doctor's son caught or stopped on the ground. There was an appeal for a catch, given in the batsman's favour, but for some reason or other he thought the umpire had said "out," and he started walking to the pavilion. He was at least two yards out of his crease when the doctor's son threw the ball to Jimmy Guilsworth at the wicket. Jimmy had the wicket at his mercy, but instead of putting it down he threw it back to the bowler. It was perhaps a trivial thing, but it epitomized the game we played. One does not take advantage of a mistake. It isn't done.

The sun was already beginning to flood the valley with the excess of amber light which usually betokens his parting embrace. The stretch of level grass became alive and vibrant, tremblingly golden against the long, crisp shadows cast from the elms. The elms themselves nodded contentedly, and down by the stream flickered little white patches of children's frocks. Everything suddenly seemed to become more vivid and transcendent. As if aware of the splendour of that moment, all the little things struggled to express themselves more actively. The birds and little insects in solemn unison praised God, or, rather, to my mind, at that moment they praised England, the land that gave them such a glorious setting. The white-clad figures on the sunlit field, the smoke from the old buildings by the inn trailing lazily skyward, the comfortable buzz of the voices of some villagers lying on their stomachs on the grass. Ah! My dear land!

I don't know how it was, but at that moment I felt a curious contraction of the heart, like one who looks into the face of a lover who is going on a journey. Perhaps a townsman gets a little tired at the end of a day in the field, or the feeling may have been due to the Cassandra-like dirge of a flock of rooks that swung across the sky and settled in the elms.

The bat, cut from a willow down by the stream, the stumps, the leather ball, the symbol of the wicket, the level lawn, cut and rolled and true—all these things were redolent of the land we moved on. They spoke of the love of trees and wind and sun and the equipoise of man in Nature's setting. They symbolized our race, slow-moving and serene, with a certain sensuous joy in movement, a love of straightness, and an indestructible faith in custom. Ah, that the beauty of that hour should fade, that the splendour and serenity of it all should pass away! Strange waves of misgiving flooded me.

If it should be all *too* slow-moving, *too* serene! If at that moment the wheels of the Juggernaut of evolution were already on their way to crush the splendour of it beneath their weight!

Ah! my dear land, if you should be in danger! If one day another match should come in which you would measure yourself against—some unknown terrors! I was aware at that moment of a poignant sense of prayer that when your trial should come it would find you worthy of the clean sanity of that sunlit field; and if in the end you should go down, as everything in nature *does* go down before the scythe of Time, the rooks up there in the elm should cry aloud your epitaph. They are very old and wise, these rooks: they watched the last of the Ptolemes pass from Egypt, they moaned above Carthage and Troy, and warned the Roman prætors of the coming of Attila. And the epitaph they shall make for you—for *they* saw the little incident of Jimmy Guilsworth and the doctor's son—shall be: "Whatever you may say of these people, they played the game."

I think those small boys down by the pavilion made too much fuss about the catch I muffed. Of course, I did get both hands to it, and as a matter of fact the sun was *not* in my eyes; but I think I started a bit late, and it seemed to be screwing horribly. Ironical jeers are not comforting. Bunty, like the dear good sportsman he is, merely called out:

"Dreaming there?"

But it was a wretched moment. I remember slinking across at the over, feeling like an animal that has contracted a disease and is ashamed to be seen, and my mental condition was by no means improved by the cheap sarcasms of young Booth or Eric Ganton. We did not get Celminster out for the second time, and the certainty that the result would not be affected by the second innings led to introduction of strange and unlikely bowlers being put on and given their chance.

I remember that just at the end of the day even young "Togs" was tired. He sent down three most extraordinary balls that went nowhere within reach of the batsman, the fourth was a full pitch, and a young rustic giant who was then batting, promptly hit it right over the pavilion. The next ball was very short and came on the leg side. I was fielding at short leg and I saw the batsman hunching his shoulders for a fearful swipe. I felt in a horrible funk. I heard the loud crack of the ball on the willow, and I was aware of it coming straight at my head. I fell back in an ineffectual sort of manner, and despairingly threw up my hands in a sort of self-defence. And then an amazing thing happened: the ball went bang into my left hand and stopped there. I slipped and fell, but somehow I managed to hang on to the ball. I remember hearing a loud shout, and suddenly the pain of impact vanished in the realization that I had brought off a hot catch.

It was a golden moment. The match was over. I remember all our chaps shouting and laughing, and young “Togs” rushing up and throwing his arms round me in a mock embrace. We ambled back to the pavilion and it suddenly struck me how good looking most of our men were, even Tony Peebles, whom I had always looked upon as the plainest of the plain. My heart warmed toward Bunty with a passionate zeal when he struck me on the back and said: “Good man! You’ve more than retrieved your muff in the long field.”

I know they ragged me frightfully in the pavilion when we were changing, but it was no effort to take it good-humouredly. I felt ridiculously proud.

We took a long time getting away, there was so much rubbing down and talking to be done, and then there was the difficulty of getting Len Booth out of the “Bull” inn. He had a romantic passion for drinking ale with yokels, and a boy had stuck a pin into one of Ganton’s tyres, and he had to find a bicycle shop and get it mended. It was getting dark when we all got established once more in the brake.

I remember vividly turning the corner in the High Street and looking back on the solemn profile of the inn. The sky was almost colourless, just a glow of warmth, and already in some of the windows lamps were appearing. We huddled together contentedly in the brake, and I saw the firm lines of Bunty’s face as he leaned over a match lighting his pipe.

The grass is long to-day in the field where we played Celminster, and down by the stream are two square, unattractive buildings, covered with zinc roofing, where is heard the dull roar of machinery. The ravages of time cannot eradicate from my memory the vision of Bunty’s face leaning over his pipe, or the pleasant buzz of the village voices as we clattered among them in the High Street, or the sight of the old corn-merchant’s face as he came up and spoke to Bunty (Bunty had stopped the brake to get more tobacco) and touched his hat and said:

“Good noight, sir. Good luck to ’ee!”

Decades have passed, and I have to press the spring of my memory to bring these things back; but when they come they are very dear to me.

I know that in the wind that blows above Gallipoli you will find the whispers of the great faith that Bunty died for. Eric Ganton, young Booth, and Jimmy Guilsworth, where are they? In vain the soil of Flanders strives to clog the free spirit of my friends.

“Good noight, sir. Good luck to ’ee!”

Again I see the old man’s face as I gaze across the field where the long grass grows, and I see the red ball tossed hither and thither, with its story still unfinished, and I hear the sound of Jimmy’s voice:

“Oh, well hit, sir!” as he encourages an opponent.

The times have changed since then, but you cannot destroy these things. Manners have changed, customs have changed, even the faces of men have changed; and yet this calendar on my knee is trying to tell me that it all happened *two years ago to-day!*

And overhead the garrulous rooks seem strangely flustered.

THE OLD LADY WITH THE TWO UMBRELLAS

Paris can be an exceedingly dull city. One has only to miss a keenly anticipated appointment with a friend, to catch a cold in the head, to be disappointed in some love affair, to realise that the cold grey waters of the Seine are the only really inviting thing about it. One is down in the depths. Certainly these moods are apt to be transitory. One burst of sunshine, and lo! the cold in the head is forgotten, the friend has been waiting all the time, the girl may turn up. I forget which of these misfortunes had assailed me, but I know that I was in a very bad humour, sitting alone outside a little café in Etoile. Imagine my delight, then, when who should amble along the boulevard, and proceed to seek a table near me, but my old friend Tolozan. I had not seen him since his retirement from the police intelligence department at Bordeaux, upon a modest but well-merited pension. He held out his hand to me and smiled in that courtly and engaging manner which was characteristic of him. One of the secrets of his successful career had been that manner of inspiring immediate confidence. One went on from the point where one last left off, however long an interval may have intervened. He forgot nothing. All one's own opinions and affections appeared to be stored away carefully in his memory. The humdrum details of my particular trouble on this occasion evoked from him a profound concern. (Looking back on it I think it must have been a girl; no cold in the head would have called forth such charming sympathy).

My affairs dismissed, he told me that he was living at Colombes with his wife and daughter. He had a small villa and an acre of garden, which occupied most of his time. He spoke lovingly of his roses and gentians, his runner beans and leeks, and vegetable marrows. He hoped I would pay him a visit. He had come to Paris to buy seeds.

I was vaguely amused at my friend's enthusiasm. I could not help being impressed by the contrast of these placid interests compared with the turbulent incidents of his career spent amongst criminals and courtesans. At the same time, I could not help rejoicing that the perils and dangers of his life were passed, and that he had now reached this calm haven, where he could enjoy a full measure of repose, and indulge in those pleasant philosophical recreations and theories, which always attracted him so.

Moreover, I had been anxious to meet him ever since his retirement. I felt convinced that stored away in the archives of his memory must be many interesting facts and stories which the etiquette of the service would have prevented him from divulging while in harness. Over our coffee I boldly insinuated that this might be the case. He smiled deprecatingly and shrugged his shoulders. He was not one of those old chaps who like to hold youth spellbound by a recapitulation of their remarkable deeds and exploits. He was no Tartarin of Tarascon. It was indeed difficult to get him to talk about himself in a subjective sense at all. If a discussion arose, he would point some little theory with a leaf or two taken from the record of his own experiences, but as for telling a tale in the accepted sense, well, he simply couldn't see the sense of it. I dug out of him the story of the Old Lady with the Two Umbrellas. Being a writer, and therefore a person with an elastic conscience, I have no hesitation in repeating it. But I'm glad I am to do it in a foreign language and in a foreign country, for I feel that Tolozan would not approve. He told me once that the only fiction he had ever read was "Monte Cristo," and he thought it a poor book, pointless and improbable. He used to study Comte, Montaigne, and seed catalogues.

I should never have got these facts out of him at all, I believe, if it had not happened to commence raining whilst we were sitting outside the café. We were under an awning and the procession of people passing by, holding up umbrellas, reminded him of the salient fact, for he turned to me and said abruptly:

"What would you think of anyone who always carried two umbrellas?"

The question was so surprising that I had nothing to reply. Two umbrellas? He continued meditatively:

"I knew a woman who did this."

I begged him to enlighten me upon the details of this unusual fact, and by many questionings and promptings I got the story out of him.

It happened after he had left the service. It appears that for a year after his retirement he and his wife and daughter continued to live in Bordeaux. They only came to Paris ultimately because it was decided that the daughter should attend the conservatoire of music. On retiring, his portfolio and the cases he had in hand were given over to a younger man, named Freycinet. He was a young man for the position, and a protégé and friend of Tolozan's. He frequently visited the family at their flat in the Rue Judaique. One evening towards the end of the summer—it was the summer following the Armistice—Freycinet came to him in a great state of consternation. He was

obviously bewildered and distressed. Tolozan took him into his little den and begged him to confide his trouble.

“I’m likely to lose my position,” he kept repeating.

“Well, old man, tell me all about it. Perhaps I can be of service,” said Tolozan.

“It’s like this,” spluttered Freycinet. “Two months ago we received information from the prefecture that gold was leaking out of the country over the Spanish border. I was sent down to Irun to take charge of the matter. I did the usual thing, examined all luggage, searched promiscuous people, arrested a few suspicious characters, doubled the sentries at vital points on the border, but nothing came of it. We could find no trace of the leaking gold. For three weeks I was up night and day doing everything I could think. Then a stern note came from headquarters. The gold was still going through. Something more must be done. These Treasury people have wonderfully sensitive ways of finding out. They believed it went through to Bilbao; a steady stream of golden louis. I became more drastic. For three days running I had every passenger on every train thoroughly searched, all the luggage thoroughly sifted. I even probed amongst the coal on the engines. I searched the guards and porters and engine-drivers. The Government sent naval packets to patrol the Bidassoa, a destroyer to watch off Hendaye, and two others to cover the coast between there and Bordeaux. Not a boat put out to sea without being searched. We never found a coin. A fortnight later the prefect of the police sent for me. He was furious. He said that he regretted to say that he held me responsible. The Government were of opinion that the gold was going through by land, and they were demanding a scapegoat. You see the position I’m in, old man. That was only a week ago, and I’ve found nothing.”

Tolozan looked very grave. He pulled at his thin grey imperial and muttered:

“Smuggling gold out of the country is a penal offence. A man or woman who does that is a traitor to France.”

He was very indignant. Tolozan had a criminal code of his own. There were some crimes of which he was surprisingly tolerant. In his opinion the worst crimes were the unpatriotic ones. He would show no mercy to a traitor. Over this affair of Freycinet he wished to make his position clear. He had retired, and he had no intention of deliberately interfering. If he helped his old colleague with his advice, he must understand that he only did so out of his affection for him and for the safety of France. His name was not to be

made use of, neither would he take any active part. He would merely observe, and if any illumination came to him he would pass it on to Freycinet to act upon. He would accompany him to the frontier, paying his own expenses.

Freycinet was naturally delighted at his friend's offer, and thanked him profusely. On their way to the station he told him of one unusual incident in the case.

"Naturally," he said, "I have been on the lookout for suspicious characters, and also for people who pass backwards and forwards frequently. Several of the latter I have examined and cross-examined, and gone to the trouble of certifying their statements. For the most part, they are quite innocuous, little traders, commercials, and genuine business people, but there is one old woman who mystifies me. She goes into Spain about twice a week and returns the next day. She always carries two umbrellas and no other luggage at all. The second time she went through I had her up. The woman officials searched her. I searched the umbrellas. There was nothing, nothing at all. She is patently an old crank of some sort. When I asked her why she carried two umbrellas she replied that one was for fair weather and the other for foul. The next time she gave some other reason, quite trivial and absurd. She is quite a character. She attracts a lot of attention in the Customs, talks loudly to everyone, cheeks the officers. They all know her, and are rather amused. They say 'Hullo, here comes Madame Fair and Foul!'"

"Have you followed up her case more closely?" asked Tolozan.

"No. As we know that she neither takes gold out of the country nor brings anything in, it hardly seems worth while. She says her name is Madame Ponsolle. She lives in Bayonne and goes across to visit her sick daughter in San Sebastian. She stays the night with the daughter and returns."

"Are the umbrellas always the same?"

"No, since you mention it, they are not. Sometimes she carries an old blue one with a black-and-white handle; sometimes a black one with a brown handle. I have not made a careful note, but it has struck me that the umbrellas are not always the same. What were you thinking?"

"They may be a sign. A message may be conveyed by such means."

"Yes—but, I don't see how a message could affect the smuggling of gold."

“It might be worth while to follow her. If the umbrellas were always the same, I agree we could dismiss her as a crank, but the fact that they are different——”

“Very good. I’ll have her followed if she comes through again.”

The two friends arrived at Irun the same afternoon, and Freycinet made arrangements to have all the passengers on the evening express examined. None of his subordinates had anything to report. The old lady with the two umbrellas had not been through again. Tolozan took up his position on the platform, the figure of an indolent, rather bored commercial traveller, with a leather attaché case, and a small pile of Parisian newspapers tucked under his arm. When the train came in, and the passengers were turned out, and headed into the Custom House, he also drifted thither. The noise was deafening—sleepy passengers grumbling at the disturbance, porters struggling with bags and trunks, everyone—including the inspectors—irritable and peevish. Tolozan was pushed hither and thither. Suddenly above the din he heard a shrill voice calling out:

“Oh, you devils! All this again, you miserable toads. As though a lady of my irreproachable character can’t carry an umbrella without having all these magpies pecking at her. Ah, there he is! There’s a pretty apple-cheeked young man. René! I’m sure his name is René. Come, come along. Hurry, little one. Much as we love you, we can’t spend the night here.”

Tolozan heard one of the porters mutter: “There she is again. There’s old Madame Fair and Foul.”

She was waving her umbrellas threateningly, the centre of an astonished group. Even the disgruntled passengers could not restrain a smile, and the officials shrugged their shoulders helplessly. She was rather a tall woman with a black shawl round her head and a shabby black frock. The shawl partly concealed her face. A mop of white hair dangled down, almost covering her eyes.

“Look at that extraordinary old woman,” people were exclaiming. “All her luggage seems to consist of two umbrellas.”

While they were indulging in this reflection, an official came in, and in an enormous voice bellowed out:

“All women to the right. All men to the left.”

A search! Freycinet’s work. Grumbles turned into curses, irritation into violent abuse. Scandalous! What was the meaning of it all? As though it wasn’t bad enough to go through the Customs! Where was liberty, equality,

fraternity? What were these busybodies thinking of? Sweating and groaning, the people poured into the adjoining rooms and quickly forgot all about the old woman with the umbrellas. Ten minutes later Tolozan drifted into a little office where Freycinet sat in state. Various officials were bustling in and out of the room.

“Well, old man?” he said, on observing Tolozan.

“I should like to examine the old lady’s umbrellas.”

“Certainly.”

In a few minutes the umbrellas were brought. There was nothing about them to arouse the slightest suspicion except that one, with a jade green handle, looked more expensive than the costume of the old lady seemed to justify. The other was shabby enough, with a handle of brown wood. Tolozan naturally examined the frames carefully to see if there was any patent spring, or any possibility of gold being secreted. But he quickly realised that such an eventuality was quite out of the case. There was no spring, the stems were much too thin, and the green one was made of steel.

“Would you like to question her?” said Freycinet.

“No,” replied Tolozan. “Have you detailed anyone to follow her?”

“Not yet.”

“In that case it would amuse me to follow her myself, if you have no objection.”

“My dear fellow, I should be delighted, if you really think—if you don’t think it will be wasting your time.”

“An idea occurred to me whilst I was watching the crowd in the Custom House. I would rather not say anything about it. I may be on the wrong track. But twenty-four hours’ delay won’t make such a grave difference.”

“Very good. The Spanish train leaves in a quarter of an hour.”

It is characteristic of Tolozan that he said very little about his trip over the border. His attitude all through was that he was a helper, not an actor, in this little drama. He wanted Freycinet to find things out for himself. He was merely assisting, suggesting. He did not return the next day. Indeed, he did not return for over a week; but on the third day Freycinet received a mysterious and cryptic message from him. It was scribbled across a half sheet of notepaper like a formula from a school text, and was initialled “T.” It ran as follows:

“If one’s attention is arrested by an old woman with two umbrellas one is apt to overlook a young man with a walking-stick.”

Whatever did he mean? A young man with a walking-stick? Had Tolozan seen or heard anything? Why didn’t he return? Freycinet continued his worrying tactics at the frontier town. He was becoming unpopular among his subordinates, who were getting tired of being nagged and sworn at by weary travellers. The old lady with the two umbrellas had returned as usual the next day and gone back to Bayonne.

“When he comes back I suppose I must keep my eyes skinned for a young man with a walking-stick,” thought Freycinet, who held his old chief in almost reverential awe. Truly enough, the day after receiving the message, Madame Ponsolle appeared again. Freycinet followed her into the Custom House. There she was as garrulous and noisy as ever. Freycinet glanced around. There was the same crowd as usual—Basque peasants, clerks, shopkeepers, commercial travellers, a few English and American tourists. A young man with a walking-stick? Well, of course, there were several. Many of the men were carrying walking-sticks. However, he felt bound to act upon his friend’s hint, so he went up to one young man who was standing close behind the old lady, and tapped him on the shoulder.

“Will you please come with me,” he said.

The young man looked scared, but followed him quickly enough. In the office he said:

“Please show me your papers.”

Maxim Quinson, aged 43, traveller in machine tools to Messrs. Charbonel et Cie, engineers of Bordeaux, visiting firms in San Sebastian, Bilbao. Yes, everything in order.

“Open your valise and remove your overcoat.”

The young man did as he was ordered.

In the valise were a few catalogues and papers, clean linen, boots, and night attire. Nothing of any consequence. Neither did the contents of his clothing reveal anything more interesting.

“This is ridiculous,” thought Freycinet, “if I’ve got to arrest every man who carries a walking-stick.”

The little traveller was sent on his journey.

A few days later Tolozan returned.

“Has the old lady with the two umbrellas been through again?” was the first question he asked.

“No,” replied Freycinet. “But I should think she is about due. Have you anything to report, Tolozan?”

Tolozan looked relieved, and slightly mysterious. He plucked at his beard thoughtfully.

“I would rather wait till after the evening train has been in before I express any opinion. In the meantime, let us see whether Madame Delarme can give us an omelette and a ragout. That Spanish food always nauseates me.” Tolozan was in gay humour over their meal, and refused to discuss the affair of smuggled gold.

When the evening train came in, however, they both were on the watch, and mingling with the crowd in the Custom House.

“As I thought,” muttered Tolozan. The old lady with the two umbrellas was as noisy and active as ever. Freycinet looked eagerly to see if the young man with the walking-stick was accompanying her. He was not. But, of course, there were other men with walking-sticks struggling and gesticulating near the barrier.

“As I thought,” again muttered Tolozan.

Freycinet glanced quickly at his friend. He was regarding a pale middle-aged man standing behind the old lady.

“That’s not the man who accompanied her the other day,” whispered Freycinet.

“No? Does it occur to you that anything else is similar?”

“No-o, I can’t say it does. Does it occur to you?”

“Only this—although it’s not the same man, it’s the same walking-stick.”

“Good God!”

“Wait a minute, Freycinet! Isn’t it more important for the Government to know where the gold comes from rather than where it goes to? Think. As a matter of fact, I believe I know where it goes to.”

“You know where it goes to! You make me feel like a baby, Tolozan. Do you mean to say that the gold is actually in that stick? And I had it in my hands the other day!”

“I have every reason to believe that it is. But there is another point. I doubt whether the man who is carrying it knows what he is carrying. There’s only one person in this crowd who knows and that’s the old woman with the two umbrellas—the decoy.”

Freycinet braced himself up. He knew that his friend expected him to act, that he was leaving it to him. He walked quickly out of the Custom House. In a few minutes an official entered and announced that everyone was to be searched again. He asked Tolozan to accompany him to his little office. “I’m simply doing this so that the old lady shan’t know we have found out,” he said to Tolozan, with the glance of a terrier seeking approval from his master. In a few minutes the man with the walking-stick was brought in.

“Your papers, please, and then open your bag and remove your coat,” said Freycinet; and then casually: “What a very handsome cane! Allow me!”

He took the cane and examined it. It certainly was handsome. It was made of some very hard South American wood—possibly snake wood. It had a silver knob and a broad silver band a few inches from the top. It was uncommonly heavy. Freycinet gave the knob several twists, but nothing happened. Then he tried the silver band. At the third attempt it moved. Exerting great pressure, he succeeded in making it revolve.

“I observe you carry a sword-stick, Monsieur Grimaux,” he remarked.

The man looked very agitated. He was standing in his shirt-sleeves. He mumbled:

“It doesn’t belong to me, inspector. I borrowed it.”

“Ah! Someone is very trusting. What is all this?”

The top of the stick had come off. Freycinet was pouring out on the deal office table a stream of gold louis pieces!

The expression on the man’s face was a strange mixture of amazement and fear. He burst into a sob.

“I know nothing about it, inspector. I know nothing about it.”

“You know that smuggling gold over the frontier is a penal offence?”

“Yes, I’ve heard so, monsieur, but I know nothing about it. I didn’t know the cane had gold concealed in it. Someone asked me to bring it. I’ve a wife and three children, monsieur. I’m a poor man. I’ve never done anything dishonest. I swear, inspector, I know nothing about it.”

“Come, come, pull yourself together. We want to get at the truth. It will pay you to be quite candid. If you lie you will go to prison. If you speak the exact truth, we may let you go. Tell us exactly how you came by this.”

The man was a poor specimen. His teeth were chattering. He blurted out:

“They threatened to kill me if I blabbed.”

“Go on. Tell us the exact story.”

“I’m a traveller in hosiery,” he stammered. “I bought my ticket for Bilbao at the ticket-office in Bayonne, where I come from. Just after I had got it a lady comes up to me and says: ‘Excuse me, monsieur; I heard you say you were going to Bilbao. I wonder whether you would do me a favour?’ ‘Charmed, mademoiselle,’ I replied. She handed me the walking-stick and said, ‘Will you take this stick to my husband? He values it very much. He will give you two hundred francs for your kindness.’ I said I was delighted. I am a poor man, and I have three children, one ailing. She said, ‘Wait two minutes and I’ll get you the address.’ She disappeared in the crowd. A few minutes later an individual came up to me that I didn’t like the look of at all. He looked like a bull-fighter. He said: ‘The lady can’t come back, but it’s all right. Your instructions are this—you’ve got to hang on to that cane like grim death and never let it out of your sight. On the platform you’ll see an old woman with two umbrellas. You go up to her and let her see you’ve got the stick, but you don’t speak to her. You keep close to her all the way to Bilbao, especially in the Customs. The next morning after you get to Bilbao, you walk along the Calle Major at twelve-fifteen. Just before you come to San Stefano you’ll meet a man with a blue rosette in his buttonhole. You hand him the stick, and he’ll give you an envelope containing two hundred francs. That’s all you have to do. It’s money easily made. Only don’t let there be any nonsense.’ He held his face close to mine and said in a horrible voice: ‘If you footle the little arrangement you’ll get a knife between your ribs.’ And there it is, Monsieur Inspector. I’ve footled it. I’m in danger. Oh! I wish I’d never seen the stick.”

Freycinet counted out the gold pieces. There were exactly two hundred and seventy-eight. They fitted perfectly into the hollow of the stick, which had obviously been made for them. He deliberately poured them all back into the stick and snapped the top to. Then, to the amazement of the traveller in hosiery, he handed it back to him and said:

“We don’t want you to be killed, Monsieur Grimaux; continue your journey and carry out your instructions, and not a word of this to anyone.”

When this dazed individual had managed to escape from the room, Freycinet turned to Tolozan and said:

“I see your point. It is more necessary to find out where this gold comes from than where it goes to.”

He rang a bell and a subordinate appeared.

“Tardieu,” he said, “follow that man who has just gone out of the bureau with a kit-bag and walking-stick. He’s going to Bilbao. But I want you to follow the stick and not the man. When he gives it up, follow the person he has given it to, and come back and report as soon as possible.”

When the sub-inspector had gone, Tolozan nodded sagely.

There was nothing more to do that night, so the friends adjourned to a local café, and Tolozan was quite eloquent upon the new theories of Professor Einstein, the influence of Comte upon modern theological reactions, and the splendour of rum omelettes as supplied by the stepmother of one of his daughter’s school friends. Freycinet was sometimes a little abstracted during these dissertations. He could not get his mind off the case in hand. While Tolozan was talking about relativity, he was thinking:

“How am I going to get hold of the real culprits? The old lady with the two umbrellas is not going to run undue risks. A clever idea to get all this smuggling done for you by innocent people. Who is he? Who gets hold of the gold in the first place? Where does it go to? It’s all so disconnected. Whoever I arrest will say they know nothing about it. There must be some big organisation at the back somewhere. Who is it? What does Tolozan think? Damn Einstein!”

Three days later Tardieu returned. This was his story. He had followed the traveller in hosiery to Bilbao. The man had gone to a quiet hotel, where Tardieu also secured a room. He had gone to bed early and taken the walking-stick with him. The next morning he had taken it out. He appeared very agitated. He sat about on the boulevards, and kept on looking at his watch. At twelve o’clock he had walked quickly to the Calle Major. There he had met a man with a blue rosette in his buttonhole. He handed the cane over to him, and received an envelope in exchange. Tardieu followed the man with the blue rosette. He entered a restaurant and ordered lunch. In a few minutes another man entered and joined him at table. They talked quietly and were quick over their lunch. When it was finished they parted, but Tardieu observed that in the process of departure they had exchanged walking-sticks. He followed the second man, who hailed a cab. Tardieu also

got a cab and bade the driver follow. They drove up to the commercial centre of the Town. The man got out and entered a building divided up into various business offices. He went up on the first floor and entered a room labelled "Private." It was part of a suite of rooms belonging to a big banking concern connected with one of the South American republics. Tolozan would not tell the name of this republic, but I gathered that it was a country whose Government had never been very friendly to France.

Anyhow, in these offices Tardieu lost sight of the walking-stick. The individual he had tracked returned without it in about twenty minutes' time and drove away. The detective watched the building for twenty-four hours, and though clerks and officials were coming and going all the time no one came out with the walking-stick. He then thought it advisable to report to his chief as he had been instructed to do so as soon as possible.

"H'm," thought Freycinet. "I've bungled it again. We have lost sight of the stick. To find it on its way back to Paris will be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

However, there was nothing to do but to lie in wait for it at Irun station and trust to luck. He detailed two inspectors to go through each train as it came through, and to search for the stick in most unlikely places. He and Tardieu took up positions in the Custom House. Tolozan wandered languidly hither and thither. On the second day, on the morning train the old lady with the two umbrellas appeared, and the staff doubled their exertions. She seemed less talkative than usual, and was attracting little attention. Neither did there appear to be anyone dancing attendance upon her. Several walking-sticks appeared in the Custom House, but not one that resembled the all-important one to the slightest degree. Freycinet was beginning to feel discouraged. He felt that his whole career depended upon his success over this search. To fail would be a terrible misfortune, but to fail under the eye of Tolozan, and helped by his advice, would make the position doubly bitter. He rushed hither and thither like a terrier on a rabbit warren. It irritated him at one moment to observe Tolozan idly chatting with a tall angular English clergyman, a ridiculous foreign tourist in a mackintosh, and carrying the inevitable bag of golf-clubs. As he passed he heard Tolozan droning about "mashies" and "niblicks." Why wasn't he helping in the hunt? What had he come from Bordeaux for? In five minutes' time the express would be leaving and another opportunity lost. Five minutes, four minutes, three minutes—someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was Tolozan. Tolozan, with a slight flush of excitement tingling his normal lethargy. He nodded in the direction of the train.

“In the third coach,” he whispered. “Bound for Paris.”

“What is that?”

“The English curé, the golf player.”

“What about him?”

“He’s got the walking-stick in his golf-bag.”

A horn was blowing, warning people of the departure of the train.

“*En voiture! En voiture!*”

Freycinet leaped upon that train like a cat springing at a bird. It was very crowded, and he had to stand in the corridor. He had to stand in the corridor nearly all the way to Paris, but he felt that the discomfort was thoroughly justified. In a corner seat lolled the angular English clergyman, with his golf-clubs in a bag on the rack above him. Freycinet had plenty of time to consider how to act. He wandered about the corridor and smoked until lunch was served in the dining-car. As he expected, the clergyman was one of the first to make a bee-line for that abode of material refreshment. When he had gone, Freycinet slipped into his seat. He was glad of the rest. He waited a few minutes; then he reached up and pulled things about on the rack, as though searching for something. The action was sufficient to enable him to verify Tolozan’s statement. There was the walking-stick, buried amongst mashies and niblicks and drivers. He smiled contentedly and read a newspaper. At the end of an hour the reverend gentleman returned. Freycinet jumped up and said in English:

“Pardon, sir. I had not the good fortune to secure a seat, so I took advantage of your absence to take a little rest.”

“Quayte! Quayte! Don’t let me disturb you.”

“Ah, no, monsieur. I should not think of usurping—excuse me.”

The little scrimmage in manners was sufficient to inaugurate a formal acquaintanceship. They talked about the weather, and the luncheon service on the train, and the condition of the greens on the San Sebastian golf course. Then Freycinet went in to lunch himself. He had no desire to be more intimate with the clergyman than the exigencies of the case demanded. He spoke to him once or twice on the journey to Paris, but it was not until the train was slackening up on its last run through that long tunnel into the Gare Quai d’Orsay that Freycinet suddenly whispered:

“Excuse me, monsieur. In your golf-bag you have a walking-stick. Will you be good enough to tell me how you came by it?”

The clergyman looked surprised, hesitated, and said blushinglly,

“Ha—H’m—yes. Quayte. Quayte so. Rather peculiah affair. Man at San Sebastian station—ah—came up to me and asked me if I would object to taking it to Paris. Some other—ah—um—fellow at the Quai d’Orsay with an ambah tiepin in a blue tie would meet me and ask for it—very old and—ah—valuable stick—heirloom—ha—h’m—yes.”

The man was at the station all right, and the clergyman departed.

(If the Reverend Peter Dorking, of Instill Rectory, near Dewsbury, should ever read these lines, let him stand up and take note that he was very nearly involved in a very serious case. Moreover, he might just as well have had the courage to speak the truth. There was nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that it was a *lady* who gave him the stick and not a man!)

In any case, with the advent of the man with the “ambah” tiepin, Freycinet’s interest in the clergyman vanished. He became very alert. As I said before, I had to dig all these details out of Tolozan. He contended that the case was the making of Freycinet, and that he showed great acumen and energy over it. Of course, he took no credit for any of it to himself. However that may be, it is certain that Freycinet is now held in high esteem by the Police Intelligence Headquarters in Paris, as well as by certain members of the Government. The disappointing thing is that I am pledged in secrecy to Tolozan not to reveal a certain name. When he came to it he seemed so reluctant to mention it that he eventually wrote it down on the back of an envelope and then tore it into little pieces with an angry gesture. The sight of that name made me gasp.

It appears that the same procedure was followed as that which had taken place in Bilbao, when Tardieu followed up the delivery of the walking-stick. The man with the amber tiepin drove to a small café in the Rue de la Boetie. There he was joined by a man and a girl. They had two drinks together, and then the man and the girl departed, and the walking-stick again changed hands. Freycinet nearly missed them, owing to the difficulty of picking up a taxi, but he got one just as they were nearly out of sight. A Parisian taxi-driver requires no encouragement to drive like a madman, because that is his normal method. The cabs raced up the Champs Elysées and turned to the left. They drove down the Avenue Malakof, and then the front cab began to pull up.

Freycinet said that when he observed the house where the cab stopped he felt his heart beating violently. He knew the gorgeous Renaissance edifice quite well by sight. It belonged to one of the wealthiest and most influential men in Paris, a member of the Government, and a high official at the Treasury. We will call him Monsieur P——. Freycinet could not believe but that there must be some mistake, and then certain rumours and stories recurred to him. The two people departed, and an hour later he saw Monsieur P—— himself come out of the house and enter his car. He was carrying the walking-stick in his hand. Freycinet had dismissed his cab, and there were none others about. He stopped and pretended to light a cigarette. He heard Monsieur P—— say:

“Drive first to the Treasury.”

It was easy to see how the gold of the Republic was leaking away!

In describing this incident Monsieur Tolozan looked as though he were still tingling with the sense of outrage; then he smiled wistfully, and added:

“As you may imagine, my friend, gold was not the only thing at the back of this affair. As occurs not infrequently in our beloved France, a woman was the agent of a man’s destruction. They never arrested Monsieur P——. With one so highly placed a different procedure is usually adopted. He was simply notified that there was to be an interpellation, that certain facts were to be made public. You may remember the unfortunate affair of Monsieur P——. He slept in a small room on the first floor in that house in the Avenue Malakof. One night, a week after these events, he went to bed as usual, but some servant had been tinkering with the top of the stove which heated the room. Disgracefully careless, these servants! The gas trickled out—hour after hour passed. Poor fellow! He was found quite dead by his man-servant in the morning. A deplorable ending to a brilliant career . . . deplorable, most deplorable.”

“But the woman?” I ventured to interject.

“Ah, yes, the woman. Truly. . . . As you know, Monsieur P—— was an elderly married man of irreproachable social character. He had two sons, one in the Army and the other in the Diplomatic Service. This woman suddenly appeared, no one quite knows from where. She was a Spanish woman, not particularly beautiful, but she exercised strange powers over many men. She was a dancer and actress, and went by the name of ‘Juanita.’ Indeed, she still sings and dances at our best variety theatres. She dances beautifully. If it would not bore you, we might go together this evening to see her. She is dancing at the Casino de Paris.”

“That would be delightful. But tell me, Monsieur Tolozan, was this woman in any way responsible for P——’s criminal smuggling of gold?”

“We have every reason to believe so, but we could never bring anything home to her. She is clever, very clever. We know that, although of Spanish stock, she comes originally from that South American State I have mentioned. She has wealthy and influential friends there, and she returns every year. Paris harbours many such women. She is a clever actress on the stage, but an even cleverer one off.”

“You have had experience of it?”

“On one occasion, yes.”

“When was that?”

“She was the old lady with the two umbrellas.”

“But, good Heavens! Tolozan, why haven’t they arrested her?”

“Arrested! Tell me, what did she ever do except cross the front with one superfluous umbrella? There’s nothing criminal in that. Come, let us go to the Casino. You will be delighted.”

THE BENT TREE

The call was irresistible. I had tramped for nearly two hours along the white road, when suddenly a long stretch of open heath with sparsely-scattered trees and high gorse bushes invited me to break my journey and to seek the shade of a wood that fringed it on the western side. The ground sloped upwards at a steep gradient and I was soon among the cool shadows of the larch trees. After climbing for nearly half-an-hour I found myself on a kind of plateau, looking down upon one of the most beautiful sights in the world, the Weald of Sussex trembling in a grey heat mist framed through a thin belt of trees. I pushed forward, determining to rest in this most attractive spot. Nearing the fringe of this little clump, I observed a bent tree in a clearing. As I approached it it occurred to me that the subject before me was curiously like Corot's famous masterpiece. It was indeed a wonderful and romantic spot. Beneath me a river rambled through the meadows and became lost in the grey-blue distances. There was no sign of civilisation except sleepy cattle and the well-kept fields, and occasionally a village nestling in the hollow of the downs. The only sound was the movement of leaves, the drone of bees and the lowing of cattle in the distant meadows.

I sat down on the bent tree, and as I looked around it occurred to me that the spot I had chosen was like a little harbour. It might have been the home of some God of ancient Britain, who could have lived here undisturbed through all the generations. I was wondering whether anyone else had ever penetrated to this glorious retreat from the world when my eye caught a small square of white paper pinned on the trunk of the bent tree. I examined it, and lo! on it was written in ink: "GONE TO LUNCH, BACK IN 20 MINUTES."

Now if there is one thing that makes me wretchedly unhappy it is the action of people who find pleasure in disfiguring nature, in carving their initials on tree-trunks, in scattering paper and orange peel about the countryside; but somehow, when I caught sight of this absurd city office formula pinned to a tree in this most inaccessible and romantic spot, I must confess that "my lungs did crow like Chanticleer." I felt that here indeed was the work of a vast and subtle humorist. The formula was so familiar. How often had I waited hours in murky passages, buoyed up by this engaging promise! It seemed so redolent of drab staircases, and files and roll-top desks, that its very mention out here struck a fantastic note. That anyone should suggest that he carried on a business here, that his time was precious,

that after gulping down a cup of coffee, he would rush back, cope with increasing press of affairs, seemed to me wonderfully and amazingly funny. I must acknowledge that I made myself rather ridiculous. I laughed till the tears streamed down my face, and my only desire was for a companion with whom to share the manna of this gigantic jest. I looked at the card again. It was comparatively clean, so I presumed that the joke had been perpetrated quite recently.

And then I began to wonder whether the jester would return, whether, after all, the slip had any significance. Was it the message of a poacher to a friend? Or was this the secret meeting place of some gods of High Finance? I determined in any case to wait the allotted span, and in the meantime I stretched myself on the stem of the bent tree, and, lighting a cigarette, prepared to enjoy the tranquillity of the scene.

It was barely ten minutes before my siesta was disturbed by a man coming stealthily up the slope. He was a medium-sized, sallow-faced fellow, with small tired eyes set in dark hollows. He was wearing a tailcoat and a bowler hat. He shuffled quickly through the wood, pushing the branches of the trees away from him. His eyes fixed me furtively, and as he entered the little arbour, he took off his hat and fidgetted with it, as though looking for a customary hook on which to hang it.

“I hope I haven’t kept you waiting?” was his greeting.

“Not at all,” I found myself answering, for lack of a more suitable reply.

“Did Binders send you?” he asked tentatively.

“No,” I replied, pulling myself together. “I just happened to come here.”

A look of disappointment passed over his face. “Oh!” he said, walking up and down. “I sometimes do a bit with Binders and his friends, you know”—he waved his arms vaguely—“you know, from Corlesham.”

Corlesham I knew to be a village rather more than two miles away, a sleepy hamlet of less than fifty souls.

“Oh, I see,” I replied, more with the idea of not discouraging him than because any particular light had come to me.

He looked at me searchingly for some moments, and then, going over to a thick gorse bush, he knelt down and groped underneath and presently produced a thick pile of papers and circulars.

“I wonder whether you would like to do anything in these? These West Australians are good. They’re right down to 65. If you can hold on, a sure

thing. If you would like a couple of thousand now . . .” he was nervously biting his nails; then he said, “Could you spare me a cigarette?”

I produced my case and handed him one.

“Thanks very much,” he said. “They don’t like me to smoke at home,” and he waved his hand towards the north. I followed the direction, and just caught sight of the top of a gable of a large red-brick building through the trees.

So this was a solution.

“This is a glorious place,” I said.

This seemed a very harmless platitude and one not likely to drive a being to despair. But it had a strange effect on my individual, for he sat down on a broken branch and burst into a paroxysm of invective.

“Oh, Gawd!” he said. “I hate it, hate the sight of it! Day after day—all the same! All these blinkin’ trees and fields—all the same, nothing happenin’ ever.”

I found it very difficult to meet this outburst. I could think of nothing to say, so I kept silent. After a time he got up, puffing feverishly at the cigarette, and walked round the little arbour. Every now and then he would stop and make a gesture towards the shrubs. I believe he was visualising files and folios, ledgers, and typewriters. He made a movement of opening and shutting drawers.

“You’ve been a bit run down, haven’t you?” I said at last, with a feeble attempt to bridge the gulf.

He looked at me uncertainly, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“I was unlucky,” he said sullenly. “I worked like a nigger for thirty years, but so do the others—lots of them—and they’re all right. Just sheer bad luck, if you know what I mean. I can do it now when they let me. That’s why I come here. Binders helps me a bit. He sends me people. And, do you know?” he whispered to me confidentially, “I’ve got the postman on my side. He delivers me letters here at twopence a time. Look! here is my mail-box!” He stooped down and lifted a large stone and produced a further pole of correspondence and circulars. “Would you like to buy some of these Trinidads? I could work it for you.”

He looked at me anxiously, and I made some elaborate excuse for not seizing such a splendid opportunity. He sighed, and placed the papers back under the stone.

“Have you ever dealt in big things?” he asked.

“I’m afraid not—in your sense,” I answered, nurturing an instinctive sense of outraged superiority against this person who, I felt, despised me.

“You know what I mean by big things,” he said fiercely. “Millions and millions, and the lives and works of millions of people! Do you know why I come down here to this rotten little clearing? Because it sometimes reminds me of my office off Throgmorton Street. Look! It was just this size. I had my desk over there. Horswall, my secretary, had his desk here. Here was the fireplace. The press just here by the window. Here the shelves with all the files. Can you imagine what it’s like to have been there all those years, to have worked up what I did—all out of nothing, mark you!—to have got the whole rubber market in the hollow of my hand!—and then, oh, God! to be condemned to—this!” and he made a gesture of fierce contempt towards the Weald of Sussex.

“For nearly two years now,” he continued, “I’ve been living in this hole.”

“Nature has a way,” I said, in my most sententious manner, “of coming back on us.”

“Naycher! Naycher!” he almost screamed. “Don’t talk to me about Naycher! What sort of friend is Naycher to me or you? Naycher gives you inclinations and then breaks you for following them! Two men fall into a pond—what does Naycher care that one man was trying to drown his enemy while the other was trying to save a dog? They both stand their chance of death. Naycher leads you up blind alleys and into marshes and lets you rot. Besides, isn’t man Naycher? Isn’t it Naycher for me to work and make money, as it is for these blighting birds to sing? Aren’t roll-top desks as much Naycher as—these blasted trees?”

He blinked savagely at the surrounding scene. The smoke from a distant hamlet drifted sleepily heavenwards, like incense to the gods of the Downs.

“My father was a turner in Walham Green, and he apprenticed me to the joinery, but I had my ambitions even in those times.” He nodded knowingly, and mopped his brow. “At eighteen I was a clerk in a wholesale house in St. Paul’s Churchyard. For three years I worked there underground, by artificial light. Then I got made sub-manager of a wharf at the South end of Lower Thames Street. I was there for five years, and saved nearly three hundred pounds out of a salary of £120 a year. Then I met Jettison, and we started that office together, Jettison & Gateshead, Commission Agents. Work and

struggle, work and struggle, year after year. But it was not till I got on to rubber that I began to make things move. That was eight years after. Do you remember the boom? I got in with Gayo, who had lived out in the Malay Straits—knew everything—we got the whole game at our fingers' ends. We knew just when to buy and just when to sell. Do you know, I've made as much as four thousand pounds in one afternoon, just talking on the telephone! And we done it all in that little room"—he gazed jealously round the little arbour in the hills, and scowled at me. Then he produced a packet of cigarettes and lighted one from the stump of the last one.

"In those days, through Gayo's friends, we followed the whole course of the raw stuff. Then Gayo went out to Malay, and he used to cable me every few days, putting me on to the right thing. My God, he was a man! It went on for two years, when suddenly a cable came to say he was dead—fever, or something, up-country. That was the end. The slump came soon after. I worked hard, but I never got control back. Down and down and down they went, as though Gayo was dragging them through the earth." His lower lip trembled as he rolled the emaciated cigarette over.

"Lord, what a fight I had, though I sat in that office there, in my shirt-sleeves, day and night for months on end, checking tapes, cabling, lying, faking, bluffing"—he chuckled with a meditative intensity. "I'd have done it then, if they'd given me time. But they closed in; there were two Scotch firms, and a man named Klaus. I knew they meant to do me down. There was a set against me. I wasn't there in the end. I was sitting in the office one night . . ." He passed his hand over his brow and swept away a wasp that had settled there. He sat silent for some moments, as though trying to recall things, and twice started to speak without framing a sentence.

"My brother was very good to me," he said suddenly, waving his hand towards the red-brick gable in the trees. "He was very good to me all through." Then he added, with a sort of contemptuous shrug, "In the cabinet-making he was; got a little works at Bow—made about four hundred a year—married, and five children."

He sat for some minutes with his head in his hands, and then he sat up and gazed upon the joyous landscape with unseeing eyes.

I ventured to remark, "Well, I'm sure this place ought to do you good." He turned his melancholy eyes upon me, and sighed.

"Yes," he said, after a pause. "You're just the sort. I've seen so many of you about. Some of you have butterfly nets." He kept repeating at intervals,

“Butterfly nets!” One felt that the last word in contumely had been uttered. He sank into an apathy of indifference. Then he broke out again.

“I tell you,” he uttered fiercely, “that I had millions and millions. I controlled the work and the lives of millions of men, and you come here and talk to me of Naycher. Look at these damned trees! They go green in the summer, yellow in the autumn, and bare in the winter. Year after year, exactly the same thing, and that’s all there is in it. I’m sick of the sight of them. But look at men! Think of their lives, the variety! What they can do! Their clothes, their furniture, their houses, their cities! Think of their power! The power of making and marring!”

“You mean the power of buying and selling,” I ventured.

“Yes, that’s just it!” he said, feeling that he was converting me.

“The power of buying and selling! Of making men rich or poor!” He stood up and waved his thin arms and gazed wildly round him. “Not chasing butterflies!”

At the moment we both became aware that a third person was on the scene. He was a well set-up man, with broad shoulders and narrow hips. He was dressed in a dark-blue serge suit and a tweed cap. He stepped quietly through the trees, and went up to my companion, and said:

“Ah! there you are, Mr. Gateshead. I’m afraid it’s almost time for your afternoon nap, sir.” And then, turning to me, he nodded and remarked: “A warm afternoon, sir!” He spoke with a quiet, suave voice that somehow conveyed the feeling of the ‘iron hand in the velvet glove.’ His voice seemed to have a sedative effect on Mr. Gateshead. My companion did not look at him, but he seemed to shrink within himself. A certain flush that had accompanied his excitement vanished, and his face looked old and set. He drew his narrow shoulders together and his figure bent. He stood abstractedly for a few moments, gazing at the trees around him, and then, with a vague gesture that was characteristic of him, he clutched the lapels of his coat, and with his head bent forward he walked away towards the building. He did not cast a glance in my direction, and the man in the serge suit nodded to me and followed him leisurely.

I clambered down the slope of the wood, and for some reason felt happy to get once more upon the road.

About half a mile from Corlesham I met the postman coming up the hill, wheeling his bicycle. He was a sandy-haired man, splendidly Saxon, with

grey-blue eyes and broad mouth. I asked him if there was a foot-path to Corlesham, and he directed me.

“Do you have a long round?” I asked.

“Three or four mile, maybe,” he said, looking at me narrowly.

“It’s a good pull up to the Institution,” I ventured.

“What institution might that be?” he said, and his mild blue eyes disarmed me with their ingenuousness.

“The house with the three red gables,” I answered.

“Oh!” came the reply. “You mean old Gateshead’s.”

“Does he own it?” I said incredulously.

“Ay, and he could own six others for all the difference it would make to his money. He owns half the county.”

“And yet what a strange idea,” I murmured insinuatingly. “To own a large house and yet to have one’s letters delivered in a wood!”

The postman swung his bag into a more comfortable position and looked across his machine at me with a grin.

“Those as has money can afford to have any ideas they like,” he said at last.

“I’m afraid his money doesn’t make him very happy,” I ventured, still groping for further enlightenment.

The postman gave his right pedal a vigorous twirl as a hint of departure. He then took out a packet of Navy Cut cigarettes and lighted one. This action seemed to stimulate his mental activities, and he leant on the handle-bars and said:

“Ay, if one has no money maybe one can make oneself happy thinking one has. And if one has money, maybe one can make oneself happy by thinking one hasn’t.” He blinked at me, and then added, by way of solving all life’s mysteries: “If one—puts too much store by these things.”

I could find no remark to complement the postman’s sententious conclusions, and, dismissing me with a nod, he mounted his bicycle and rode off up the hill.

THE GOLDEN WINDMILL

At the top of the hill the party halted. It had been a long trek up and the sun was hot. Monsieur Roget fanned himself with his hat, and his eye alighted on a large pile of cut fern-leaves.

“But this will suit me admirably!” he remarked, and he plumped his squat little figure down, and taking out his large English pipe he began to stuff tobacco into it.

“My little one,” said his stout wife, “I should not advise you to go to sleep. You know that to do so in the afternoon always gives you an indisposition.”

“Oh, la la! No, no, no. I do not go to sleep, but—this position suits me admirably!” he replied.

“Oh, papa, papa! . . . lazybones!” exclaimed his pretty daughter Louise. “And if we leave you, you will sleep like a dormouse.”

“It is very hot!” rejoined the father.

“Leave him alone,” said Madame Roget, “and we will go down to that place that looks like an inn, and see whether they will sell us milk. Where is Lisette?”

“Lisette! Where should she be?”

And of course it was foolish to ask. Lisette, the younger daughter, had been lost in the wood on the way up, with her *fiancé*, Paul Fasquelle. Indeed, the party had all become rather scattered. It is a peculiarity of picnics. Monsieur Roget’s eldest son, Anton, was playing at see-saw with his three children on the trunk of a fallen tree. His wife was talking to Madame Aubert, and occasionally glancing up to exclaim:

“Careful, my darlings!”

Monsieur Roget was left alone.

He lighted his pipe, and blinked at the sun. One has to have reached a mature age to appreciate to the full the narcotic seductiveness of good tobacco on the system, when the sun is shining and there is no wind. If there is wind all the pleasant memories and dreams are blown away, but if there is no wind the sun becomes a kind, confidential old fellow. He is very, very mature. And Monsieur Roget was mature. He was fifty-nine years old, given

to corpulence, rather moist and hot, but eminently comfortable leaning against the pile of ferns. A glorious view across the woods of Fontainebleau lay stretched before him, the bees droned in the young gorse, his senses tingled with a pleasureable excitement, and, as a man will in such moments, he enjoyed a sudden crystallised epitome of his whole life. His struggles, and failures, and successes. On the whole he had been a successful man. If he died to-morrow, his beloved ones would be left in more than comfort. Many thousand francs carefully invested, some house property in the Rue Renoir, the three *comestibles* establishments all doing reasonably well.

Things had not always been like that. There had been long years of anxiety, worry, and even poverty. He had worked hard and it had been a bitter struggle. When the children *were* children, that had been the anxious time. It made Monsieur Roget shudder to look back on it. But, God be praised! he had been fortunate, very fortunate in his life-companion. During that anxious time, Madame Roget had been patient, encouraging, incredibly thrifty, competent, resourceful, a loyal wife, a very—Frenchwoman. And they had come through. He was now a proud grandfather. Both his sons were doing well, and were married. Lisette was engaged to a very desirable young advocate. Of Louise there need be no apprehension. In fact, everything. . . .

“Name of a dog! that’s very curious,” suddenly thought Monsieur Roget, interrupting his own pleasant reflections.

And for some minutes he could not determine exactly what it was that was curious. He had been idly gazing at the clump of buildings lower down the hill, whither his wife and daughter had gone in search of milk. Perhaps the perfume of the young gorse had something to do with it, but as he looked at the buildings, he thought:

“It’s very familiar, and it’s very unfamiliar. In fact, it’s gone wrong. They’ve been monkeying with that gable on the east side, and they’ve built a new loft over the stables.”

But how should he know? What was the gable to him? or he to the gable? He drew in a large mouthful of smoke, held it for some seconds, and then blew it out in a cloud round his head. Where was this? When had he been here before? They had driven out to a village called Pavane-en-Bois, and from there they had walked, and walked, and walked. He may have been here before, and have come from another direction. . . .

“Oo-eh!”

Monsieur Roget was glad that he was alone when he uttered this exclamation, which cannot convey what it is meant to in print. Of course, across there on the other side of the clearing was the low stone wall, and the reliquary with the figure of the Virgin, and doubtless at the bottom of the slope the other side would be—the well!

It was exactly on this spot that he had met Diane—God in heaven! how long ago? Ten, twenty, thirty. . . . Exactly thirty-seven years ago!

And how vividly it could all come back to one!

He was twenty-two, then, a slim young man—considered elegant and rather distinguished-looking by some people—an orphan without either brothers or sisters, the inheritor of a quite substantial competence from his father, who had been a shipbroker at Marseilles. He had gone to Paris to educate himself and to prepare for a commercial career. He was a serious young man, with modest ambitions, rather moody and given to abstract speculations. Paris bewildered him, and he used to escape when he could, and seek solitude in the country. At length he decided that he must settle down to some definite career, and he became articled to a firm of chartered accountants: Messrs. Manson et Cie. He took rooms at a quiet *pension* near the Luxembourg, and there fell in love with his patron's daughter, Lucile, a demure and modest brunette. The affair was almost settled, but not quite. Monsieur Roget, even in those days, was a man who never put his leg over the wall till he had seen the other side. He was circumspect, cautious, and there was indeed plenty of time.

And then one day he had found himself on this identical hillock. He could not quite clearly remember how he came to be there. Probably he had come for the day, to escape the clamour of Paris. He certainly had no luggage. He was seated on this spot, dreaming and enjoying the view, when he heard a cry coming from the other side of the low stone wall. He jumped up and ran to it, and lo! on the other side he beheld—Diane! The name was peculiarly appropriate. She was lying there on her side like a wounded huntress. When she caught sight of him she called out:

“Ah, monsieur, will you be so kind to help me? I fear I have sprained my ankle.”

Paul Roget leapt the wall and ran to her assistance (the thought of leaping a wall now made him gasp!) He lifted her up, trembling himself, and making sympathetic little clucks with his tongue.

“Pardon, pardon! very distressing!” he murmured, when she stood erect.

“If monsieur will be good enough to allow me to rest my hand on his shoulder, I shall be able to hop back to the auberge.”

“With the greatest pleasure. Allow me.”

On the ground was an upturned pail. He remarked:

“Would it distress mademoiselle to stand for one minute, whilst I refill the pail?”

“Oh, no, no,” she exclaimed. “Do not inconvenience yourself.”

“Then perhaps mademoiselle will allow me to return for the pail?”

“Oh, no, if you please! My father will do it.”

She leant on his shoulder and hopped a dozen paces.

“How did it happen, mademoiselle?”

“Imbecile that I am! I think I was dreaming. I had filled the pail and was descending the embankment when I slipped. I tried to step across the pail, but caught my foot in the rim. And then—I don’t know quite what happened. I fell. It is the other ankle which I fear I have sprained.”

“I am indeed most desolated. Is it far to the inn?”

“You see it yonder, monsieur. It is perhaps ten minutes’ walk, but twenty minutes’ hop.”

She laughed gaily, and Monsieur Roget said solemnly:

“If I might suggest it—I think it would be more comfortable for Mademoiselle if she would condescend to place her arm round my neck.”

“It is too good of you.”

They proceeded another hundred paces in silence, and then rested against a stile. Suddenly she gave him one of her quick glances, and said:

“You are very silent, monsieur.”

“I was thinking—how very beautiful the day is.”

As a matter of fact, he was not thinking anything of the sort. He was in a fever. He was thinking how very beautiful, adorable, attractive this lovely wild creature was hanging round his neck. He had never before adventured such an experience. He had never kissed Lucile. Women were an unopened book to him, and lo! suddenly the most captivating of her sex was clinging to him. He felt the pressure of her soft brown forearm on the back of his neck. Her little teeth were parted with smiles, and she panted gently with the

exertion of hopping. Her dark eyes searched his, and appeared to be slightly mocking, amused, interested.

“If only I might pick her up and carry her,” he thought, but he did not dare to make the suggestion.

Once she remarked:

“Oh, but I am tired,” and he thought she looked at him slyly.

The journey must have occupied half-an-hour, and she told him a little about herself. She lived with her father. Her mother had died when she was a baby. It was quite a small inn, frequented by charcoal-burners and woodmen, and occasionally by visitors from Paris. She liked the country very much, but sometimes it was dull—oh, dull, dull, dull!

“Ah, it is sometimes dull, even in Paris!” sighed Monsieur Roget.

“You must come and speak to my father, and take a glass of wine,” she remarked.

In the forecourt of the inn the father appeared.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed. “What is all this?”

He was a rubicund, heavy-jowled gentleman, who by the wheezy exhalations coming from his chest gave the impression of being a chronic sufferer from asthma. Diane laughed.

“I have been through fire and water, my dear,” she said, “and this is my deliverer.”

She explained the whole episode to the landlord, who shook hands with Paul, and they led the girl into a sitting-room at the back of the café. Paul was somewhat diffident about entering this private apartment, but the landlord wheezed:

“Come in, come in, monsieur.”

They sat Diane down on a sofa, and the landlord pulled off her stocking. In doing so he revealed his daughter’s leg as far as the knee. She had a very pretty leg, but the ankle was considerably swollen.

“The ankle is sprained,” said the landlord.

“Will you allow me to go and fetch a doctor?” asked Paul.

“It is not necessary,” replied the landlord. “I know all about sprained ankles. When I was in the army I served in the ambulance brigade. We will

just bind it up very tight with cold linen bandages. Does it hurt, little one?"

"Not very—yet. It tingles. I feel that it may. Won't you offer Monsieur—I do not know his name—some refreshment?"

"Monsieur Paul Roget," said that gentleman, bowing. "But please do not consider me. The sufferer must be attended first. Later on, I would like to be permitted to partake of a little lunch in the inn."

While the landlord, whose name was Jules Courturier, was binding up his daughter's ankle, Paul slipped out and returned to the well, filled the pail, and brought it back to the yard of the inn.

"But this is extremely agreeable of you, monsieur," exclaimed the landlord, as he came bustling through the porch. "She will do well. I know all about sprained ankles. Oh, yes! I have had great experience. I beg you to share a little lunch with us. We are quite simple folk, but I think we may find you an omelette and a ragoût. Quite country people, you know; nothing elaborate."

The lunch was excellent, and Diane had the sofa drawn up to the table, and in spite of the pain she must have been suffering, she laughed and joked, and they were quite a merry party. After lunch he helped to wheel her out into the crab-apple orchard at the back, and he told her all about himself, his life and work, and ambitions. He told her everything, except perhaps about Lucile. And he felt very strange, elevated, excited.

When the evening came he left it till too late to catch the train back to Paris, and the landlord lent him some things and he stayed the night.

He stayed three nights, and wrote to Messrs. Manson et Cie, and explained that he had gone to Pavane-en-Bois, and had been taken ill. He wrote the same thing to Lucile. And during the day he talked to Diane, and listened to the landlord. Sometimes he would wander into the woods, but he could not bring himself to stay away for long. He brought back armfuls of flowers, which he flung across her lap. He touched her hands, and trembled, and at night in bed he choked with a kind of ecstasy and regret. It was horribly distracting. He did not know how to act. He was behaving badly to Lucile, and dishonourably to Manson et Cie. His conscience smote him, but the other little fiend was dancing at the back of his mind. Nothing else seemed to matter. He was mad—madly in love with this little dark-eyed huntress.

At the end of three days he returned to Paris but not till he had promised to come back at the earliest opportunity.

“Perhaps I will go again in August,” he sighed in the train. It was then the seventh of June.

On the fifteenth of June he was back again in the “Moulin d’Or.” Diane was already much better. She could hobble about alone with the help of two sticks. She was more bewitching than ever. He stayed three weeks, till her ankle was quite well, and they could go for walks together in the woods. And he called her Diane, and she called him Paul. And one day, as the sun was setting, he flung his arms round her and gasped:

“Diane . . . Diane! I love you!”

And he kissed her on the lips, and her roguish eyes searched his.

“Oh, you!” she murmured. “You bad boy . . . you!”

“But I love you, Diane. I want you. I can’t live without you. You must come away with me. We will get married. We will build a world of our own. Oh, you beautiful! Tell me you love me, or I shall go mad!”

She laughed that low, gurgling, silvery laugh of hers.

“What are you saying?” she said. “How should I know? I think you are—a nice boy. But I cannot leave my father.”

“My dear, he managed all the time you had to lie with your foot up. Don’t torture me! Oh, you must love me, Diane. I couldn’t love you so much if you didn’t love me a little in return.”

“Perhaps I do,” she said, smiling.

“What is it, then, Diane?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I do not want to marry. I want to be free, to see the world. I am ambitious. I have been to the conservatoire at Souboise. They say I can sing and dance. My father has spent his savings on me.”

“Darling, if you marry me, you shall be free. You shall do as you like. You shall dance and sing and see the world. Everything of mine shall be yours if only you will love me. You must, you must, Diane!”

“Well . . . we shall see. Come; father will be anxious.”

In July he left his *pension* and moved out to Montmartre. He had never definitely proposed to Lucile, but his expressions of affection had been so definite that he felt ashamed. He spent his holiday in August at the “Moulin d’Or.” And Diane promised to marry him “one day.”

“Diane,” he said, “I will work for you. You have inspired me. I shall go back to Paris and think of you all day, and dream of you all night.”

“That won’t give you much time to make your fortune, my little cabbage.”

“Do not mock me. Where would you like to live?”

“In Paris, in Nice, in Rome, in Vienna. And then, one day, I would like to creep back here and just live in the ‘Moulin d’Or.’ ”

“ ‘The Moulin d’Or?’ ”

“Oh, we could improve it. We could build an extra wing, with a dancing-hall, and more nice bedrooms, and a garage. We could improve the inn, but we could not improve these beautiful hills. Isn’t that true, little friend?”

“Nothing could be improved where you are. You are perfection.”

“Yes, but——”

In September Diane came to Paris. She stayed with an aunt in Parnasse, and attended a conservatoire of dancing. And every evening Paul called on her, and took her flowers and chocolates and trinkets. And in the daytime, when the image of Diane’s face did not interpose between his eyes and his desk, he worked hard. He meant to work hard and become a rich man, and take Diane to Nice, and Rome, and Vienna, and make the structural alterations to the “Moulin d’Or.”

In a few months’ time Diane made such progress that she was offered an engagement in the ballet at Olympia. She accepted it and Paul was consumed with a fever of apprehension. Every night he went to the performance, waited for her, and escorted her home. But he disliked the atmosphere of the music-hall intensely, and the other girls, Diane’s companions—Heaven defend her!

And then she quarrelled with her aunt, and Paul besought her to marry him so that he might protect her. But she prevaricated, and in the end he took some rooms for her, and she consented to allow him to pay for them. She lived there for several weeks alone, only attended by an old concierge, and then she took a friend, Babette Baroche, to share the rooms with her, and Paul still continued to pay. Paul disliked Babette. She was a frivolous, vain, empty-headed little *cocotte*, and no fit companion for Diane. On occasions Paul discovered other men enjoying the hospitality of the rooms, and they were always of an objectionable sort. And Diane got into debt, and he lent her four hundred francs.

At Christmas-time she was dismissed from her engagement, and in a perversicacious mood she promised to marry him in the spring. Paul was delirious. Nothing was good enough for his Diane, and he engaged a complete flat for her, with the services of an elderly *bonne*. Diane was very grateful and loving, and in the transition Babette was dropped. However, a few weeks after he had signed the lease, she was offered an engagement for a tour, and after a lengthy dispute and many tears, she had her way and accepted it. She was away three months, and Paul was consumed with dread, and doubt, and gloomy forebodings. On occasions he dashed down to Lyons, or Grenoble, or wherever she happened to be, for the week-end. And he thought that the company she was with were a very fast lot.

“But, my angel,” he would exclaim, “only another month or two, and all this will be over. You will be mine for ever and ever.”

He was still paying the rent of the flat in Paris, and it was necessary to send Diane flowers and presents wherever she was. It was an expensive time, particularly as, owing to Diane having had her purse stolen just when she was paying off a debt, he had to send her another four hundred francs. She returned at the end of March, and so great had been her success on tour that an egregious, oily manager named Bonnat offered her a part in a new revue. She received a good salary, but the management would not supply her frocks. It was necessary to dress well for this part. It was her first real chance. She ransacked shops in the Rue de Tivoli, and Paul accompanied her. Eventually she spent twelve hundred francs on them, and Paul advanced the money. She only allowed him to do so on the understanding that she paid him back by instalments out of her salary. It is needless to say that she never did so. However, the frocks were a great success, and Diane made a hit. She was undoubtedly talented. She danced beautifully, and she had a gift of imitation. She very quickly became a star, and of course a star could not scintillate in the poky little flat she had so far occupied. She moved to a more fashionable quarter, and occupied a flat the rent of which was rather more than her salary alone. She developed more expensive tastes, and nearly always kept a taxi-cab waiting for her at stage-doors and restaurants.

At this time Paul began to realise that he was living considerably above his income. It would be necessary to reduce it by breaking into his capital. He sold some house property and paid Diane’s debts and bought her a pearl pendant.

“Next month she will be my wife,” he thought, “and then I shall be able more easily to curb these extravagancies.”

But when the next month came Diane was at the height of her success. She had been given more to do in the revue, and her imitations were drawing the town. The management raised her salary. Her head was completely turned.

“Oh, no, no, no! dear heart,” she exclaimed. “Not this month. At the end of the season. It would be imbecile when I have all Paris at my feet.”

Paul begged and urged her to re-consider, but she was obdurate. She continued the same life, only that her tastes became more and more extravagant. And one day Paul took her to task.

“My angel-flower,” he said, “we must not go on like this. All the savings for our wedding are vanishing. I am eating into my capital. We shall be ruined.”

“But, my little love,” replied Diane, “I spend so little. Why, you should see the electric brougham Zénie at the Folies Bergères has. Besides, next year, or perhaps before, they will have to double my salary.”

“Yes, but in the meantime——?”

“In the meantime your little girl shall kiss away your naughty fears.”

And of course Diane soon had an electric brougham of her own. The more salary she had, the more it seemed to cost Paul. He was receiving merely a nominal salary himself from Messrs. Manson et Cie, where he was little more than a pupil. However, at that time he managed to get a small increase, and invested a good bulk of his patrimony in a rubber company that a very astute business friend advised him about. If the shares went up considerably he might sell out, and reimburse himself for all these inroads on his capital.

In the meantime a disturbing element crept into his love affair. A depraved young fop, the Marquis de Lavernal, appeared on the scene. He was one of these young men who have plenty of money and frequent stage-doors. He was introduced by Babette, whom he almost immediately forsook for Diane. He called upon her, left more expensive flowers and chocolates than Paul could afford, and one day took her to Longchamps in his car.

Paul was furious.

“This man must not come here,” he exclaimed. “I shall kill him!”

“Oo-oh! but why? He is quite a nice boy. He is nothing to me. He is Babette’s friend.”

“I don’t trust him. I won’t have him here. Do you understand, Diane? I love you so, I am distracted when that kind of person speaks to you!”

“Oo-oh!”

Diane promised not to see him again alone, but Paul was dubious. The trouble was that he did not know what went on in the daytime. In the evening he could to a certain extent protect her. But in the daytime—that raven! that ogre! that blood-sucker! He was the kind of man who had the *entrée* of all theatres, both the back and the front. He went about with parties of girls. Diane explained that it was impossible sometimes not to meet him. He was always with her friends.

At the end of July Paul had a stroke of fortune. The rubber shares he had bought went up with a great boom, quite suddenly. He sold out and netted a considerable sum. And then he had a brilliant inspiration. He would tell Diane nothing of this. He had plans of his own.

One day he took the train and went down to see his prospective father-in-law at the “Moulin d’Or.” The old man was wheezier than ever, but very cordial and friendly.

“Well, my boy, how goes it?” he asked.

“Excellently,” said Paul. “Now, father-in-law, I have a proposition to make. Diane and I are to be married after the summer season. It has always been her ambition to live at the ‘Moulin d’Or.’ But she has spoken of improvements. I want to suggest to you with all respect that you allow me to make those improvements. I would like to do it without her knowing it, and then to bring her down as a great surprise.”

“Well, well, very agreeable, I’m sure. And why not? It would be very charming!”

“I suggest building a new wing, with a dancing-hall and several nice bedrooms, and a garage; and laying out the gardens more suitably.”

“Well, good! It would be very desirable, and conducive to good business. You may rely upon me to assist you in your project, Monsieur Paul.”

“I am indeed grateful to you, Monsieur Couturier.”

Paul returned to Paris in high spirits. He made plans of the suggested alterations on the back of an envelope, in the train. The next morning he went to an eminent firm of contractors. So feverish was he in his demands that he persuaded them to send a manager down that very day to take

particulars and prepare the estimate. The work was commenced the same week.

In the meantime, Diane had bought some expensive little dogs, because Fleurie at the Odéon kept expensive little dogs, and a new silver tea-service because Lucie Castille at the Moulin Rouge had a silver tea-service. And Paul was surprised because neither of the accounts for these luxuries was sent to him. Diane said she had paid for them herself, but the little demons of jealousy were still gnawing away at his heart.

The revue was to terminate at the end of the third week in August, and Paul said:

“And then, my love, we will marry quietly in Paris, and then we will do the grand tour. We will go to Nice, and Rome, and Vienna, and commence our eternal honeymoon at the ‘Moulin d’Or.’ ”

Diane clapped her hands.

“Won’t that be beautiful, my beloved!” she exclaimed, and she twined her sinuous arms around his neck. “Fancy! just you and I alone at the dear ‘Moulin d’Or’! Ah! and then we will go to Venice, and to Munich. Good gracious! it will be soon time to think about the frocks and trousseau!”

Paul’s heart swelled. The trousseau! Diane was becoming serious. There had been moments when he had doubted whether she meant to marry him at all, but—the trousseau! Why, yes, the matter must be attended to at once. They spent three weeks buying Diane’s trousseau. Nearly every day she thought of something fresh, some little trifle that was quite indispensable. When the bills came in they amounted to twenty-two thousand francs! Paul was aghast. He had no idea it was possible to spend so much on those flimsy fabrics. And furniture had yet to be purchased. He went to his astute business friend again, and begged for some enticing investment. He was recommended a Nicaraguan Company that was just starting. They had acquired the rights of a new method of refining oil. It was going to be a big thing. With the exception of a sum of money to pay for the improvements at the “Moulin d’Or” Paul put practically the whole of his capital into the Nicaraguan Company.

Nearly every day he called at the contractor’s, or sent frenzied telegrams to Monsieur Couturier to inquire how the work was progressing. At length he received a verbal promise that the whole thing would be completed by about the twentieth of September.

Excellent! That would fit in admirably. It would give him a month's honeymoon with his beautiful Diane, and then, one glorious September evening, he would drive up the hill, and jumping out of the car in the new drive he would be able to exclaim:

“Behold! Do not all your dreams come true?”

And Diane would fling her arms round his neck, and the old father would come toddling out and find them in that position, and he would probably weep, and it would all be very beautiful.

A few days later there was a rather distressing incident. Quite on her own responsibility Diane ordered a suite of Louis XVI furniture. They were fabulously expensive copies. Paul had nothing like enough money to pay for it. He did not want to sell his Nicaraguan shares. In fact, he had only just applied for them. He protested vehemently:

“But, my dear, you ought not to have done this! It is ruinous. We cannot afford it.”

“But, my Carlo, one must sit down!”

“One need not pay fifteen thousand francs to sit down!”

“Oo-oh!”

Paul knew the evidence of approaching tears, and he endeavoured to stem the tide. In the end he went to a money-lender and borrowed the money at an abnormal rate of interest, and then he went to Diane and said:

“My beloved, you must promise me not to spend any more money without my consent. The consequences may be serious. My affairs are already getting very involved. You must promise me.”

Diane promised, and the next day drove up to his office in a great state of excitement. Bonnat had been to see her. They wanted to take the revue for a two months' tour to Brittany and Normandy, commencing at Dinard on August 22nd. He had offered her dazzling terms. She simply must go. It might be her last chance. The wedding must be postponed till the end of October. Paul protested, and they both became angry and cried before two other clerks in Messrs. Manson's office. They parted without anything being settled. When he saw her at night after the theatre, she had signed the contract. And Paul returned to his rooms, and bit his pillow with remorse and grief.

On the twenty-first of August Diane locked up her trousseau, and the furniture, and left with the company for Dinard. And Paul wrote to her every

day, and she replied once a week, and occasionally sent him a telegram announcing a prodigious success. Only occasionally did he get an opportunity of going to her over a week-end. The journeys were very long and he resented spending the money. In only one way did he derive any satisfaction from that tour. The building work—like all building work—could not possibly be completed in the time specified. If they had arrived there on the 21st September, his beautiful Diane would have found the place all bricks and mortar and muddle. As it was, it would be comfortably finished by the middle of October.

When not going to Diane he would spend Sunday with Monsieur Couturier, who was keenly excited about the improvement to his inn. It was going to be very good for the business. All the countryside spoke of it. The patron of the “Colonne de Bronze,” further down the hill, was furious, and this was naturally a matter of satisfaction to Monsieur Couturier. He was proud of and devoted to his future son-in-law.

At the end of September came the great blow. Paul heard of it first through the newspapers. The Nicaraguan Company had failed. The refining process had proved efficient, but far more expensive to work than any other refining process. The company was wound up, and the shareholders received about 2½ per cent on their investments. Paul was practically ruined. He would have to pay for the building of the “Moulin d’Or.” Beyond that he had only a few thousand francs, and he had to meet the promissory note of the money-lenders. He wrote to Diane and confessed the whole story. She sent him a telegram which simply said: “Courage! courage!”

He wore the telegram inside his shirt for three days, till it got rather too dilapidated. Then he concentrated on his work. Yes! he would have courage. He would build up again. Diane trusted him. In any case, they could sell the furniture and go and live at the “Moulin d’Or.” He wrote her long letters full of his schemes. On October the twelfth the work was completed, and he went down and spent two days and nights with Monsieur Couturier. Diane was to return to Paris on the fifteenth. Monsieur Couturier was full of sympathy and courage. They talked far into the night of how they would manage. With the increase of business assured, the inn would no doubt support the three of them. There were great possibilities, and Paul was young and energetic. Nothing mattered so long as his Diane believed in him.

The night before he returned to Paris he went for a walk in the woods by himself. He visualised the days to come, the walks with Diane, the tender moments when they held each other’s hands; he could see their children toddling hand in hand through the woods, picking flowers. In an ecstasy he

rushed to a thick bush, and picked a bunch of red berries. He would take them to Diane. They would be the symbols of their new life. Wild flowers from their home, not exotic town-bred things. It was all going to be joy . . . joy . . . joy!

He ran back to the inn, and spent a sleepless night, dreaming of Diane and the days and nights to come.

In the morning came a letter from Messrs. Manson et Cie. His dealings with the money-lenders had been disclosed. His services were no longer desirable.

Well, there it was! It would take more than that to crush him in ecstatic mood. He would start again. He would begin by helping Monsieur Couturier to run the inn.

He returned to Paris late in the evening. He would go to Diane's flat after she had returned from the theatre. She would be a little sleepy, and comfortable, and comforting. She would wear one of those loose, clinging, silky things, and she would take him in her arms, and he would let down her beautiful dark blue-black hair, and then he would make her a coronet of the red berries. He would make her his queen. . . .

He was too agitated to dine that evening. He walked the streets of Paris, clasping the red berries wrapped in tissue paper. He kept thinking:

“Now she is resting between the acts. Now she is dancing a *pas seul* in the second act. Now she is giving her imitation of Yvette Guilbert. Now she is taking a call. Now the manager speaks to her, congratulating her—curse him! Now she awaits her cue to go on again.”

He was infinitely patient. He restrained his wild impetus to rush to the theatre. He hung about the streets. He meant to stage-manage his effect with discretion. He waited some time after the theatre was closed. Then, very slowly, he walked in the direction of her flat. As he mounted the stairs, he began to realise that he was very exhausted. He wished that he had not foregone his dinner. However, after the first rapturous meeting with Diane, he would take a glass of wine. Very quietly he slipped the key in the lock, and let himself in. (He had always had a key of Diane's flat, which was in effect *his* flat.) Directly he had passed the door he heard loud sounds of laughter. He swore inwardly. How aggravating! Diane had brought home some of her friends! There were evidently a good many of them, from the noise and ribaldry. In the passage were several bottles and glasses. He crept along silently to the *portière* concealing the *salon*. He could hear Diane's

voice. She was speaking, and between each sentence the company screamed with laughter. Ah! she was entertaining them with one of her famous imitations. He stood there and listened. He made a tiny crack in the curtain and peeped through. Diane was doing a funny little strut, and speaking in a peculiar way. He listened and watched for three or four minutes before he realised the truth of what he saw and heard. And when he did realise it, he had to exert his utmost will-power to prevent himself from fainting.

The person that Diane was imitating was—*himself!*

The realisation seemed to be bludgeoned into him, assisted by a round of ironic cheers. People were calling out:

“*Brava! brava! Diane!*”

He heard Babette say:

“Where is the little end-of-a-man?”

And Diane’s voice reply:

“Oh, he is coming back soon, I believe. I forget when.”

A man’s voice—he believed it was the Marquis de Lavernal’s—exclaimed:

“And when is our Diane going to marry it?”

Diane, very emphatically:

“Do not distress yourself, my dear; he’s lost all his money.”

A roar of laughter drowned conversation, and Paul groped his way along the passage, still clutching the red berries. He reached the door. Then he reconsidered the matter. He crept back to her bedroom. He placed the berries under the coverlet, and taking a sheet of paper, he wrote one word on it: “Good-bye.”

He placed this on the berries, and then stole out into the night.

Paul was then twenty-two, and his life was finished. He was a crushed and broken man. He wandered the streets of Paris all night. He spent hours grimly watching the enticing waters of the Seine, the friend and comforter of so many broken hearts. At dawn he returned to his own apartment. He slept for several hours, and then woke up in a fever. He was very ill for some weeks.

But one must not despair for ever. At the end of that time, he pulled himself together, and went out and sought employment. He eventually got a

situation as a junior clerk in a wholesale stores, and he went back to live at the old *pension* near the Luxembourg, and he resumed his friendship with Lucile. And in two years' time he married Lucile. And then his life began. His life began. His life began. And lo! here was Lucile walking slowly up the hill, arm in arm with her daughter Louise. Yes, his life began. . . .

"Ah! there you are! What did I say?" exclaimed Louise. "He's been asleep!"

"And we've had such an interesting time," added Madame Roget, panting with exertion. "We've been to the inn."

"And there's such a pretty girl there," continued the daughter. "You'd fall in love with her, papa."

"Is she very dark?" asked Monsieur Roget.

"Yes; she has blue-black hair and beautiful dark eyes."

"Good God!"

"I knew he would be interested. She gave us some milk, and she has been telling us her story. She's quite young, and she owns the inn, although it's very hard work to run it, she says. She only has one woman and a potman. Her mother was a famous actress, who made a lot of money and bought the inn and improved it. She died when Mademoiselle was fifteen."

"Who was her father?"

"I don't know. I rather gather that her father was a bad lot. He died, too."

"How old is she?"

"Not much more than twenty."

"Then her mother must have been thirty-nine when she died."

"What makes you say so?"

"Of course she must have been. What happened to the old man?"

"What old man?"

"Her grandfather."

"What are you talking about, papa? I don't believe you're quite awake yet."

"She must have had a grandfather. Everybody has a grandfather."

"Well, of course. But——"

“Then he must be either dead or alive.”

“How tiresome you are! We must be going. The others are waiting for us lower down the hill.”

Monsieur Roget struggled to his feet, and shook the little dead fronds of fern from his clothes, and his wife dusted him down behind.

“We shall be going back past the inn,” she said.

“The inn! Why can’t we go the other way? The way we came?”

“Don’t be so absurd. What does it matter? The others are awaiting us.”

They went slowly down the hill, and came in sight of the “Moulin d’Or.”

“Isn’t it disgusting,” remarked Louise, “how these speculative builders are always spoiling these old inns?”

“I don’t see it’s spoilt,” answered her father petulantly.

“You are ridiculous, papa! Anyone can see the inn isn’t half so nice as it was.”

As they approached the forecourt of the inn, a girl came out carrying a pail. She had dark eyes, blue-black hair, and a swinging carriage. Yes, yes, there was no doubt about it. She was the spit and image of her mother.

As she approached she smiled pleasantly, and said:

“Good evening, *mesdames*; a pleasant journey. Good evening, monsieur.”

The ladies returned a friendly greeting, and Monsieur Roget suddenly turned to the girl and said:

“Is your grandfather alive or dead?”

She continued smiling, and replied:

“I do not remember my grandfather, monsieur.”

No, perhaps not; it was thirty-seven years ago, and old Couturier was an old man then. Perhaps not.

“Papa, can’t you see she’s going to the well to fetch water? Why don’t you offer to help her?”

“Eh? No, I’m not going. Let her fetch it herself!”

“Papa!”

They walked on in silence till well out of hearing, when Louise exclaimed:

“Really, papa, I can’t understand you. So ungallant! It’s not like you. You ought to have offered to fetch the water for her, even if she refused.”

“Eh? Oh, no! I wasn’t going. Very dangerous. You might fall down and sprain your ankle. Oh, no! Or she might fall down, or something. It’s very slippery up there by the well. You’re not going to get me to do it. Let her fetch her own water. Oh, no! no, no, no, no!”

“Louise, dear,” remarked Madame Roget. “Let us hurry. Your father is most queer. I always warn him, but it is no good. If he sleeps in the afternoon he always gets an indisposition.”

“OLD FAGS”

The boys called him “Old Fags,” and the reason was not far to seek. He occupied a room in a block of tenements off Lisson Grove, bearing the somewhat grandiloquent title of Bolingbroke Buildings, and conspicuous among the many doubtful callings that occupied his time was one in which he issued forth with a deplorable old canvas sack, which, after a day’s peregrination along the gutters, he would manage to partly fill with cigar and cigarette ends. The exact means by which he managed to convert this patiently gathered garbage into the wherewithal to support his disreputable body nobody took the trouble to enquire. Neither were their interests any further aroused by the disposal of the contents of the same sack when he returned with the gleanings of dustbins distributed thoughtfully at intervals along certain thoroughfares by a maternal borough council.

No one had ever penetrated to the inside of his room, but the general opinion in Bolingbroke Buildings was that he managed to live in a state of comfortable filth. And Mrs. Read, who lived in the room opposite, No. 477, with her four children was of opinion that “Old Fags ’ad ’oarded up a bit.” He certainly never seemed to be behind with the payment of the weekly three-and-sixpence that entitled him to the sole enjoyment of No. 475, and when the door was opened, among the curious blend of odours that issued forth, that of onions and other luxuries of this sort was undeniable.

Nevertheless, he was not a popular figure in the Buildings. Many, in fact, looked upon him as a social blot on the Bolingbroke escutcheon. The inhabitants were mostly labourers and their wives, charwomen and lady helps, dressmakers’ assistants; and several mechanics. There was a vague tentative effort among a great body of them to be a little respectable, and among some even to be clean.

No such uncomfortable considerations hampered the movements of Old Fags. He was frankly and ostentatiously a social derelict. He had no pride and no shame. He shuffled out in the morning, his blotchy face covered with dirt and black hair, his threadbare green clothes tattered and in rags, the toes all too visible through his forlorn-looking boots. He was rather a large man with a fat, flabby person and a shiny face that was over-affable and bleary through a too constant attention to the gin bottle. He had a habit of ceaseless talk. He talked and chuckled to himself all the time, he talked to every one he met in an undercurrent of jeering affability. Sometimes he would retire to

his room with a gin bottle for days together and then (the walls at Bolingbroke Buildings are not very thick) he would be heard to talk and chuckle and snore alternately, until the percolating atmosphere of stewed onions heralded the fact that Old Fags was shortly on the war-path again.

He would meet Mrs. Read with her children on the stairs and would mutter, "Oh, here we are again! All these dear little children been out for a walk, eh? Oh, these dear little children!" and he would pat one of them gaily on the head.

And Mrs. Read would say: "'Ere, you keep your filthy 'ands off my kids, you dirty old swine, or I'll catch you a swipe over the mouth!"

And Old Fags would shuffle off muttering: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! these dear little children! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

And the boys would call after him and even throw orange peel and other things at him, but nothing seemed to disturb the serenity of Old Fags. Even when young Charlie Good threw a dead mouse that hit him on the chin he only said: "Oh, these boys! these *boys!*"

Quarrels, noise and bad odours were the prevailing characteristics of Bolingbroke Buildings and Old Fags, though contributing in some degree to the latter quality, rode serenely through the other two in spite of multiform aggression. The penetrating intensity of his onion stews had driven two lodgers already from No. 476, and was again a source of aggravation to the present holders, old Mrs. Birdle and her daughter Minnie.

Minnie Birdle was what was known as a "tweeny" at a house in Hyde Park Square, but she lived at home. Her mistress—to whom she had never spoken, being engaged by the housekeeper—was Mrs. Bastien-Melland, a lady who owned a valuable collection of little dogs. These little dogs somehow gave Minnie an unfathomable sense of respectability. She loved to talk about them. She told Mrs. Read that her mistress paid "'undreds and 'undreds of pahnds for each of them." They were taken out every day by a groom on two leads of five—ten highly groomed, bustling, yapping, snapping, vicious little luxuries. Some had won prizes at dog shows, and two men were engaged for the sole purpose of ministering to their creature comforts.

The consciousness of working in a house which furnished such an exhibition of festive cultivation brought into sharp relief the degrading social condition of her next room neighbour.

Minnie hated Old Fags with a bitter hatred. She even wrote to a firm of lawyers who represented some remote landlord and complained of “the dirty habits of the old drunken wretch next door.” But she never received any answer to her complaint. It was known that Old Fags had lived there for seven years and paid his rent regularly.

Moreover, on one critical occasion, Mrs. Read, who had periods of rheumatic gout, and could not work, had got into hopeless financial straits, having reached the very limit of her borrowing capacity, and being three weeks in arrears with her rent, Old Fags had come over and had insisted on lending her fifteen shillings! Mrs. Read eventually paid it back, and the knowledge of the transaction further accentuated her animosity toward him.

One day Old Fags was returning from his dubious round and was passing through Hyde Park Square with his canvas bag slung over his back, when he ran into the cortège of little dogs under the control of Meads, the groom.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” muttered Old Fags to himself. “What dear little dogs! H’m! What dear little dogs!”

A minute later Minnie Birdle ran up the area steps and gave Meads a bright smile.

“Good-night, Mr. Meads,” she said.

Mr. Meads looked at her and said: “ ’Ullo! you off?”

“Yes!” she answered.

“Oh, well,” he said, “Good-night! Be good!”

They both sniggered and Minnie hurried down the street. Before she reached Lisson Grove Old Fags had caught her up.

“I say,” he said, getting into her stride. “What dear little dogs those are! Oh, dear! what dear little dogs!”

Minnie turned, and when she saw him her face flushed, and she said: “Oh, you go to hell!” with which unladylike expression she darted across the road and was lost to sight.

“Oh, these women!” said Old Fags to himself, “these *women!*”

It often happened after that Old Fags’s business carried him in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park Square, and he ran into the little dogs. One day he even ventured to address Meads, and to congratulate him on the beauty of

his canine protégés, an attention that elicited a very unsympathetic response, a response, in fact, that amounted to being told to “clear off.”

The incident of Old Fags running into this society was entirely accidental. It was due in part to the fact that the way lay through there to a tract of land in Paddington that Old Fags seemed to find peculiarly attractive. It was a neglected strip of ground by the railway that butted at one end on to a canal. It would have made quite a good siding but that it seemed somehow to have been overlooked by the railway company and to have become a dumping ground for tins and old refuse from the houses in the neighbourhood of Harrow Road. Old Fags would spend hours there alone with his canvas bag.

When winter came on there was a great wave of what the papers call “economic unrest.” There were strikes in three great industries, a political upheaval, and a severe “tightening of the money market.” All these misfortunes reacted on Bolingbroke Buildings. The dwellers became even more impecunious, and consequently more quarrelsome, more noisy and more malodorous. Rents were all in arrears, ejections were the order of the day, and borrowing became a tradition rather than an actuality. Want and hunger brooded over the dejected buildings. But still Old Fags came and went, carrying his shameless gin and permeating the passages with his onion stews.

Old Mrs. Birdle became bedridden and the support of room No. 476 fell on the shoulders of Minnie. The wages of a “tweeny” are not excessive, and the way in which she managed to support herself and her invalid mother must have excited the wonder of the other dwellers in the building if they had not had more pressing affairs of their own to think about. Minnie was a short, sallow little thing, with a rather full figure, and heavy grey eyes that somehow conveyed a sense of sleeping passion. She had a certain instinct for dress, a knack of putting some trinket in the right place, and of always being neat.

Mrs. Bastien-Melland had one day asked who she was. On being informed, her curiosity did not prompt her to push the matter further, and she did not speak to her, but the incident gave Minnie a better standing in the domestic household at Hyde Park Square. It was probably this attention that caused Meads, the head dog-groom, to cast an eye in her direction. It is certain that he did so, and, moreover, on a certain Thursday evening had taken her to a cinema performance in the Edgware Road. Such attention naturally gave rise to discussion and alas! to jealousy, for there was an under

housemaid and even a lady's maid who were not impervious to the attentions of the good-looking groom.

When Mrs. Bastien-Melland went to Egypt in January she took only three of the small dogs with her, for she could not be bothered with the society of a groom, and three dogs were as many as her two maids could spare time for after devoting their energies to Mrs. Bastien-Melland's toilette. Consequently, Meads was left behind, and was held directly responsible for seven, five Chows and two Pekinese, or, as he expressed it, "over a thousand pounds worth of dogs."

It was a position of enormous responsibility. They had to be fed on the very best food, all carefully prepared and cooked and in small quantities. They had to be taken for regular exercise and washed in specially prepared condiments. Moreover, at the slightest symptom of indisposition he was to telephone to Sir Andrew Fossiter, the great veterinary specialist, in Hanover Square. It is not to be wondered at that Meads became a person of considerable standing and envy, and that little Minnie Birdle was intensely flattered when he occasionally condescended to look in her direction. She had been in Mrs. Bastien-Melland's service now for seven months and the attentions of the dog-groom had not only been a matter of general observation for some time past, but had become a subject of reckless mirth and innuendo among the other servants.

One night she was hurrying home. Her mother had been rather worse than usual of late, and she was carrying a few scraps that the cook had given her. It was a wretched night and she was not feeling well herself, a mood of tired dejection possessed her. She crossed the drab street off Lisson Grove and as she reached the curb her eye lighted on Old Fags. He did not see her. He was walking along the gutter patting the road occasionally with his stick.

She had not spoken to him since the occasion we have mentioned. For once he was not talking: his eyes were fixed in listless apathy on the road. As he passed she caught the angle of his chin silhouetted against the window of a shop. For the rest of her walk the haunting vision of that chin beneath the drawn cheeks, and the brooding hopelessness of those sunken eyes, kept recurring to her. Perhaps in some remote past he had been as good to look upon as Meads, the groom! Perhaps some one had cared for him! She tried to push this thought from her, but some chord in her nature seemed to have been awakened and to vibrate with an unaccountable sympathy toward this undesirable fellow-lodger.

She hurried home and in the night was ill. She could not go to Mrs. Melland's for three days and she wanted the money badly. When she got about again she was subject to fainting fits and sickness. On one such occasion, as she was going upstairs, at the Buildings, she felt faint, and leant against the wall just as Old Fags was going up. He stopped and said: "Hullo, now, what are we doing? Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" and she said: "It's all right, old 'un." These were the kindest words she had ever spoken to Old Fags.

During the next month there were strange symptoms about Minnie Birdle that caused considerable comment, and there were occasions when old Mrs. Birdle pulled herself together and became the active partner and waited on Minnie. On one such occasion Old Fags came home late and, after drawing a cork, varied his usual programme of talking and snoring by singing in a maudlin key, and old Mrs. Birdle came banging at his door and shrieked out: "Stop your row, you old——. My daughter is ill. Can't you hear?" And Old Fags came to his door and blinked at her and said: "Ill, is she? Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Would she like some stew, eh?" And old Mrs. Birdle said: "No, she don't want any of your muck," and bundled back. But they did not hear any more of Old Fags that night or any other night when Minnie came home queer.

Early in March Minnie got the sack from Hyde Park Square. Mrs. Melland was still away, having decided to winter in Rome; but the housekeeper assumed the responsibility of this action, and in writing to Mrs. Melland justified the course she had taken by saying that "she could not expect the other maids to work in the same house with an unmarried girl in that condition." Mrs. Melland, whose letter in reply was full of the serious illness of poor little Anisette (one of the Chows), that she had suffered in Egypt on account of a maid giving it too much rice with its boned chicken, and how much better it had been in Rome under the treatment of Doctor Lascati, made no special reference to the question of Minnie Birdle, only saying that "she was so sorry if Mrs. Bellingham was having trouble with these tiresome servants."

The spring came and the summer, and the two inhabitants of Room 476 eked out their miserable existence. One day Minnie would pull herself together and get a day's charing, and occasionally Mrs. Birdle would struggle along to a laundry in Maida Vale where a benevolent proprietress would pay her one shilling and threepence to do a day's ironing, for the old lady was rather neat with her hands. And once when things were very desperate the brother of a nephew from Walthamstow turned up. He was a small cabinet maker by trade, and he agreed to allow them three shillings a

week “till things righted themselves a bit.” But nothing was seen of Meads, the groom. One night Minnie was rather worse and the idea occurred to her that she would like to send a message to him. It was right that he should know. He had made no attempt to see her since she had left Mrs. Melland’s service. She lay awake thinking of him and wondering how she could send a message, when she suddenly thought of Old Fags. He had been quiet of late, whether the demand for cigarette ends was abating and he could not afford the luxuries that their disposal seemed to supply, or whether he was keeping quiet for any ulterior reason she was not able to determine.

In the morning she sent her mother across to ask him if he would “oblige by calling at Hyde Park Square and asking Mr. Meads if he would oblige by calling at 476, Bolingbroke Buildings, to see Miss Birdle.” There is no record of how Old Fags delivered this message, but it is known that that same afternoon Mr. Meads did call. He left about three-thirty in a great state of perturbation and in a very bad temper. He passed Old Fags on the stairs, and the only comment he made was: “I never have any luck! God help me!” and he did not return, although he had apparently promised to do so.

In a few weeks’ time the position of the occupants of Room 476 became desperate. It was, in fact, a desperate time all round. Work was scarce and money scarcer. Waves of ill-temper and depression swept Bolingbroke Buildings. Mrs. Read had gone—heavens knows where. Even Old Fags seemed at the end of his tether. True, he still managed to secure his inevitable bottle, but the stews became scarcer and less potent. All Mrs. Birdle’s time and energy were taken up in nursing Minnie, and the two somehow existed on the money now increased to four shillings a week, which the sympathetic cabinet maker from Walthamstow allowed them. The question of rent was shelved. Four shillings a week for two people means ceaseless gnawing hunger. The widow and her daughter lost pride and hope, and further messages to Mr. Meads failed to elicit any response. The widow became so desperate that she even asked Old Fags one night if he could spare a little stew for her daughter who was starving. The pungent odour of the hot food was too much for her. Old Fags came to the door.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” he said. “What trouble there is! Let’s see what we can do!”

He messed about for some time and then took it across to them. It was a strange concoction. Meat that it would have been difficult to know what to ask for at the butcher’s, and many bones, but the onions seemed to pull it together. To any one starving it was good. After that it became a sort of established thing—whenever Old Fags *had* a stew he sent some over to the

widow and daughter. But apparently things were not doing too well in the cigarette end trade, for the stews became more and more intermittent, and sometimes were desperately “boney.”

And then one night a terrible climax was reached. Old Fags was awakened in the night by fearful screams. There was a district nurse in the next room, and also a student from a great hospital. No one knows how it all affected Old Fags. He went out at a very unusual hour in the early morning, and seemed more garrulous and meandering in his speech. He stopped the widow in the passage and mumbled incomprehensible solicitude. Minnie was very ill for three days, but she recovered, faced by the insoluble proposition of feeding three mouths instead of two, and two of them requiring enormous quantities of milk.

This terrible crisis brought out many good qualities in various people. The cabinet maker sent ten shillings extra and others came forward as though driven by some race instinct. Old Fags disappeared for ten days after that. It was owing to an unfortunate incident in Hyde Park when he insisted on sleeping on a flower bed with a gin-bottle under his left arm, and on account of the uncompromising attitude that he took up toward a policeman in the matter. When he returned things were assuming their normal course. Mrs. Birdle’s greeting was:

“Ullo, old ’un, we’ve missed your stoos.”

But Old Fags had undoubtedly secured a more stable position in the eyes of the Birdles, and one day he was even allowed to see the baby.

He talked to it from the door. “Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” he said. “What a beautiful little baby! What a dear little baby! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”

The baby shrieked with unrestrained terror at sight of him, but that night some more stew was sent in.

Then the autumn came on. People whose romantic instincts had been touched at the arrival of the child gradually lost interest and fell away. The cabinet maker from Walthamstow wrote a long letter saying that after next week the payment of the four shillings would have to stop. He “hoped he had been of some help in their trouble, but that things were going on all right now. Of course he had to think of his own family first,” and so on. The lawyers of the remote landlord, who was assiduously killing stags in Scotland, “regretted that their client could not see his way to allow any further delay in the matter of the payment of rent due.” The position of the Birdle family became once more desperate. Old Mrs. Birdle had become

frailer, and though Minnie could now get about she found work difficult to obtain, owing to people's demand for a character from the last place. Their thoughts once more reverted to Meads, and Minnie lay in wait for him one morning as he was taking the dogs out. There was a very trying scene ending in a very vulgar quarrel, and Minnie came home and cried all the rest of the day and through half the night. Old Fags's stews became scarcer and less palatable. He, too, seemed in dire straits.

We now come to an incident that we are ashamed to say owes its inception to the effect of alcohol. It was a wretched morning in late October, bleak and foggy. The blue-grey corridors of Bolingbroke Buildings seemed to exude damp. The strident voices of the unkempt children quarrelling in the courtyard below permeated the whole Buildings. The strange odour that was its characteristic lay upon it like the foul breath of some evil god. All its inhabitants seemed hungry, wretched and vile. Their lives of constant protest seemed for the moment lulled to a sullen indifference, whilst they huddled behind their gloomy doors and listened to the rancorous railings of their offspring. The widow Birdle and her daughter sat silently in their room. The child was asleep. It had had its milk, and it would have to have its milk whatever happened. The crumbs from the bread the women had had at breakfast lay ungathered on the bare table. They were both hungry and very desperate. There was a knock at the door, Minnie went to it, and there stood Old Fags. He leered at them meekly and under his arm carried a gin-bottle three parts full.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said. "What a dreadful day! What a dreadful day! Will you have a little drop of gin to comfort you? Now! What do you say?"

Minnie looked at her mother; in other days the door would have been slammed in his face, but Old Fags had certainly been kind in the matter of the stews. They asked him to sit down. Then old Mrs. Birdle did accept "just a tiny drop" of gin, and they both persuaded Minnie to have a little. Now neither of the women had had food of any worth for days, and the gin went straight to their heads. It was already in Old Fags's head firmly established. The three immediately became garrulous. They all talked volubly and intimately. The women railed Old Fags about his dirt, but allowed that he had "a good 'eart." They talked longingly and lovingly about his "stoos," and Old Fags said:

"Well, my dears, you shall have the finest stoo you've ever had in your lives to-night."

He repeated this nine times, only each time the whole sentence sounded like one word. Then the conversation drifted to the child, and the hard lot of parents, and by a natural sequence to Meads, its father. Meads was discussed with considerable bitterness, and the constant reiteration of the threat by the women that they meant "to 'ave the lor on 'im all right," mingled with the jeering sophistries of Old Fags on the "genalman's behaviour," and the impossibility of expecting "a dog-groom to be sportsman," lasted a considerable time.

Old Fags talked expansively about "leaving it to him," and somehow as he stood there with his large puffy figure looming up in the dimly lighted room, and waving his long arms, he appeared to the women a figure of portentous significance. He typified powers they had not dreamt of. Under the veneer of his hide-bound depravity Minnie seemed to detect some slow-moving force trying to assert itself. He meandered on in a vague monologue, using terms and expressions they did not know the meaning of. He gave the impression of some fettered animal launching a fierce indictment against the fact of its life. At last he took up the gin-bottle and moved to the door and then leered round the room. "You shall have the finest stoo you've ever had in your life to-night, my dears!" He repeated this seven times again and then went heavily out.

That afternoon a very amazing fact was observed by several inhabitants of Bolingbroke Buildings. Old Fags washed his face! He went out about three o'clock without his sack. His face had certainly been cleaned up and his clothes seemed in some mysterious fashion to hold together. He went across Lisson Grove and made for Hyde Park Square. He hung about for nearly an hour at the corner, and then he saw a man come up the area steps of a house on the south side and walk rapidly away. Old Fags followed him. He took a turning sharp to the left through a mews and entered a narrow street at the end. There he entered a deserted-looking pub, kept by an ex-butler and his wife. He passed right through to a room at the back and called for some beer. Before it was brought Old Fags was seated at the next table ordering gin.

"Dear, oh dear! what a wretched day!" said Old Fags.

The groom grunted assent. But Old Fags was not to be put off by mere indifference. He broke ground on one or two subjects that interested the groom, one subject in particular being dog. He seemed to have a profound knowledge of dog, and before Mr. Meads quite realised what was happening he was trying gin in his beer at Old Fags's expense. The groom was feeling particularly morose that afternoon. His luck seemed out. Bookmakers had

appropriated several half-crowns that he sorely begrudged, and he had other expenses. The beer-gin mixture comforted him, and the rambling eloquence of the old fool who seemed disposed to be content paying for drinks and talking, fitted in with his mood.

They drank and talked for a full hour, and at length got to a subject that all men get to sooner or later if they drink and talk long enough—the subject of woman. Mr. Meads became confiding and philosophic. He talked of women in general and what triumphs and adventures he had had among them in particular. But what a trial and tribulation they had been to him in spite of all. Old Fags winked knowingly and was splendidly comprehensive and tolerant of Meads's peccadillos.

"It's all a game," said Meads. "You've got to manage 'em. There ain't much I don't know, old bird!"

Then suddenly Old Fags leaned forward in the dark room and said:

"No, Mr. Meads, but you ought to play the game, you know. Oh, dear, yes!"

"What do you mean, *Mister Meads*?" said that gentleman sharply.

"Minnie Birdle, eh? you haven't mentioned Minnie Birdle yet!" said Old Fags.

"What the devil are you talking about?" said Meads drunkenly.

"She's starving," said Old Fags, "starving, wretched, alone with her old mother and your child. Oh, dear! yes, it's terrible!"

Meads's eyes flashed with a sullen frenzy, but fear was gnawing at his heart, and he felt more disposed to placate this mysterious old man than to quarrel with him.

"I tell you I have no luck," he said after a pause. Old Fags looked at him gloomily and ordered some more gin. When it was brought he said:

"You ought to play the game, you know, Mr. Meads—after all—luck? Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Would you rather be the woman? Five shillings a week you know would——"

"No, I'm damned if I do!" cried Meads fiercely. "It's all right for all these women. Gawd! How do I know if it's true? Look here, old bird, do you know I'm already done in for two five bobs a week, eh? One up in Norfolk and the other at Enfield. Ten shillings a week of my—— money goes to these blasted women. No fear, no more, I'm through with it!"

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” said Old Fags, and he moved a little further into the shadow of the room and watched the groom out of the depths of his sunken eyes. But Meads’s courage was now fortified by the fumes of a large quantity of fiery alcohol, and he spoke witheringly of women in general and seemed disposed to quarrel if Old Fags disputed his right to place them in the position that Meads considered their right and natural position. But Old Fags gave no evidence of taking up the challenge: on the contrary, he seemed to suddenly shift his ground. He grinned and leered and nodded at Meads’s string of coarse sophistry, and suddenly he touched him on the arm and looked round the room and said very confidentially:

“Oh, dear! yes, Mr. Meads. Don’t take too much to heart what I said.”

And then he sniffed and whispered:

“I could put you on to a very nice thing, Mr. Meads. I could introduce you to a lady I know would take a fancy to you, and you to her. Oh, dear, yes!”

Meads pricked up his ears like a fox-terrier and his small eyes glittered.

“Oh!” he said. “Are you one of those, eh, old bird? Who is she?”

Old Fags took out a piece of paper and fumbled with a pencil. He then wrote down a name and address somewhere at Shepherd’s Bush.

“What’s a good time to call?” said Meads.

“Between six and seven,” answered Old Fags.

“Oh, hell!” said Meads, “I can’t do it. I’ve got to get back and take the dogs out at half-past five, old bird. From half-past five to half-past six. The missus is back, she’ll kick up a hell of a row.”

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” said Old Fags. “What a pity! The young lady is going away, too!”

He thought for a moment, and then an idea seemed to strike him.

“Look here, would you like me to meet you and take the dogs round the park till you return?”

“What!” said Meads. “Trust you with a thousand pounds’ worth of dogs! Not much!”

“No, no, of course not, I hadn’t thought of that!” said Old Fags humbly.

Meads looked at him, and it is very difficult to tell what it was about the old man that gave him a sudden feeling of complete trust. The ingenuity of

his speech, the ingratiating confidence that a mixture of beer-gin gives, tempered by the knowledge that famous pedigree Pekinese would be almost impossible to dispose of, perhaps it was a combination of these motives. In any case a riotous impulse drove him to fall in with Old Fags's suggestion, and he made the appointment for half-past five.

Evening had fallen early, and a fine rain was driving in fitful gusts when the two met at the corner of Hyde Park. There were ten little dogs on their lead, and Meads with a cap pulled close over his eyes.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" cried Old Fags as he approached. "What dear little dogs! What dear little dogs!"

Meads handed the lead over to Old Fags, and asked more precise instructions of the way to get to the address.

"What are you wearing that canvas sack inside your coat for, old bird, eh?" asked Meads, when these instructions had been given.

"Oh, my dear sir," said Old Fags. "If you had the asthma like I get it, and no underclothes on these damp days! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

He wheezed drearily and Meads gave him one or two more exhortations about the extreme care and tact he was to observe.

"Be very careful with that little Chow on the left lead. 'E's got his coat on, see? 'E's 'ad a chill and you must keep 'im on the move. Gently, see?"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Poor little chap! What's his name?" said Old Fags.

"Pelleas," answered Mr. Meads.

"Oh, poor little Pelleas! Poor little Pelleas! Come along. You won't be too long, Mr. Meads, will you?"

"You bet I won't," said the groom, and nodding he crossed the road rapidly and mounting a Shepherd's Bush motor-bus he set out on his journey to an address that didn't exist.

Old Fags ambled slowly round the Park, snuffling and talking to the dogs. He gauged the time when Meads would be somewhere about Queen's Road, then he ambled slowly back to the point from which he had started. With extreme care he piloted the small army across the high road and led them in the direction of Paddington. He drifted with leisurely confidence through a maze of small streets. Several people stopped and looked at the dogs, and the boys barked and mimicked them, but nobody took the trouble

to look at Old Fags. At length he came to a district where their presence seemed more conspicuous. Rows of squalid houses and advertisement hoardings. He slightly increased his pace, and a very stout policeman standing outside a funeral furnisher's glanced at him with a vague suspicion. However, in strict accordance with an ingrained officialism that hates to act "without instructions," he let the cortège pass. Old Fags wandered through a wretched street that seemed entirely peopled by children. Several of them came up and followed the dogs.

"Dear little dogs, aren't they? Oh my, yes, dear little dogs!" he said to the children. At last he reached a broad gloomy thoroughfare with low irregular buildings on one side, and an interminable length of hoardings on the other that screened a strip of land by the railway—land that harboured a wilderness of tins and garbage. Old Fags led the dogs along by the hoarding. It was very dark. Three children, who had been following, tired of the pastime, had drifted away. He went along once more. There was a gap in a hoarding on which was notified that "Pogram's Landaulettes could be hired for the evening at an inclusive fee of two guineas. Telephone, 47901 Mayfair."

The meagre light from a street lamp thirty yards away revealed a colossal coloured picture of a very beautiful young man and woman stepping out of a car and entering a gorgeous restaurant, having evidently just enjoyed the advantage of this peerless luxury. Old Fags went on another forty yards and then returned. There was no one in sight.

"Oh, dear little dogs," he said. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What dear little dogs! Just through here, my pretty pets. Gently, Pelleas! Gently, very gently! There, there, there! Oh, what dear little dogs!"

He stumbled forward through the quagmire of desolation, picking his way as though familiar with every inch of the ground, to the further corner where it was even darker, and where the noise of shunting freight trains drowned every other murmur of the night.

It was eight o'clock when Old Fags reached his room in Bolingbroke Buildings carrying his heavily laden sack across his shoulders. The child in Room 476 had been peevish and fretful all the afternoon and the two women were lying down exhausted. They heard Old Fags come in. He seemed very busy, banging about with bottles and tins and alternately coughing and wheezing. But soon the potent aroma of onions reached their nostrils and they knew he was preparing to keep his word.

At nine o'clock he staggered across with a steaming saucepan of hot stew. In contrast to the morning's conversation, which though devoid of self-consciousness, had taken on at times an air of moribund analysis, making little stabs at fundamental things, the evening passed off on a note of almost joyous levity. The stew was extremely good to the starving women, and Old Fags developed a vein of fantastic pleasantry. He talked unceasingly, sometimes on things they understood, sometimes on matters of which they were entirely ignorant and sometimes he appeared to them obtuse, maudlin and incoherent.

Nevertheless, he brought to their room a certain light-hearted raillery that had never visited it before. No mention was made of Meads. The only blemish to the serenity of this bizarre supper party was that Old Fags developed intervals of violent coughing, intervals when he had to walk around the room and beat his chest. These fits had the unfortunate result of waking the baby. When this undesirable result had occurred for the fourth time Old Fags said:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! This won't do! Oh, no, this won't do. I must go back to my hotel!" a remark that caused paroxysms of mirth to old Mrs. Birdle.

Nevertheless, Old Fags retired and it was then just on eleven o'clock. The women went to bed, and all through the night Minnie heard the old man coughing. And while he is lying in this unfortunate condition let us follow the movements of Mr. Meads.

Meads jumped off the 'bus at Shepherd's Bush and hurried quickly in the direction that Old Fags had instructed him. He asked three people for the Pomeranian Road before an errand boy told him that he "believed it was somewhere off Giles Avenue," but at Giles Avenue no one seemed to know it. He retraced his steps in a very bad temper and inquired again. Five other people had never heard of it. So he went to a post office and a young lady in charge informed him that there was no such road in the neighbourhood.

He tried other roads whose names vaguely resembled it, then he came to the conclusion that "that blamed old fool had made a silly mistake." He took a 'bus back with a curious fear gnawing at the pit of his stomach, a fear that he kept thrusting back; he dare not allow himself to contemplate it. It was nearly seven-thirty when he got back to Hyde Park and his eye quickly scanned the length of railing near which Old Fags was to be. Immediately that he saw no sign of him or the little dogs, a horrible feeling of physical sickness assailed him. The whole truth flashed through his mind. He saw the

fabric of his life crumble to dust. He was conscious of visions of past acts and misdeeds tumbling over each other in a furious kaleidoscope.

The groom was terribly frightened. Mrs. Bastien-Melland would be in at eight o'clock to dinner, and the first thing she would ask for would be the little dogs. They were never supposed to go out after dark, but he had been busy that afternoon and arranged to take them out later. How was he to account for himself and their loss? He visualized himself in a dock, and all sorts of other horrid things coming up—a forged character, an affair in Norfolk and another at Enfield, and a little trouble with a bookmaker seven years ago. For he felt convinced that the dogs had gone for ever, and Old Fags with them.

He cursed blindly in his soul at his foul luck and the wretched inclination that had lured him to drink “beer-gin” with the old thief. Forms of terrific vengeance passed through his mind, if he should meet the old devil again. In the meantime what should he do? He had never even thought of making Old Fags give him any sort of address. He dared not go back to Hyde Park Square without the dogs. He ran breathlessly up and down peering in every direction. Eight o'clock came and there was still no sign! Suddenly he remembered Minnie Birdle. He remembered that the old ruffian had mentioned and seemed to know Minnie Birdle. It was a connection that he had hoped to have wiped out of his life, but the case was desperate.

Curiously enough, during his desultory courtship of Minnie he had never been to her home, but on the only occasion when he had visited it, after the birth of the child, he had done so under the influence of three pints of beer, and he hadn't the faintest recollection now of the number of the block. He hurried there, however, in feverish trepidation. Now Bolingbroke Buildings harbour some eight hundred people, and it is a remarkable fact that although the Birdles had lived there about a year, of the eleven people that Meads asked not one happened to know the name. People develop a profound sense of self-concentration in Bolingbroke Buildings. Meads wandered up all the stairs and through the slate-tile passages. Twice he passed their door without knowing it: on the first occasion only five minutes after Old Fags had carried a saucepan of steaming stew from No. 475 to No. 476.

At ten o'clock he gave it up. He had four shillings on him and he adjourned to a small “pub.” hard by and ordered a tankard of ale, and, as an afterthought, three pennyworth of gin which he mixed in it. Probably he thought that this mixture, which was so directly responsible for the train of tragic circumstances that encompassed him, might continue to act in some manner toward a more desirable conclusion. It did indeed drive him to

action of a sort, for he sat there drinking and smoking Navy Cut cigarettes, and by degrees he evolved a most engaging but impossible story of being lured to the river by three men and chloroformed, and when he came to, finding that the dogs and the men had gone. He drank a further quantity of “beer-gin” and rehearsed his role in detail, and at length brought himself to the point of facing Mrs. Bastien-Melland. . . .

It was the most terrifying ordeal of his life. The servants frightened him for a start. They almost shrieked when they saw him and drew back. Mrs. Bastien-Melland had left word that he was to go to a breakfast-room in the basement directly he came in and she would see him. There was a small dinner-party on that evening and an agitated game of bridge. Meads had not stood on the hearthrug of the breakfast-room two minutes before he heard the foreboding swish of skirts, the door burst open and Mrs. Bastien-Melland stood before him, a thing of penetrating perfumes, high-lights and trepidation.

She just said “Well!” and fixed her hard bright eyes on him. Meads launched forth into his improbable story, but he dared not look at her. He tried to gather together the pieces of the tale he had so carefully rehearsed in the “pub.,” but he felt like some helpless barque at the mercy of a hostile battle fleet, the searchlights of Mrs. Melland’s cruel eyes were concentrated on him, while a flotilla of small diamonds on her heaving bosom winked and glittered with a dangerous insolence. He was stumbling over a phrase about the effects of chloroform when he became aware that Mrs. Melland was not listening to the matter of his story, she was only concerned with the manner. Her lips were set and her straining eyes insisted on catching his. He looked full at her and caught his breath and stopped.

Mrs. Melland still staring at him was moving slowly to the door. A moment of panic seized him. He mumbled something and also moved toward the door. Mrs. Melland was first to grip the handle. Meads made a wild dive and seized her wrist. But Mrs. Bastien-Melland came of a hard-riding Yorkshire family. She did not lose her head. She struck him across the mouth with her flat hand, and as he reeled back she opened the door and called to the servants. Suddenly Meads remembered that the rooms had a French window onto the garden. He pushed her clumsily against the door and sprang across the room. He clutched wildly at the bolts while Mrs. Melland’s voice was ringing out:

“Catch that man! Hold him! Catch thief!”

But before the other servants had had time to arrive he managed to get through the door and to pull it to after him. His hand was bleeding with cuts from broken glass, but he leapt the wall and got into the shadow of some shrubs three gardens away. He heard whistles blowing and the dominant voice of Mrs. Melland directing a hue-and-cry. He rested some moments, then panic seized him and he laboured over another wall and found the passage of a semi-detached house. A servant opened a door and looked out and screamed. He struck her wildly and unreasonably on the shoulder and rushed up some steps and got into a front garden. There was no one there and he darted into the street and across the road.

In a few minutes he was lost in a labyrinth of back streets and laughing hysterically to himself. He had two shillings and eightpence on him. He spent fourpence of this on whisky, and then another fourpence just before the pubs closed. He struggled vainly to formulate some definite plan of campaign. The only point that seemed terribly clear to him was that he must get away. He knew Mrs. Melland only too well. She would spare no trouble in hunting him down. She would exact the uttermost farthing. It meant gaol and ruin. The obvious impediment to getting away was that he had no money and no friends. He had not sufficient strength of character to face a tramp life. He had lived too long in the society of the pampered Pekinese. He loved comfort.

Out of the simmering tumult of his soul grew a very definite passion—the passion of hate. He developed a vast, bitter, scorching hatred for the person who had caused this ghastly climax to his unfortunate career—Old Fags. He went over the whole incidents of the day again, rapidly recalling every phase of Old Fags's conversation and manner. What a blind fool he was not to have seen through the filthy old swine's game! But what had he done with the dogs? Sold the lot for a pound, perhaps! The idea made Meads shiver. He slouched through the streets harbouring his pariah-like lust.

We will not attempt to record the psychological changes that harassed the soul of Mr. Meads during the next two days and nights, the ugly passions that stirred him and beat their wings against the night, the tentative intuitions urging toward some vague new start, the various compromises he made with himself, his weakness and inconsistency that found him bereft of any quality other than the sombre shadow of some ill-conceived revenge. We will only note that on the evening of the day we mention he turned up at Bolingbroke Buildings. His face was haggard and drawn, his eyes blood-shot and his clothes tattered and muddy. His appearance and demeanour was

unfortunately not so alien to the general character of Bolingbroke Buildings as to attract any particular attention, and he slunk like a wolf through the dreary passages and watched the people come and go.

It was at about a quarter to ten when he was going along a passage in Block "F" that he suddenly saw Minnie Birdle come out of one door and go into another. His small eyes glittered and he went on tiptoe. He waited till Minnie was quite silent in her room and then he went stealthily to Room 475. He tried the handle and it gave. He opened the door and peered in. There was a cheap tin lamp guttering on a box that dimly revealed a room of repulsive wretchedness. The furniture seemed mostly to consist of bottles and rags. But in one corner on a mattress he beheld the grinning face of his enemy—Old Fags. Meads shut the door silently and stood with his back to it.

"Oh!" he said. "So here we are at last, old bird, eh!"

This move was apparently a supremely successful dramatic coup, for Old Fags lay still, paralyzed with fear, no doubt.

"So this is our little 'ome, eh?" he continued, "where we bring little dogs and sell 'em. What have you got to say, you old——"

The groom's face blazed into a sudden accumulated fury. He thrust his chin forward and let forth a volley of frightful and blasting oaths. But Old Fags didn't answer; his shiny face seemed to be intensely amused with this outburst.

"We got to settle our little account, old bird, see?" and the suppressed fury of his voice denoted some physical climax. "Why the hell don't you answer?" he suddenly shrieked, and springing forward he lashed Old Fags across the cheek.

And then a terrible horror came over him. The cheek he had struck was as cold as marble and the head fell a little impotently to one side. Trembling, as though struck with an ague, the groom picked up the guttering lamp and held it close to the face of Old Fags. It was set in an impenetrable repose, the significance of which even the groom could not misunderstand. The features were calm and childlike, lit by a half smile of splendid tolerance that seemed to have overridden the temporary buffets of a queer world. Meads had no idea how long he stood there gazing horror-struck at the face of his enemy. He only knew that he was presently conscious that Minnie Birdle was standing by his side and as he looked at her, her gaze was fixed on Old Fags and a tear was trickling down either cheek.

“’E’s dead,” she said. “Old Fags is dead. ’E died this morning of noomonyer.”

She said this quite simply as though it was a statement that explained the wonder of her presence. She did not look at Meads or seem aware of him. He watched the flickering light from the lamp illumining the underside of her chin and nostrils and her quivering brows.

“’E’s dead,” she said again, and the statement seemed to come as an edict of dismissal as though love and hatred and revenge had no place in these fundamental things. Meads looked from her to the tousled head leaning slightly to one side of the mattress and he felt himself in the presence of forces he could not comprehend. He put the lamp back quietly on the box and tiptoed from the room.

Out once more in the night, his breath came quickly and a certain buoyancy drove him on. He dared not contemplate the terror of that threshold upon which he had almost trodden. He only knew that out of the surging maelstrom of irresolution some fate had gripped him. He walked with a certain elasticity in the direction of Millwall. There would be doss-houses and docks there and many a good ship that glided forth to strange lands, carrying human freight of whom few questions would be asked, for the ship wanted them to ease her way through the regenerating seas. . . .

And in the cold hours of the early dawn Minnie Birdle lay awake listening to the rhythmic breathing of her child. And she thought of that strange old man less terrible now in his mask of death than when she had first known him. No one to-morrow would follow him to his pauper’s grave, and yet at one time—who knows? She dared not speculate upon the tangled skein of this difficult life that had brought him to this. She only knew that somehow from it she had drawn a certain vibrant force that made her build a monster resolution. Her child! She would be strong, she would throw her frail body between it and the shafts of an unthinking world. She leant across it, listening intensely, then kissed the delicate down upon its skull, crooning with animal satisfaction at the smell of its warm soft flesh.

THE KIDNAPPED “GENERAL”

Jim Parker and I climbed a stile, walked a hundred yards along a sandy road, and came out on to a glorious common. The common was dotted with clumps of furze, gorse bushes, and beeches. Here and there a sandy pit broke the normal level of the landscape.

The origin of these weekly rambles of ours had been a mutual antipathy to golf. Paying the usual physical penalties of men who lead sedentary lives, we had each been advised by different doctors “to take up golf.” Now golf may be an excellent game——

I’m not going to argue about it. We did experiment, and lost an enormous number of balls in an incredibly short space of time, but the insistent admonition: “Ah, old man, what you ought to do is to play golf,” got on our nerves. We met in solemn conclave, and vowed that we would not be bullied into playing golf. Eventually we decided to absorb the benefits of golf without undergoing the nervous strain of chasing that absurd little white ball.

We rambled far afield. On this occasion we were just over the border in Buckinghamshire. Jim Parker sighed.

“I wonder they haven’t turned this into one of their beastly golf courses,” he said.

“Touch wood,” I answered. “We’re not across it yet.” But no, there was no golf course on this nameless common. It was a delightful and deserted spot. We walked across it for half a mile, when we came to a kind of dingle formed by the opening into a long, narrow sand-pit. We were just passing it when Jim remarked:

“There’s a queer habitation for you!”

I looked in the direction his stick was pointing, and beheld half-way up the dingle an odd-looking shanty in red and white.

“Um,” I answered. “Let’s go and have a look at it.”

We entered the dingle and approached the rustic dwelling. At first it appeared to be a double-storeyed cabin painted rather gaily, with pots of flowers hanging from a balcony. On closer inspection the truth became apparent. On the lower part of the dwelling, dim but quite perceptible, was

the word “General.” It was an old converted “General” motor-bus! The owner had certainly been rather clever about it. The wheels had either been removed or were buried in the sand. The lower part remained practically intact, except for a surrounding wooden platform. The upper part had been roofed in with timber, and a balcony built out, supported by wooden posts. The woodwork was painted white; there were chintz curtains at the windows, and flowers in profusion in pots and tubs. A gay little dwelling. It was, I suppose, deplorably bad manners for Jim Parker and me to stand there and laugh. But there was something about the association of the “General” with this obscure and picturesque retreat that was irresistible. We were still laughing when a man came out on to the lower platform and regarded us. He was a tall, strongly-built man, with a neat, pointed brown beard, close-cropped hair turning grey, cold blue eyes, and the skin of a man who lives in the open. He bowed to us gravely, and said:

“Good morning, gentlemen.”

We pulled ourselves together and responded. Then he added:

“I presume they have sent you from the inn to hear the story of the kidnapped General?”

It was the time of day when it was pleasant to hear that there was an inn in the offing, but we explained that we had come from the opposite direction, and that we were merely explorers, trying to escape from the tyranny of social custom. We had no intention of invading his privacy, but nevertheless the story of the kidnapped General promised an entertaining diversion.

“Come and sit on this bench in the shade,” said the sturdy individual. “I regret I have no liquid refreshment to offer you, other than water. My medical advisers——” He waved his hand in the direction of the dwelling as though the position explained itself. We all sat down and lighted our pipes.

“My name is McGregor,” he said quite simply—“William McGregor, but the story of the kidnapped General circles round the character of one Ronny Skinner—Captain Ronald Skinner of the Royal Engineers. Skinner his name was, but the boys called him Grinner. He was that—essentially. He was a man who grinned through life. He grinned through triumph and through disaster. He grinned through battle and when things went wrong. He grinned even when he was bullied or betrayed. He was an irrepressible grinner. A stocky, merry, jolly chunk of a man who never had any luck, except that he always managed to escape with his life. His war record would probably bore you, it was like so many others. He was up to his neck in it

the first week, temporarily attached to the R.F.A. as a motor-bike despatch rider. He was a wonderful chauffeur, and could drive any car. You may remember at that time they sent the despatch riders out in couples, one without lights carrying the despatches, the other lighted up as a decoy. Ronny was always the decoy. The war had only been on for five weeks when one night a shell blew his front wheel to pieces. He was captured by the Germans. He spent nine months in a concentration camp at Cassel. I believe he even grinned there. And then one day he and another man escaped, and got across the border into Switzerland. He reported and went back into the line. Does this bore you?"

"Not at all—most interesting," Jim Parker and I both interjected.

"He was over a year in Belgium, and he grinned when they removed a piece of shrapnel from the fleshy part of his thigh. 'Dashed lucky it didn't hit the bone,' he said. He grinned when they sent him to Salonika, and kept him hanging about for nine months in a fever-stricken marsh, playing football and cracking lice in his shirt. He even grinned in Gallipoli when the flood came and carried all his kit away, and he was eaten up by savage flying things and poisonous growing things. He didn't grin much when he really got the fever because he was unconscious most of the time. But he grinned when he found himself in a clean bed at Imbros. 'Golly! this is fine!' he said, and he hurried up to get well. He wrote to his girl in England. Did I tell you there was a girl? She was a pretty girl, the daughter of a wealthy provision merchant living quite near here. They were not officially engaged. He had very little money, and he had only just started his career when the war came. The father would not sanction it, and there was no mother. I can't tell you what he wrote to her, or what she wrote to him. But when her letters came he used to grin contentedly, so one assumes the girl was staunch. They sent him off to Egypt after that for another sixteen months and then back to Blighty. Jemini! didn't he grin when he saw the old white cliffs again! But that wasn't for long, mind you. In another month he was in France again.

"The fellow went through everything, right up to the retreat in March, 1918, and then the turn of the tide in July. Except for that one wound in his thigh he was never touched. When the end came he was in the army of occupation on the Rhine, grinning at the Boche housewives, and helping them hang out their clothes to air. And then they demobbed him and sent him back to England. In the meantime his father, who was an architectural sculptor, was ruined by the war. The old man had gone bankrupt, and was

living with a married sister, not much better off than himself. There was no one to help the boy.

“When the war started Ronny was nineteen. He was now nearly twenty-five, and he had had no training. He could do nothing except drive a car. London was flooded with unemployed ex-service men who could drive cars. He had to get a job anyway, and he went about grinning into all kinds of offices and warehouses. Nobody wanted him. The war was over, and the great need now was economy and retrenchment. The girl was still writing to him, and so he went on grinning and hoping. But the girl’s father forbade him to enter the house. He had made a lot of money during the war, and he wasn’t going to have his daughter thrown away on a penniless, out-of-work loafer. By God, no, he wasn’t.

“I don’t know how Skinner eventually managed to get the job he did. Things must have been getting pretty desperate, but one day he blossomed out into a beautiful blue uniform with white piping and large black buttons. He was a driver on a London General motor-bus. And there he was sitting up in his box, grinning for all he was worth, responding to the clang of the bell, swerving through the traffic in a most skilful way. The company recognized that he was a good driver, and he was very popular in the yard among the other men. One day he received quite a promotion. There was a special motor-bus that used to leave South Hampstead at five minutes to nine in the morning and run express to the City—no stop. They charged a shilling per skull for the trip, and it was very popular amongst stockbrokers and City merchants. The ’bus was always full, and the men were allowed to smoke inside. There was an express return journey in the evening at five-thirty. To Ronny Skinner fell the great honour of driving this ’bus. The conductor was a man named Eyles, and they were great pals.”

Mr. McGregor paused and looked at us, as though anxious to check the impression of his story on our faces. The impression apparently satisfied him, for he proceeded.

“I am now coming to the amazing crisis of this affair, which, although not kept secret, was never satisfactorily treated, or truthfully chronicled in the Press. It is not altogether surprising. Accounts varied, and when reported they usually appeared so incredible that cautious sub-editors were afraid of their papers being ridiculed. I was one of the few people who knew the truth, and even I never knew the whole truth. I have already told you that there was a woman in the case.

“Ronny Skinner drove that ’bus every day for just on four months. Every day there was almost identically the same crowd of men. They rushed up a few minutes before it started, with their newspapers and despatch-cases and pipes. They scrambled for the best seats, talked to each other or read their newspapers all the way down. They paid their shillings to the conductor but no one took the slightest notice of the driver. I don’t think any of them would have recognised him. The ’bus always started to the minute and arrived to the minute. There was never a hitch or an accident of any sort. And yet one day during the first week of July Skinner received a week’s notice. No reason was given. The notice merely stated that his services would not be required after the following Friday. The truth was that one of the directors of the company had written to the manager to say that a job had got to be found for a chauffeur who was in his employ, and whom he wanted to get rid of. This story got round. When Ronny heard it, he grinned and said: ‘Oh, well, I’ll have to look out for something else. That’s all!’ He’d been through the war, you see. . . . Now, one thing which affects this story is a letter he received a few days later. It will be better if I don’t tell you about this till later on. All that week Ronny grinned, and grinned, and grinned. There never was such a grin. And one night after the last trip he took Eyles out, and they went down town and did themselves well. The morning of his last day was a glorious summer’s day, just like this, gentlemen. The ’bus was there outside Finchley Road Station twenty minutes before its time, with Skinner and Eyles already aboard. The stockbrokers and City merchants began to assemble. It was a very full load, and not only was it full inside and out, but there were five standing up.

“Five minutes to nine—clang went the bell! Grrh! Grrh! went the starter. She was off. The stockbrokers started their usual early morning badinage, papers rustled, cigar smoke curled upwards. Everything was delightfully as usual. The ’bus went along at its usual pace past Swiss Cottage. A little farther on it took a turning to the right down-hill.

“‘How provoking!’ said the manager of a chain of tea-shops. ‘I suppose the road is up.’ Several of the others looked equally provoked, but no one was unduly alarmed. At the end of a few minutes, however, a curious sense of misgiving crept over the company. The ’bus had taken another turning to the right and *was going back in the direction from which it had come!*

“Exclamations were flying around. ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Why is he doing this?’ ‘Here, ring the bell.’ Eyles was appealed to, but he only looked bewildered. He rang the bell. No notice was taken of it. Some of them

tapped on the glass, but all they could see was Skinner's face, grinning furiously.

"In five minutes' time they were nearly a mile out of their course, and making for somewhere west of Golder's Green. The stockbrokers and City merchants began to get seriously alarmed. It was not only that the 'bus was out of its course, but it was being driven recklessly. It hardly slackened pace to go round corners. When impeded it dashed along on the wrong side of the road; it lurched through the traffic regardless of consequences. At one corner a policeman held up his hand to stop it, but the 'bus swerved past him, and at the last second he succumbed to the popular slogan of 'Safety First' and leapt out of the way. After that the 'bus went off the beaten track. It raced along side-streets, and was already getting out into the country. Now, I want you to get firmly fixed in your mind's eye the picture of that company of gentlemen being whirled away from their lawful occasions. I could give you the details of several specific cases. There was for instance, the chief cashier of a banking establishment in Lombard Street. He had the keys of the strong-room on him. It meant that the bank could do no business until he turned up. There was a barrister who had to defend a fraudulent company promoter at the Old Bailey at eleven o'clock. There was another man with six hundred and fifty pounds in cash in a bag. He had to pay off a ship's company down at Tilbury Docks at ten-thirty. The manager of the chain of tea-shops had to meet his directors at Cannon Street Hotel at ten, and render his annual report. There were innumerable board meeting appointments, business appointments, urgent affairs to be settled that morning, stocks to be disposed of, shares bought, certainties to be acted on, not even bookmakers to be overlooked, and here they all were rushing out into the country captive to the bow and spear (or shall we say wheel and lever?) of a madman!

"Englishmen as a rule have the reputation of taking this kind of adventure philosophically, but there was an element of outrage about this performance which infuriated them. Liberty of the subject indeed! It was the sudden realisation of their utter helplessness which led to a condition of pandemonium. All they could do was to ring the bell furiously all the time, bang on the window, and yell out: 'Stop! Stop!' The men on top were no better off. They tried to get at the driver, but he is protected by a solid canopy. They could not even see him. They began to yell out to the passers-by, but the noise was so uproarious and confused, the passers-by merely thought it was some picnic or excursion party cheering, and they cheered back in response and waved their hats. The mad thing got right away into the country. Eyles was being bullied and badgered, but he merely continued to look bewildered and to mutter, 'I don't know what's the matter with the

chap. *I can't stop him.*' Some of the passengers crowded the back-board with the idea of leaping off if the 'bus slackened its pace at all, but it never went slow enough for that. There was nothing to do but bawl, and yell, and argue. Jagged nerves led to internal dissensions. One man wanted to smash the window and knock the driver over the head, and when it was pointed out to him that such an action would almost inevitably lead to a wreck of the 'bus, or in any case to a very bad accident, he wanted to fight his opponents, and was only prevented from carrying out his project by being held down on the floor.

“The 'bus was scheduled to carry twenty-two passengers inside and twenty-four out. In addition to this were the five straphangers inside, making a total of fifty-one, of whom only three were women, one being the secretary to the editor of a financial paper, another a clerk in the Admiralty, and the third a lady with a summons to serve on a jury. The three women were neither better nor worse than the forty-eight men. The behaviour of the whole crowd of them can only be described as deplorable.

“I do not propose to weary you gentlemen with a detailed chronicle of the journey. Once well out into the country, the grin of Skinner became broader, the venomous expression of the passengers more menacing. All their business and other appointments had gone by the wind. They were collectively buoyed up by the anticipation of some sort of feral vengeance. They gave up hope of any immediate release and simply waited for the mad journey to end, as end it must. They rushed along the country roads, up and down hills, across commons, through little villages, scattering all before them. They ran over three fowls, a cat, and two geese. In one village the left mudguard struck the wheel of a milk-cart and hurled seventeen gallons of good milk into the roadway. These were the only tragedies of note. In other respects it was a perfectly successful and triumphant ride, reflecting the utmost credit on the man at the wheel. Nothing happened, I say, until they reached—this common. Coming round the bend where you gentlemen came, the car began gradually to slow up. When it reached the entrance to this dingle it was travelling at rather less than six miles an hour. Suddenly it turned, swerved to the left, raced up the dingle, and ran nose on into the sand with a pretty considerable bump. And there it stuck, and there it remains to this day.”

Parker and I uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and Mr. McGregor paused and critically examined the stem of his pipe.

“And then?” I asked breathlessly.

“Hats fell off, some of the men were jerked on to the floor, but no one was seriously hurt. When they realised that the tension was over, they scrambled off that ’bus like madmen. In a body they rushed round and bore down on the chauffeur. Then an unpleasant surprise awaited them. Skinner had already dismounted. He was standing clear of the car, with an insolent grin on his face. In either hand he held a six-chambered revolver. As the crowd approached, he called out: ‘Stand back!’

“Now, a panic-stricken crowd is liable to do all kinds of unreasonable things, but there is something about the glitter of a shiny little revolver that will steady the most rampageous. The stockbrokers and City merchants, armed with walking-sticks, newspapers, and despatch-cases drew back and wavered. A white-whiskered City accountant with heavy gold chains hanging over his pendulous stomach bawled out: ‘What the devil is the meaning of this outrage?’ Skinner called out: ‘Corporal Eyles, get all these men and women into line!’ There was then another disconcerting discovery. Eyles appeared from the rear of the ’bus also carrying a six-chamber. He drew himself up and saluted Skinner. Skinner acknowledged the salute, and then, turning to the crowd, he said, ‘There are fifty-one of you to two of us. With a little cohesion it would be possible for you to overcome us, but I assure you before that happened eighteen of you gentlemen would surely die. My friend, Corporal Eyles, who was with me during the first battle of the Marne will now get you into line. I will then address you from the top of the ’bus.’ A more remarkable sight has surely never been seen on an English common. One of the women became hysterical and ran away, and she was allowed to go. The rest, under cover of Eyles’ revolver, were drawn up in two lines of twenty-five. There they all stood, the oddest collection of sizes, and ages, and figures, in top-hats, and bowler hats, and Trilby hats, with newspapers tucked under their arms, holding bags and despatch-cases, and sticks and umbrellas. And the birds were singing overhead, just as they are to-day, gentlemen, and the bees were humming above the gorse. And there was Skinner, still in his driver’s uniform, standing commandingly on the top of that ridiculous red ’bus. There was a clamour of angry protest from those fifty throats, not unmixed with jeering and even a little laughter. It became necessary for Skinner to flash one of the horrid little revolvers to obtain complete silence. When this desirable condition had been obtained, he spoke in a loud, ringing voice: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, let me relieve your minds at once of what I know is the dominant fear that possesses you. Eyles and I have not brought you here to rob you. You shall return with all your property intact. Our exploit is rather a spiritual than a material one. We are doing it for your good. If we had not kidnapped you in this way you would now all

be grinding and grubbing away in the City, making money, losing it; planning to make it, planning to lose it; contributing nothing of any real importance to the human commonweal. And now here you are on a lovely common with all the day before you, and the sun above your heads. You do not see enough of Nature, you do not learn to live, you do not see facts as they are. You never give yourselves a chance. Your idea of visiting Nature is to motor down to some such place as this, and then create for yourselves a miniature arena of all the petty, fidgeting conditions of your City lives. You stoop over a little white ball. Isn't that the expression you use: "Keep your eye on the ball?" I ask you, gentlemen, don't keep your eye on the ball, but keep your eye on the stars above you. Soften your hearts, and, when you travel, think of the people who drive you; when you labour and profit and play, think of the people who minister to your necessities. I have mentioned that there are fifty of you to two of us. Well, that represents roughly the percentage of the non-combatant element in the Great War. Have you already forgotten that there was a great war, gentlemen? Have you already forgotten Eyles and me? or will you forget us to-morrow? Go, then, all of you, wander the fields and commons, and look into your hearts. Go, and be damned to you!' And without the slightest hesitation, he turned his revolver on to the crowd and fired point-blank into it!

"The panic that ensued is indescribable. The old man with the white whiskers leapt sideways, jumped and fell into a gorse bush, shot through the heart. No, that is not true, but that was the immediate impression. As a matter of fact he did fall into a gorse bush, but that was only because he caught his foot in a rut. With a wild yell the whole company fled helter-skelter out of the dingle and across the common, followed by shot after shot from three revolvers. None of them was to know that the three revolvers were only loaded with blank cartridges. Was there ever such a sight? Top-hats fell off and were not reclaimed, bags and sticks and newspapers were scattered hither and thither. Someone with experience yelled out: 'Scatter! Open out!' They *did* scatter, they *did* open out. Younger men were racing like the wind. Fat old gentlemen were tumbling into sand-pits. The two women were screaming and holding on to the men. The common was dotted with black figures, ducking, doubling, and yelling. No one turned to look back at the assailants. No one saw the broad grin on Skinner's face."

Mr. McGregor again paused, and then he remarked casually:

"We've shifted the position of the old 'bus a little since those days, and removed the wheels."

"We?" said Parker faintly.

Mr. McGregor seemed hesitating how to shape the crisis of his story.

“I have mentioned the letter,” he continued. “I cannot tell you the exact contents of the letter. You see, it was one of those sacred missives—a love-letter, and not written to me. But this I know. It came from the girl—this girl of Skinner’s. Her father had died suddenly, and forgotten to make a will. The daughter inherited his fortune. I think there was something in it about a special licence, something about Paris, something about the Italian Lakes. It may seem ironic that a man of Skinner’s character should accept money left by a war profiteer. On the other hand, it seemed not altogether unfair that this money should go back to a man who went through it all. I think the girl must have pointed it out to him in the letter. He grinned so happily.”

“But what happened when the stockbrokers scattered?” I asked.

“Everything was so easy after that. A parcel of clothes—two suits—was produced from beneath the front seat of the ’bus. The two men went behind some bushes in the dingle and changed. You see, the reason why Skinner had come to this particular common was because the girl lived at that little Georgian house just beyond the pine trees over there. You can’t see it from here, but it is less than ten minutes’ walk away. Thither they both went.”

“But we are still mystified, Mr. McGregor,” said Parker, noticing that our informant seemed inclined to leave off. “How is it that the ’bus is still here? Why are *you* living here? What action did the passengers take? and the company? Did Skinner get away?”

McGregor sighed pleasantly.

“Ronny Skinner is not the kind of man to go back on a pal. It may simplify things to you, gentlemen, if I tell you that my name is not McGregor—it is Eyles! Skinner did not have the slightest difficulty in getting away. No one recognised in the handsome young man who arrived at Cathay House any resemblance to the driver of the General. They had not even got his photograph, you see, to put in the *Daily Mail*. No one had noticed him very much. That is the advantage of being a nonentity. There was a half-hearted law case between the passengers and the company, but, as I have said, the majority were only too anxious to escape the ridicule which the case brought upon them. As for the ’bus itself, lawyers argued about it for nearly a year. It was so damaged that the company was not over-anxious to have it back. The local Commons Committee tried to make them. In the end it was found that Cathay House estate—that is to say, the girl—had certain rights over this particular dingle. The argument went on so long that the whole thing petered out. About a year later Skinner said to me: ‘Eyles,

old boy, here is a hundred pounds. You go and make that 'bus into a snug little retreat, and live there when you want a change.' And Skinner allows me two hundred a year to live on, for helping him in the exploit. And here I am!"

"You seem a very educated man for a corporal and a 'bus conductor," I remarked.

"My experience was almost identical to that of Skinner," said Eyles. "When the war broke out I was just leaving Charterhouse. I joined up as a private. When it was over I was twenty-four, with no training, and my people had all been ruined. There are lots of others, too, in our position."

Parker stood up and shook himself.

"Well, Mr. Eyles," he said. "I'm sure we are much obliged to you. It's a most amazing story, and it's delightful to know that it has a happy ending."

"Yes," answered Eyles. "It has a happy ending. I hope I haven't bored you. You'll find the inn a quarter of a mile past the cross roads."

We thanked him profusely and departed. The kidnapped General! It was a most amazing story. As we tramped along the road we discussed and dissected the details of it.

"There's one thing that strikes me as queer," said Parker. "He said he was leaving Charterhouse when the war broke out. Say he was eighteen. When the war was over he would be approximately twenty-three, so now he should be about twenty-seven. He looks much older."

"Yes," I answered, "he does, but that may be partly due to the fact of his hair going grey. A lot of men went prematurely grey during the war. He looks very wiry and fit."

"Do you believe it's possible that there wasn't a lot of talk about it in the newspapers?"

"There may have been some. But you know what it is—one often reads some fantastic story of that sort, and one simply does not believe it. It's like freak dinners and explorers' yarns. One thinks, 'Yes, yes,' and then you turn to see who won the semi-finals at Wimbledon. It may be true. And then there is a lot in what he says about ridicule. The majority of people would rather be robbed than made to look ridiculous."

A little farther on we came to the inn. It was a pleasant lime-washed building set back from the road, and called "The Harvester." A few carters and field labourers were drinking beer in the public bar. We entered and called for bread and cheese and beer. The landlord, a fat, melancholy-looking man in corduroy trousers and a slate-grey flannel shirt, insisted on our having our repast in a little room called a "coffee-room." He seemed friendly but not inclined to be very discursive. This may have been due to the fact that his pulmonary organs were obviously in need of repair. He wheezed, and gasped, and panted as he toddled hither and thither in the prosecution of his good offices. It was late and we were hungry, and is there anything in such circumstances so completely satisfying as bread and cheese and good brown ale? We munched in happy silence, both, I believe, still ruminating on the bearded man's strange story.

When we had finished, we called the landlord to settle our reckoning.

Having done so, and come to complete agreement with him that it was a fine day, one of us—I think it was Parker, said:

"That's a queer customer you have out there, living in the motor-'bus on the common."

The landlord blinked his eyes, wheezed through the contortions of his breathing apparatus:

"Mr. Ormeroyd?"

"No," one of us answered. "Mr. Eyles, the man in the shanty built on the remains of an old General motor-'bus."

The landlord's face twisted into a form that was probably the nearest thing it ever did in the way of a smile. When in control of his voice more, he said:

"Eyles? Oh, so that's what he calls himself to-day, is it?"

At this surprising remark we both looked at each other questioningly. Before we had had time to frame any query, however, the landlord added:

"What story did he tell you about the 'bus to-day?"

As briefly as possible Parker recounted the story as told to us. When it was finished, we listened patiently to the landlord's lungs. At the end of a few minutes the bellows appeared to give out.

"Oh, so that's the story to-day is it? A good one, too. He always tells a different story."

“What!” I exclaimed. “You mean to say the whole thing is made up?”

“I wouldn’t go so far as that,” said the landlord. “There is a story right enough, but it has never been told. I’ve heard tell that if the true story was ever told——”

He stopped and blinked at a small canary in a diminutive cage in front of the window.

We waited for the landlord’s version, but it seemed never to be coming.

“Did you say that his real name is Ormeroyd?” I asked at length.

“So I’ve heard tell,” answered our host. “They say he is a very clever fellow. He’s a very nice fellow, anyway. I’ve nothing against him. They say he used to be a writer before the war. You know, story-book stuff, tales and so on—made quite a big name, I believe, and lots of money. Now all the stories he invents concern the old ’bus.”

“But—why? What is the cause?”

“I believe there is a story that, if told, would leave the story you heard to-day not worth mentioning. D’you remember during the first weeks of the war they sent a whole lot of London motor-’buses out to help transport the troops? Well, Mr. Ormeroyd was a skilful shuvver, and he volunteered, and got the billet to drive one of these ’buses. I don’t rightly know the details. He was only out there six weeks. There was some awful incident—I believe he was the only one of a company saved—he on his old battered ’bus. There was a score of them ’buses, men and drivers, and all blown to pieces. It was somewhere in Belgium. He got away back to the lines. But—well, it’s kind of—what do you call it?—you know, got on his nerves, never thinks of anything else. He can still invent his stories, but they always concern the old ’bus. When they discharged him, I believe he went to one of these dumps and bought an old battered ’bus. He says it was his. It may be, for all we know. People up on the common there gave him permission to build his shanty. He lives there, thinkin’ and writin’. A clever fellow, they all say.”

“But—hasn’t he any friends? Can’t they make it better for him?”

“Oh, yes, he’s got plenty of friends. The people at the house, for instance—you know Cathay House—they look after him. There’s a girl there. They say it is better for him to live as he does—a kind of rest-cure. He’s getting better. They say he’ll get all right in time. He’s got money and his health is otherwise middlin’ good. He’s a clever fellow. He’ll get it all back, they say. His stories get better you know. I’ve noticed it. That one about the stockbrokers! Oh, dear! He, he, he!”

“There is a girl, you say?” Parker almost whispered.

“A very nice girl, too, the daughter of Colonel Redding, who owns Cathay House. Why, yes. Oh, I do like that about the stockbrokers!”

The landlord was still chuckling as we took our departure.

When we were once more upon the road, I remarked:

“So this story, also, may have a happy ending, Jim.”

“I hope so,” answered Parker. “I liked that fellow. I liked the rude things he said about golf.”

And borrowing a match from me, he lighted his pipe; and we continued our pilgrimage.

A MAN OF LETTERS

ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

“MY DEAR ANNIE,

“I got into an awful funny mood lately. You’ll think I’m barmy. It comes over me like late in the evenin when its gettin dusky. It started I think when I was in Egypt. Nearly all us chaps who was out there felt it a bit I think. When you was on sentry go in the dessert at night it was so quite and missterius. You felt you wanted to *know* things if you know what I mean. Since I’ve come back and settled in the saddlery again I still feel it most always. A kind of discontented funny feelin if you know what I mean. Well old girl what I mean is when we’re spliced up and settled over in Tibbelsford I want to be good for you and I want to know all about things and that. Well I’m goin to write to Mr. Weekes whose a gentleman and who lives in a private house near the church. They say he is a littery society and if it be so I’m on for joinin it. You’ll think I’m barmy won’t you. It isn’t that old dear. Me that has always been content to do my job and draw my screw on Saturday and that. You’ll think me funny. When you’ve lived in the dessert you feel how old it all is. You want something and you don’t know what it is praps its just to improve yourself and that. Anyway there it is and I’ll shall write to him. See you Sunday. So long, dear.

“ALF.”

ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES, ESQ.

“DEAR SIR,

“Someone tell me you are a littery society in Tibbelsford. In which case may I offer my services as a member and believe me.

“Your obedient servant,

“ALFRED CODLING.”

PENDRED CASTAWAY (SECRETARY TO JAMES WEEKES,
ESQ.)
TO ALFRED CODLING.

“DEAR SIR,

“In reply to your letter of the 27th inst. I beg to inform you that Mr. James Weekes is abroad. I will communicate the contents of your letter to him.

“Yours faithfully,
“PENDRED CASTAWAY.”

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

“MY DEAR ALF,

“You are a dear old funny old bean. What *is* up with you. I expeck you are just fed up. You haven’t had another tutch of the fever have you. I will come and look after you Sunday. You are a silly to talk about improvin’ considerin the money you are gettin and another rise next spring you say. I expeck you got fed up in the dessert and that didn’t you. I expeck you wanted me sometimes, eh? I shouldn’t think the littery society much cop myself. I can lend you some books. Cook is a great reader. She has nearly all Ethel M. Dells and most of Charles Garvice. She says she will lend you some if you promiss to cover in brown paper and not tare the edges. They had a big party here over the week-end a cornel a bishop two gentlemen and some smart women one very nice she gave me ten bob. We could go to the pictures come Wednesday if agreeable. Milly is walking out with a feller over at Spindlehurst in the grossery a bit flashy I don’t like him much. Mrs. Vaughan had one of her attacks on Monday. Lord she does get on my nerves when she’s like that. Well be good and cheerio must now close. Love and kisses till Sunday.

“ANNIE.”

JAMES WEEKES, ESQ. (MALAGA, SPAIN) TO ALFRED
CODLING

“DEAR SIR,

“My secretary informs me that you wish to join our literary society in Tibbelsford. It is customary to be proposed and seconded by two members.

“Will you kindly send me your qualifications?

Yours faithfully,
“JAMES WEEKES.”

ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

“MY DEAR ANNIE,

“Please thank Cook for the two books which I am keepin rapt up and will not stain. I read the Eagles mate and think it is a pretty story. As you know dear I am no fist at explaining myself. At the pictures the other night you were on to me again about gettin on and that. It isn’t that. Its difficul to explane what I mean. I expeck I will always be able to make good money enough. If you havent been throw it you cant know what its like. Its somethin else I want if you know what I mean. To be honest I did not like the picturs the other night. I thought they were silly but I like to have you sittin by me and holding your hand. If I could tell you what I mean you would know. I have heard from Mr. Weekes about the littery and am writin off at once. Steve our foreman has got sacked for pinchin lether been goin on for yeres so must close with love till Sunday.

“ALF.”

ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES, ESQ.

“DEAR SIR,

“As regards your communication you ask what are my quallifications. I say I have no quallifications sir nevertheless I am wishful to join the littery. I will be candid with you sir. I am not what you might call a littery or eddicated man at all. I am in the saddlery. I was all throw Gallipoli and Egypt L corporal in the 2 15th Mounted Blumshires. It used to come over me like when I was out there alone in the dessert. Prehaps sir you will understand me when I say it for I find folks do not understand me about it not even the girl I walk out with Annie Phelps, who is a nice girl a feller could wish. Prehaps sir you have to have been throw it if you know what I mean. When you are alone at night in the dessert its all so big and quite you want to get to know things and all about things if you know what I mean sir so prehaps you will pass me in the littery.

Your obedient servant

“ALFRED CODLING.”

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

“DEAR ALF,

“You was funny Sunday. I dont know whats up with you. You never used to be that glum I call it. Is it thinking about this littery soc turnin your head or what. Millie says you come into the kitchen like a boiled oul you was. Cheer up ole dear till Sunday week.

“ANNIE.”

JAMES WEEKES, ESQ., TO ALFRED CODLING

“DEAR SIR,

“Allow me to thank you for your charming letter. I feel that I understand your latent desires perfectly. I shall be returning to Tibbelsford in a week’s time when I hope to make your acquaintance. I feel sure that you will make a desirable member of our literary society.

Yours cordially,

“JAMES WEEKES.”

JAMES WEEKES TO SAMUEL CHILDERS

“MY DEAR SAM,

“I received the enclosed letter yesterday and I hasten to send it on to you. Did you ever read anything more delightful? We must certainly get Alfred Codling into our society. He sounds the kind of person who would make a splendid foil to old Baldwin with his tortuous metaphysics—that is, if we can only get him to talk.

“Yours ever,

“J.W.”

SAMUEL CHILDERS TO JAMES WEEKES

“MY DEAR CHAP,

“You are surely not serious about the ex-corporal! I showed his letter to Fanny. She simply screamed with laughter. But of course you mean it as a joke proposing him for the ‘littery.’ Hope to see you on Friday.

“Ever yours,

“S.C.”

ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

“MY DEAR ANNIE,

“I was afraid you would begin to think I was barmy dear I always said so but you musnt take it like that. It is difficult to tell you about but you know my feelins to you is as always. Now I have to tell you dear that I have seen Mr. Weekes he is a very nice old gentlemen indeed he is very kind he says I can go to his hous anytime and read his books he has hundreds and hundreds. I have nevver seen so many books you have to have a ladder to clime up to some of them he is very kind he says he shall propose me for the littery soc and I can go when I like he ast me all about mysel and that was very kind and plesant he told me all about what books I was to read and that so I think dear I wont be goin to the picturs Wendesday but will meet you by the Fire stasesion Sunday as usual.

“Your lovin

“ALF.”

EPHRAIM BALDWIN TO JAMES WEEKES

“MY DEAR WEEKES,

“I’m afraid I cannot understand your attitude in proposing and getting Childers to second this hobbledehoy called Alfred Codling. I have spoken to him and I am quite willing to acknowledge that he may be a very good young man in his place. But why join a literary society? Surely we want to raise the intellectual standard of the society, not lower it? He is absolutely ignorant. He knows nothing at all. Our papers and discussions will be Greek to him. If you wanted an extra hand in your stables or a jobbing gardener well and good, but I must sincerely protest against this abuse of the fundamental purposes of our society.

“Yours sincerely,

“EPHRAIM BALDWIN.”

FANNY CHILDERS TO ELSPETH PRITCHARD

“DEAR OLD THING,

“I must tell you about a perfect scream that is happening here. You know the Tibbelsford literary society that Pa belongs to, and also Jimmy Weekes? Well, it’s like this. Dear Old Jimmy is always

doing something eccentric. The latest thing is he has discovered a mechanic in the leather trade with a soul! (I'm not sure I ought not to spell it the other way). He is also an ex-soldier and was out in the East. He seems to have become imbued with what they called 'Eastern romanticism.' Anyway, he wanted to join the Society, and old Weekes rushed Pa into seconding him, and they got him through. And now a lot of the others are up in arms about it—especially old Baldwin—you know, we call him 'Permanganate of Potash.' If you saw him you'd know why, but I can't tell you. I have been to two of the meetings specially to observe the mechanic with the soul. He is really quite a dear. A thick-set, square-chinned little man with enormous hands with a heavy silver ring on the third finger of his left, and tattoo marks on his right wrist. He sits there with his hands spread out on his knees and stares round at the members as though he thinks they are a lot of lunatics. The first evening he came the paper was on 'The influence of Erasmus on modern theology,' and the second evening 'The drama of the Restoration.' No wonder the poor soul looks bewildered. He never says a word. How is Tiny? I was in town on Thursday and got a duck of a hat. Do come over soon.

“Crowds of love,
“FAN.”

JAMES WEEKES TO ALFRED CODLING

“MY DEAR CODLING,

“I quite appreciate your difficulty. I would suggest that you read the following books in the order named. You will find them in my library:

Jevon's 'Primer of Logic.'
Welton's 'Manual of Logic,'
Brackenbury's 'Primer of Psychology,' and
Professor James' 'Text book of Psychology,'

Do not be discouraged!

“Sincerely yours,
“JAMES WEEKES.”

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

“DEAR ALF,

“I dont think you treat me quite fare You says you are sweet on me and that and then you go on in this funny way It isnt my falt that you got the wind up in Egypt I don’t know what you mean by all this I wish the ole littery soc was dead and finish. Cook say you probibly want a blue pill you was so glum Sunday. Dont you see all these gents and girls and edicated coves are pullin youre leg if you dont know what they talkin about and that Your just makin a fule of yourself and then what about me you dont think of me its makin me a fule too. Milly says *she* wouldent have no truck with a book lowse so there it is.

“ANNIE.”

ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES, ESQ.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am much oblided to you for puttin me on them books It beats me how they work up these things. I’m afeard I’m not scollard enough to keep the pace with these sayins and that. Its the same with the littery I lissen to the talk and sometimes I think Ive got it and then no. Sometimes I feels angry with the things said I know the speakers wrong but I cant say I feel they wrong but I dont know what to say to say it. Theres some things to big to say isnt that sir. Im much oblided to you sir for what you done Beleive me I enjoy the littery altho I most always dont know the talk I know who are the rite ones and who are the rong ones. If you have been throw what I have been throw you would know the same sir Beleive me your

“obedient servant

“ALFRED CODLING.”

EPHRAIM BALDWIN TO EDWIN JOPE, SECRETARY TO
THE
TIBBELSFORD LITERARY SOCIETY

“DEAR JOPE,

“For my paper on the 19th prox. I propose to discuss ‘The influence of Hegelism on modern psychology.’

“Yours ever,

“EPHRAIM BALDWIN.”

EDWIN JOPE TO EPHRAIM BALDWIN

“DEAR MR. BALDWIN,

“I have issued the notices of your forthcoming paper. The subject, I am sure, will make a great appeal to our members, and I feel convinced that we are in for an illuminating and informative evening. With regard to our little conversation on Wednesday last, I am entirely in agreement with you with regard to the quite inexplicable action of Weekes in introducing the ‘leather mechanic’ into the society. It appears to me a quite superfluous effrontery to put upon our members. We do not want to lose Weekes but I feel that he ought to be asked to give some explanation of his conduct. As you remark, it lowers the whole standard of the society. We might as well admit agricultural labourers, burglars, grooms and barmaids, and the derelicts of the town. I shall sound the opinion privately of other members.

“With kind regards,

“Yours sincerely,

“EDWIN JOPE.”

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

“All right then you stick to your old littery. I am sendin you back your weddin ring you go in and out of that place nevvver thinkin of me Aunt siad how it would be you goin off and cetterer and gettin ideas into your head what do you care. I doant think you care at all I expeck you meet a lot of these swell heads there men *and women* and you get talkin and thinkin you someone All these years you away I wated for you faithfull I never had a thowt for other fellers and then you go on like this and treat me in this way Aunt says she wouldnt put up and Milly says a book lowse is worse than no good and so I say goodby and thats how it is now forever. You have broken my hart

“ANNE.”

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

“I cried all nite I didndt mean quite all I says you know how I mene dear Alf if you was only reesonible I doant mind you goin the littery if you eggsplain yourself For Gawds sake meet me toight by the fire stachon and eggsplain everything.

“Your broke hearted
“ANNE.”

JAMES WEEKES TO SAMUEL CHILDERS

“MY DEAR SAM,

“I hope Harrogate is having the desired effect upon you. I was about to say that you have missed few events of any value or interest during your absence, but I feel I must qualify that statement. You have missed a golden moment. The great Baldwin evening has come and gone and I deplore the fact that you were not there. My sense of gratification, however, is not due to Ephraim himself but to my unpopular protégé and white elephant—Alfred Codling. I tell you it was glorious! Ephraim spoke for an hour and a half, the usual thing, a dull *réchauffée* of Schopenhauer and Hegel, droning forth platitudes and half-baked sophistries. When it was finished the chairman asked if anyone else wished to speak. To my amazement my ex-lance-corporal rose heavily to his feet. His face was brick red and his eyes glowed with anger. He pointed his big fingers at Ephraim and exclaimed: ‘Yes, talk, talk, talk—that’s all it is. There’s nothing in it at all!’ and he hobbled out of the room (you know he was wounded in the right foot). The position, as you may imagine, was a little trying. I did not feel in the mood to stay and make apologies. I hurried after Codling. I caught him up at the end of the lane. I said, ‘Codling, why did you do that?’ He could not speak for a long time, then he said: ‘I’m sorry, sir. It came over me like, all of a sudden.’ We walked on. At the corner by Harvey’s mill we met a girl. Her face was wet—there was a fine rain pouring at the time. They looked at each other these two, then she suddenly threw out her arms and buried her face on his chest. I realised that this was no place for me and I hurried on. The following morning I received the enclosed letter. Please return it to me.

“Yours ever,
“JAMES.”

ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES

“DEAR SIR,

“Please to irrase my name from the littery soc. I feel I have treated you bad about it but there it is. I apologise to you for

treatin you bad like this that is all I regret You have always been kind and pleasant to me lendin me the books and that. I shall always be grateful to you for what you have done. It all came over me sudden like last night while that chap was spoutin out about what you call *physology*. I had never heard tell on the word till you put me on to it and now they all talk about it. I looked it up in the diction and it says somethin about the science of mind and that chap went on spoutin about it. I had quarrel with my girl we had nevver quarrel before and I was very down abowt it. She is the best girl a feller could wish and I have always said so. Somehow last night while he was spoutin on it came over me sudden I thowt of the nights I had spent alone in the dessert when it was all quite and missterous and big. I had been throw it all sir. I had seen my pals what was alive one minnit blown to pieces the next. I had tramped hundreds of miles and gone without food and watter. I had seen hell itsel sir And when you are always with death like that sir you are always so much alive You are alive and then the next minnit you may be dead and it makes you want to feel in touch like with everythin. You cant hate no one when you like that You think of the other feller over there whose thinkin like you are prehaps and he all alone to lookin up the blinkin stars and it comes over you that its only love that holds us all together love and nothin else at all My hart was breakin thinkin of Annie what I had treated so bad and what I had been throw and he went on spoutin and spoutin. What does he know about *physology*? You have to had been very near death to find the big things thats what I found out and I couldnt tell these littery blokes that thats why I lost my temper and so please to irrase me from the soc They cant teach me nothen that matters I've seen it all and I cant teach them nothen because they havent been throw it What I have larnt is sir that theres somethin big in our lives apart from getting on and comfits and good times and so sir I am much oblidged for all you done for me and except my appology for the way I treat you

“Your obedient servant,

“ALFRED CODLING.”

JAMES WEEKES TO EDWIN JOPE

“DEAR JOPE,

“In reply to your letter, I cannot see my way to apologise or even dissociate myself from the views expressed by Mr. Alfred

Codling at our last meeting, consequently I must ask you to accept my resignation.

“Yours very truly,
“JAMES WEEKES.”

SAMUEL CHILDERS TO EDWIN JOPE

“DEAR JOPE,

“Taking into consideration all the circumstances of the case, I must ask you to accept my resignation from the Tibbelsford Literary Society.

“Yours faithfully,
“S. CHILDERS.”

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

“MY DEAR ALF,

“Of course its all right. I am all right now dear Alf I will try and be a good wife to you. I amnt clever like you with all your big thowts and that but I will and be a good wife to you. Aunt Em is goin to give us that horses-hair and mother says therell be tweanty-five pounds comin to me when Uncle Steve pegs out and he has the dropsie all right already. What do you say to Aperil if we can git that cottidge of Mrs. Plummers mothers See you Sunday

“love from
“ANNIE.”

XXXXXXXXXX

EPHRAIM BALDWIN TO EDWIN JOPE

“DEAR MR. JOPE,

“As no apology has been forthcoming to me *from any quarter* for the outrageous insult I was subjected to on the occasion of my last paper, I must ask you to accept my resignation.

“Yours faithfully,
“EPHRAIM BALDWIN, O.B.E.”

ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

“MY DEAR ANNE,

“You will be please to hear they made me foreman this will mean an increas and so on I think April will be alright Mr. Weekes sent me check for fifty pounds to start farnishin but I took it back I said no I could not accep it havin done nothin to earn it and treatin him so bad over that littery soc but he said yes and he put it in such a way that I accep after all so we shall be alright for farnishin at the present He was very kind and he says we was to go to him at any time and I was to go on readin the books he says I shall find good things in them but not the littery soc he says he has left it hissself I feel I treated him very bad but I could not stand that feller spoutin and him nevver havin been throw it like what I have That dog of Charly’s killed one of Mrs. Reeves chickens Monday so must now close till Sunday with love from

“Your soon husband (dont it sound funny?)

“ALF.”

EDWIN JOPE TO WALTER BUNNING

“DEAR SIR,

“In reply to your letter I beg to say that the Tibbelsford Literary Society is dissolved.

“Yours faithfully,

“E. JOPE.”

THE FALL

The city of Bordeaux is a city of broad avenues, open spaces, big blocks of commercial buildings, narrow alleys leading down to congested docks, great wealth, great poverty, great industry. It has a character widely differing from any other French city. Broadly speaking, it is a hard-working, thriving, sober place. People do not go there for pleasure; they go there to trade. Nevertheless as in the case of all large cities, especially when they happen to be ports, it is watered by a continuous social flux that is anything but hard-working, thriving or sober. It holds out endless temptation to the adventurer, the thief and the garrotter and the speculator. The constant inflow of ingenuous sailors, blue-eyed and bewildered, who draw their pay and get lost in the mazes of the west side, attract the attentions of the more malignant characters. The cafés and cabarets abound with mysterious individuals, willing and anxious to introduce the new-comer to the most delectable and special attractions.

On the whole, Bordeaux is neither better nor worse than her sister cities of the South. Less sophisticated than Marseilles, she seems somehow more independent. Further removed from the nerve centres of France, she contrives to lead a life of her own. The depressing *Landes* country does not get on her nerves. She re-acts to it. And there is always Biarritz, and St. Jean de Luz and the gay little luxury towns within easy train journey. And there is the Spanish border and untracked regions of the Pyrenees—easily accessible places for the lady or gentleman who suddenly finds that the only people desirous of his or her company are the very efficient *gendarmérie de Bordeaux*.

Max Renault, alias Anton Sachs, alias Jules Destourney, was one individual who more than once found getting over the border at Irun, disguised as an old priest, a useful means of evading the just retribution of the law. On the second occasion he was away two years, wandering about the north coast of Spain. During that time his experiences must have been unenviable. He knew little Spanish and no Basque. The people he moved amongst were mostly beggars themselves, or poor fishing-folk, living from hand to mouth. He begged what he could, stole what he could, but the conditions of life were very hard. He made himself a weird instrument, a kind of piccolo, out of a cane stem. This he played somewhat unconvincingly outside cafés and eating-houses; but the Spaniards and Basques are musicians themselves, and his awards were negligible.

Once he stole a donkey, drove it into the hills, and sold it to some gypsies for a trifling sum. He travelled far afield after that, put up at an inn and drank much brandy.

And that night he dreamt about falling. We all have our pet nightmares, and Jules' pet nightmare concerned falling. It was horrible. He never actually fell, but he was always just on the point of falling from some great height. Sometimes he would be on the roof of a very high building, looking down into the street below—just losing his balance. On other occasions he would be seated on the front row of a gallery, very, very high up in a theatre. There was no rail in front of him. His knees were giving way. The floor below was attracting him. Sometimes he would be peering over the edge of an enormous precipice, lying on his face and looking down at the rocks beneath. He would try and edge away, but an overwhelming power drew him forward. At such moments he would try to scream, and be unable to. After an endless struggle he would awaken with a start, and find himself clutching the bedclothes, making horrible noises in his chest, and his brow would be clammy with perspiration.

During those two years he did many reprehensible and desperate actions, but he always managed to escape detection. At the end of that time he found himself one day at the little fishing village of Fuenterrabia, looking wistfully across the bay at his beloved France. Surely the time was ripe for return. He had changed much in those two years. The police must have been very busy with other fugitive gentlemen. He thought longingly of Bordeaux, with its rich merchants and stupid sailors, its familiar cafés and well-cooked food. Yes, he was a desperate man. Somehow or other he would return there.

Whilst gazing across the sea, he became suddenly aware of someone approaching him. Instantly alert, and prepared for flight, Jules turned. One glance satisfied him that the man was an English tourist. One of those absurd, comic Englishmen, as drawn in the French journals. Elderly, with drooping moustaches, rather fat, in a check suit with baggy knickerbockers and stockings, and thick brown boots. Round his shoulder was slung a leather strap with field-glasses, and in his hand he carried a camera. The Englishman spoke to him in broken Spanish, but he seemed to know less Spanish than Jules. Jules replied in French, which the Englishman spoke tolerably well. He wanted to know how far it was to Pasaques across the hills, how long it would take to get there and what sort of place it was. But yes, of course, Jules smiled ingratiatingly, was he not himself a professional guide?

It would take perhaps two hours, two hours and a half to Pasaques. There was no road. It could only be found by one accustomed to the mountain path. An enchanting place—Pasaques, where the famous Victor Hugo lived for some time, and there was a café there built over the bay with passion flowers in profusion growing over the pergola. And the patron would draw you up oysters straight from the river bed in a basket. An enchanting place! Why, yes, he would guide the distinguished visitor that very afternoon and they would return in time for the Englishman's dinner at the Hotel Miramar. Excellent!

As they picked their way up the mountain path that afternoon, Jules was constantly thinking of Bordeaux. It was a steep climb. He was quite surprised that the fat, elderly Englishman stood it so well. Surprised—and angry.

Bordeaux? He wondered whether old Madame Lachaise still kept that little comestible establishment in the Place Duquesne. There were friends who would never give him away. There was no one to fear except the police. Inspector Tolozan? Curse fate! Spit on all these comfortable people to whom everything seemed to go right. This fat, prosperous Englishman!

Once on a broken plateau they passed an ox-cart laden with ferns and a peasant in a blue blouse. They passed no one else in a two hours' walk. They were cut right off from the world, amidst boulders of rocks, shrubs, thick masses of fern, distant peaks, some snow-clad.

"Bella vista, monsieur!" said Jules, pointing across an opening in the hills. The Englishman leant forward and looked in the direction Jules' stick was pointing. Bella vista, indeed! There was a sudden quick movement, and a knife was driven clean and truly between the Englishman's shoulder blades.

When the convulsions had ceased, Jules dragged the heavy body into a thick, high clump of ferns, and calmly went through the pockets. There were a lot of papers that annoyed him intensely, passports, letters of credit, bills, cheque book, things denoting wealth but quite unnegotiable. Nevertheless, Jules had little cause to complain. There were Spanish, French and English notes. There was a gold watch and chain, a gold cigarette-case, loose silver and various light trifles. He flung the camera away and also the case of field-glasses, too compromising articles to be seen with—but stuffed the field-glasses into his breast pocket. Then he walked on hurriedly for half a mile, crawled under a dwarf oak-tree and counted the spoil. He rapidly added up the notes, calculated the total in francs, allowing for the rate of exchange,

and the probable selling value of the watch and chain, etc., in his own market. He was the sudden possessor of approximately nine thousand francs!

He cleaned up his hands on some damp moss, buried the knife deep in the earth and covered that with moss and stones, and set out for San Sebastian.

Fortune at last smiled upon him. He gave no further thought to the ridiculous Englishman, except as an inert piece of matter that might be compromising under certain circumstances.

He arrived in San Sebastian after dark, weary and footsore. He knew the town well, and he made for a humble quarter, where food and lodging would be procurable. He ate heartily, drank good red wine and much brandy until he fell into a heavy torpid sleep. He had, however, taken the precaution beforehand to see that he secured a room in the lodging with a door that locked. Fortune and security at last! Bordeaux at last!

He swung out into a glorious, rose-hued dreamland of happiness, only to find himself, after an interval of time, clinging to the flat surface of an enormous stone column above a square. The column seemed to be swaying in the wind. Down below tiny figures were just perceptible on the pavement. The old horror again possessed him. He was bound to fall—hundreds of feet—into that terrifying void below. It did not occur to him to wonder how he had got there. The fact that he was there was sufficient. If only the dread thing would keep still! If only there were any means of descending! But—no, he was on a kind of large projecting capital. The column beneath was narrower. He peered over the edge, and saw the narrowing flutes of the column vanishing into perspective, lost amongst the stone base hundreds of feet below. There was nothing at all to cling to. He was falling! He screamed, but the screams were stifled in his throat. This way! That way! Now he was off! . . . Oh, God! He was hanging over—the edge of the bed, those choked, ugly noises coming from his chest.

Ah, thank God! All a dream, all a dream! He would not sleep again that night. He sat up, drank some water, lighted the candle, counted his wealth all over again, lay there, inert and watchful, till the light of dawn crept between the crevices of the shabby curtain. Then he slept quite placidly for several hours.

The sun was shining on San Sebastian when he went out. Everything was normal and gay. Along the front tamarisk trees, with their soft, feathery outlines, blended into the warm haze above the bay. Women in black

mantillas passed by him, and he did not resent the fact that their glances were not for him. He wandered about the town, and bought a ready-made suit, a shirt, a scarf, a new Basque cap and some canvas shoes. Then he returned to his lodgings, changed his clothes, paid his bill, took the old clothes away with him tied up in a paper parcel, and walked to the station.

In two days' time he arrived in Bordeaux, looking like a respectable Spanish workman. His hair had turned grey during those two years, and he had grown a moustache and a little stubby beard. He made his way to the Place Duquesne, crept stealthily up the stairs of number seventeen and gave three slow taps on the door, the last tap being louder than the first. The door was opened a few inches, and there was a short interval of inspection, and then a voice exclaimed:

“Name of God! It’s the Jackal!”

He was admitted. The room was occupied by two men. One was a thick-set, malevolent-looking, middle-aged man, with very dark eyes and a long scar running from just below the ear to the middle of the throat. The other was a frowsy old man, with swivel eyes, impossible to focus. It was the younger one who had admitted him. He turned to the elder, and said:

“Do you hear, Uncle Sem? It’s the Jackal!”

The old man appeared to be searching the ceiling. He muttered:

“The Jackal—eh! Where have you been, my brave Jackal, all these years?”

“Over the border, Uncle Sem.”

“What have you come back for, fool? To compromise us? Don’t you know it’s the Widow for you if they catch you?”

“I was bored, Uncle Sem. I had to come back. I was lonely—”

“Imbecile!”

“He’s all right,” interjected the younger man, known as La Tonnerre. “Look at him, uncle! His mother wouldn’t know her darling boy. The Jackal was always a good workman, Uncle Sem. How have the dice fallen, old boy?”

“Badly,” answered Jules. “Pigs and stones. There’s not a sou to be scratched from the vile, evil-smelling swine. Nothing came my way, until last week, when a fool of an Englishman fell into my mouth. See here!”

And he produced the field-glasses, the gold watch and chain, the cigarette-case and the other trifles. The older man's eyes regarded the objects obliquely.

“Any money?”

“Only a few francs.”

“Um!” grunted Uncle Sem, suspiciously. “Travelling Englishmen usually carry more than a few francs upon them, especially when they boast such finery as this.”

“Letters of credit, cheque books, if they're any good to you, Uncle!”

“Um. Let's have a glance. Where's the case to the field-glasses?”

“I threw it away.”

“Imbecile! A Zeiss too.”

Whilst the old man was examining the watch and cigarette-case, Jules inquired of La Tonnerre concerning their mutual acquaintances.

“Where is Barouche?”

“Barouche! He is spending a long vacation out in Cochin China. There was an unfortunate affair with the cashier of a bank at Bayonne. Clumsy work!”

“And Anton?”

“Dead. He died quietly one morning at dawn. The blade was too quick for him!”

“Lisette?”

“No one has seen her since you left. She was last seen walking on the quays looking into the water.”

“Toni Hecht?”

“They have sent him back to Selesia. They did not like his face.”

“Gabriel Foret?”

“Yes, he is still working. But he becomes foolish. Women and absinthe do not agree with him. Labori died in the infirmary. There is no one left of our old company except Uncle Sem and myself. You are welcome, Jules. We want men of intellect and go.”

It was not an inspiring record. Jules felt a craving to escape from it all. He had been drawn back to Bordeaux by the nostalgia of old associations. He liked the place, the kind of food to be procured there, familiar places and people. But the life of crime terrified him. It was not conscience which troubled him. It was just the physical dread of—falling. It was in his blood that somewhere, at some time, in the prosecution of his nefarious craft, he would fall. The nightmare would materialise. And yet what was he to do? About his person he had concealed eight thousand francs. From the sale of the field-glasses, the watch and cigarette-case, he would be lucky if he got another two hundred. This was wealth, comfort and security for a few months. And then what? He could not afford to go back on his only two pals.

The old man was saying:

“Here, I will see what I can do with the watch and cigarette-case. You take these glasses, Jackal, and try your luck on the East side. You were an idiot to have taken these out of their case.”

“The case isn’t of much value, Uncle Sem. And it was clumsy, with a long leather strap attachment, difficult to conceal.”

Uncle Sem said nothing, but he blinked vacantly at the ceiling, stood up, and shuffled towards the door.

“He’s a marvel!” exclaimed La Tonnerre, when the old man had gone. “He must be seventy-two, and he has never made a slip. The police watch him like cats, and they’ve never sprung within a metre of him. I believe he could cast his shadow into the face of the sun.”

Jules sighed. “Let’s go and eat,” he said. “I have a few francs, and that vile Spanish food wants forgetting.”

They repaired to a quiet restaurant of which the patron was a good fellow, not too inquisitive or squeamish about his guests. And they did themselves well. Soup, a *bouillabaise*, tripe stewed in oil with braised Spanish onions, Rockfort and radishes, and two bottles of good Burgundy. Oh, it was glorious to be back in Bordeaux!

And Jules kept on saying to himself:

“I mustn’t talk too much. I mustn’t let on to La Tonnerre that I have eight thousand.”

There is a fascination about spending freely almost as intoxicating as any alcoholic material which may be the product of this action. Once he

thought at random: “Why, I’ve only got to sell those field-glasses to make enough to pay for this luncheon.”

La Tonnerre indeed was not unduly aroused. They both belonged to the school which taught that the great thing in life was to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow—Ah! lots of nasty, unpleasant episodes might happen to-morrow. One might fall for instance. Clambering about on dangerous peaks there was always that sickening attraction—the law of gravitation. Bah! Another glass, old boy! Glorious to be back in Bordeaux.

The docks were alive with dear familiar sights—stately liners, the black hulls of old sailing ships, weather-battered smoke-stacks of tramps. There was the delicious odour of tar, oil, hemp, brine and the chestnut braziers on the quays. There were the familiar figures, wharfingers in blue blouses, foreign sailors, fat old fishwives with their booths, women selling flowers, stockings and gingerbread, port officials fussily conscious of their gold trimmings. This was the place to live in, to lose oneself in. No one took any particular stock of this respectable looking man. What was he? a mechanic of some sort? a small shopkeeper? a ship’s cook? Who cared?

Having parted from La Tonnerre, who stated that he had to go and claim some “commission” that was due to him, Jules wandered luxuriously eastward. It was early afternoon and the sun was pleasantly hot. He walked up the Rue Fondaudege and then took two turnings, sharp to the left, then to the left again. He came to a narrow middle-class street of shops. Near the end of the street he stopped in front of an establishment, which bore the name of François Mossel. He entered and produced the field-glasses. A rather bored young clerk said: “Yes, what is it?”

“Do you want to buy some field-glasses, monsieur?”

“Field-glasses!” exclaimed the young man in a tone that implied that field-glasses were the very last thing that his employer would ever dream of buying. Nevertheless he took them in his hand and examined them.

“Where is the case?” he asked.

“The case is lost!”

The young man’s face expressed bored indignation. However, he disappeared behind a wooden partition with the glasses. In two or three minutes an elderly Jew came in with the young man. He was wearing thick spectacles and a black skull cap. He looked hard at Jules and said:

“Where did you get these glasses from?”

“They belonged to my brother, monsieur, who died.”

The Jew looked closely at Jules’ face, his clothes, his shoes and his cap. He made no attempt to conceal his suspicion.

“Where is the case?”

“There wasn’t a case. My brother must have lost it, monsieur.”

“When did your brother die?”

“Last year, monsieur.”

“This is a pair of new Zeiss field-glasses.”

Jules flushed. What the devil business was it of the Jew when or where his brother died? Why didn’t he hurry up and give him the money! Monsieur Mossel seemed to be meditating. He muttered to himself:

“Curious . . . a new pair of Zeiss field-glasses without a case.”

Looking at Jules once more, he said in a melancholy voice:

“How much do you want for them?”

“Four hundred francs, monsieur.”

The old Jew turned to his assistant with an expression clearly conveying the fact that he had long since given up being surprised at the insolent and extortionate demands made to him in his profession. He turned the glasses over and over and examined them more thoroughly. At last he said:

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you twenty-seven francs for them.”

It was Jules’ turn to express clearly that he had given up being surprised at the preposterous offers one was to expect from these money-lenders. He answered without hesitation:

“One hundred.”

“Twenty-eight.”

What was the use? He felt a wild desire to be rid of the whole transaction. The atmosphere of this poky, furtive office frightened him. He mumbled:

“Oh! . . . well——”

“Leave the glasses here and come in later at half-past five, and you shall have the money. You must sign a written declaration.”

Why? He didn't like this aspect of it at all. But something told him to clear out of that place at the earliest possible moment. A few minutes later he was thankful for this subconscious warning. He had just crossed the street when he saw an elderly distinguished-looking man turn the corner and saunter casually into Mons. Mossel's shop. It was the last person in Bordeaux he was desirous of meeting—Inspector Tolozan, chief of the *gendarmerie de Bordeaux*.

He never went back for his twenty-eight francs. On the other hand, he could not bring himself to tell the true story to Uncle Sem and La Tonnerre. He said he had sold the glasses for ninety francs, and he shared the spoil with them loyally. Uncle Sem declared that he was only able to raise two hundred and forty francs on the watch and cigarette-case. This was also divided.

Jules slept in an attic in the same house in the Place Duquesne where his two companions resided. He continued to lead a life of indolence and luxury.

At the end of a few weeks, however, he began to realize that there was something queer happening to him. His health was not all that could be desired. The fact was, that the sudden spasm of luxurious living, after the two years of semi-starvation, was seriously affecting his digestion. He suffered from attacks of vertigo. Lying in his attic at night, he would have an abrupt vision of the courtyard below. Some power seemed to compel him to get out of bed and go to the window and look down. He would stand there, clutching the window frame, his face bathed in cold sweat. The terror was unendurable. After two or three of these experiences he gave up the attic. He managed to secure a dingy room in the basement of the house next door.

So far as the prosecution of his criminal practices was concerned, he was entirely inactive. He had lost his nerve. He made up elaborate stories to Uncle Sem and La Tonnerre of exploits about purse-snatching and confidence tricks. He even handed them the money as a share of the spoils, anything to buy peace. His small fortune would not last long at this rate.

Once he dreamt he was on top of a lighthouse, out at sea. A high wind was blowing, and he was clutching his few remaining notes and trying to hang on to the smooth stone surface. A sudden, fiercer gust came and carried the notes away. He looked over the edge, and saw the notes fluttering on the surface of an angry sea, a hundred feet below him. Again he tried to scream. . . .

It was Uncle Sem's discovery—the fat Dutch ship-master, who went nightly to a little café in the Rue Muyens and got drunk. He appeared to

have money. It was believed that he had on his person the cash to pay off a ship's company that was expected from Rio.

"Here is a neat little game we might play together," said Uncle Sem.

Jules shivered, but he knew there was no escape. They couldn't understand, these two; they couldn't understand this fear of falling. On a certain night he found himself entering the Café des Etoiles. Uncle Sem was whispering:

"This is the table."

They sat down, and ordered two anisettes. Uncle Sem was very garrulous. After a little while the fat Dutchman entered. He glowered at them, but took his usual corner seat, and ordered Schnappes. Uncle Sem bowed to him very politely, and continued to talk to Jules. After a few more glasses of Schnappes it was not difficult to engage the Dutchman in conversation, in spite of his villainous French. They discussed all kinds of subjects, and Uncle Sem was most entertaining and hospitable, ordering innumerable rounds of drinks. It was getting late, when La Tonnerre entered the café. He was very smartly dressed. He looked round the room, then, approaching Uncle Sem, he said diffidently:

"May I occupy this seat, monsieur?"

"But certainly," replied Uncle Sem.

In a few minutes La Tonnerre was drawn into the conversation, and somehow or other it got round to the Dutch East Indies. La Tonnerre said that he had often touched at Sumatra, when a seafaring man. Curiously enough, Uncle Sem, according to his own account, had once been manager of a tea plantation at Tebing Tinggi. Helped by a nudge, Jules said he knew all the islands intimately. This might have been all very well, except for the fact that Uncle Sem referred to Tebing Tinggi as being on the north-east coast of Sumatra.

"Tebing Tinggi!" exclaimed the Dutchman. "Why, it is in the interior, one hundred and thirty miles west of Pelembeng!"

It is invariably about insignificant trifles that men lose their tempers. The argument became heated.

"Considering I lived there for two years!" cried the Dutchman, banging his fist down on the table.

Uncle Sem was equally emphatic and so was La Tonnerre, who insisted that Tebing Tinggi was in the north. The argument became more and more

acrimonious. At last Uncle Sem said:

“I tell you what, gentlemen. I’m willing to bet. I suggest we put up a hundred francs each. We all put the notes right down here on the table. Then we each in turn draw a plan of the island, indicating the position of Tebing Tinggi. That being done, we borrow our patron’s atlas. I know he has one. And we compare. The one who has drawn the most accurate plan gets the lot.”

“Done!” roared the Dutchman. “On one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“That we make it two hundred francs.”

“I agree,” said Uncle Sem.

“Agreed,” said La Tonnerre.

“Yes, I agree also,” said Jules faintly.

The Dutchman produced a fat pocket-book. He took out two hundred francs and put the notes down on the table. The others followed suit. They drew lots for the order of performance. La Tonnerre drew the first plan. He picked up a menu card and carefully drew a plan of the island on the back, indicating the position of the disputed town. The Dutchman, who had drawn second place, snorted with contempt and was in a fever to get to work. Directly La Tonnerre had finished, he snatched up the pencil and pored over the back of another menu card. Very laboriously, with the tip of his fat tongue pouting between his lips, he made a careful and exact plan of the island. When he was half way through, La Tonnerre rose and said:

“I’ll get the atlas in the meantime.”

He got up and walked out. The Dutchman had nearly finished his drawing, when Uncle Sem exclaimed:

“My God!”

“What’s the matter?” growled the Dutchman.

“The notes! the notes! That fellow has taken the notes!”

The Dutchman’s eyes bulged. He glared round the table, gasped, put his hand in his breast pocket.

“God in Heaven!” he wailed. “My pocket-book my pocket-book! Which way did he go?”

“Good God! he’s taken my pocket-book too!” said Uncle Sem. “Curse him! the thief! the dirty thief! I believe he went out this way.”

And he jumped up and dashed to the door. The Dutchman dashed after him. Jules was left alone. The thing had happened so quickly that the other occupants of the café had not time to take it all in. Besides, in that part of the world they are accustomed to quarrelling and gambling among seafaring men. It is advisable sometimes not to be too curious. A waiter came up to Jules and said:

“What’s the matter?”

“That stranger who came in went off with my pal’s notes,” he replied.

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. Jules got up to follow the others. Just as he rose his eye was attracted by a face on the other side of the room. It seemed vaguely familiar. It was the face of a young man, talking to a girl. What was disturbing was that the young man was staring at him and quite patently talking to the girl about him. As he reached the door, he remembered in a flash that it was the young clerk to the Jew who had bought the field-glasses. Once through the door, Jules ran as fast as he could until he had put several abrupt turnings between himself and that sinister café. He was terribly frightened. His heart was beating against his ribs. The appearance of the young clerk from the pawnbroker’s shop seemed to be a portentous climax to the sordid adventure. He must keep clear of that side of the river for some time. He went a long way round, and avoiding the Pont de Bordeaux, crossed the river by the railway bridge. His teeth were chattering when he rejoined the other two in that crazy room in the Place Duquesne. He found Uncle Sem feeding a fat moulting canary with lumps of sugar, and calling it endearing names.

La Tonnerre was stretched luxuriously on an old couch, eating sardines out of a tin. The evening had been a great success. The Dutchman’s wallet had contained seven thousand three hundred francs.

“Nevertheless,” said La Tonnerre, “Uncle Sem thinks a little change of scenery might do us all good. Scatter, Uncle, eh? Wait till the Dutch pig has had to return to his greasy country. I’m for the South, I. I know a pair of dark eyes at St. Jean de Luz that always welcome me, especially when I can slap my pockets, and throw a franc or two round at random.”

“I have an urgent affair to attend to in Paris, my children,” said Uncle Sem. “Some dear relations I must visit. They miss me dreadfully.”

One eye appeared to be on the door, whilst the other was searching the opposite curtain-pole. "Tweet! tweet! There's a little darling! Tweet! tweet!"

Jules sat morosely apart. Where should he go? What should he do?

"Wherever I go I know that—the fall is not far off," he thought. The fall! He was high up now, and there was that courtyard down below. Oh! . . . He stood up and pretended to yawn carelessly.

"I shall stay in Bordeaux," he said, and stumbled towards the door.

"Imbecile!" hissed Uncle Sem, and then he appeared to chuckle with malevolent glee. "Tweet! tweet! There's a dear little bird for you!"

It was coming nearer. Ice-cold hands were clutching at his ribs, drawing him up, preparing to hurl him down.

Three days had elapsed since Uncle Sem and La Tonnerre vanished from Bordeaux. His pockets were well-lined with notes and silver. He drifted from restaurant to restaurant, from café to café, consuming quantities of rich food and wines, which gave him no satisfaction. The richer the repast the more violent the reaction. That morning he had seen the young clerk again with the same girl. They were going out of a café where he was seated. He thought the girl looked at him, but he could not be certain. He felt too apathetic to leave. He sat there drinking absinthe, and watching the door. He was waiting.

But no one came, and after a while he went out. All the afternoon he wandered about the docks. The familiar scenes had lost their attraction. He felt impatient for the crisis. This could not go on indefinitely. It was now early evening. He was seated at another café in the Rue Maille. The hour when one dines. But no, he had no desire for food. Even the sight of a glass of absinthe nauseated him. The thing was too near.

The café was dimly lighted and almost deserted. He was still watching the door. A few seafaring men passed in and out. Soon it would be quite dark. Why didn't they light up the café? Lights . . .

Two sturdily-built men entered together. One had a paper in his hand. They glanced round, whispered, and came up to him. The one with the paper said:

"Monsieur Max Renault, alias Anton Sachs, alias Jules Destourney?"

Jules did not answer. He lay in a heap, staring at the well-filled glass.

"We hold here a warrant for your arrest."

Well, what was it? The Dutchman, or——?

“You are arrested on an extradition warrant from the Spanish Government, charged with the murder of an Englishman, John Watson, five kilos from Fuenterrabia, on the afternoon of the 17th August. Have you anything to say? Anything you will say——”

The scream came at last. There were none of the choked gaspings of a dream. The fuddled mists cleared away. He experienced a moment crowded with the pellucid vision of the onrush of a huge steel knife! It had come—the ghastly end. Then the room swung into darkness, filled with shouts and screams—his own. Followed a period of impenetrable blackness, discomfort, and terror. Frightened to focus. . . . But it came at last. Where was this? Where was it? He was lying in a bed. A dim light at the other end of the room revealed other beds—five of them. A figure in blue was walking by, clanking a bunch of keys. The air seemed to be filled with a pornographic roar. Snoring. The other five beds seemed to be occupied by men determined to snore their way to hell. His heart was still behaving queerly, but bit by bit the true position was dawning on him. A gaoler! This must be the prison infirmary. They had him at last. How did they discover it all? Vultures! The Englishman, John Watson, an inert piece of matter! The field-glasses.

“Why did you throw the case away? Imbecile!”

Where was Uncle Sem? Why wasn't *he* here? He deserved everything and always escaped. Liar, thief, seducer, murderer, property receiver. . . . “Tweet! Tweet!”

What a satisfaction to wring that fat canary's neck! Crush it under foot! Where was La Tonnerre?

But they *had* him. That was the fact to be faced—they had him at last, Jules Destourney. The Englishman, John Watson? Ah, God, if he were the only one! The long relentless arm of the police, the cold, relentless logic of the courts, the calm, inevitable chain of evidence prepared by Inspector Tolozan, who had been watching him for years—what chance had he to stand against it? It couldn't be faced. Something must be done. Some exit must be found. He lay there, with eyes half-closed. A figure in a white overall passed through, other figures, vaguely occupied.

It must be the middle of the night. The man in blue clanked by once more. He went to the end of the room, and talked with someone behind a

screen. The door had been left ajar. Yes, there was one thing he could do. Escape!

He slipped out of bed, and was surprised at the ease and silence with which he glided through that door . . . like a ghost. In a flash he was along that corridor, and turned down two others. The place was all in darkness.

Here and there were piled-up trestles, and planks and short ladders. Pails of size and lime-wash were lined along the wall. This must be one of the Superintendent's quarters, being re-decorated. Without any hesitancy, he opened a door and entered a room. It was bare, except for more planks and trestles and lime-wash. The room was lighted by the light of the moon. He crept to the window. His heart beat violently. The window was not barred. Across a narrow alleyway was a low stone building, all in darkness. It must have been the Governor's house. This room was level with the roof. On one side of the building was an iron spiral staircase—a fire emergency staircase. This led to the Governor's private grounds. As far as he could see on the farther side was a wall not too high to scale.

But now, this alleyway between the room and the roof opposite? It could be little more than three metres to the stone parapet. He quickly calculated the length of the painters' planks. One was at least three metres and a half, or four.

Someone would be coming! He listened at the door. There was no lock. It had got to be done boldly. He gripped the plank and thrust it through the open window. Good God, it barely reached! He could not see how far on it was, but not more than the length of his first finger, he could swear.

It had got to be done. No time to lose. Again he was surprised at his own agility and nerve. He slipped quickly from the window-sill on to the plank. Crawl slowly across on hands and knees, that was the idea. He almost chuckled to himself as he swung carefully forward.

“They won't get me! They shan't get me!”

He had gone a metre and a half, and then he looked down on to the stone floor of the alley beneath.

In that brief instant he realized that he had reached the culminating terror of his life. It was predestination. This was no dream. *He was going to fall!* He lay there, completely paralysed with the certain knowledge of what was to happen. He was actively visualizing the whole experience. He was half-way across, and he could go neither backwards nor forwards. The ground beneath held him pinioned. The stone floor seemed to be sucking him

towards it. He shook with an ague of terror, and at the same instant the plank seemed to be imperceptibly moving, as though he were rocking one end off its support. If anyone came they could not save him. Nothing could save him. *He was going to fall!*

He wanted to scream again, as in his dreams, but, curiously enough, the sounds were throttled in his breast in just the same way. And then the plank distinctly swayed. He fell forward on his face and clutched it. It turned up on one side. He flung his arms round it, and fell free, hanging by its narrow edge. And still he could not scream.

During the horrific instant that followed when he realized that his strength was feebler than the suction of the ground beneath, he was still perplexed with the problem of why it was he could not scream.

The plank slipped from its support on the wall opposite at the same moment that he lost his grip. His body seemed to drop and leave his heart where it had been, and his hands clutching the air. Some part of him was racing madly through space, and the ground was rushing up to strike the heart which he had left above him. His consciousness seemed to split up into a variety of vital activities. There was something rushing through his ears, like the roaring of a steam engine going through a tunnel. *He was falling!*

There was a sudden whirling vision of his mother stepping off the gangway of a boat and saying: "Come on, my little one. Are you tired then?" There was a hiss of water, the vision of a girl he had known once at Bayonne, named Lisette. She was weeping into an apron and crying out: "No, no, not that! not that!" Other visions crowded simultaneously—his brother eating gingerbread, Uncle Sem, and the canary which seemed to have reached vast dimensions, filling up a whole room. There was a fat man in a tweed suit lying on his face amongst some bushes, and coughing horribly. There was a half-vision, half-realization, of something bursting, blowing up to the sky in a horrible explosion of unbelievable violence. A crystallized instant in which all the anger, all the feral passions, crashed in an agony of blood. . . .

"You think, then, Doctor Lancret," said Inspector Tolozan, as the two men entered the solemn mortuary, "that there will be no need for a post-mortem examination of the body?"

"None at all, Monsieur Tolozan," replied the doctor. "The cause of death was perfectly normal. The deceased passed away quietly in his sleep as the

result of cardiac failure, probably due to the shock of his arrest and the nature of the charge against him. Such cases are not at all uncommon, as you know, not at all.”

“You yourself were on duty, Monsieur le docteur?”

“Yes, Monsieur Tolozan. When the—er—deceased was brought in at 8.20 p.m. he was in a state of coma. We tested the heart and found it to be in a very bad condition, very bad condition indeed. He slept soundly until 3.20 a.m. when the attendant called me to say that number 107 was showing signs of collapse. I arrived, but we could do nothing. He sank rapidly and passed away at three minutes past four. Um—yes, that was how it was. Are you going to Madame Lombard’s reception to-night?”

“No,” answered Inspector Tolozan. “No, I am not going.”

“You will excuse me, Monsieur Tolozan? I have much to do before . . .”

“But, certainly, Monsieur le docteur, and thank you.”

The doctor bustled out, and Inspector Tolozan turned once more to the body covered with a white sheet. He raised the cloth and regarded the features of the criminal, now immutably set in calm repose.

And there crept into his eyes an expression of pity and wonder. This analyst of human frailties, this solver of human problems stood meekly in the presence of a mystery beyond his powers to solve.

With a reverent gesture he replaced the cloth and went out quietly.

THE HAPPY MAN

I

There had been much ado about a stool. You see during all the twenty odd years that Mr. Journée had been in business he had directed operations seated on a wooden box, that had eventually become polished to a beautiful brown shine by the friction of his pants. But when his son Anthony returned from college—where only by exercising the most rigid economies had his father been able to send him—and entered the workshops, the stool became a mild centre of discord. Anthony resented his father sitting on the box. There seemed something discreditable about it. At Rainsworth College, where he had fairly distinguished himself, people didn't sit on boxes. It was not as though there were no chairs about. There were several in that part of the workshop which served as a kind of reception-room. There were two even of a period somewhere about the respectable Mr. Chippendale. But when his son suggested a substitution he said no. He had always sat on the box, and it was quite good enough for him. He was quite huffy about it, which for a man of his equable and lovable nature was remarkable.

Anthony made several more hints, but they were of no avail. Then he adopted a very astute move. He waited until Christmas, and then on Christmas morning he presented his father with a beautiful circular mahogany stool with a green plush seat. He said: "I thought you might like this, dad, to sit on in the shop."

Mr. Journée was cornered for the moment. He coughed and spluttered out vague thanks. It was very good of the boy, of course, very good indeed. H'm! Yes, well, well—— When business was resumed after Christmas the stool was substituted for the box. But as the days went by it became apparent that Mr. Journée was not happy about it. He fidgeted restlessly upon his stool, and appeared preoccupied as though unable to concentrate on his work. And a week later Anthony found him seated once more on the box, with the stool tucked away under the bench. He said nothing, but he felt angry.

Now we have not sufficient evidence to convict Anthony of the disaster which happened the next morning, but it is certain that his sympathy appeared a little strained at the time. For when Mr. Journée went to sit down, there was a sudden crash, and the top of the box fell in, and Mr. Journée with it. When he picked himself up he called out:

“Who has been monkeying with this box?”

Anthony, who had been working on a clay model a dozen yards away, hurried forward and helped to rectify the disturbance, but, of course, he knew nothing about it. Mr. Journée growled and carried the box to another part of the workshop and with his own hands—he was a good workman—he repaired the box, and by an arrangement of splats and screws he made the box strong enough to support a he-elephant. And that was the end of that. Anthony gave up, and Mr. Journée continued to sit on the box to the end of his days.

II

It might be advisable at this point to give a rough description of Mr. Journée's workshops. They were situated down a narrow cul-de-sac called Glaize Yard. You came to a black fence on which was inscribed: “Paul Journée, architectural carver in wood and stone.” You entered an untidy yard, rendered unduly untidy by the prodigal litter of loose plaster. In the summertime the plaster blew about and covered everything like a frost. In the winter it was dangerous to walk on it on account of the slipperiness. The yard was filled with blocks of Portland stone, planks of timber, and dilapidated plaster-casts. The workshops were in a buff brick building on two floors. The ground floor was devoted to plaster, stone, and sometimes marble. The floor upstairs was devoted to the noble purposes of fashioning wood, that loyal and ancient friend to man. It was a long narrow workshop with benches all along the wall under the window, with rows of gouges and wood-carvers' tools neatly arranged in front of each workman. The brick walls were distempered an Indian red, and on them were a bewildering number of casts, scraps of carving, sections of volutes, capitals, cornices, cherub's heads, acanthus scrolls, lions rampant, and lions couchant, and other heraldic devices, rough charcoal drawings, architectural photographs, and full-size details.

The other side of the long workshop had a socially and intellectually elastic character. For it had to express various activities without definite lines of demarcation. At the further end was a sink and some pegs, where the workmen washed and hung up their clothes. Then came two long benches covered with drawings and books, at which Mr. Journée and an old draughtsman, named Lintot, used to work. At the back of these benches were two white pine chests, a grandfather clock, and an oak chest. Then there came a break in the wall, and the workshop began to take on a slightly different character. One was slowly approaching the social and business end

of the workshop, near the entrance door. A deal bench was covered by a piece of green baize, on which reposed pens, ink, books, and correspondence. It was here that Mr. Journée conducted the administrative side of his business, seated on his wooden box. After that the workshop culminated in a surprising touch of the magnificent. For one thing there was a square of carpet, projecting sufficiently far out so that the wood-carvers could avoid it when passing in and out. There was a fine old walnut tallboy, another eight-day clock, three barometers, two Louis XVI mirrors, a large framed print of the Colosseum at Rome, an oil-painting by an unknown Italian painter, an ebony and ivory Venetian chair, and three other old chairs. This was in effect Mr. Journée's reception-room, where he interviewed his clients, who were mostly architects.

III

The incident about the stool had a disturbing effect on Mr. Journée. It was not that he regarded it as important in itself as that it symbolized a disquieting side of his son's nature. He himself was proud of his craft, of his good name, of his Huguenot stock. The Journées had been English craftsmen of some sort ever since the days of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. He was a simple man, with a simple outlook, and passionately devoted to his wife and son. It had been one of his great ambitions that his son should take his place and carry on the fine tradition of his calling. But a few months' service in the workshop gave evidence that the young man was restless. It was not that he showed any lack of ability. He gave promise of being an extremely brilliant draughtsman. He was quick and clever in every way. But the father became subtly aware that the son in some way despised the business, and was even slightly contemptuous of himself. His own education had been of a very sketchy nature. He had had to earn his own living since he was fourteen. He occasionally dropped his "h's," and invariably his "g's." He dressed in a slightly eccentric manner, and was not alive to the finer meanings of social life. But in these matters he could find nothing important. He was wrapped up in his work.

When he had married at the age of twenty-four, he had been a journeyman wood-carver, earning tenpence an hour. His wife Bessie was the daughter of a piano-tuner. They lived in two rooms in Kentish Town, and the boy was born the following year. The early struggles of the young couple were severe. Being a journeyman carver he was always liable to an hour's dismissal, and when work was scarce he would frequently be out of employment for months. It says a good deal for the courage and faith of this young workman and the devotion and loyalty of his wife that they emerged

from these conditions successfully. At the age of twenty-six, a relative died and left him seventy-five pounds, and he immediately set up in business for himself. He worked in a kind of scullery in the basement of the house where their lodgings were. He traipsed the streets of London with samples and photographs of his work, and called on innumerable architects. For the most part he was received with indifference if not with rebuffs, frequently with that chilling formula: "Very well. Leave your name and address. If an opportunity occurs, Mr. So-and-so will let you know."

He was at that time a tall, clumsily-built young man, high-shouldered, and too long in the thin flanks. When he walked his spindley legs seemed to be shaking in disgust at the eager onrush of those hunched shoulders and that keen projecting chin. The face was narrow, and the nose and ears too large. His untidy black hair, which was short behind, fell in unmanageable strands across his temples and deep brown eyes. He looked like a gentle and reflective vulture, if you can conceive such a thing. But in this grim struggle to improve the lot of his kind he had one invaluable asset. Old Lintot—who was devoted to him—used to say in after years:

"Where the gov'nor gets away with it is that he *believes in things*."

And he just went on *believing* in things. He had a simple reverence for names, traditions, and beauty in every form. Not understanding much, he felt it all intensely. His dreams were coloured by magic yearnings. And because he believed in his dreams he gradually influenced others to believe in him. Sometimes at night when he and his wife were discussing how they could possibly buy boots for the growing boy, they would suddenly change the subject and talk eagerly about the wonderful trip they were going to make to Italy "one day." They had got on. The boy had been sent to a public school, but the dream of the trip to Italy had not yet materialized.

The disturbing thoughts that crept into the mind of Paul Journée when meditating upon his son's attitude, centred round a recurring doubt, a doubt that—well, with all his cleverness, his brilliance, his learning, did the boy really *believe* in things?

IV

If Anthony's advent to his father's workshop opened inauspiciously it did in any case have one bright aspect to it, for it synchronized with a wave of comparative prosperity. It was as though nature, preparing this youth for a brilliant career, was deliberately determined to see that his setting should always be appropriate. Soon after his arrival the father received a large order

for carving on a municipal building in the Midlands, and soon after another large order for carved chair-backs. This latter demand came through Justin McGrath. The McGraths were the Journées' closest and most intimate friends. Justin was a chairmaker with premises in the neighbourhood. He and his wife were much older than the Journées, and they had a daughter named Laura. Laura was a sweet-tempered, rather plain girl in her twenty-seventh year. She appeared to be considerably older, as a result, no doubt, of living her life and submerging it in the lives of two much older people. The old couple adored their daughter, and were entirely oblivious of how much they preyed upon her youth and vitality.

The two families supped together at least once a week, and looked in on each other at odd hours of the day and night. Mr. Journée always referred to Mr. McGrath as "the old 'un." These two elderly craftsmen would sit over their pipes in the evening and discuss Wren, and Jean Goujon, and Viollet-de-Duc. And they would lend each other books, over which they would pore, books with illustrations of Italian palaces, and sculpture, and gardens, of French cathedrals, and Spanish iron. They were neither of them of a keenly critical nature. They admired everything, as though hushed into a profound reverence for the past. Mr. Journée would adjust his spectacles and exclaim:

"By Jove, old 'un, here's a fine frieze!"

And Mr. McGrath would adjust his, and make little clucking sounds of approbation. They belonged to a guild where men of their kind foregathered, and read papers and held discussions on the subjects which interested them. They went for a walk together regularly every Sunday morning in Regent's Park, whilst their wives prepared the Sunday dinner. Sometimes they allowed their minds to wander in abstract speculations. They touched on politics, religion, philosophy, and life, and so came to know each other.

During this year of Anthony's experiment in the workshop, the slow-moving mind of Mr. Journée became quietly occupied with a plan for the realization of a dream. For he was a careful man, and, as Lintot said, "never put his leg over the stile till he could see the other side." But things were going well, very well, better than they had ever gone before. After paying his workmen on Saturday morning he went carefully into his accounts. He made calculations and estimates. Yes, it could be done. It was now the end of February. He wouldn't tell Bessie. He would wait till April. She would be so bitterly disappointed if it didn't come off. Lintot and the foreman, Greville, would manage somehow. They would go off for a month. They should realize that honeymoon dream of over twenty years ago—a month in

Italy. Rome, Padua, Florence, Venice, Sienna. He could almost see the white palaces glistening in the sun, the cypress-trees, the olive groves. He could almost hear the low, musical cry of the gondoliers, as they glided their craft down dimly-lighted canals out into the moon-flooded mystery of the Venetian night, where the festival is held under the shadow of the Santa Maria della Salute.

He suffered agonies of restraint in not breaking the news to his wife, but the months went by and April came. One Sunday morning when the daffodils were out in the Park, where he was walking with his friend McGrath, he suddenly thought: "I will tell her to-night." But he said nothing to McGrath. He felt it would be in some way mean to let anyone know until he had told her.

After tea that evening Anthony followed him into the drawing-room. The mother was washing up. He said:

"Father, can I have a bit of a jaw with you?"

Mr. Journée said: "Of course, my boy."

The young man seemed a little self-conscious and on edge. He suddenly blurted out:

"You know, I don't think I'm going to be any good at this business. It bores me."

An expression of troubled disappointment came into the eyes of Mr. Journée, but he answered quietly:

"What do you want to do, Anthony?"

"Father, you've been—been doing pretty well lately, haven't you? Couldn't you afford to send me to Paris? I'd like to go over there and study to become a painter. I know two other chaps going in the spring."

Mr. Journée looked into the bowl of his pipe. He took a long time to answer and when he did he said:

"Anthony, is it that you *really* want to become a painter? It isn't, is it, that you think you would just like to lead that kind of life?"

"No. I've got ambitions. I feel cramped here. Everyone says I have talent, don't they?"

"Yes, that's true."

He paused again and fumbled with a match.

“I want you to do what you think is right, my boy. I shall have to think this over.”

And the young man went out, and Mr. Journée sat there thinking. He could hear his wife singing over the clatter of the teacups. Paris, eh? Of course, the boy must choose his own career. But—Paris! this would mean a lot of expense, years and years and the uncertain life of a painter. Of course, the boy’s career was more important than—than their pleasures. But that would be the end of Italy—for the time. He poked the fire and watched the grey ash fall into the pan. After a time his wife came in. He said:

“Well, mother, finished?”

“Yes, dear, there wasn’t much to do.”

The tones of his voice seemed a little clouded as, after a pause, he said:

“The McGraths are coming in to-night.”

“Oh, I’m so glad.”

A happy smile lighted the face of Mrs. Journée, as she picked up her work-basket, and took her accustomed seat facing her husband.

V

Anthony was away until July, when he returned for a month’s holiday. The two families shared a furnished house at Angmering for the month of August, with a rather surprising result. For Anthony and Laura fell in love. The boy had been working hard, and he was obviously keen and ambitious. The father was pleased to see that it was, indeed, “the thing itself” his son was seeking, and not the attractive features of a student’s life in Paris. He had not felt justified in allowing him more than just sufficient to live on comfortably, and he had not got into debt. Although more animated and eager in his manners, his attitude was, if anything, graver than it had been before he went away. He was obviously in earnest. Well, well, in that case the postponement of the trip to Italy was justified. Business would improve, the boy would get on, the day would not be far distant. Neither Mr. Journée nor Mr. McGrath could spare a whole month from their business. They stayed a fortnight and came down for the following two weekends. It was on that first week-end, after they had been a week in town, that the truth was brought home to them.

It came about most unexpectedly. Anthony and Laura had known each other for years, and had never once regarded each other in any other light than as good friends. She was seven years older than he.

But there is something about the seashore which has always proved a source of trouble to wayward hearts. After four months' separation their meeting had about it an element of novelty. They saw each other in a new light. There were aspects about his Parisian experiences which caused Anthony to react rather violently to this familiar, simple-minded girl friend. He had found himself over there a little shy, home-sick, and bewildered. Everyone seemed so clever, so sophisticated, so very much a part of it all. He had not made many friends, and his knowledge of French was very imperfect.

One morning, lying on the beach after bathing, he looked at Laura, who was lying on her back by his side, taking a sun bath. She was wrapped up in a towel, but her legs and arms were bare. Her healthy plump face was framed in loose brown hair drying in the sun. Her arms were stretched out, and her eyes closed, giving the impression of complete contentment. Her little pink feet were diapered with sand.

He looked away for a moment at the sea, and felt something queer stir within him. Why had he never thought of this before?

This happened during the first week of his stay. Angmering is a small place, and the days are idle. He had no other companions of his own age. Even if—even if nothing came of it, it was obviously the pleasantest way to pass one's time. They went for rambles on the dunes, and lay side by side beneath the tamarisks. And he told her eagerly of his life in Paris, his ambitions, and his hopes. And he took her hand, and romped with her, as brothers and sisters do. And still she did not see.

She was a difficult girl to flirt with. She accepted everything as a literal statement. Her large, grey, innocent eyes seemed proof against the most subtle erotic shafts. She was desperately happy!

One thing concerning her irritated him. He could not get her to come out with him in the evening. She would not leave her mother. In the raw daylight he still felt a little self-conscious. He had not had the experience to carry this thing by storm without the aid of darkness. When it came to the question of any kind of protestation of this new-found passion he felt quite inarticulate. Perhaps there warred within him two forces uncertain of each other, a subconscious egoism that did not mean to be denied, and an unfamiliar passion he knew not how to interpret.

One night, however, the opportunity he was seeking occurred. She had finished a game of bezique with her mother, and dashed out hatless to the

post. He followed, and at the angle of the road called after her. She stopped and said:

“Hullo, Tony, are you coming with me?”

He said “Yes” in a husky voice, and caught hold of her by the forearm. They were by the side of a steep grass bank that walled-in someone’s garden. She noticed something strange about his pale face in the moonlight, and she said:

“What is it?”

For answer he threw his other arm around her, and kissed her clumsily on the cheek. And still he could see that she did not understand. She said:

“Are you in trouble, Tony?”

He tried to kiss her on the lips then, but she turned her cheeks away, and raised her arms between them.

“Don’t be foolish,” she said calmly.

“Can’t you see?” he exclaimed almost angrily.

“What is it?”

“I love you, Laura.”

But when the words left his lips they did not sound as he meant them to sound. They were less like an avowal of love than a complaint of ill-treatment. But he saw her start, as though awakened from a dream. She looked at him, with her lips half-parted. She was probably blushing, but he could not be certain. She muttered: “Oh, my dear, I did not know. You mustn’t—you mustn’t——” She hurried across the road to the pillar-box, and he followed her in silence.

When the letter was posted, and they were returning, they walked arm in arm, but he did not try to kiss her again. They walked back without speaking. He could see her bosom heaving, and her eyes were bright. At the gate she gave his hand a tight little squeeze and hurried in.

And as each of them fell asleep that night they both shared an emotion in common. It was an emotion which had in it something of an unknown blinding ecstasy; but the ecstasy of one was tinged with contentment and a profound happiness; the ecstasy of the other with a sense of fear and vague unhappiness.

Before the return of the two fathers the following Saturday, things moved with surprising rapidity. It took Laura two days to begin even to unravel the skeins of emotion which had suddenly entangled her. Love! She had read about love in books—when she had time to escape from her domestic obligations. She had even dreamed of love as a remote passion applying to far-off people. But to come upon *her* like this!

It was all wild and foolish. She was in any case much too old for Anthony, much too plain and dull. Nevertheless, the next morning she regarded him in an entirely new light. He had become very good-looking of late. Paris had improved him. Everyone said he was brilliant; that he had a brilliant career before him. Things came his way. He was quick, clever, and charming in manners when he wanted to be. She watched his lithe boyish figure sprinting across the sands. She saw the laughter and the love-light in those keen, dark, rather mysterious eyes. She liked him next to her, and what he said aroused a thousandfold more interest than it had done the previous day. She thought about him, and thought, and thought. And she thought about herself, and her father and mother, and her God. And a new book in her life seemed to be opened.

The first night she would not go out with him after supper, but the second night she did. The old ladies went to bed very early. They had all been for an excursion. Laura wanted to know, wanted to hear, in any case, how people spoke when they were in love. She wanted to hear how Anthony spoke. And that night he was eloquent enough. For he took her down on to the sandbanks and kissed her on the lips. She found herself clinging to him, and when he said he loved her, his voice was vibrant and convincing. For the first time she heard the voice of a lover speaking.

After that there was no pretence. Laura was incapable of pretending, and Anthony had no desire to. They spent the day rejoicing in each other, regardless of the glances of onlookers. For the first time in her life Laura neglected her mother in the evenings. At first the old lady did not understand. She became peevish and querulous. But Mrs. Journée was quicker in her perceptions. She did not rely upon her son with that taken-for-granted assurance that her friend relied upon her daughter. Perhaps for this reason she observed him more objectively. She was more sensitive to the shifts of his moods. She saw him again and again holding Laura's hand, gazing into her eyes——

And she thought: "Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish it was Saturday and Paul was here." She was unused to grappling with any emotional experience without her husband's help. This was tremendous, cataclysmic, almost

beyond itself. Her Anthony! Nancy's Laura! And Laura was so much older—— She could not face it.

It was not until she was enveloped in comfortable darkness, in her own bed, on the Saturday night, and her husband was lying by her side, that she unburdened herself. Mr. Journée was at first inclined to laugh about it.

“I don't suppose there is anything in it, mother,” he said. “Young people, you know, the sea air and that——”

Nevertheless, he was quite patently excited about it. To think that his son and Justin's daughter—after all these years. Of course, the girl was older than the boy, but still—— He told his wife about a new job he expected to get, a carved staircase for a rich South African. He thought it well to distract her attention. She might not sleep. She had probably not been sleeping too well. He felt a tinge of conscience that he should have been absent, when she was assailed by this emotional upheaval.

In the morning, he was up early, anxious to take his bearings. Justin came down later and after breakfast the two families wandered down to the beach. Mr. Journée was preoccupied. His fellow-guildsman wanted to tell him about a contract that a firm of decorators had secured by bribing a consulting architect, and also about a sale of furniture that was coming off the following week in Hanover Square, but Mr. Journée's eyes were intently fixed upon two figures prancing about on the shore, and lying side by side against the breakwater, and his mind was occupied with doubts and misgivings. “Suppose he gets tired of her——”

In the afternoon he went for a walk by himself. Alone amidst the murmur of the sea, and the intermittent screaming of the gulls, he thought the thing out.

“No, I shan't tell the old 'un. It wouldn't be fair. He'll never notice. It will probably all blow over. I would trust Laura. But she's seven years older—— Anthony might get tired of her. He's clever. Poor Laura girl, you're dull and not too pretty. Of course, if it had all been just the other way about or in any case a little different—— My son and his daughter! But we must try and do the right thing, eh, old man? If the boy says anything I shall try and dissuade him. When he gets back to Paris——”

He hummed to himself perplexedly. In this great open space the world seemed very vast—vast and mysterious—and yet somehow wonderfully satisfying. The tamarisks nodded in the breeze, and the sun began to set.

“Life is very beautiful,” he thought. “I mustn't let mother worry.”

And then he went back home, for with all its beauty, nature, as he saw it then, seemed lacking in something.

The families spent a quiet evening. The two young ones disappeared soon after supper, and the four elders devoted the evening to a sleepily conversational game of whist. At half-past ten Mrs. Journée declared for bed, and the McGraths followed her. Mr. Journée said he would sit up a bit and read. The night was warm, and he sat near the window turning over the sheets of a Sunday newspaper which he had already read once. After a time he heard the garden gate click, and two people come whispering up the path. They stood near the window which was open, and he drew back into the room. It was not his place to overhear. He heard the front door open and shut, and two people tiptoeing up the stairs. He must have dozed after that, for the room seemed cold, when, with a start, he heard his name called, and, looking up, saw Justin standing by the door. The old 'un was in a dressing-gown, looking tousled, but somehow very agitated. He came straight up and, without any preliminaries, tapped him on the shoulder and said excitedly:

“Paul! Paul, old man. Do you know that our two children are engaged?”
And he held out his hand.

VII

Mr. Journée was a man who extracted extreme delight out of small things. It was an intense pleasure to him to polish his boots—he never allowed anyone else to touch his square-toed brown boots—brush his clothes, or clean out his pipe. When he came down in the morning at Angmering he would stroll out into the garden, take several deep breaths in a way someone had shown him, do a few clumsy exercises, and then light his pipe for a few whiffs before breakfast. He would stand there in the sun, blinking at the flowers or the glittering dew on a spider's web, and feel good. Nature felt good to him, because he never questioned her prescriptions. He liked to feel life pouring through him, and he the reverent medium for life's expression.

Before Anthony returned to Paris he enjoyed many such mornings. His early misgivings were overcome by the contagious optimism of the rest, and particularly of his old friend Justin. Justin dismissed the question of the difference in the ages of the young people as of little consequence. They were both young in his eyes, so what did a mere matter of seven years make in a lifetime? In his opinion it was an ideal match. His wife agreed with him, only adding a hope that they would not marry “for a long, long time.” As for

Mrs. Journée, she wept a little when she heard that the affair was already settled, but she did not let her husband see her tears.

That the affair would not happen for a long long time was fairly obvious. Anthony had only just begun to study for one of the most precarious professions in the world, and neither of the parents was in a position to set the young couple up in a life partnership. It gave Mr. Journée an opportunity of giving his son a broad hint that he should forego his extravagant ambitions, and return to the workshops. It was a solider career. In only a few years' time he might be able to make him a partner, and then he could marry and settle down. At the expression "settle down," Anthony tossed his head. He said that he had no intention of settling down, even when married. Settling down meant curbing your ambitions, becoming a cabbage. Mr. Journée didn't quite understand what he meant. He said defensively that there was "no harm in anyone having a touch of cabbage about them."

Nevertheless, having once acquiesced in the affair, Mr. Journée subscribed to it whole-heartedly. He was as excited as a schoolboy. He kissed Laura and already began to treat her as his own daughter. He playfully ragged his wife about it, and felt drawn closer than ever to his old friend. And in his morning walk—he always did a mile walk before starting his day's work—he dreamt of this new-born happiness the earth was producing, and of his grandchildren—what he would do for them. Perhaps by that time the business would be paying well. He visualised soft clinging little limbs about his knees, and baby voices calling "Grandpa!" Anthony went back to Paris with his ambitions; but he left his heart behind, and also a beautiful gold ring set with a pearl and two small rubies (paid for by his father). It was all very rapid. But as Mr. Journée said, "It was not as though they had only *known* each other a month."

Two years passed rapidly and uneventfully. He and Laura corresponded frequently. We must not pry into these letters, but their devotion was apparent and constant. Laura began studying all the art books she could borrow, and she made frequent visits to the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection. She could already distinguish between a Raphael and a Raeburn. She was preparing herself as the wife of a famous painter.

One day Mrs. McGrath had a mild paralytic seizure. She was confined to bed for several months. Laura waited on her day and night. Coming out of the house one night and standing by the hall door, where Laura was seeing him off, Mr. Journée suddenly thought:

“Good Lord! Poor Laura, how she’s ageing. She must be over thirty, but she looks—she looks anything to-night. Those dark lines round her eyes. It’s quite time she was married——”

The problem began to obsess him. Anthony was getting on well. But—well, he had not sold a picture yet, and was not likely to for some time. His own business was going fairly well, but nothing to write home about. Old McGrath had his hands full to keep things going. But he would like the boy to get married. He spent long hours over his books, and his calculations. It was certain that he and his wife couldn’t do that Italian trip until the young couple were launched. But still——

If only the boy would settle down a bit. It would be as cheap to keep them both in London as to keep the boy in Paris. If they could manage not to have children for a year or two, for instance; or, for that matter, why shouldn’t Laura go to Paris?

Returning home one Sunday morning from their weekly walk, he said:

“Old un, I think it’s time those children got married.”

“Eh? what’s that?” said Justin. “Married! But surely Anthony could hardly——”

It was impossible for Mr. Journée to explain that he was thinking less of his son in the matter than of his friend’s daughter. He pretended to a greater state of affluence than he had any claim to. After a good deal of misgiving he offered to set the young people up “in a modest way” until such time as Anthony should be in a position to support the household. The old ’un almost shed tears of gratitude. It would certainly be very desirable. He deplored the fact that he could do so little himself. He would however, do what he could. Mrs. McGrath, on the other hand, offered every objection. It was wrong, for young people to marry without means. Besides, what was going to happen to her?

“I married when I was earning tenpence an hour,” argued Mr. Journée. And as a bright after-reflection he suggested that, perhaps, they would agree to live with Mr. and Mrs. McGrath so that Laura could still carry out her filial obligations. When Anthony came home for the Christmas holidays the proposal was put to him, and to everyone’s surprise he accepted it.

VIII

Anthony and Laura were married the following Easter. The ceremony was carried out with as much *éclat* as the means of the parties concerned

allowed for. Mr. Journée was all for a little show. He liked the ceremonial and sentimental side of it. He bought a tailcoat and a top-hat. A wedding cake was ordered, and they were married in a church. The ceremony was followed by a wedding breakfast to which some fifteen guests were invited. Mr. Journée was up early in a great state of excitement. Being a nervous man he fussed over every little detail. He was the kind of man who, when he had to catch a train, was always at the station at least three-quarters of an hour before the train was due to start. And at the wedding he was ready at least two hours too soon, fussing about and calling out:

“Now then, Mary, has that claret come yet? Mother, are you nearly ready? Anything I can do, my dear? God bless my soul! we haven’t any cigarettes for the young men. Where’s Anthony? You mean to say the boy’s not up yet! Does he know it’s *his* wedding and not mine? Anthony! Anthony!”

Anthony took no pains to show that all this fuss was distasteful to him. He regarded it as frankly Philistine, not to say, common. He would have liked to have been married at a registrar’s office, and to have quietly slipped away. He was in a perfect dread that his father would want to make a speech at the wedding breakfast, saying silly and sentimental things and dropping his “h’s” and “g’s” all over the place. Fortunately, there would be no one there who mattered. He thought, however, that it was advisable to give way on certain points, as he had been somewhat lordly in his terms in agreeing to the wedding at all. He had agreed that he and his wife should live with the McGraths, on the understanding that he had a studio out. He had, indeed, become a little tired of Paris, and the idea of marriage seemed to present a pleasant change. He was anxious, too, to work on his own, unrestricted by French professors.

His attitude at the wedding breakfast was, rather, one of bored tolerance. He did not know that his father had actually rehearsed a speech. Mr. Journée wanted to talk about love and happiness, about his own married life, and his long friendship with the bride’s father. When he got upon his legs, however, his eye alighted on his son’s face, and he merely stammered:

“Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the toast of the bride and bridegroom.”

Everyone cheered and raised their glasses and there were loud calls for a speech from the bridegroom, but the latter merely shook his head and smiled uncomfortably. He was anxious to be off.

When they left there was the usual tragic-comic parting associable with such events. The funny man and some of his friends, to whom it meant just a wedding, some of whom had drunk a little too much and were hilarious; the Journées and McGraths rather pathetically trying to be gay; Mrs. McGrath weeping a little when she kissed her daughter; the bride radiantly happy and trying not to cry; Mr. Journée showing meticulous interest in all the details of their journey to the Isle of Wight, where they were going for the honeymoon, and all the time deeply stirred by the larger aspects of the great affair; the bridegroom posing as essentially the man of the world, to whom being married was an everyday occurrence.

They went at last, and the guests gradually departed. Mr. McGrath went too, as he had to see a man on business. The two mothers sat in the drawing-room and talked. The evening crept on. Mr. Journée put on his hat and strolled across to his workshops, which had been closed for the day in honour of the event. He let himself in and went upstairs.

Deep in thought, he paced the long, narrow shop. On the other side of the yard were other workshops, from which came the sound of someone beating on iron. It had a soothing rhythmic sound. He became subtly aware of the smell of wood. Wood! all his life had been spent under the smell of wood. At the end of the shop was a heap of pine shavings. He went up and stirred them affectionately with his foot. Then he strolled along the benches, examining the men's work.

"H'm!" he thought, "Dawes is getting too much relief into the scroll. Some of these fellows get a tool in their hand and there's no holding 'em. I must tell him. By Jove! that's a lovely egg-and-tongue! Charlie's cutting that beautifully. That young man will get on. I shall have to give him another twopence an hour soon. Sievewright's clamped this baluster in a funny way. I don't see how he's going to get at it. Must ask him to-morrow."

He put on his steel-rimmed spectacles, and examined Lintot's drawing.

"Now where has that old man got that detail from? It's not Gibbons. It's not even Inigo Jones. Clever old rascal though! Expect he has some authority."

He wandered down towards the administrative side of the shop. Suddenly he caught sight of a stool beneath his writing-bench. Quite mechanically he pulled it out and examined it. It was a circular mahogany stool with a green plush seat. He had forgotten all about it. It still looked bright and new and somehow uncompanionable. He turned it over and muttered:

“H’m, yes, very good of the boy, very good, of course.”

Then he tucked it away in the place from which he had taken it. The workshop seemed to get a little lonely then. He lighted his pipe, the match flickering impatiently over the bowl, as though the hand that held it was not quite steady. Then he pulled his large slouch hat over his eyes and went out.

IX

Work is the social leaven that keeps men and women sane. Some people avoid it and become degenerates. Others abuse it and become unbalanced. It was work which kept the eye of Mr. Journée bright, whilst his son was away on his honeymoon. It was work which drove Anthony back from his honeymoon, rather precipitately a week before he was due. He had become restless. After a few days at the sea, he became convinced that there was no need for the delights of early married life to interfere with the thrust of his ambitions. He had seen the great world, and he desired to be part and parcel of it. His fingers itched to express something that should be noticed—something that would make his name. Laura talked of her home, and what she would do with the rooms allocated to them, and how she would manage details that seemed hardly worth worrying about to Anthony. He had already, in imagination, designed the place they would live in when he was famous. He visualised receptions where all the notabilities foregathered, and he and Laura standing at the top of a noble staircase receiving them. He could already hear the hushed whispers of the crowd: “Look! there he is, that’s Anthony Journée!”

The explanation of their return was perhaps a little lame, but it satisfied the parents. When Mr. McGrath said raggingly:

“What my dear, tired of honeymooning already?”

She blushed and whispered:

“It didn’t seem important being down there, dad. Our life is going to be one long honeymoon. Besides, Anthony naturally wants to get on with his work, and I must get the place straight.”

They both set about their respective duties with avidity. The person most delighted to see them back was old Mrs. McGrath. Nothing had been right while Laura was away. She could never find anything. Her food was never cooked properly. Her husband was out all day and the servant neglected her, and was rude and careless.

“If you hadn’t come back soon, my dear, I’m sure I should have been really seriously ill.”

All that was soon put to rights. Anthony went off to his studio directly after breakfast and returned in time for dinner in the evening. This in itself was an innovation to the McGraths and the Journées, who were accustomed to have their dinner midday. Anthony was not made aware of the time and attention devoted to his mother-in-law. The rooms he lived in were clean and bright and comfortable. His dinner was always excellently cooked and served. He did not know that it was the second hot meal his wife had cooked that day. Indeed, he made no inquiries at all about the domestic details of the McGrath household. He arrived home rather surly and preoccupied. Laura soon discovered that it was better to say little to him till he had fed. After dinner he would stretch himself, talk glib satisfaction about his day’s work, be a little amorous, smoke many cigarettes, read the newspaper, and go to bed.

Laura was perfectly happy. In only one particular did she find her union with Anthony disconcerting. And that curiously enough was in connection with his work.

She had taken great pains to attain some understanding of the old masters. And to her alarm she found she was all wrong. Anthony seemed to have no great respect for the old masters. He spoke of them superciliously, in the same tone that he spoke of the McGrath’s and Journée’s relatives and friends. It was as though he had something up his sleeve about them that it was hardly worth his while to impart to her. His own work seemed quite incomprehensible. He painted in the manner of some French school she had not heard of. It impressed her as being curiously angular and unconvincing. Neither did he ever seem very anxious that she should come round to his studio. If she went, he would kiss her and play with her hair, but he made no attempt to explain his work. It appeared to be the kind of painting that was done by a certain set, and which, in a few years’ time, would become all the rage.

But if Laura was bewildered by her husband’s surprising productions, Mr. Journée was even more so. He arrived all aglow to observe his son’s progress. He was given to understand that he principally painted interiors, and he envisaged an immature, but promising display of works in the manner of Pieter de Hoogh. Instead of which he found himself regarding most astonishing daubs of pink and green, tables all out of perspective, curious patterns, intending to represent herrings and teapots and such-like things.

In his naïveté he asked what it was all about, and Anthony simply shut him up. He told his father he knew nothing about art, and was very rude to him. It was the unpleasantest interview that had ever taken place between father and son. Discussing it that night with old McGrath—he had forgiven his son by then—he said:

“I don’t know, old ’un, I’m sure. It seems to me funny stuff. Founded on nothing. Of course, I may be wrong. I’ve been brought up to believe in tradition. But perhaps we’re getting out of date, old ’un. The boy says it’s the thing that’s coming. He talks above my head. I’ve never yet heard of anything good coming out of nothing. But we may be wrong. Life is very mysterious. These young people——”

He paused and blinked at the gas chandelier.

“Do people buy that kind of thing?” grunted the old ’un.

“Ah! that I don’t know. He said nothing about that.”

“He said nothing about it!”

The two elderly gentlemen sat there in silence; Mr. McGrath surprised that his friend should show so little sympathy for the interests of his daughter; Mr. Journée wondering whether the long tradition of craftsmanship he had the honour to represent was going to end in abortion or genius.

X

It was a strange two years which followed this union of the Journées and McGraths. Beneath the surface of apparent success there was a disturbing undercurrent. Over many pipes Mr. Journée often pondered whether he had been wise in sending his son to a public school, in allowing him to go to Paris, in lavishing upon him more than the surplus of his hard-earned gains. He had read somewhere a line which ran: “Each man kills the thing he loves,” and the phrase haunted him. At the same time he felt that Anthony was in some queer way beyond him. He felt a little proud—as people always do—of producing something he didn’t understand. And it produced in him a certain sense of egotistical vanity to be able to tell his friends that his son was going to be a painter, that he had been to Paris, and that he had a studio of his own. After his own hard lot and struggles it appeared to him a piquant luxury to be the parent of such a situation.

He buried himself in his workshops, making large charcoal drawings of pediments and friezes, supervising the workmen, getting out estimates of

cornices and egg-and-dart at so much per foot. He kept his accounts—seated on his wooden box—paid his men, interviewed architects, got out quantities for builders, and discussed detail with Lintot. The business fluctuated. Sometimes he was very busy, sometimes very slack. On the whole doing fairly well.

He would have been really in a position to put money by, but for the expenses of his married son. It was not that the boy was extravagant in himself—his domestic expenses were negligible, thanks to Laura. But his muse appeared to be an eccentric mistress. She required an enormous number of canvases and strange colours, and materials. And occasionally it appeared to be imperative that the young artist should go over to Paris or Munich. He always went by himself, and usually returned more reserved and aloft than usual, more oblivious to his surroundings. He began to develop a personality that could only be described as exotic. There were lines of insolent beauty about his face and the poise of his head. Also he made friends in Chelsea and Kensington, people of a wealthy æsthetic set. He never took his wife there, and hardly ever referred to them among his own family. It was as though he considered it impossible to explain. These were two alien worlds. In the one he was loved, and love is a quality common to the masses. In the other he was admired, and admiration is a quality reserved for the few.

It was old McGrath who began to kick against the situation. A child was expected. And as he said to his friend one night:

“Paul, how much longer is this monkeying about with new art going on? What is going to happen when the child comes? It’s unfair on you.”

Mr. Journée frankly didn’t know what to do. He wanted to do the best for the boy. It was not as though he were indolent or dissolute. He worked very hard and was very keen. It was true he didn’t understand his son’s work. But he might be wrong. He knew that he mixed with people who were much talked about and who admired his son, who avowed that he had genius. But the time must come when ways and means would have to be considered. One day he decided that he would take his son to task and thrash the whole matter out.

He said nothing to his wife at supper-time. He felt nervous. He thought out carefully just what he would say to his son, the questions he would put, the advice he would give—he was a difficult boy to talk to. He was always slightly apprehensive that his son was laughing at him deep down in his

soul, that he meant nothing to him at all, except as a rather foolish means to an enigmatic end.

After supper he put on his hat and toddled across to the McGraths. Old Justin turned on the light in the hall, and opened the door to him. He said:

“Good evening, old ’un, is the boy in?”

Old McGrath stared for a moment as though hardly recognising him. Then he said: “No. He left this afternoon for Paris. He said it was very important. He borrowed ten pounds from me.”

Then, melting to a different mood, the old man seized his hand and added:

“Come in Paul. Laura’s very bad.”

XI

The child—a boy—was born forty-eight hours later, after what the doctor described as “a very difficult case.” Anthony had not returned. They wired to him, and received a reply the following day: “Congratulations, love, wiring later, Anthony.” They heard no more from him for four days, and there was a distinct rift in the lute of family affection. Laura made no complaint.

“He is busy,” she said. “Besides, what good can he do? He will come soon.”

She was, perhaps, too blinded by this magic bundle of delight that had so abruptly, painfully, and mysteriously thrust itself into her life to be unduly perturbed by the absence of her husband. But Mrs. McGrath complained that she thought it was “a very curious way of going on,” and Mr. McGrath was righteously indignant. He was even inclined to blame Mr. Journée, as though he considered that he was partly to blame.

If you thrust a stick into an ants’ nest and stir it up the ants immediately start rebuilding. But human creatures are not so recuperative. It takes time for their emotions to focus before building work can be even considered. It seemed a curiously hard, cruel stick that Anthony had suddenly thrust into this nest, unnecessarily cruel and thoughtless, to say the least of it. Fancy deserting one’s wife in such a crisis, going off without explanation, and sending such a bald telegram!

On the fourth day, however, the further telegram as promised arrived. Its contents were equally astonishing. It ran: “Sold picture *petit salon* fifteen

thousand francs, writing, love, Anthony.” On the receipt of this telegram the ants immediately foregathered and tried to piece their emotions into a workable form. Laura exclaimed:

“Oh, I’m *so* glad for him. He will be so happy, poor dear. He’s sure to come back soon now.”

And she went on feeding the baby. Mr. McGrath said:

“Good gracious me!” and he took out an envelope and, on the back of it, he rapidly calculated that the sum meant something between four and five hundred pounds.

They all agreed—they were all anxious to—that this accounted for everything. Anthony had had an appointment with some wealthy client, whom he had gone over to meet. But why had he said nothing about it? Mr. Journée was very perplexed. So far as he knew, his son had never sold a thing in his life, and this seemed a vast sum for a novice. Of course, he was glad, glad, very glad. It meant that he was wrong. There must be something in the boy’s work after all. At the same time he couldn’t help feeling that—well, he wished he hadn’t gone off like that. He wasn’t sure that he wouldn’t rather have had the boy stick by his wife and not sell the picture, even at a loss to himself.

It was not till three days later that the letter came to Laura. She did not show it to the others, but she tried to tell them the gist of it. It seemed rather a confused description, affecting as it did, various people they had not heard of. There appeared to be an Italian countess, who was a sculptress and lived in Chelsea. She had a great friend in Paris, another Italian woman, the wife of a wealthy South American. She adored the “Vortex School,” and had bought works by Pinneti, Lammonde, and Sasha McFay, three of the greatest exponents. It was she who had introduced Anthony to the South American. He had been to stay with them at Fontainebleau. The outcome was the sale. She was likely to buy more. He hoped to return the following week— There was nothing more in the letter that Laura quoted, and it was the quick eye of Mr. Journée that detected a tear hovering near her lash as she finished.

“Damn the boy!” he thought as he turned away.

XII

Who were all these people, Pinneti, Lammonde, Sasha McFay? What in God’s name was the Vortex School? Why was Anthony running about the Continent with Italian countesses, when he should be dancing attendance on

his wife? Mr. Journée was seriously alarmed. The act seemed to mark the first definite line of cleavage between his son's life and his own. He recalled vividly the night when Anthony was born. He was out of work at the time, and they were living in poor lodgings in Kentish Town. He had only a few pounds in the world. He remembered his feverish pacing of the streets, his tearing anxiety, his complete sense of helplessness. He ate nothing for twenty-four hours. He remembered in a spasmodic fit of abstraction, going out late in the afternoon and selling a marble clock that had been given him by an uncle as a wedding present, for fifteen shillings. He remembered turning the fifteen shillings over in his hand, staring hard at it, regarding it lovingly—another tiny bulwark to protect his wife's life. He remembered his reward—that blinding ecstasy in the early hours of a Sunday morning. She was well, well, and the child lived—nothing else mattered! He had got work soon after and their marital bliss had not been obscured for one hour.

And Anthony? Was it just Anthony, or was it the gesture of this modern generation that had lost the sense of tradition? From what he could see of them, looking around, they seemed to be thin, evanescent people, irreverent, respecting neither themselves, nor others, nor the past. They lived in postures, and phrases, and a kind of morbid self-analysis unconnected with life. It was deplorable. He had never met these people except by hearsay and books and the theatre. He had hardly accepted them as reality. It had taken his son's defection to bring home to him the truth that such people lived.

Amidst the shavings, the smell of wood, and the sound of mallets striking gouges, he decided that he would have it out with Anthony when he returned. Unfortunately it was a full week before this happened, and by that time his anger—as usual—had abated. He yearned for his son, and wanted to see him again.

Anthony returned nonchalantly, as though his behaviour had been quite normal. He went in to see his wife and child, and later in the evening the two families sat round Laura's bed, and he became quite eloquent. It was true that he only talked about himself, but the father could not resent a sneaking pride in his son. There was about him a certain richness of personality, a definite promise of distinction. He was no ordinary young man. The world, so hard to others, had to make allowances for such a creature. He had sold two other pictures to this Madame Forzamba, the wife of the South American. He had returned enriched by over a thousand pounds!

He did not seem to regard it as very remarkable, merely the natural due to his genius. He said nothing about repaying his father, or making other

arrangements for his family. He took a perfunctory interest in the baby, and said he should like to see it painted by Lammonde.

The next morning he was at his studio, working feverishly. He never went to his father's workshop, or inquired what he was doing. The next evening he went to Chelsea and did not get home till three in the morning.

This went on for several days. He spent an hour or two with his wife, but finding that she was most inconveniently bedridden for the time being, he dined out in the evening and came home late. When with the family he sat around like one doped. He gazed at the poorly furnished rooms, and could hardly conceal the expression of disgust upon his face. It was apparent that he was in an atmosphere entirely uncongenial and distasteful to him. His mind was wandering elsewhere. On the fourth evening, Mr. Journée met him going out. He went straight up to him and said:

“Anthony, come over to the shop. I want to talk to you.”

There was a hard drawn line about the father's mouth. They walked over in silence and went upstairs. The men had gone. Mr. Journée lighted a gas-jet and said:

“Sit down.”

They were both terribly self-conscious, as between two men fond of each other, but separated by a wide gulf of unfamiliar experience. After a time Mr. Journée said:

“Anthony boy, I don't think—I don't think you're quite playing the game. You went off like that and left Laura just when she—— We all feel it very much—your mother, too——”

He coughed, and Anthony shifted uneasily in his seat. He said in a weak voice:

“I had to. It was business, you know.”

“I've never heard of you being interested in business before. Talking of that, boy, I think now that you—that you are—well, beginning to make a move. I think it's up to you to keep your wife and child. Mother and I have been only too happy that we could help a bit—you know, when you really needed it. But business is not too good. We have to think of old age and that ——”

“Yes of course,” said Anthony, and there was a meaningless, non-committal pause. In Mr. Journée's voice there suddenly came a more vibrant note.

“But, Anthony boy, I don’t really care so much about that. It’s you I’m thinking of. This set you get in to. I know nothing about it. Only I don’t—I don’t—I’d rather you——”

Mr. Journée became inarticulate. Under the flickering light of the one gas-jet he could just see the dark, mocking eyes of his son. And in the son’s voice there crept a note of querulous anger.

“You don’t understand,” he said, and stood up.

Mr. Journée was about to reply, also on a note of anger. Then he looked down at the blotting-paper on the desk in front of him. After a pause he said resignedly:

“No, I suppose I don’t understand.”

He looked crumpled and careworn. Anthony edged towards the door. The situation was intolerable. With his hand on the latch he said:

“Good-night, father!”

Mr. Journée did not look up. He replied quietly:

“Good-night!”

After he had gone, Mr. Journée continued to stare at the blotting-paper. Once he mumbled to it:

“No, I suppose I don’t understand.”

Out in the street Anthony picked up a vagrant taxi. To the man he cried angrily:

“Drive like blazes to the Café Royal!”

XIII

That Laura had some curious appeal for him was incontestable. For a few weeks after she was up and about again he actually took her to call on his friend, the Countess Strozetti, at Chelsea. How much he was influenced by the interview with his father it is impossible to say. But in his own way he certainly gave evidence of certain feelings of remorse at his behaviour. He was too proud or too egoistic to say anything about it, but he paid more attention to his wife. He bought her a necklace, and suggested that they should take a house of their own in the neighbourhood. But this, of course, raised the old difficulty of Mrs. McGrath. The old lady, however, was overridden in her wishes by the other members of the family. It was pointed out to her that it was only fair, since Anthony was wishing to play the game,

that he should be allowed a home of his own. Moreover, being in the neighbourhood, Laura could pop in every day for such time as she could spare from the baby.

They, therefore, rented a seven-roomed semi-detached house less than half a mile away, and at the next quarter-day Anthony wrote quite a polite note to his father and said that he thought he should be able to manage all right now, and at the same time he thanked him for all his kindness in the past. It was the kind of thing he could write to his father, but which he would have been much too self-conscious to say. But the gesture alone made Mr. Journée very happy. A good boy, Anthony, a splendid chap! Just had his head a wee bit turned by this sudden and facile success. Of course, he had never meant to act like that. Returning from their guild meeting that night—where the paper had been on “French engravings of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries”—Mr. Journée discussed it with Justin.

“What I object to about these new-fangled movements is just that very thing; it has no relation to true values. When we started in, old ’un, we were paid according to our worth—starting at fivepence and sixpence an hour—this, mind you, after serving a long apprenticeship without payment. We had to learn our job—a recognised job with a tradition behind it. We didn’t suddenly make a thousand pounds like a stockbroker. To whom can a painting of a beginner like Anthony possibly be worth four hundred pounds or more? It’s an artificial growth on the side of true art.”

Mr. Journée was rather pleased with this last phrase, and he repeated it. And Justin, knocking his pipe out against a lamp-post, said:

“Yes, not only on the side of art, too, Paul; on the side of society. It is impossible to teach this younger generation that nothing comes out of the blue. They believe it does. Sometimes they snatch something out of the blue. They think they’ve found the divine afflatus. Instead of that it’s a thunderbolt, and it destroys them. We’ve linked up, you see, linked up with the dead and—the unborn.”

Mr. Journée accompanied his friend home. They found Mrs. McGrath sitting by the fireside knitting.

“Well, Nancy,” said Mr. Journée, “how are——” he was about to say “the children,” but feeling that it might be an embarrassing question he altered it to “things?”

Mrs. McGrath had a queer puzzled look on her face. She said with what was for her considerable animation:

“Anthony has taken Laura out to a party—some of his friends in Chelsea.”

The two fathers looked at each other. They could not have appeared more surprised if Mrs. McGrath had informed them that he had taken her to the South Pole. Mr. McGrath sat there with his mouth open. Mr. Journée was about to utter an exclamation but thought better of it. He yawned, and said casually:

“Oh, that’s nice—that’s very nice.”

XIV

Anthony explained to his wife that it wasn’t a party they were going to, it was just a “studio evening.” One didn’t have to dress. She had never heard of a “studio evening,” and she didn’t like to ask what it meant. Nevertheless, she felt all agog, a little flustered and nervous, but terribly proud that Anthony should condescend to take her to meet his friends. She wore her best frock, and examined her face carefully in the mirror. It was some time since she had taken such a close personal interest in her own face. She noticed the little sharp-cut lines developing beneath her eyes, the tiny cracks along the brow, the slightly puffy chin. It was no good. She was beginning to show her age. And yet she felt happy and high-spirited. There was nothing to be ashamed of in getting old. She thought of a child’s book illustration she had seen years ago. “Jane is a good girl and has a kind face.” Perhaps she looked like that.

She had, in any case, a handsome and clever husband, a child, a home. One couldn’t expect everything.

They arrived at the studio just before ten, and there were already about twenty people there. The first thing that struck her was that their hostess, a large dark, rather handsome woman, with a suspicion of down on her upper lip, called Anthony “Pan.” Her greeting was:

“Hullo, Pan! Good egg!” and then catching sight of Laura, she said: “Is this the wife? How nice!”

She shook hands, and, without waiting for any further greeting, she continued:

“Lobby is being perfectly absurd. He keeps on giving an imitation of Sarah Bernhardt, and it’s no more like her than it is like George Robey. I wish you’d shut him up, Pan.”

When Laura had had time to focus the room and the company, she found herself in a most astounding environment. Several women were sitting straddle-legged on cushions on the floor, drinking coffee or beer; others were lolling on ottomans or against easels. Everyone seemed to be leaning against something. There was a loud buzz of talk, frequently broken by strident laughter. A swarthy-looking Jewish man, in a black shirt and a black scarf with no apparent collar, was talking to a thin woman with a dead white face and carmine lips. A fierce-looking man, with a square blond beard, was striking his left palm with his right fist and declaiming:

“My dear nincompoop, James Branch Cabell is not a romanticist. He’s a mountebank.”

A large-eyed young man listening to him appeared to be about to burst into tears. A pretty woman, who looked like a mischievous linnet, with bright eyes, caught hold of Anthony and said:

“Hullo, Pan, how are you, darling?”

She was about to dart away without waiting for an answer, when Anthony grabbed her. He said:

“Come here, you little devil! This is my wife. Laura, this is Gina Cherbourg, one of the worst adventuresses in London!”

Gina squealed with laughter, and held out her hand to Laura.

“Nice!” she said. “Have some coffee?”

Laura felt it incumbent upon her to try and adapt herself to her surroundings. She said:

“Yes, I’d like some, please.”

The linnet darted away, but she was caught by two young men in plus fours, one of whom was wearing a monocle. It looked curiously out of place. He said to the linnet:

“Darling, I haven’t seen you for a week. Keep still. I want to make love to you.”

The other young man turned away, as though this type of conversation bored him. Catching sight of Anthony, who was standing at his elbow, he grunted:

“Hullo, Pan!”

Anthony said: “Look after my wife a minute. I want to talk to Bistowe.”

The young man turned to Laura and gave a stiff little bow. He looked at her closely, and she was fully conscious of having his entire disapproval. She could see him desperately trying to think of something to say. At last he said:

“Do you know the Challices?”

“No,” said Laura.

This reply also seemed to meet with his disapproval. He said:

“We had an awful binge there last night.”

Laura didn't know what a “binge” was, but she said politely enough:

“Really!”

After that the conversation lapsed. She saw Anthony across the room, the centre of a group. She couldn't hear what he was saying, but he was making them all laugh. He seemed to be imitating someone's broken English. A large man, with a walrus moustache, was splitting with laughter, and kept slapping Anthony on the back and exclaiming: “Good! good! excellent!”

The linnet had forgotten all about Laura's coffee, but a schoolboy, very proud of his office, was handing round cakes. He offered her some and she said:

“Thank you very much,” and took a piece.

After a considerable interval of neglect, the hostess came up to her with a thin, sad-faced man who looked terribly ill. She said:

“Mrs. Journée, I want to introduce you to an old friend of your husband's, Bernard Ossip. Bernard, this is Pan's wife!”

The melancholy man looked doubtfully at his hostess and said:

“I didn't know he had a wife”; then, taking her hand, which he squeezed very hard between his bony fingers, he exclaimed: “Well, I'm damned!”

They were left alone, and he continued:

“Paint at all?”

“No, not at all.”

He nodded, as much as to imply that anyone could see that. Then he appeared to rouse himself from his stupor, and said with a degree of animation:

“Your husband’s a genius. I was with him in Paris. We shared an apartment in the Rue Visconti.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” said Laura, who seemed now to have vaguely heard the name Ossip mentioned once. Anthony’s friend proceeded:

“Have you seen the Sasha McFay’s at Ryders?”

“No,” she answered, “not yet.”

He nodded again, as though realising that he had asked a foolish question. After a pause he said: “I don’t know whether Pan told you. I’ve been very bad, you know—kidneys; doctor thought I had Bright’s disease.”

“Oh, I *am* sorry,” said Laura, really meaning it.

“It pulls you down so. Anything to do with the kidneys is always depressing. You have to stick to a diet——”

He was about to enter into further details about his kidneys, when a girl in a jade green frock went to the piano, and sang a French song. It was charmingly done, and the company all laughed at the various sallies. Laura laughed too. It was funny, it was all very funny, but—why had Anthony married her?

She caught sight of his handsome face, silhouetted against a dark curtain. He was so very much at home here, so different, so animated, so happy. These people understood him, and liked him. It wasn’t all his fault, poor boy! What was she going to do? She could never fit in. It was an utterly different world she found herself in, and it was Anthony’s world. It couldn’t be helped.

Going home in the cab he did not seem dissatisfied with her. He did not say much, but he was in good spirits. He had drunk quite a number of glasses of *crème-de-menthe*, and he kissed her rather sloppily on the lips. She made no protest.

The next morning her mother said:

“Well, dear, what was it like?”

She replied:

“Oh, it was very amusing, mother. Very different, you know, very different from—what we are used to.”

One late September morning, Mr. Journée awakened with a twinge of rheumatism in his left shoulder. It was a melancholy day, with the rain coming down in torrents.

“Oh, dear!” he thought, “and soon we shall have winter here! Seven or eight months of it!”

And suddenly his mind reverted to the old desire—Italy! At that moment the sun would be gilding the dome of St. Mark’s. The little church of San Miracule, which he had studied so often in photographs, would be trembling with light against the deep blue sky. The peasant women in their black shawls would be flocking into the Baptistery at Florence. The maize fields would be a blaze of gold. Well, why not? The years of physical enjoyment were numbered. Anthony was getting on. He had sold two more of his extraordinary pictures. He was no longer dependent on his father.

Mr. Journée got up, rubbed his shoulder with ointment, washed himself, and went down to breakfast. So optimistic did he suddenly feel that he said to his wife:

“Mother, what do you say? why shouldn’t we do that little trip to Italy?”

Mrs. Journée was never at her best in the early morning. The servants hadn’t been able to get the fire to go, and the bacon was burnt, the boy had left a white loaf—Mr. Journée always had to have brown—and there was a bill from a dressmaker. She said:

“Oh, don’t talk such nonsense, Paul.”

Mr. Journée made allowances. They had been married for twenty-seven years, and he had, perhaps, talked too much about this trip to Italy—talked and done nothing. There always seemed some obstacle. And on a morning like this, with the rain pouring down, and all the petty frictions of domestic life, it seemed as remote as ever.

In the evening, however, he broached the subject again. It was feasible. He could afford it. They were not very busy, and Lintot could manage while he was away. Over her sewing Mrs. Journée pondered the problem carefully. As a young girl it had been her wildest dream to go to Italy with Paul. The idea no longer excited her. She was happy in her home, and travelling frightened her. But still—if *he* wanted to go, why, yes, yes, of course. There was no longer Anthony to consider. It would doubtless do Paul good. She said:

“It would be lovely, dear.”

Mr. Journée bought a Baedeker, a map, and got together a collection of travel bureau circulars. He worked the whole thing out carefully in detail: Paris, Milan, Verona, Venice; then to Florence, Sienna, Rome, and back to Genoa. They would start at the end of the month.

During the following weeks Mr. Journée walked about as though in a dream. He was like a schoolboy with the end of term approaching. One evening he was sitting in his workshop, after the men had gone, going into his accounts. There was a sudden knock at the door, the click of the latch, and Justin came hurrying in. One glance at his face, and Mr. Journée could see that his friend was in trouble. He instinctively stood up. Justin came straight up to him and said:

“Paul, Paul, I’m in for it!”

“What’s the matter, old man?”

“My workshops were burnt down last night, and, my God, I’d forgotten to send the insurance money last week! I’m ruined, Paul!”

Mr. Journée stood erect, and looked very solemn. He patted his friend’s shoulder. “Good God!” he muttered. “Not insured, eh?”

He took one or two paces up and down and came back. “What can I do, old man?”

“Can you lend me two hundred and fifty pounds, Paul? I’ll pay you back one day.”

Mr. Journée passed his hand through his hair. After a brief pause and said:

“Yes, of course.”

He did not tell his wife about this when he got home. He could not lend £250 and go to Italy as well. The situation was grave. Poor old Justin! Another vague hope crept to the back of his mind. Anthony! It was the boy’s father-in-law, and, after all, he was doing very well now. Perhaps he might help the old man a little. Why shouldn’t he?

After supper Mr. Journée said he was going out for a stroll. He put on his hat, and took a bus. He found Laura alone making some mysterious baby garment. He kissed her, and after the usual formalities, said:

“Where’s Anthony?”

Laura bent over her work, and speaking with perfect control, replied:

“Anthony? Oh, he’s gone off to Italy with some friends of his.”

Italy! . . .

XVI

Anthony wrote to Laura from Italy. He described Venice as “a common little bourgeois swamp, overrun with trippers.” Florence bored him. Rome was on a par with Birmingham. He seemed to spend most of his time at Milan, studying some new school of painting that had sprung up there. Though with whom he had gone, and with whom he was staying, he did not reveal.

He was away four months, and the trip might be described as Anthony’s last phase. Further successes, both financial and social, had come to him. He became frankly egocentric, a creature living in abstractions that recognised no moral or social code. Laura never told him of her father’s loss, and when Mr. Journée, trying to sympathise with her in her position, deplored what he called “the set” that the boy had drifted into, she turned on him very fiercely. “After all,” she said, “they are his people. They understand him and like him. It is the world he belongs to.”

She hid her grief in the little claims of her home, and the laughter of her son. And Mr. Journée hid his in his work, and in the genial satisfaction of setting an old friend on his feet. He still did his breathing exercises, smoked his pipe, and walked in the park. The air seemed sweet and good. The little grandson was an eternal joy—“People have queer ways of seeking happiness,” he said at random one day to old Justin.

When Anthony eventually returned, the change in him was apparent and striking. From the shy, self-conscious young man, he had developed into a cynical poseur. He was superficial, patronising, and bored. Laura was a middle-aged matron, slopping about the house. He found his home disgusting—all baby and cooking. He met the family in the evening, and talked languidly of his experiences and successes. The names of countesses and men of genius were ever on his lips. At the same time he seemed afraid to be alone with his father. Mr. Journée asked him over to the shop to have a talk. He promised to go, but never turned up. He disappeared a few days later. And the mind of Laura registered this reflection:

“He will never come back. It was wicked of me to have married a man seven years younger than I.”

She went about her work with calm deliberation. Colin was going to be a splendid boy——

It was nearly two years, however, before the inevitable happened. He came occasionally, and would sometimes send her a spasmodic cheque. And then one day there came a letter, obviously dictated by a lawyer, and enclosing a receipted hotel bill. She was glad that no one was present when the letter came. She turned quite white, and put it in her chatelaine. That evening she called on Mr. Journée at his shop, and showed him the letter. The old man put on his spectacles and read it, his hands trembling. And he took her in his arms and held her close. There seemed nothing to say. They were just two creatures clinging together in the darkness for support.

“He wants me to divorce him, so I suppose I must,” Laura reflected, but she did not discuss the matter with her family. She went to a lawyer and asked for the thing to be done as quietly and quickly as possible. It took a year, however, for the formalities to be arranged, and by that time Anthony was something of a notoriety, the divorce was mentioned in all the daily papers.

The climax filled Mr. Journée with dull anger, like an outrage on his own personal pride. It seemed in some strange way incomprehensible, meaningless. He brooded upon it all day. And when the men had gone in the evening he poured out his troubles to old Lintot.

“I feel I’m wrong, Lintot. I’m somehow responsible. What have I done that makes me deserve this. He was a good boy. I educated him. I did what I thought was the very best always for him. It seemed as though he couldn’t be happy. He hadn’t the faculty. I doubt whether he’s happy now. Whether he ever could be—that’s the great trouble.”

Old Lintot regarded his master thoughtfully. A dank cigarette hung from the corner of his heavily bearded mouth. He twisted it and wriggled it from one side to the other. At last he put on his hat and shuffled towards the door. With his hand on the latch, he turned and said in a melancholy voice:

“A man who doesn’t believe in things, guv’nor, never finds happiness.”

He added: “Good-night!” rather jerkily, as though afraid to trust his voice.

XVII

Believe in things! Was the old man right? Was that perhaps just the trouble? You can educate the mind, but you cannot educate the heart. You can believe in things yourself, but can you teach others to do so? The boy had been bored with Italy! Italy? no, he knew that he would never go there now. The time had passed. But he could still walk with Leonardo through

the squares of Florence. He could gaze reverently at the Duomo, and listen to the chanting of priests. He could be at one with all the masters of the past, because, without knowing, he desired so much to contribute in his humble way to their tradition. And at night he could creep through the olive groves, and gaze up at the stars, and feel the majesty of life pour through him. Across the valley he could hear the silver tinkle of a bell in some remote campanile. And he could be happy, because he loved it all, the beauty of the world, and the great soul that moved behind its mysterious purposes.

He thought that he would never see his son again, but he did just once. It was five years later, and he came to borrow money. He had married a French woman, and was living at Mentone. The Vortex School was a little out of date. He had been gambling, and got into the hands of money-lenders. His rich friends seemed to have deserted him. In a state of despair he had come to London, and sought out his father. He called at the workshop, quite casually one evening, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world to call and borrow £500. His face was lined, haggard, and furtive. Mr. Journée had often visualised the coming of his son. He had rehearsed in his mind the things he meant to say. He had not forgotten Laura's dictum: "After all, they are his people. They understand him, and like him. It is the world he belongs to." He had meant to be magnanimous, forgiving. We can none of us quite help being what we are, perhaps.

But with his son before him, he could think of none of the things he wished to say. There arose between them again that solid wall of unfamiliar experience. He felt that anything he said the young man would either not understand, or consider banal and worthless. His clever sophisticated face rebelled any approach to emotional comprehension. He talked glibly of certain vague securities, and spoke of the loan as of a quite temporary arrangement. Mr. Journée lent him £100. He could not afford more. He had been keeping Laura for years, and there was the grandson's future to consider. He did not resent this. The responsibility enlarged his horizon. He accepted Anthony's worth at Laura's valuation. But he would not give him more than a hundred.

Just as he was going he noticed a strange expression on his son's face. He looked around the workshop, at the carved panels and friezes, the charcoal drawings, and the workmen's tools. He seemed to sniff the wood, and suddenly gave his father a keen hungry glance. And in that glance the father became aware of a salient fact. *The boy was envious of him!* Not only that, but somewhere deep down in him he loved his father. He had drugged the passion, but it was there.

Mr. Journée wanted to say: “Anthony, my boy, speak to me. Tell me all about yourself. What are you really thinking? What are you really feeling? Speak to me! Speak to me!”

But he merely blotted and handed him the cheque. The young man took it and put it in his pocket-book, with a hang-dog air. He said:

“Thanks awfully, father,” and shuffled towards the door.

Mr. Journée watched him go. He heard the latch click, and the door shut. Then he heard the footsteps clattering down the iron-clamped stairs. When the footsteps had nearly reached the bottom, he suddenly raised his head and cried hoarsely: “Anthony! come back! . . . Come back!”

But he heard the front door shut, and the footsteps die away across the yard. And the old man buried his face in his hands.

XVIII

Colin was ten years old. He went to school. On Sundays he always accompanied his two grandfathers on their weekly walk in Regent’s Park. He had accepted the familiar explanation about his father having “gone on a long journey” with complete acquiescence. He seldom asked about him now. Laura also found that she could talk about her husband dispassionately. She rather liked to talk about him to Mr. Journée. She could see that the old man was still troubled, and it somehow helped him to hear her talk about his son. She called him “Father Paul.” Once when he was deploring the boy’s behaviour, she said:

“I can’t altogether blame him, Father Paul. We are all made differently. It’s a curious thing that on those few occasions when he took me out to visit those friends of his, I liked him better than at any other time. He was quite natural there, and, somehow, so charming and entertaining. I could not mix with his friends, and he knew it. It was unfortunate that he—well, that he married me, more than anything else. He loved me in a way. I fitted in with a certain mood. He needed me. But love with him was not a personal thing so much as a condition. He slipped out of that mood and he didn’t need me. The trouble with him was that—unlike you—he had no faculty for happiness.”

Mr. Journée regarded her thoughtfully. Happiness! that was just what old Lintot had said. Something like that—about believing in things. He said: “You’re a brave girl, Laura.”

One October, Mrs. Journée got her feet wet marketing. The next day she developed a chill, which lasted for some days. It was practically cured, when, probably through cleaning out a cupboard in a draughty loft, it recurred with renewed violence. The following night she developed pneumonia, and a doctor was sent for. For days she lay in a critical condition.

Mr. Journée's distress was pitiful to watch. He would sometimes dart over to his workshop, but in half an hour he would be back. He wandered about the house helplessly, picking things up and putting them down again. He would go into his wife's bedroom, clutch her hand, and murmur:

“Well, mother?”

He would look at the medicine bottles, and finger them nervously, as though appealing to them, or accusing them of inertia. Then he would wander about the room on tiptoe, making curious little noises of distress like a wounded animal.

Laura—who at that time had given up her house, and was living with her parents again—came in and took up her abode. She relieved the night nurse, who had been called in. On the second day the doctor said to her:

“The situation is very grave.”

At dinner-time that day Mr. McGrath called to make inquiries. As he was leaving he said to Laura:

“I see in the paper, my dear, that Anthony is in London. Look! he is staying with—with his wife at this address.”

Laura mechanically looked at the paper. After her father had gone this information that Anthony was in London kept interrupting her thoughts. Anthony no longer meant anything to her that mattered. But this was his mother. It was of Mr. Journée that she kept thinking. There was Anthony within a cab ride of his dying mother. There was Mr. Journée blindly groping for comfort and sympathy from all the world. . . .

When evening came she had arrived at a decision. The night nurse relieved her at eight o'clock. She would put her pride in her pocket and go to him. When she was leaving she looked in on Mr. Journée who was standing in front of a neglected fire in the dining-room. She kissed him and said:

“I may come back later, Father Paul.”

He kissed her lightly, and answered in a preoccupied manner:

“No, no, my dear, you look so tired and pale. Go to bed! Go to bed! It will be all right.”

She pressed his arm and said confidently: “You must still believe, Father Paul. We expect you to believe——”

She went away hurriedly, and after a search she found a cab, and told the driver to go to a certain address on Chelsea Embankment. The evening was cold and foggy. The cab crept round corners, and was continually being blocked in the traffic. The journey seemed interminable. She set her teeth and clutched the window strap.

At last they pulled up at a little white house. She paid the driver, and he began to abuse her because she only gave him a threepenny tip. She blushed confusedly. She was so unaccustomed to taking cabs that she did not know. She wanted to say: “Please, please, not to-night——”

She hurriedly gave him another shilling, and went up to the door and rang the bell. After a time the door was opened by a solemn-looking butler. She asked for Mr. Anthony Journée. The man had a strange scared expression on his face.

He seemed uncertain how to act. He let her in and left her standing in the hall without a word. The house seemed to smell of some curious odour she could not recognize. In a room on the right she heard a woman behaving hysterically. She was left alone for two or three minutes, and then two burly-looking men came out to her. They ushered her into another room, and looked at her searchingly. The elder said:

“Will you tell me who you are, madam?”

She answered quickly: “Does it matter? I have come from Mr. Journée’s father. His mother is seriously ill.”

The two men looked at each other, and the same speaker replied quietly:

“Mr. Anthony Journée is dead! He was murdered this afternoon by a woman!”

Laura was conscious of some strong underlying power forcing her to a surprising degree of control. She thought instinctively of her son, and then of old Mr. Journée pacing that lonely room in front of the neglected fire. There were others to fight for. She must not think of herself.

As he spoke the man handed her a card, and she just glimpsed the fact that he was a police inspector. She felt terribly undecided how to act—what to ask. She heard the voices of a man and woman almost screaming at each

other in the hall. The door opened abruptly. The man and woman entered. The man was a foreigner of some sort, with a sallow skin, and a black moustache. The woman was also obviously a foreigner, with a dead white skin, and unnaturally glittering eyes, which she was mopping with a handkerchief. She was exclaiming:

“I don’t believe it! I don’t believe it! I was at Amalfi all the time. He never met her there——”

She caught sight of Laura, and ejaculated: “Oh, mon Dieu!”

The man was saying:

“I don’t know, Mimi. Why do you bully me? It is only the Contesse’s word——”

The two police inspectors stood up. Suddenly the woman looked at Laura again, a new light coming into her eyes. She screamed out:

“Oh, how funny! Do you know who this is? This is his wife—his first wife!”

She went off into hysterical laughter, and snapped her fingers in Laura’s face. The scent from the handkerchief mingled with that other more penetrating smell. The man, the woman, and the police inspectors all seemed to be talking at the same time. She heard unfamiliar names flung about, threats, menaces. Out of the confusion she sensed some sordid episode, which is generously spoken of as the *crime passionelle*. The whole thing seemed terribly unreal. It was as though she had stepped from moving reality straight into a film.

She turned to the police inspector as to the one stable thing in a reeling world, and said quite calmly:

“I presume I may go?”

Her placidity appeared to anger the Frenchwoman. She spat at her, abused her, and called her names. The two inspectors intervened, and ushered her quickly from the room.

When out in the air she nearly fainted. She rested for a time on an embankment seat, and watched the river.

“So that was the end of it,” she thought. “My poor Anthony!”

She choked back a little sob, the only personal indulgence she had allowed herself that night, and hailed a cab.

She found Mr. Journée up, and when she saw him she knew that he had good news. He clutched her hands, and said eagerly:

“Laura, Laura girl, the doctor says he thinks the crisis is past. She will get better, please God!”

She stayed with him an hour, watching him gradually calm down.

“Poor Father Paul!” she thought, “your anguish for the night is not yet over.”

It would be in all the papers in the morning. Even if he did not see it, someone would tell him. It were better that she told him herself.

When he seemed quite calm, she said softly:

“Father Paul, I have bad news for you.”

She got up and turned the light very low. She somehow felt that it was easier to say what she had to in the dark. Going close up to him and resting her face on his shoulder, she said:

“Anthony is dead!”

And then she wept tempestuously. She made no attempt to restrain her tears. She wanted him to feel that she relied on him. That the pity for himself would be submerged in that greater pity of which he had so inexhaustible a store.

When she had spent herself she lay inertly against him ready to succour him in any way he needed. They remained silent for a long while. At last he sighed and murmured:

“That fellow was right, you know, Laura, that fellow was right.”

“What fellow, Father Paul?”

“That fellow who said, ‘Each man kills the thing he loves.’ Come, my dear, kiss me good-night.”

XIX

It was Colin’s twelfth birthday, and five other children were invited to the birthday party. There was a great to-do. The tea-table was laden with cakes and bonbons. In the centre was a large cake covered with pink icing on which was modelled in white, “C. J., 12 years.”

Mr. Journée had come home very early. He was in a great state of excitement, running from one room to another, calling out:

“Now then, mother, anything I can do, my dear? Where are those candles? Colin, Colin! God bless my soul! I don’t believe the boy has washed his face yet! Scaramouche! Come along, hurry up! They’ll all be here soon. What did I do with that parcel I brought in? Laura, Laura! Have you seen a large brown-paper parcel?”

The children arrived, all a little shy of each other. They glanced furtively at the cakes, and then at each other. The tea began in almost sepulchral silence, so far as they were concerned. Only Mr. Journée kept up a running fire of badinage. A bonbon popped. A small girl began to giggle. One boy pushed another off a chair (roars of laughter)! In a few minutes the fun was fast and furious. The tea finished in a din, all the children wearing paper caps. A move was made into the other room, and games began. Coloured air-balloons were banged hither and thither, to the detriment of sundry vases and pieces of furniture. They played musical chairs and postman’s knock, and a curious game invented by Mr. Journée called “Squidge,” in which everyone had to imitate an animal of some sort.

Old Lintot came in later. He had a niece there, and he stood on the fringe of the party smiling amusedly. Laura brought him some tea, and talked to him.

Suddenly she said: “Look at Father Paul! Isn’t he wonderful?”

He was at that particular moment being an elephant, and two small boys were riding on his back. His eyes were bright, and he was totally immersed in the game. A few minutes later he was a lion roaring under the piano. Old Lintot said:

“I’ve known him thirty-five years, Mrs. Laura.”

He meditatively bit a piece of seed cake, and added:

“He’s a genius, Mrs. Laura. If you know what I mean, he has the greatest genius of all, the genius for happiness. He’s not afraid of letting himself feel things, even if they make him suffer. He is always seeing, you know, what the old poet spoke of ‘sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, good in everything.’ It’s the one thing really worth while. It’s when a man loses the child in himself that he goes wrong.”

The old man flicked some crumbs from his beard, muttering: “Excuse me!” Then he looked at Laura, as though doubting whether he hadn’t been a little tactless. He put down his teacup, and said:

“Of course, it’s no good blaming anyone. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made,—a fine boy that of yours.”

Laura suddenly plucked him by the sleeve.

“Come into the other room a moment, Mr. Lintot,” she whispered.

When they arrived there, she said:

“You have been such an old friend of—of everyone’s, Mr. Lintot. Did Father Paul ever tell you the little incident about poor Anthony’s will?”

“No, no. He did not.”

“He left a will on half a sheet of notepaper. It was made many, many years ago, when he was at the height of his success. He left it with a lawyer. It simply said: ‘I leave everything I may possess when I die to my son Colin. May he be more like my father than like me.’ The lawyer told me he brought it to him one evening when he was very drunk. He made him put it away in a safe, and promise to act on it when he died.”

Old Lintot nodded. He murmured:

“Ah! Yes, yes, I understand. Truth in the cup! It’s very strange how this ‘leperous distilment’ will sometimes make a man see truth when all else fails. And has the lawyer acted on it?”

Laura shrugged her shoulders.

“Poor boy! his only legacy was debts and debts and debts. But, oh! that little gesture flung out on a drunken night. . . .”

“It made your father happy, I’ll be bound.”

“Yes, father always believed in him, you see.”

The old man took her arm, leading her back to the party. His voice was almost inaudible as he repeated:

“Yes, yes, we’re fearfully and wonderfully made. It’s no good blaming anyone—thank you for your confidence, Mrs. Laura.”

OLD IRON

You know how the story goes, of course. Husband and wife just about to retire to bed. Wife yawns, husband knocks out his pipe on the grate and remarks:

“Well, better turn in, I suppose.”

Wife replies:

“Yes”; then adds languidly:

“I meant to call round to ask the Cartwrights to dinner on Thursday.”

Husband, after prolonged pause:

“I’ll pop round and ask them now, if you like. They never go to bed till very late.”

“I wish you would, dear.”

Husband pulls on a cloth cap and goes out. Wife yawns again, and picks up “The Ladies’ Boudoir,” and idly examines charmeuse gown, and notes the prices of gloves at Foxtrot’s & Fieldfern’s. Yawns again more audibly. Collects sewing and places it in work-basket. Takes the kitten out and locks it up in the scullery. Yawns, and walks languidly upstairs. Turns on the light and spends fifteen minutes examining face at various angles in the glass. Begins to disrobe. Thinks sleepily: “Tom’s a long time.” Brushes out her hair and admires it considerably. Conceives a new way of dressing it for future festivities. Disrobes farther. Yawns. Disrobes completely and re-robes—dressing-gown.

“It’s too bad being all this time!”

Vitality slightly stirred in the direction of resentment and a kind of mild apprehension. Lies on the bed and drowsily reviews the experiences of the day. Dreams. . . . Suddenly starts with a consciousness of cold. Gropes for her wrist watch. *A quarter past one!* Jumps from the bed, feeling the cold hand of fear on her heart. Runs downstairs and stares helplessly out of the front door. Pauses to consider a thousand possible eventualities. Returns to bedroom and completely re-robes, not forgetting to do her hair neatly and powder her nose. Puts on cloak and goes out. Cartwright’s house all in darkness. Bangs on the front door and rings bell. Head of old Mr. Cartwright at first-floor window:

“Who’s the devil that?”

“It’s me! Where’s Tom?”

“Tom! Haven’t seen him for weeks!”

“Good God! Let me in.”

Cartwright family aroused. Panic. Fainting scene in drawing-room. Brandy, smelling-salts and eau-de-cologne. Young George Cartwright mounts his bicycle—rides to the police-station; on the way talks to policeman on point duty. No, no one heard anything of a thin man with a snuff-coloured moustache. At police-station, no accidents so far reported. Chief Inspector will make a note and await developments. Night passes, and the following day. No news.

Weeks, months, years elapse. Eight years slide easily by. The wife survives her grief. She marries the local organist, a blond and commendable young man. They continue to live in the wife’s house. Children gather round her knee. One, two, three, twins, an interval, six, seven handsome blond children. They grow up.

Twenty-two years elapse. They are sitting at tea. The father, the mother and the eldest son, a handsome young man in a grey flannel suit. He kisses his mother and says:

“I must go now, mother dear. I have to take a Bible-class.”

He goes out (presumably to the Bible-class). The mother smiles with pride, the father glows with benignity and helps himself to another buttered muffin. Everything perfect.

Suddenly the door opens, and an old man in a long grey beard and a perambulating manner wanders into the room. He stares at the wife, and mumbles:

“Did you say Thursday or Friday? . . . My memory is not what it was.”

...

And the wife stares at the old man, and then at the blond organist. And the blond organist stares at the mother of his beautiful children, and then at the bearded interloper. And they all stare at each other and feel very embarrassed.

The story is familiar to you? Well, perhaps so. It is the story of the eternal triangle, the most useful of geometrical forms in the construction of a romantic pattern.

Heigho! the trouble with human triangles is that they are never equilateral. Two sides together are invariably greater than the third side.

Jim Canning was the third side of a triangle, and he got flattened out. In fact, his wife used to flatten him out on every possible occasion. She was bigger than he, and she was aided by the *tertium quid*, Ted Woollams, who was nothing more or less than a professional pugilist. What was Jim to do? In every well-conducted epic the hero performs physical feats which leave you breathless. He is always tall and strong, and a bit too quick with the rapier for any villain who crosses his path. But what about a hero who is small and elderly, of poor physique, shortsighted, asthmatical, with corns which impede his gait? You may say that he has no place in the heroic arena. He should clear out, go and get on with his job, and leave heroism to people who know how to manage the stuff. And yet there was something heroic in the heart of Jim Canning: a quick sympathy, and an instinct for self-sacrifice.

He used to keep a second-hand furniture shop, which, you must understand, is a very different thing from an antique shop. Jim's furniture had no determinate character such as that which goes by the name of Chippendale, Sheraton or Heppelwhite. It was just "furniture." Well-worn sofas, broken chairs and tables, mattresses with the stuffing exuding from holes, rusty brass beds with the knobs missing, broken pots and mirrors and dumbbells; even clothes, and screws, false teeth and birdcages, and ancient umbrellas. But his speciality was old iron. Trays and trays and baskets filled with scraps of old iron.

His establishment used to be known in Camden Town at that time as "The Muck Shop." At odd times of the day you might observe his small pathetic figure trundling a barrow laden with the spoils of some hard-pressed inhabitant. What a tale the little shop seemed to tell! Struggle and poverty, homes broken up, drink, ugly passions, desperate sacrifices—a battered array of the symbols of distress. And, somehow, in his person these stories seemed to be embodied. One felt that he was sorry for the people whose property he bought. He was always known as a fair dealer. He paid a fair price and never took advantage of ignorance.

His marriage was a failure from the very first. She was a big, strapping woman, the daughter of a local greengrocer. Twelve years younger than Jim, vain, frivolous, empty-headed and quarrelsome. Her reasons for marrying him were obscure. Probably she had arrived at the time when she wanted to marry, and Jim was regarded as a successful shopkeeper who could keep her in luxury. He was blinded by her physical attractions, and tried his utmost to

believe that his wife was everything to be desired. Disillusionment came within the first month of their married life, at the moment, indeed, when Clara realised that her husband's business was not so thriving as she had been led to believe. She immediately accused him of deceiving her. Then she began to sulk and neglect him. She despised his manner of conducting business—his conscientiousness and sense of fair dealing.

“If you'd put some ginger into it,” she once remarked, “and not always be thinking about the feelings of the tripe you buy from, we might have a house in the Camden Road and a couple of servants.”

This had never been Jim's ambition. Many years ago he had attended a sale at Shorwell Green, on the borders of Sussex, a glorious spot near the downs, amidst lime-trees and little running streams. It had been the dream of his life that one day he would retire there, with the woman he loved—and her children. When he put the matter to Clara, she laughed him to scorn.

“Not half!” she said. “Catch me living among butterflies and blinking cows. The Camden Road is my game.”

Jim sighed, and went on trundling his barrow. Well, there it was! If the woman he had married desired it, he must do what she wanted. In any case it was necessary to begin to save. But with Clara he found it exceedingly difficult to begin to save. She idled her day away, bought trinkets, neglected her domestic offices, went to the pictures, and sucked sweets. Any attempt to point out to her the folly of her ways only led to bitter recriminations, tears and savage displays of temper, even physical violence to her husband.

Then there came a day when Jim fondly believed that the conditions of their married life would be ameliorated. A child was born, a girl, and they called her Annie. Annie became the apple of his eye. He would hurry back from the shop to attend at Annie's bath. He would creep in at night and kiss the warm skin of her little skull. He would think of her as he potted around amidst his broken chairs and tables, and utter little croons of anticipatory pleasure. Annie! She would grow up and be the mainstay of his life. He would work and struggle for her. Her life should be a path of roses and happiness. For a time his wife, too, appeared to improve upon the advent of Annie. The baby absorbed her. She displayed a kind of wild animal joy in its existence. She nursed it and fondled it, and did not seem to resent the curtailment of her pleasures. It was an additional mouth to feed; nevertheless, their expenses did not seem to greatly increase, owing probably to Clara's modified way of living.

Four years of comparative happiness followed. Jim began to save. Oh! very slowly; very, very slowly. He still had less than three hundred pounds put on one side for—that vague future of settled security. But still it was a solid beginning. In another ten or fifteen years he would still be—well, not quite an old man; an active man, he hoped. If he could save only one hundred pounds a year!

It was at this point that Ted Woollams appeared on the scene. He was the son of a manager of a Swimming Bath. On Sundays he used to box in “Fairyland” for purses of various amounts—he was a redoubtable middle-weight. During the week he swaggered about Camden Town in new check suits, his fingers glittering with rings. He met Clara one evening at a public dance. The mutual attraction appears to have been instantaneous. They danced together the whole evening, and he saw her home.

And then began the squeezing out of the third side of the triangle. Jim was not strong enough for them. At first he professed to see nothing in the friendship. He described Ted as “a jolly young fellow, a great pal of my wife’s.” And Ted treated him with a certain amount of respect. He called in at odd times, stayed to meals, drank Jim’s beer, and smoked Jim’s tobacco. The triangle was quite intact. It was Annie who caused the first disruption. She disliked the prize-fighter, and screamed at the sight of him. This led to reprisals when he had gone, and Jim’s championship of the child did not help to cement the always doubtful nature of the affection between husband and wife. There were cross words and tears, and once she pushed him over a chair, and, in the fall, cut his temple.

A few days later, Ted Woollams called in a great state of agitation. He wished to see Jim alone. It appeared that a wonderful opportunity had occurred to him. It was a complicated story about a quantity of bonded brandy which he had a chance of acquiring and selling at an enormous profit. He wanted to borrow fifty pounds till Saturday week, when he would pay Jim back sixty. Jim said he would lend him the fifty, but he didn’t want any interest.

When Saturday week came, Ted said the deal had fallen through, but he would let him have the money back the following Saturday. In the meantime he came to supper nearly every night. Sometimes he drank too much beer.

Then Clara began to dress for the part. She bought expensive frocks, and had the account sent in to Jim. She neglected the child.

The months drifted by, and Ted was always going to pay, but he became more and more part and parcel of the household. Jim’s savings began to

dwindle. He protested to both his wife and Ted, but they treated him with indifference. The boxer began to abuse his familiarity. He would frequently tell Jim that he was not wanted in the drawing-room after supper. When spoken to about the money he laughed and said:

“Oh, you’ve got plenty, old ’un. Lend us another fiver.”

On one occasion Jim was foolish enough to lend him another ten pounds, under the spell of some heartrending story about a poor woman in the street where Woollams lived. This lopsided triangle held together for nearly four years. Jim was unhappy and distracted. He did not know how to act. He could not leave his wife for the sake of the child. If he turned her out—and he had no legal power to do so—she would probably take Annie with her. And the child was devoted to him. They were great friends, and it was only this friendship which prevented him indulging in some mad act. Several times he ordered Woollams out of the house and forbade him to come again, but the boxer laughed at him and called him an old fool. He knew that his wife was practically keeping the man. They went to cinemas together, and often disappeared for the whole day, but she always returned at night, although it was sometimes two or three in the morning before she did so. Jim had no proof of actual unfaithfulness. Neither could he afford to hire detectives, a course of action which in any case appeared to him distasteful. Far from saving a hundred pounds a year, he was spending more than his income. His savings had dwindled to barely forty pounds. His business was stagnant, but still he trundled his barrow hither and thither, calling out, “Old iron! Old iron!” and he struggled to pay the fair price.

During a great period of his life Jim had enjoyed an unaccountable but staunch friendship with a gentleman named Isaac Rubens. Isaac Rubens was a Jew in a slightly similar way of business to himself, and he conducted a thriving business at the corner of Holy Angel Road. Isaac was in many respects a very remarkable man. Large, florid and puffy, with keen eagle eyes and an enormous nose, he was a man of profound knowledge of the history and value of *objets d’art*. He was, moreover, a man of his word. He was never known to give or accept a written contract, and never known to break a verbal one. The friendship between these two was in many respects singular. Isaac was a keen man of business, and Jim was of very little use to him. Isaac’s furniture was the real thing, with names and pedigrees. He did not deal in old iron but in stones and jewels and ornaments. Nevertheless, he seemed to find in Jim’s society a certain pleasure. Jim would call on his rounds and, leaving his barrow out in the road, would spend half-an-hour or so chatting with the Jew across the counter.

Sometimes after supper they would call on each other and smoke a pipe and discuss the vagaries of their calling, or the more abstract problems of life and death.

When this trouble came upon Jim he immediately repaired to his friend's house and told him the whole story.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear! This is a bad business! a bad business!” exclaimed Isaac, when it was over. His moist eyes glowed amidst the general humidity of his face. “How can I advise you? An erring wife is the curse of God. You cannot turn her away without knowledge. Thank God, my Lena. . . . But there! among my people such lapses are rare. You have no evidence of unfaithfulness?”

“No.”

“You must be gentle with her, gentle but firm. Point out the error of her ways.”

“I am always doing that, Isaac.”

“She may get over it—a passing infatuation. Such things happen.”

“If it wasn't for the child!”

“Yes, yes, I understand. Oh, dear! oh, dear! very distressing, my friend. If I can be of any assistance——”

He thrust out his large hands helplessly. It is the kind of trouble in which no man can help another, and each knew it. Jim hovered by the door.

“It's nice to have someone to—talk to, anyway,” he muttered; then he picked up his cap and shuffled away, calling out:

“Old iron! Old iron!”

Annie was nine when the climax came. An intelligent, pretty child, with dark hair and quick, impulsive manners. Her passionate preference for her father did not tend to smooth the troubles of the household. She attended the grammar-school and had many girl-friends. She saw very little of her mother.

One evening Jim returned home late. He had been on a visit to his friend, Isaac. He found Annie seated on the bottom stair, in her nightdress. Her face was very pale and set, her eyes bright. She had been crying. When she saw her father she gasped:

“Daddy! . . . Oh, Daddy!”

He seized her in his arms and whispered:

“What is it, my dear?”

Then she cried quietly while he held her. He did not attempt to hurry her. At last she got her voice under control and gasped quietly:

“I had gone to bed. I don’t know why it was. I got restless in bed. I came down again softly. I peeped into the sitting-room. . . . Oh, Daddy!”

“What? What, my love?”

“That man . . . that man and——”

“Your mother?”

“Yes.”

“He was——”

“He was kissing her and—oh!”

Jim clutched his child and pressed her head against his breast.

“I went in. . . . He *struck* me.”

“What!”

“He struck me because I wouldn’t promise not to tell.”

“He struck you, eh? He struck you! That man struck you, eh?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Where is he?”

“They’re—up there now. I’m frightened.”

“Go to bed, my love. Go to bed.”

He carried her up the stairs and fondled her, and put her into bed.

“It’s all right, my love. Go to sleep. Pleasant dreams. It’s all right. Daddy will look after you.”

Then he went downstairs.

A shout of laughter greeted him through the door of the sitting-room. He gripped the handle and walked deliberately in. Ted Woollams was stretching himself luxuriously on the sofa. His heavy sensual face appeared puffy and a little mussed. Clara was lying back in an easy chair, smoking a cigarette. Jim did not speak. He walked up to Ted and without any preliminary explanation struck him full on the nose with his clenched fist. For a moment the boxer

appeared more surprised than anything. His eyes narrowed, then the pain of the blow appeared to sting him. He rose from the sofa with a growl. As he advanced upon Jim, the latter thought:

“He’s going to kill me. What a fool I was not to strike him with a poker!”

He thrust out his arms in an ineffectual defence. There was something horribly ugly, ugly and revolting in the animal-like lurch of the man bearing down on him . . . the demon of an inevitable doom. Jim struck wildly at the other’s arms, at the same time thinking:

“My little girl! I promised to look after her.”

A jarring blow above the heart staggered him, and as he began to crumple forward he had a quick vision of the more destroying fate, the something which came crashing to his jaw. He heard his wife scream; then darkness enveloped him.

A long and very confused period followed. His glimpses of consciousness were intermittent and accompanied by pain. He heard people talking, and they appeared strangers to him. There was a lot of talking going on, quarrelling, perhaps. When he was once more a complete master of his brain he realised abruptly that he was in the ward of a hospital. His jaw was strapped up tight and was giving him great pain; a nurse was feeding him through a silver tube. Two of his teeth were missing. He wanted to talk to her, but found he could not speak. Then he recalled the incident of his calamity. Well, there it was. He had been brought up in a hard school. Old iron! The instinct of self-preservation prompted him to bide his time. Doubtless his jaw was broken; a long job, but he would get well again. At the end of the journey Annie awaited him. What was the child doing now? Who was looking after her? He passed through periods of mental anguish and misgiving, and then long periods of drowsy immobility. Night succeeded day. To his surprise, on the following afternoon, his wife appeared. She came and sat by the bed, and said:

“Going on all right?”

He nodded. She looked uneasily round, then whispered:

“You needn’t have taken on like that. Ted’s going off to America, tomorrow—fulfilling engagements.”

Jim stared at the ceiling, then closed his eyes. Ted no longer interested him. He wanted Annie, and he could not ask for her. Clara stayed a few moments, chatted with the nurse, and vanished. Why had she come? Later

on, he was removed to the operating theatre, and they re-set his jaw. The shift of time again became uncertain. A long while later he remembered a kindly-faced man in a white overall saying:

“Well, old chap, who struck you this blow?”

He bent his ear down to Jim’s lips, and the latter managed to reply:

“A stranger.”

Isaac came, humid and concerned, and pressed his hand.

“Well, well, I’ve found you, old friend! A neighbour told me. Distressing, indeed. They say you must not talk. Well, what can I do?”

Jim indicated with his hands that he wished to write something down. Isaac produced an envelope and a pencil, and he wrote:

“Go and see my little gal Annie send her to me keep an eye on her.”

Isaac nodded gravely, and went away.

There appeared an eternity of time before the child came, but when she did all his dark forebodings vanished. She came smiling up the ward, and kissed him. They held each other’s hands for a long time before she spoke.

“They would not tell me where you were. It was old Mr. Rubens. Oh, Daddy, are you getting better?”

Yes, he was getting better. Much better. During the last two minutes he had improved enormously. He felt that he could speak. He managed to mumble:

“How are you, my love?”

“All right. Mother has been very cross. That horrid man has gone away. Mr. Rubens said you hurt your face. How did it happen, Daddy?”

“I slipped on the stairs, my dear, and fell.”

Annie’s eyes opened wide very, but she did not speak. He knew by her manner that she did not believe him. At the back of her eyes there still lurked something of that horror which haunted them on the night when she had discovered “that horrid man” embracing her mother. It was the same night that her father “slipped on the stairs.” The child was too astute to dissociate the two incidents, but she did not want to distress him.

“I shall come every day,” she announced.

He smiled gratefully, and she stayed and chatted with him until the sister proclaimed that visitors were to depart.

From that day the convalescence of Jim Canning, although slow, was assured. Apart from the broken jaw, he had suffered a slight concussion owing to striking the back of his head against the wall when he fell. The hospital authorities could not get out of him how the accident happened. Annie and Isaac Rubens were regular visitors, but during the seven weeks he remained in hospital Clara only visited him twice, and that was to arrange about money. On the day that he was discharged he had drawn his last five pounds from the bank.

“Never mind, never mind,” he thought to himself; “we’ll soon get that back.”

And within a few days he was again trundling his barrow along the streets, calling out in his rather high tremolo voice, “Old iron! Old iron!”

There followed after that a long period in the life of the Canning family which is usually designated as “humdrum.” With the departure of Ted Woollams Clara settled down into a listless prosecution of her domestic routine. She seldom spoke to her husband except to nag him, or to grumble about their reduced circumstances, and these for a time were in a very serious state. Debts had accumulated, and various odds and ends in the house had disappeared while he had been in hospital. Clara was still smartly dressed, but Annie’s clothes, particularly her boots, were in a deplorable condition. But Jim set to work, leaving home in the morning at seven o’clock and often not returning till eight or nine at night. For months the financial position remained precarious. A period of hunger, and ill-temper, and sudden ugly brawls. But gradually he began again to get it under control. Clara had not lost her taste for good living, but she was kept in check by the lack of means. She was furtive, sullen and resentful. Jim insisted that whatever they had to go without, Annie was to continue with her schooling.

They never spoke of Ted Woollams, but Jim knew that he had only gone away for four or five months. Jim struggled on through the winter months, out in all weathers in his thin and battered coat. Sometimes twinges of rheumatism distorted his face, but he mentioned it to no one, not even Isaac.

It was in April that a sudden and dramatic change came into Jim’s life. One morning he was alone in the shop. It was raining, and no customers had been in for several hours. Jim was struggling with the unsolvable problem of getting things straight and sorted out. Beneath a bed he came across a

jumble of indescribable things, bits of iron and broken pots, odd boots, sections of brackets, nameless odd-shaped remnants covered with dust and grime. He sighed. He remembered this lot quite well. They had been a great disappointment to him. He had trundled his barrow all the way down to a sale in Greenwich, where he had been given the tip that there were some good things going. Owing to losing his way, he had arrived late, and all the plums had been devoured by rival dealers. He had picked up this lot at the end of the sale for a few shillings, not that they appealed to him as a good bargain, but because he did not want to feel that he had completely wasted his day. He had brought them back and dumped them under the bed, intending to go through them later on. That was many months ago, long before he had been to the hospital, and there they had remained ever since.

Jim's ideas of dusting were always a little perfunctory. With a small feather brush he flicked clouds of dust from one object to another. No; there was nothing here of any value, though that piece of torn embroidery might fetch five shillings, and the small oblong iron box which someone had painted inside and out a dark green might be worth a little more. He picked it up and examined it. A ridiculous notion to paint iron; but there, people were fools, particularly his customers. Of course it might be copper or brass. In that case it would be worth more. He pulled out a long jack-knife and scraped the surface. The paint was old but incredibly thick. It must have had a dozen coats or so. When he eventually got down to the surface he found a dark-blue colour.

“Um!” thought Jim. “That’s a funny thing.”

And he scraped a little more, and found some brown and white.

“That’s enamel,” he said out loud. “An enamel box. Um! I’ll show that to Isaac. An enamel box might be worth several pounds.”

He put the box on one side, and continued tidying up. That evening, after supper, he wrapped the box up in a piece of newspaper and took it round to his friend.

Isaac adjusted his thickest glasses and examined the spot where Jim had scratched. Then he went to the door and called out:

“Lizzie, bring me some turpentine.”

When the turpentine was brought, Isaac began to work away at the surface with a rag and penknife. His face was very red, but he made no remark except once to mutter:

“This paint alone is twenty or thirty years old.”

It took him nearly half an hour to reveal a complete corner of the box. Then he sat back and examined it through a microscope. Jim waited patiently. At last Isaac put it down and tapped the table.

“This,” he said deliberately, “is a Limoges enamel box of the finest period. It is an amazing find! Where did you obtain it?”

“I bought it at a sale of the effects of an old lady named Brandt, at Greenwich. She died intestate, and had no relatives.”

“You are in luck’s way, Jim Canning.”

“But why was it painted dark green?”

“There are many mysteries in our profession. It was probably stolen many years ago—possibly a century ago. The thief knew that the piece was too well-known to attempt to dispose of it for some time. So for security he painted it in order to hide it. Then something happened. He may have died or been sent to prison. The box passed into other hands. Nobody worried about it. It was just an old iron box. It has probably been lying in a lumber-room for years.”

“It’s been lying in my shop for five months. Is it worth a great deal, Isaac?”

Isaac thoughtfully stroked his chin.

“I am of opinion that if it is undamaged, and if the rest of it is up to the standard of this part we have disclosed, it is worth many thousand pounds.”

Jim looked aghast.

“But I only gave six-and-six for the lot!”

“It is the fortune of our profession.”

The upshot of it was that Jim left the box in Isaac’s hands to deal with as he thought fit. At first Isaac wished to waive the question of commission, but when Jim pointed out that but for Isaac’s superior knowledge he would probably have sold it for a five-pound note, the Jew agreed to sell it on a ten per cent basis. Fair bargaining on both sides.

Jim returned home, almost dazed by the news. Was it fair to obtain such a large sum of money in such a way? He had done nothing to deserve it. And yet—who should have it, if not he? The old lady had not even any relations. She was an eccentric who lived alone with a crowd of cats. An enamel box has no attraction to a cat.

He said nothing about his find to his wife or to Annie. He did not wish to buoy them up with false hopes. Perhaps, after all, Isaac might be mistaken, or he may have overvalued the object. A thousand pounds! A dazzling sum. Why, he could almost retire upon it to—Shorwell Green, where it was so quiet and peaceful. But no! Clara would not agree to that—the Camden Road! He detested the Camden Road, but still, there it was. Clara was his wife. It was only fair to consider her wishes, although they were so unhappy together. In any case, it would be a great relief; security for years to come.

He went back to his work as though nothing had happened. Weeks went by, and Jim heard nothing about the enamel box; and then, one morning, he received a note from Isaac asking him to call round at once.

When he entered his friend's shop he knew that something exceptional had happened. Isaac was excited. He glowed and smiled, and was almost jocular.

“Come into my little room,” he said.

When they were seated, he elaborately produced a cheque from his vest pocket, and handed it across the table to Jim.

“Here is your little share. I have kept my commission.”

It was a cheque for £4,140. Isaac had sold it for £4,600 to a well-known collector.

The rest of the day was like a dream to Jim. Truly, he returned and pretended to be busy. In the afternoon, he even went out and trundled his barrow, calling out, “Old iron! Old iron!” but he did it more by force of habit.

“I need not do this any more,” he kept on thinking. His mind was occupied with many visions. It was a bright Spring day, with light fleecy clouds scudding above the chimney-pot. How beautiful it would be in that Sussex vale! The flowers would be out, and the young pollard-willows reflected in the cool streams. Pleasant to lie on the bank and fish, and forget this grimy life. And Annie, racing hither and thither, picking the buttercups and marguerites, and nestling by his side. He could do all this! Freedom, by one of those queer twists of fate.

The day wore on, and he still continued his work in a dazed, preoccupied manner. When the evening came, a feeling of exhaustion crept over him. Yes, probably he was tired. He wanted a rest and change. How fortunate he was. And yet he dreaded breaking the news to Clara. She would immediately demand a complete social upheaval. A new house, new

furniture, luxuries, and parties, and social excitements. He arrived home late. During supper he was very silent.

“I will tell her afterwards,” he thought. Annie was in bed. She should be told to-morrow. But to-night it must be broken to Clara. After all, it was true, she *was* his wife. It was the fair thing to do. He tried to recall the moments of passion and tenderness of the early days of their honeymoon, but all the other ugly visions kept dancing before his eyes. He lighted his pipe and gazed around the untidy room. Perhaps she would improve. Perhaps the changed conditions would soften her, and make her more amenable. But still, she was his wife, and if she wished to live in the Camden Road, well . . .

It was nearly dark, and Clara went out of the room, humming. She seemed peculiarly cheerful to-night. Almost as if she knew. . . . He fingered the cheque in his breast pocket. She had gone upstairs—probably to fetch a novel. When she came down, he would lay the cheque on the table, and say:

“Look, Clara; see what has happened to us!”

And then he would be a little tender with her, try and make her understand how he felt. They would start all over again.

And then happened a variant of that hypothetical case described at the beginning of this story. Only, in this case it was the woman who went out.

Jim was sitting there with his fingers on the cheque that was to be their means of reconciliation, and with the tears already banked in his unuttered speech, when Clara put her head in the door. She had her hat on. She said:

“I’m going to the post.”

Jim removed his hand from his breast pocket. He sat back, and heard the door slam.

“I’ll tell her when she comes in.”

But Clara never came in. He waited half-an-hour, and then he thought:

“She’s gone to some dissipation with a friend. Oh, well, I must wait up till she returns, I suppose. I’m sorry she has disappointed me on—a night like this, though.”

He sat dreaming in the chair, till he became suddenly painfully aware of cold. It was quite dark. He lighted the gas. It was one o’clock. He felt his heart beating with a physical dread. Something had happened to Clara. Perhaps she had been run over, at the very moment when everything was

going to change for the better for her. He blundered his way out into the hall, where a gas-jet flickered feebly, and groped for his overcoat. On it he found a note pinned. He turned up the gas higher, and read:

“I’m going off to Ted Woollams. I’m sick of you, and the stinking little house. Ted’s made a bit in America, and I give you the address. You can do what you like about it, but it’s no good you ever trying to get me back.

“CLARA.”

It was characteristic of Jim Canning that this note made him cry. He was so sensitive to its utter callousness and ingratitude. Then he dabbed his eyes with his old red handkerchief, and went upstairs. He tapped on Annie’s door, then he opened it and said quietly:

“Annie, it’s all right, my dear. It’s only me. May I come in?”

The sleeping child was awake abruptly. She held out her arms.

“I ought not to have woken you up, my love, only I felt a little—lonely. Annie, would you like to come away with me to a beautiful place in the country, where it’s all woods and flowers, and little streams?”

“Oh, Daddy, yes! And would there be lambs, too, and little black pigs, and brown calves?”

“Yes, my dear; all those things; and birds, too, and quietness, and freedom.”

“But, Daddy, could we?”

“Yes, dear; I’ve had some good fortune.”

Annie was very wide awake now, and she sat up and clapped her hands.

“Oh, Daddy, when can we go?”

“Quite soon, my dear. Perhaps in a few weeks.”

When he had closed the door, he dabbed his eyes again, and thought:

“It was unthinking of me. I oughtn’t to have woken her up, but—she is all I have.”

A week later he wrote to Clara:

“DEAR CLARA,—

“I understand that for the last week you have been living with Ted Woollams. I do not criticize your action. We are all as God made us. I shall in the due course take divorce proceedings not as an act of hostility to you but that you may marry the man of your choice and be respectable. I also shall share with you the result of a good deal last week in order that you may not want and so close with check for £2020. I think this fair.

“JIM.”

It was Isaac who helped him over all the difficult problems which occurred at that time, and it was Isaac who persuaded him that he was overdoing the “fairness” to Clara. He said that under the circumstances he had no moral obligation to Clara, and that £500 would be lavish. So in the end Jim altered the cheque to that amount. It was Isaac who took over the little shop, which he used as a kind of dumping ground of his superfluous stock. And it was Isaac who a year after returned letters addressed to Jim in a handwriting he recognised, “Gone away. Address not known.” And it was he who in later years bore the brunt of the wild invective of a drunken harridan who said that her husband had deserted her, and would not hand her any of the fortune he must have inherited. He shook his head sadly, and replied that he knew nothing. Mr. Canning and his daughter had left London. He thought they had gone to Australia.

When she had gone, he said to himself:

“It would distress Jim to know that a woman who had once been his wife had sunk to such a condition.”

As he passed through the room at the back he smiled and thought:

“How fortunate she did not come in here!”

On the table was a large bowl of red and white roses, with the label and card still lying on the table. On the card was inscribed, “With love to Uncle Isaac. A.”

The postmark on the label was a village in Sussex.

THE SONG OF PRAISE

George Arthur always began the day with song. Almost directly he awoke he would sit bolt upright against the pillow, his small chest thrust out, his bright blue eyes fixed on the sky and the nodding branches of the elms visible from the night-nursery window, and he would sing.

It was a wonderful song. It had no recognisable air and no recognisable words. It was a volume of sound that rose and fell, rushed onward, sometimes repeated itself, sometimes hung poised, sometimes rumbled with a deep mock-manly note, sometimes lingered and sometimes scurried. But whatever its tempo, and whatever its rhythm, it always contained that quality which it shared with the birds on the branches below, the quality of triumph, the quality of praise.

It was as though, after the pause of darkness, when everything fell apart and became detached, one could not accept these golden gifts of the awakening and uniting god without due recognition. The story must be continued from where it left off when the sun departed.

To the sophisticated this interruption of darkness is accepted with the insolent assumption that in precisely so many hours and minutes it will again be light. But why? Why regard this astounding miracle with cynical indifference?

George Arthur and the birds had no cause to doubt the coming of the light, but it still remained a miracle. It still remained a subject upon which to pour out one's heart in praise. Through his open door he could see through the open door of Nan-nan's room, and observe her bustling movements, but he never felt impelled to offer her any kind of greeting until the song had run its full course. And not even then in the general sense of the term greeting.

When, on this particular morning, she appeared some twenty minutes later, he immediately broke into a lively torrent of discourse concerning two rabbits, one of which the gardener's son had allowed to escape into Major Towle's kitchen-garden, and how it had been chased and nearly killed by the red setter.

The unabated frenzy of the narrative lasted well into breakfast time. And breakfast was no inconsiderable trifle with George Arthur, consisting as it did of wheat flakes and cream, a boiled egg, toast, butter, jam and some

stewed prunes, this solid nutriment being helped down by two cups of warm milk.

These matters being disposed of, George Arthur was aware that the serious business of the day was about to start. But not quite yet. For the first and most important business of the day was the visit to *Her*. And for some reason or other she did not like him to visit her until a certain time known only to Nan-Nan and herself.

So in a spasmodic way he continued his song, lying on his tummy on the nursery floor, and making a drawing of a steamer with clouds of smoke pouring out of the funnels, until she sent for him.

This was always a golden hour to George Arthur, the time when he had her entirely to himself, without fear of interruption. He was intimately aware of her astounding beauty, her gold-brown hair framed by the white pillow, her wonderful pink and white skin, those large, wistful, blue-grey eyes. There was a wonderful perfume about her body, which he could only recognise vaguely as the essence of their intimacy.

In bed she wore a wonderful pale blue thing trimmed with white fur. In fact, everything she wore was beautiful, far more beautiful than things worn by other women. He had even heard people say so. And she moved more gracefully, and her voice was deeper, gentler, more musical than any other voice in the world. By the side of the bed was her breakfast-tray. Her breakfast never seemed to consist of anything but tea, toast and letters. And sometimes, while she was talking to him, she would pick up one of the letters and glance through it abstractedly.

He forgave these aberrations because, knowing that she was the most beautiful woman in the world, everyone wanted her. The house always seemed to be full of people wanting her. And they stayed to meals, played cards, or made her sing; and sometimes they took her away with them for long stretches of time, all night sometimes, and even several nights. But when, on these occasions, she returned, he always noticed an added pressure of her arms, a kind of breathless expression of her nearness.

Particularly did he notice this when "Dadda" was away, and Dadda was away quite a lot. A curious person, Dadda, not a bit like her. There was nothing beautiful about him. He was rather bald with heavy black moustaches. Everything about him was rather heavy. He wore heavy dark clothes and watchchains, and rings, and although he was always in a hurry he moved heavily. Sometimes he would come across George Arthur, and exclaim in his heavy voice:

“Well, my old cockalorum!” and he would pat him and admire his drawings, but very quickly he would seem to get tired of this and he would keep on looking at his watch, or else Mr. Lanyard, his secretary, would come bustling along with a brown leather case, and would say:

“The car is here, sir.”

And then they would go off together, and nothing more would be seen of Dadda until the next morning, or until many next mornings. There was something unsatisfactory about this. Of course Dadda didn't matter in the way *she* mattered. He was not indispensable. But George Arthur always felt a kind of queer pity for him. He would have liked to know him better; but they were always both a little shy in each other's company.

It seemed to George Arthur that Dadda was always driven along by some hidden power to do the things he didn't want to do. He so often seemed worried and distracted, and sometimes when at home he would sit forward on his chair and look at *her*, with an odd, appealing look in his eyes, just like Jimmy, Major Towle's red setter, when his master had told him to “Wait.” But George Arthur seldom saw them together. There were all these people always wanting her, and there was Dadda driven hither and thither by Mr. Lanyard, and the brown leather case.

There were occasions, as on this morning, when Dadda had been away some time, that George Arthur would feel a sudden need for him, as though he felt there were something missing in the general scheme of things, and nestling in the crook of her white arm he said abruptly:

“When is Dadda coming back?”

There was a pause and she seemed to laugh a little uncomfortably.

“I don't quite know, darling. Not yet.”

“What is he doing?”

“Oh, he's busy. Business, you know.”

“What is business?”

“Being busy, darling. Selling things, making money—”

“Is it hard to make money?”

“To some people, not to others.”

“To Dadda?”

“I don’t know. He—there, don’t lean on me, darling. I must go and have my bath.”

On some mornings he accompanied her into the bathroom. He liked to watch her long white body glistening under the water. But this morning he refrained. He wanted to think something out.

For the last few weeks he had determined—and he had elaborated the idea minutely to Nan-nan—that when he grew up he was going to be a policeman. Not, as he explained, an ordinary policeman, but an “important” policeman, one who rode on a horse and wore white gloves and ordered the motor-cars about. He had seen one on his last visit to London town, when they stayed at a large dark house in a square. He had seen this policeman in one of the busy streets near a park and he had been duly impressed. But now he was wondering whether it wouldn’t be nicer to be a business man, to have a lot of cases and papers, and dash about in a motor-car, with everybody very deferential, and handing you bags of gold over counters.

The only great objection to this seemed to be that one had to be so much in London town, a place he did not like. When they went to stay at that dark house in the square he was always conscious of a feeling of depression. It seemed no place for games and make-believe, and sometimes he went into the garden of the square, and he noticed that the trees were dirty. The seats were dirty, and everything you touched made your hands black. And the other children and their nursemaids never seemed disposed to be friendly.

Which reminded him! In a leap he was off the bed and down the stairs. This was the morning that Joan and Nigel were coming in to play Red Indians. Joan was five and Nigel eight, and they belonged to Major Towle’s, next door.

Of course they had not come, and Nan-nan called out of the window that they would not be here yet, not till eleven o’clock. Oh, bother eleven o’clock! What a world of waiting this was! Nothing ever seemed to happen at once. It was always: soon, or presently, or by-and-by, or one day, or later on, or we-shall-see, or eleven o’clock. How he hated these expressions! When was eleven o’clock? It sounded a remote and sinister hour. Wasn’t the whole essence of everything to do it immediately?

However, the sun was shining brilliantly, and he rushed to the hutches behind the garage and engaged the rabbit in conversation. He pushed cabbage stalks through the wire and told “Joey” he was an old silly. And the rabbit’s nostrils worked up and down so rapidly it seemed just as though he were eagerly corroborating this criticism.

Then there was Beauchamp, the chauffeur, turning the hose on to the Daimler. He also had to be interviewed. There were, indeed, a great number of garden activities that required attention, and the time passed quickly. George Arthur had, in fact, forgotten all about his fellow Red Indians until a familiar war-whoop greeted him from the other side of the vegetable garden. Nigel was in full war paint with feathers and tomahawk complete, and Joan was wearing a headdress and a coloured shawl.

“Wait a minute!” was his greeting. “I’m not ready.”

He dashed indoors and yelled out to Nan-nan for his Indian suit. There were times when her dilatoriness infuriated him. It was not that she was actually so slow in movement as that she did not always appreciate the importance of certain things.

There she was calmly ironing something out, and laughing and talking with Annie, the parlour-maid, while “the tribe” were waiting for him below! However, by the employment of a certain amount of violence, both physical and vocal, he managed to persuade her to help him into his suit and feathers.

Down in the hall he ran into *her*. She was exquisitely gowned in some pale mauve colour with a small black hat. She was just going out to the car.

“Oh, darling, how splendid you look!” she exclaimed, drawing on her gloves. “I shan’t be long. I shall be home to tea in any case.”

In the ordinary way he would have protested at her going out for so long a time, but in an instant he sensed that she, too, like Nan-nan, failed to judge the true importance of the situation. There was a shade of insincerity in her admiration. She was, he knew, anxious to get off “without a fuss.” She had her interests and he had his, and there it was. Moreover, this was not the time of day for emotions and regrets.

He allowed her to kiss him on the cheek, and then with a quick: “All right, then,” he dashed past her into the garden.

Beyond the vegetable garden, was a narrow strip of copse, and here the Indians pitched their tent. It was a glorious morning. There was much spying and creeping through the undergrowth, and waving of tomahawks. There were muttered whispers of “Walla, walla, walla,” and similar sounds, alien tribes were defeated, victims scalped, bears and buffaloes tracked, and slain, and Joan rescued from the clutches of the enemy about to burn her. The morning seemed to go like a flash.

A smiling ayah glided into view almost simultaneously with Nan-nan.

Oh, bother, bother, bother, bother, bother! What a tyranny were the interventions of these grown-ups. In the same way that nothing ever happened at once, neither did it ever happen continuously. There were always these absurd interruptions and intervals—just when one was getting into things.

“Now children, your rest before lunch.”

It was not even as though they could resume the game quite soon. After lunch Joan and Nigel had to go out, he knew. He, too, would probably have to go out for a walk with Nan-nan. Mum didn't like him to play in the garden all day—then home to tea. Perhaps they could come after tea? But, no, Joan and Nigel, it seemed, had promised to go to tea with some other children, to play with them. To play with other children!

George Arthur felt a little stab of jealousy. He turned abruptly away and ran into the house. Lying on his bed, during his rest before lunch, he began again to think about Mum. Why did she always want to be going about seeing other people, leaving him to his own and Nan-nan's devices? Had he treated her rather brusquely that morning, though? Oh, well, there were moments when he felt a queer desire to punish her in some fantastic way, or at least if not to punish her, to show his power over her. He hummed to himself, and turned to his drawing-book.

He found that Indian warfare had given him an appetite, and he did full justice to a meal consisting of roast chicken, vegetables, stewed damsons, custard and cream, and ending up with a nectarine.

It seems a significant comment upon the nature of the animal that immediately after this he could stand on his head in the corner of the room with his legs bent and balance the kitten on his knees, amidst shrieks of laughter from himself, mild protests from Nan-nan, and dubious acquiescence from the kitten.

After the excitement of the morning the afternoon seemed a mild and rather uneventful experience. He went on to the common with Nan-nan, and he took a kite, but owing to lack of wind this was not a success, neither was sailing a boat on a small muddy pond. These failures, however, were a little discounted by the sight of a large rat, which scuttled away from the reeds of the pond, and disappeared under a culvert. Then they sat down on a rug and Nan-nan read to him. It was a lovely story about “Winnie, the Pooh.” He had heard it before several times, but he did not like stories that were unfamiliar.

Nan-nan had a pretty voice—Scotch. Sometimes he found it difficult to understand her, and he would stop her and ask her to repeat something. Sometimes he found himself just listening to the cadence of her voice, and not following the story. There was something very attractive about it when she read; much more attractive than when she just talked in the ordinary way.

He began to wonder how much he loved her. Her hair, pulled tightly back, was turning grey. Her cheeks were red and a little rough, but her eyes were deep and grey and understanding. She was very dear to him, sitting there bolt upright, with her back to a furze-bush and reading in her pretty Scotch voice. She was dear to him because she was so familiar, and reliable, and understanding. Of course it wasn't like Mum—there was nothing exciting about it. But he leant against her for a moment, and without stopping her reading, she put an arm round him, and pressed him to her.

Bees were droning in the yellow gorse. Little specks of white cloud drifted idly overhead. An aeroplane appeared from nowhere, the sound of its engine drowning the hum of the bees.

Tea-time was always the most important and exciting time of the day, especially when *she* was to be there. It seemed to mark the crisis of the day's adventures. The only danger lay in people. Mum had an unfortunate habit of bringing people home to tea. When they were strangers, or people he objected to, then the meal was spoiled. But sometimes people whom he liked came—you never knew.

There was Uncle Arthur, Dadda's elder brother. He was a big, clumsy man, too solemn in his manners. He and George Arthur had much in common. What he liked about Uncle Arthur was that he talked to him quite seriously, as between man and man. He never seemed to be laughing at him, or patronising. He knew the importance of things. And there was Aunt Mildred, and Betty Smallpiece, and Grandmamma, and, oh, quite a number of nice people.

From the edge of the common they could see that tea was set in the sunk rose garden. There was the gleam of white napery, and the glitter of silver and china. Two or three people were wandering around, admiring the roses. There was Mum, two people he could not recognise, and then to his profound disgust—"that man!" He always called him "that man" to Nan-nan, who reproved him mildly with:

"Oh, hush, Georgie! I'm sure Mr. Sievewright is very nice."

She, as any adult might, found it very difficult to explain George Arthur's bitterness against Oswald Sievewright. A more charming gentleman Nan-nan had never met. Young, good-looking, boyish, gay, no one had made greater efforts to ingratiate himself with George Arthur; but it had all been in vain. The small boy would have nothing to do with him. He showed his dislike openly.

Whatever it was, George Arthur regarded him as his secret enemy, his pet aversion. And he had noticed of late than when "that man" was there there was something subtly different about *her*. She spoke differently, moved differently, and what was most unpardonable, behaved slightly differently to George Arthur. She seemed worried by his inimical attitude, and was always trying to wheedle him into a more friendly one.

During tea he sat at his mother's elbow, and wouldn't speak. The two strangers, a man and a woman, seemed harmless. In any case, they didn't try to be familiar. But "that man" seemed to monopolise everyone's attention, and his attempts to draw George Arthur out or be friendly with him were so persistent and abortive that Mum eventually said:

"Oh, leave him alone, Ossy. He's a funny boy."

A few minutes later she was conscious of a disturbance at her elbow. She glanced round and saw that her small son was shaking, and tears were assembling on the brink of his eyes. Tea was in any case nearly finished, and she arose and said calmly:

"Excuse me, good people. Georgie and I are going for a little stroll."

She tried to chatter to him dispassionately of other things, but when they were out of sight the storm burst. She picked him up, patted him, and tried to comfort him.

"What is it, Georgie? What's the matter? Tell Mum."

But he would not speak. In the midst of his tears he uttered small groans of pain like one whose soul has been stricken. She knew him well enough to realise that it was no use to cross-examine too closely in an emotional crisis: moreover, she had a shrewd suspicion of the cause of the trouble. In a conflict between two personalities she had for an instant taken the side of the enemy. She said, in her effort to appease:

"There, there, darling, policemen don't cry."

This statement had in any case the satisfactory effect of eliciting a reply, jerked vehemently through diminishing sobs:

“I’m not going to be a policeman. I’m going to be a business.”

“Oh, you’re going to be a business, are you!”

She smiled weakly, wondering what this might portend.

A few minutes later something exciting happened. Nan-nan came out to say that the new “fairy car” promised by Uncle Arthur had just arrived by the carrier. All troubles were instantly forgotten. The car was unpacked. It was painted scarlet and green. George Arthur mounted it and raced round the lawns, violently ringing the bell. The garden immediately became a playground, a paradise, a fairyland. He squealed with delight, and grinned with pride at the onlookers’ praise of his skill.

The two strangers went, but “that man” stayed on. In the corner of the rose garden he was sitting very close to Mum. They seemed absorbed in each other. He was whispering to her and smiling. Her eyes were lowered. They appeared to be concentrated on the ground, but now and then she would look up at him and sigh. Neither of them was any longer interested in the skill of the cyclist. The latter kept pausing and looking in their direction. Once or twice he felt deeply stirred to protest, but something prompted him to bide his time.

Nan-nan had disappeared, but it was getting near the time when she would come for him for his bath. Sometimes when they were alone Mum would give him his bath, but not very frequently. Certainly no chance of it while “that man” was there.

He rode down past the copse, and out of sight. There was no one about. He felt a little stab of melancholy. At the end of the copse was a little wooden gate and bridge that crossed a tiny stream, dividing the garden property from the common. He dismounted and stood staring about him. Then he heard Nan-nan call.

Acting on a sudden impulse, he conducted his fairy car across the stream. Then he tipped it up on edge, and ran away into the common. He heard Nan-nan calling, and he crept into the heart of a thick bush, where he was entirely hidden, but where he had a good view of what might take place near the bridge. Indians with a vengeance!

Her calls became louder, and at last she appeared at the bridge, and caught sight of the car. She hurried towards it, picked it up, gave a quick glance at the stream, and then peered all around her. She was obviously a little bewildered and frightened. She called on a higher note:

“Georgie! Georgie! Where are you?”

She seemed about to make a search of the common, then she crossed the bridge again and ran in the direction of the house. This was a lovely game! In a few minutes she returned, accompanied by Mum, and “that man.” He heard the latter exclaim:

“I bet you he’s only hiding.”

And he began whistling and calling loudly, and then started a running trot across the common. He passed within two yards of Georgie, who crouched down, and held his breath. When his enemy passed he chuckled with glee. Mum was calling out in her deep musical voice:

“Geor-gie!”

There was a note of anxiety in it. She drifted uncertainly in his direction, continuing her call. He waited until she was within pouncing distance, then he sprang out with a triumphant yell. He saw her stagger for a moment, and put her hand across her eyes.

“Georgie,” she said quietly, “you shouldn’t do that.”

He had accomplished what he had set out to do! He had established the fact that his hold over her was greater than the hold over her of—any rival. He danced around her with savage delight. Her relief had its reaction. She was a little angry.

She said: “You’re a silly boy,” and she called out to “that man.” But the latter had already heard, and came running back, laughing.

“Where was the young monkey?”

They all went back to the house. George Arthur didn’t care very much if she was angry. He had won. He mounted his fairy car and rode vigorously around the lawns. He elected to be perverse. When Nan-nan called him he rang his bell, laughed, and dodged her. The chase went on until it was late for his bath-time. Nan-nan herself was getting winded and a little angry.

Mum showed her disapproval by leaving him and going into the drawing-room with “that man.” At last he dismounted and pushed the tricycle away. He crept into the drawing-room after her. She and “that man” were sitting on the Chesterfield. He went up and whispered in her ear:

“You give me my bath to-night.”

She whispered back: “No, I can’t to-night, darling. I—I’ve got something else to do. Run on upstairs, there’s a darling. I’ll come up and see you when you’re in bed.”

It was all nonsense. She had nothing to do. She was just sitting there talking to “that man.” He wheedled and coaxed, but she would not come. He had never known her so obstinate. He had his ultimate weapon—tears, but he was not going to use it in front of “that man.” Besides—with a sulky wriggle he left her.

“Good-night, old man,” called out “that man.”

He did not answer. George Arthur was not a well-behaved little boy. And to-night he was angry. Something was all wrong with the world. He didn’t know exactly what it was, but he felt disasters and disappointments crowding upon him. He proceeded to take it out of Nan-nan. He splashed her and threw the soap out of the bath, and also the three motor-boats which usually afforded such absorbing entertainment while ablutions were being performed. Nan-nan struggled bravely with her exasperations. She had had strict instructions from both parents that in no circumstances was she ever to slap or physically chastise the child. Neither had she any desire to do so, but there were moments—like the present—when she rather envied the people who had not so much conscience in these matters. But when she was drying him he seemed to change suddenly. He looked at her and said:

“Are you tired, Nan-nan?”

“You make me tired sometimes, Georgie, when you are a naughty boy.”

Sitting up in his small bed, when she was out of the room, he felt a wave of pity for her sweep over him. Poor Nan-nan! She, too—there was something all wrong with the world these days. She returned with his banana and biscuits, and as though to make atonement for his misdeeds he told her the full details of his adventures with Joan and Nigel, and he gave imitations of bears and tigers and the language of Indians.

He was interrupted in the performance by the entrance of Mum, who had come to say good-night. Nan-nan went out of the room. As soon as he was alone with her he was aware of some unusual disturbance. Before she came he had entirely calmed down. He had become quite normal and himself. But now he felt not only that curious emotional thrill which her presence always gave to him, but the sense of something else, something more disturbing. She was looking pale, and seemed to be struggling to be matter-of-fact. Once or twice she looked at him, and then looked around the room curiously, as though she had never seen it before.

Her voice shook when she said: “Was it a nice banana, darling?”

She kept touching things in an odd, jerky manner. And when she kissed him good-night she hurt him with a kind of savage hug. And though she looked into his face and there was the old familiar hungry look in her eyes, he noticed that she looked away almost immediately, and made some casual remark about the stuffed elephant on the chest of drawers.

She had gone before he had time to determine the shape of his own attitude towards her. He had felt aggrieved, and in need of comfort, and loving assurance, and she had not given it to him. He felt an immediate desire to cry out, and yell for her return, but some stubborn impulse made him hold his peace. He had learnt that in dealing with grown-ups one had to invent one's own weapons. They didn't always fight fair. They had all the advantages, and their reserves were inexhaustible. There were, nevertheless, ways of defeating them. In this cumulating sense of a world against him Mum had somehow got involved. He struggled to think the matter out, but it eluded him. It began to get dark.

Nan-nan came in and talked to him a little. He would have liked to tell her of his trouble, but he didn't know what his trouble was. It was indefinable. Neither was she somehow quite the person to tell, much as he loved her. She was neither in it, nor out of it. He didn't feel that she could help him. He was almost relieved at last when she went.

It was quite dark now, for he would never have a night-light. He lay there struggling with his load of trouble, trying not to cry. He thought of other things, flying impressions of the day, his new fairy car, Uncle Arthur and the rabbits, but the load remained.

He slept at last, still suffering as the dumb suffer. He did not know how long he slept, or what had happened in his dreams, but he knew that after what appeared a great lapse of time he awoke quite suddenly as though someone had touched him. He looked around.

It was daylight, but there was no one in the room. What hour was this? It was some unfamiliar time, much earlier than usual. He heard the birds outside, but there were no sounds of activity within the house. It was a forlorn, deserted hour. The recollections of yesterday had faded, but suddenly the burden of them came back to him in a concentrated form. He knew he could stand it no longer. He must cry. Not an ordinary whimper which one may do in bed, but an important cry. Something which would definitely relieve his depression.

He jumped out of bed and pattered across the room in his pyjamas. Nan-nan's door was open, but he ignored it. He was in search of bigger game. He

ran down the passage, opened Mum's door, and trotted in.

The fact that she was sitting on the edge of her bed partly dressed gave him no surprise, the fact that when she saw him she turned quite pale, and started like a person who had seen a ghost, seemed of small consequence. He flew at her, like an arrow to its mark, flung his arms around her and began to sob. His little bosom beat against hers, his tears ran down her neck. What could she do but hug him, and sway, beating time on his back with each rhythmic sob coming from his entire body?

"There, there, darling. It's all right. What is it? What is Georgie crying about?"

No answer; only the continual sob and the pat upon the afflicted back. She swung up her legs, and lay down on the bed still holding him close, and crooning softly. In that first fierce assault the defences of her own personal interest in the matter were carried, and she knew instinctively that she would never recover the ground lost. But her own tears were not far away.

"Oh, Georgie, why did you—how did you know?"

He heard her say this and he remembered it afterwards, but he did not answer. Know! know what? It was largely the fact of not knowing that had brought him to this condition. He was fighting with his own weapons, and he continued to sob.

Through his tears he caught a glimpse of her face. It still had that haunted scared expression, as though there was something she could not understand. She was desperately anxious to calm him.

"It's all right, darling, it's all right. Mum's not going. She's staying here with Georgie." He was not going to acknowledge his goal, or gloat over the spoils of an uncertain victory. His business was to make sure. He clung to her the tighter, and for a long time neither spoke. But his sobs gradually diminished and he appeared to sleep. But her deep, troubled eyes were very wide awake. They travelled from the chintz curtains of her beautiful room to a small hand-bag, partially packed, and then back to her son. They alighted upon a Limoges enamel box, brought back from her honeymoon, and from there to a note, addressed to Nan-nan, propped up on the flap of the rose-wood escritoire, and then back to her son. She knew that she was beaten. And amidst the anguish of defeat she was already conscious of the balm of relief which would eventually heal her wounds.

"Wait for me, darling. Mum must go and telephone to—someone. She won't be long."

He saw her glide out of the room, closing the door behind her. He heard her go down to the little room off the hall, and there was that funny click of a bell which meant someone was asking for a number. Then followed a long interval. Then the click of that bell again, which meant the receiver had been put up. Another short interval, and she glided back into the room. She looked pale. She put her hand to her brow, and stared about vaguely. Then she seemed to shiver, and to emit a little sigh. She picked up the letter from the escritoire and tore it into a thousand pieces.

“I must go and have a bath, Georgie.” She said this almost petulantly, as though she were struggling to force herself into the normal observances of the working day.

He again watched her go without comment. He heard the bath water running, and the usual splashing which follows soon after. Other sounds of activity from the house and garden reached him. He knew that it would soon be *his* time to get up. Nan-nan would be wondering where he was.

And then suddenly he remembered that it was time for his song. In a crystalline instant he realised that whatever happened in this world, the song must go on. And so, propped up against Mum’s pillow, with his little chest thrust out, he began his morning song of praise and triumph.

With his bright blue eyes fixed on the blue of the sky there seemed to flood through him a praise of all living things, and a faith of man to surmount all obstacles. Tigers and Indians, elves and elephants, the menace of darkness, unseen and unknown powers ever conspiring to beat him down.

But the mission of man was to rise above all this. He must stand by his fellowman. Perhaps that was the true purport of George Arthur’s song. Divided, he was at the mercy of the powers of darkness. The world was a battlefield where real blood and anguish flowed. United, it was the happy playground of a thousand dreams. And while he played and dreamed there would flow for ever through his heart the golden melody of song—the song of praise, the song of triumph.

THE OCTAVE OF JEALOUSY

I

A tramp came through a cutting by old Jerry Shindle's nursery, and crossing the stile, stepped into the glare of the white road. He was a tall swarthy man with stubby red whiskers which appeared to conceal the whole of his face, except a small portion under each eye about the size of a two shilling piece. His skin showed through the rents in a filthy old black green garment, and was the same colour as his face, a livid bronze. His toes protruded from his boots, which seemed to be home-made contraptions of canvas and string. He carried an ash stick, and the rest of his worldly belongings in a spotted red and white handkerchief. His worldly belongings consisted of some rags, a door-knob, a portion of a foot-rule, a tin mug stolen from a workhouse, half a dozen date stones, a small piece of very old bread, a raw onion, the shutter of a camera and two empty match-boxes.

He looked up and down the road as though uncertain of his direction. To the north it curved under the wooded opulence of Crawshay Park. To the south it stretched like a white ribbon across a bold vista of shadeless downs. He was hungry and he eyed, critically, the potential possibilities of a cottage, standing back from the road. It was a shabby little three-roomed affair with fowls running in and out of the front door, some washing on a line, and the sound of a child crying within. While he was hesitating, a farm labourer came through a gate to an adjoining field, and walked toward the cottage. He, too, carried property tied up in a red handkerchief. His other hand balanced a steel fork across his left shoulder. He was a thick-set, rather dour-looking man. As he came up the tramp said:

“Where does this road lead to, mate?”

The labourer replied brusquely:

“Pondhurst.”

“How far?”

“Three and a half miles.”

Without embroidering this information any further he walked stolidly across the road and entered the garden of the cottage. The tramp watched him put the fork down by the lintel door. He saw him enter the cottage, and he heard a woman's voice. He sighed and muttered into his stubby red

beard: "Lucky devil!" Then, hunching his shoulders, he set out with long flat-footed strides down the white road which led across the downs.

II

Having kicked some mud off his boots, the labourer, Martin Crosby, said to his wife:

"Dinner ready?"

Emma Crosby was wringing out some clothes. Her face was shiny with the steam and the heat of the day. She answered petulantly:

"No, it isn't. You'll have to wait another ten minutes, the 'taters aren't cooked. I've enough to do this morning I can tell you, what with the washing, and Lizzie screaming with her teeth, and the biler going wrong."

"Ugh! There's allus somethin'."

Martin knew there was no appeal against delay. He had been married four years; he knew his wife's temper and mode of life sufficiently well. He went out into the garden and lighted his pipe. The fowls clucked round his feet and he kicked them away. He, too, was hungry. However, there would be food of a sort—in time. Some greasy pudding and potatoes boiled to a liquid mash, a piece of cheese perhaps. Well, there it was. When you work in the open air all day you can eat anything. The sun was pleasant on his face, the shag pungent and comforting. If only old Emma weren't such a muddler! A good enough piece of goods when at her best, but always in a muddle, always behind time, no management, and then resentful because things went wrong. Lizzie: seven months old and two teeth through already and another coming. A lovely child, the spit and image of—what her mother must have been. Next time it would be a boy. Life wasn't so bad—really.

The gate clicked, and the tall figure of Ambrose Baines appeared. He was dressed in a corduroy coat and knickers, stout brown gaiters and square thick boots. Tucked under his arm was a gun with its two barrels pointing at the ground. He was the gamekeeper to Sir Septimus Letter. He stood just inside the gate and called out:

"Mornin', Martin."

Martin replied: "Mornin'."

"I was just passin'. The missus says you can have a cookin' or so of runner beans if you wants 'em. We've got more than enough, and I hear as yours is blighty."

“Oh! . . . ay, thank’ee.”

“Middlin’ hot to-day.”

“Ay . . . terrible hot.”

“When’ll you be comin’?”

“I’ll stroll over now. There’s nowt to do. I’m waitin’ dinner. I ’specks it’ll be a half-hour or so. You know what Emma is.”

He went inside and fetched a basket. He said nothing to his wife, but rejoined Baines in the road. They strolled through the cutting and got into the back of the gamekeeper’s garden just inside the wood. Martin went along the row and filled his basket. Baines left him and went into his cottage. He could hear Mrs. Baines singing and washing up.

Of course *they* had had their dinner. It would be like that. Mrs. Baines was a marvel. On one or two occasions Martin had entered their cottage. Everything was spick and span, and done on time. The two children always seemed to be clean and quiet. There were pretty pink curtains and framed oleographs. Mrs. Baines could cook, and she led the hymns at church—so they said. Even the garden was neat, and trim, and fruitful. Of course *their* runner beans would be prolific while his failed. Mrs. Baines appeared at the door and called out:

“Mornin’, Mr. Crosby.”

He replied gruffly: “Mornin’, Mrs. Baines.”

“Middlin’ hot.”

“Ay . . . terrible hot.”

She was not what you would call a pretty, attractive woman; but she was natty, competent, irrepressibly cheerful. She would make a shilling go as far as Emma would a pound. The cottage had five rooms, all in a good state of repair. The roof had been newly thatched. All this was done for him, of course, by his employer. He paid no rent; Martin had to pay five shillings a week, and then the roof leaked, and the boiler never worked properly—but perhaps that was Emma’s fault. He picked up his basket and strolled toward the outer gate. As he did so, he heard the two children laughing, and Baines’s voice joining in.

“Some people do have luck,” Martin murmured, and went back to his wife.

III

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after!

It was very pretty—the way Winny Baines sang that, balancing the smaller boy on her knee, and jerking him skyward on the last word. Not what the world would call a pretty woman, but pretty enough to Ambrose, with her clear skin, kind motherly eyes, and thin brown hair. Her voice had a quality which somehow always expressed her gentle and unconquerable nature.

“She’s too good for me,” Ambrose would think at odd moments. “She didn’t ought to be a gamekeeper’s wife. She ought to be a lady—with carriages, and comforts, and well-dressed friends.

The reflection would stir in him a feeling of sullen resentment, tempered with pride. She was a wonderful woman. She managed so well; she never complained. Of course, so far as the material necessities were concerned, there was enough and to spare. The cottage was comfortable, and reasonably well furnished—so far as he could determine. Of food there was abundance; game, rabbits, vegetables, eggs, fruit. The only thing he had to buy in the way of food was milk from the farm, and a few groceries from Mr. Mead’s shop. He paid nothing for the cottage and yet—he would have liked to have made things better for Winny. His wages were small, and there were clothes to buy, all kinds of little incidental expenses. There never seemed a chance to save and soon there would be the boy’s schooling.

In spite of the small income, Winny always managed to keep herself and the children neat and smart, and even to help others like the more unfortunate Crosbys. She did all the work of the cottage, the care of the children, the mending and washing, and still found time to make jam, to preserve fruit, to grow flowers, and to sing in the church choir. She was the daughter of a piano-tuner at Bladestone, and the glamour of this early connection always hung between Ambrose and herself. To him a piano-tuner appeared a remote and romantic figure. It suggested a world of concerts, theatres, and Bohemian life. He was never quite clear about the precise functions of a piano-tuner, but he regarded his wife as the daughter of a public man, coming from a world far removed from the narrow limits of the life she was forced to lead with him.

In spite of her repeated professions of happiness, Ambrose always felt a shade suspicious, not of her, but of his own ability to satisfy her every demand. Sometimes he would observe her looking round the little rooms, as though she were visualising what they might contain. Perhaps she wanted a grand piano, or some inlaid chairs, or embroidered coverings. He had not the money to buy these things, and he knew that she would never ask for them; but still it was there—that queer gnawing sense of insecurity. At dawn he would wander through the coppices, drenched in dew, the gun under his arm, and the dog close to heel. The sunlight would come rippling over the jewelled leaves, and little clumps of primroses and violets would reveal themselves. Life would be good then, and yet somehow—it was not Winny’s life. Only through their children did they seem to know each other.

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after!

“Oo—Ambrose,” the other boy was tugging at his beard, when Winny spoke. He pretended to scream with pain before he turned to his wife.

“Yes, my dear?”

“Will you be passing Mr. Mead’s shop? We have run out of candles.”

“Oh? Roight be, my love. I’ll be nigh there afore sundown. I have to order seed from Crumblings.”

He was later than he expected at Mr. Mead’s shop. He had to wait whilst several women were being served. The portly owner’s new cash register went “tap-tapping!” five times before he got a chance to say:

“Evenin’, Mr. Meads, give us a pound of candles, will ye?”

Mrs. Meads came in through a parlour at the back, in a rustling black dress. She was going to a welfare meeting at the vicar’s. She said:

“Good evening, Mr. Baines, hope you are all nicely.”

A slightly disturbing sight met the eye of Ambrose. The parlour door was open, and he could see a maid in a cap and apron clearing away tea things in the gaily furnished room. The Meads had got a servant! He knew that Meads was extending his business. He had a cheap clothing department now, and he was building a shed out at the back with the intention of supplying petrol to casual motorists, but—a servant!

He picked up his packet of candles and muttered gruffly: "Good evenin'."

Before he had reached the door he heard "Tap-tapping!" *His* one and twopence had gone into the box. As he swung down the village street, he muttered to himself:

"God! I wish I had his money!"

IV

When Mrs. Meads returned from the welfare meeting at half-past eight, she found Mr. Meads waiting for her in the parlour, and the supper laid. There was cold veal and beetroot, apple pie, cheese and stout.

"I'm sorry I'm late, dear," she said.

"That's all right, my love," replied Mr. Meads, not looking up from his newspaper.

"We had a lovely meeting—Mrs. Wonnicot was there, and Mrs. Beal, and Mrs. Edwin Pillcreek, and Mrs. James, and Ada, and both the Jamiesons, and the Vicar was perfectly sweet. He made two lovely speeches."

"Oh, that was nice," said Mr. Meads, trying to listen and read a piquant paragraph about a divorce case at the same time.

"I should think you want your supper."

"I'm ready when you are, my love."

Mr. Meads put down his newspaper, and drawing his chair up to the table, began to set about the veal. He was distinctly a man for his victuals. He carved rapidly for her, and less rapidly for himself. From this you must not imagine that he treated his wife meanly. On the contrary, he gave her a large helping, but a close observer could not help detecting that when carving for himself he seemed to take more interest in his job. Then he rang a little tinkly hand-bell and the new maid appeared.

"Go into the shop, my dear," he said, "and get me a pot of pickled walnuts from the second shelf on the left before you come to them bales of calico."

The maid went, and Mrs. Meads clucked:

"Um—being a bit extravagant to-night, John."

“The labourer is worthy of his hire,” quoted Mr. Meads sententiously. He put up a barrage of veal in the forefront of his mouth—he had no back teeth, but managed to penetrate it with an opaque rumble of sound. “Besides we had a good day to-day—done a lot of business. Pass the stout——”

“I’m glad to hear it,” replied Mrs. Meads. “It’s about time things began to improve, considerin’ what we’ve been through. Mrs. Wonnicot was wearin’ her biscuit-coloured taffeta with a new lace yoke. She looked smart, but a bit stiff for the Welfare to my way of thinkin’.”

“Ah!” came rumbling through the veal.

“Oh, and did I tell you Mrs. Mounthead was there, too? She was wearing her starched ninon—no end of a swell she looked.”

Mr. Meads’s eyes lighted with a definite interest at last. Mrs. Mounthead was the wife of James Mounthead, the proprietor of that handsome hostelry, “The Die is Cast.” When his long day’s work was over, Mr. Meads would not infrequently pop into “The Die is Cast” for an hour or so before closing time and have a long chat with Mr. James Mounthead. He swallowed half a glass of stout at a gulp, and helped himself liberally to the pickled walnuts which the maid had just brought in. Eyeing the walnuts thoughtfully, he said:

“Oh, so she’s got into it, too, has she?”

“Yes, she’s really quite a pleasant body. She told me coming down the street that her husband has just bought Bolder’s farm over at Pondhurst. He’s setting up his son there who’s marrying Kate Steyning. Her people have got a bit of money, too, so they’ll be all right. By the way, we haven’t heard from Charlie for nearly three weeks.”

Mr. Meads sighed. Why were women always like that? There was Edie. He was trying to tell her that things were improving, going well in fact. The shed for petrol and motor accessories was nearly finished; the cheap clothing department was in full swing; he had indulged in pickled walnuts for supper (her supper, too); and there she must needs talk about—Charlie! Everybody in the neighbourhood knew that their son Charlie was up in London, and not doing himself or anybody else any good. And almost in the same breath she must needs talk about old Mounthead’s son. Everyone knew that young Mounthead was a promising industrious fellow. Oh! and so James had bought him Bolder’s farm, had he? That cost a pretty penny, he knew. Just bought a farm, had he? Not put the money into his business; just

bought it in the way that he, Sam Meads, might buy a gramophone, or an umbrella. Psaugh!

“I don’t want no tart,” he said, on observing Edie begin to carve it.

“No tart!” she exclaimed. “Why, what’s wrong?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” he replied. “Don’t feel like it—working too hard—bit flatulent. I’ll go out for a stroll after supper.”

An hour later he was leaning against the bar of “The Die is Cast,” drinking gin and water, and listening to Mr. Mounthead discourse on dogs. The bar of “The Die is Cast” was a self-constituted village club. Other cronies drifted in. They were all friends of both Mr. Meads and Mr. Mounthead. Mrs. Mounthead seldom appeared in the bar, but there was a potman and a barmaid named Florrie; and somewhere in the rear a cook, two housemaids, a scullerymaid, a boy for knives and boots, and an ostler. Mr. Mounthead had a victoria and a governess car, as well as a van for business purposes, a brown mare and a pony. He also had his own farm well stocked with pigs, cattle, and poultry. While taking his guests’ money in a sleepy leisurely way, he regaled them with the rich fruits of his opinions and experiences. Later on he dropped casually that he was engaging an overseer at four hundred a year to take his son’s place. And Mr. Meads glanced round the bar and noted the shining glass and pewter, the polished mahogany, the little pink and green glasses winking at him insolently.

“He doesn’t know what work is either,” suddenly occurred to him. Mr. Mounthead’s work consisted mostly in a little bookkeeping, and in ordering people about. He only served in the shop as a kind of social relaxation. If he, Sam Meads, didn’t serve in his shop himself all day from early morning till late evening, goodness knows what would happen to the business. Besides—the pettiness of it all! Little bits of cheese, penny tins of mustard, string, weighing out sugar and biscuits, cutting bacon, measuring off ribbons and calico, and flannelette. People gossiping all day, and running up little accounts it was always hard to collect. But here—oh, the snappy quick profit. Everybody paying on the nail, served in a second, and what a profit! Enough to buy a farm for a son as though it was—an umbrella. Walking home, a little dejectedly, later on, he struck the road with his stick, and muttered:

“Damn that man!”

Mrs. James Mounthead was rather pleased with her starched ninon. She leant back luxuriously in the easy chair, yawned, and pressed her hands along the sides of her well-fitting skirt. Gilt bangles round her wrists rattled pleasantly during this performance. A paste star glittered on her ample bosom. She heard James moving ponderously on the landing below; the bar had closed. He came puffily up the stairs and opened the door.

“A nightcap, Queenie?” he wheezed through the creaking machinery of his respiratory organs.

Mrs. Mounthead smiled brightly. “I think I will to-night, Jim.”

He went to a cabinet and poured out two mixed drinks. He handed his wife one, and raising the other to his lips said:

“Well, here’s to the boy!”

“Here’s to James the Second!” she replied, and drank deeply. Her eyes sparkled. Mrs. Mounthead was excited. The bangles clattered against the glass as she set it down.

“Come and give me a kiss, old dear,” she said, leaning back.

Without making any great show of enthusiasm, James did as he was bidden. He, too, was a little excited, but his excitement was less amorous than commercial. He had paid nearly twelve hundred pounds less for Bolder’s farm than he had expected. The news of his purchase was all over the neighbourhood. It had impressed everyone. People looked at him differently. He was becoming a big man, *the* big man in those parts. He could buy another farm to-morrow, and it wouldn’t break him. And the boy—the boy was a good boy; he would do well, too.

A little drink easily affected Mrs. Mounthead. She became garrulous.

“I had a good time at the Welfare, though some of the old cats didn’t like me, I know. Ha, ha, ha, what do I care? We could buy the whole lot up if we wanted to, except perhaps the Wonniccotts. Mine was the only frock worth a tinker’s cuss. Lord! You should have seen old Mrs. Meads! Looked like a washerwoman on a Sunday. The vicar was ever so nice. He called me madam, and said he ’oped I often come. I gave a fiver to the fund. Ha, ha, ha, I didn’t tell ’em that I made it backing ‘Ringcross’ for the Nunhead Stakes yesterday! They’d have died.”

During this verbal explosion, James Mounthead thoughtfully regarded his glass. And he thought to himself: “Um. It’s a pity Queenie gives herself away sometimes.” He didn’t particularly want to hear about the Welfare. He

wanted to talk about “James the Second” and the plans for the future. He wanted to indulge in the luxury of talking about their success, but he didn’t want to boast about wealth in quite that way. He had queer ambitions not unconnected with the land he lived on. He had not always been in the licensing trade. His father had been a small landed proprietor and a stock breeder; a man of stern, unrelenting principles. From his father he, James Mounthead, had inherited a kind of reverence for the ordered development of land and cattle, an innate respect for the sanctity of tradition, caste, property and fair dealing. His wife had always been in the licensing trade. She was the daughter of a publican at Pondhurst. As a girl she had served in the bar. All her relations were licensing people. When she had a little to drink—she was apt to display her worst side, to give herself away. James sighed.

“Did Mrs. Wonnycott say anything about her husband?” he asked, to change the subject.

“You bet she did. Tried to put it across us—when I told her about us buying Bolder’s farm—said her old man had thought of bidding for it, but he knew it was poor in root crops and the soil was no good for corn, and that Sturge had neglected the place too long. The old cat! I said: ‘Yes, and p’raps it wouldn’t be convenient to pay for it just now, after ’aving bought a lawn mower! Ha, ha, ha. He, he, he. O my!’”

“I shouldn’t have said that,” mumbled Mr. Mounthead, who knew, however, that anything was better than one of Queenie’s violent reactions to quarrelsomeness. “Come on, let’s go and turn in, old girl.”

An hour later, James Mounthead was tossing restlessly between the sheets. Queenie’s reference to the Wonnycotts had upset him. He could read between what she had said sufficiently to envisage a scene, which he himself deplored. Queenie, of course, had given herself away again to Mrs. Wonnycott. He knew that both the Wonnycotts despised her, and through her, him. He had probably as much money as Lewis Wonnycott, if not more. He certainly had a more fluid and accumulative way of making it, but there the matter stopped. Wonnycott was a gentleman; his wife a lady. He, James, might have been as much a gentleman as Wonnycott if—circumstances had been different. Queenie could never be a lady in the sense that Mrs. Wonnycott was a lady. Wonnycott led the kind of life *he* would like to live—a gentleman farmer, with hunters, a little house property, and some sound vested interests; a man with a great knowledge of land, horses, finance, and politics.

He loved Queenie in a queer enduring kind of way. She had been loyal to him, and she satisfied most of his needs. She loved him, but he knew that he could never attain the goal of his vague ambitions, with her clinging to his heels. He thought of Lewis Wonnicot sleeping in his white panelled bedroom with chintz curtains and old furniture, and his wife in the adjoining room, where the bay window looked out on to the downs; and the heart of James became bitter with envy.

VI

“I don’t think I shall attend those Welfare meetings any more,” remarked Mrs. Lewis Wonnicot with a slight drawl. She gathered up her letters from the breakfast table and walked to the window.

In the garden below, Leach, the gardener, was experimenting with a new mower on the well-clipped lawns. The ramblers on the pergola were at their best. Her husband in a broad check suit and a white stock, looked up from *The Times* and said:

“Oh, how is that, my dear?”

“They are getting such awful people in. That dreadful woman, the wife of Mounthead, the publican, has joined.”

“Old Mounthead’s all right—not a bad sort. He knows a gelding from a blood mare.”

“That may be, but his wife is the limit. I happened to say something about the new mower, and she was simply rude. An awful vulgar person, wears spangles, and boasts about the money her husband makes out of selling whisky.”

“By gad! I bet he does, too. I wouldn’t mind having a bit in his pub. Do you see Canadian Pacifics are still stagnant?”

“Lewis, I sometimes wish you wouldn’t be so material. You think about nothing but money.”

“Oh, come, my dear, I’m interested in a crowd of other things—things which I don’t make money out of, too,”

“For instance?”

“The land, the people who work on it, horses, cattle, game, the best way to do things for everybody. Besides, ain’t I interested in the children? The two girls’ careers at Bedales? Young Ralph at Rugby and going up to Cambridge next year?”

“You know they’re there, but how much interest you take, I couldn’t say.”

“What is it you want me to do, my dear?”

“I think you might bestir yourself to get amongst better people. The girls will be leaving school soon and coming home. We know no one, no one at all in the neighbourhood.”

“No one at all! Jiminy! Why, we know everyone!”

“You spend all your time among horse-breeders and cattle-dealers, and people like Mounthead, and occasionally call on the Vicar, but who is there of any importance that we know?”

“Lord! What do you want? Do you want me to go and call at Crawshay Park, and ask Sir Septimus and Lady Letter to come and make up a four at bridge?”

“Don’t be absurd! You know quite well that the Letters are entirely inaccessible. He’s not only an M.P. and owner of half the newspapers in the country, but a millionaire. They entertain house parties of ministers and dukes, and even royalty. They can afford to ignore even the county people themselves. But there are others. We don’t even know the county.”

“Who, for instance?”

“Well, the Burnabys. You met St. John Burnaby at the Constitutional Club two or three times and yet you have never attempted to follow it up. They’re very nice people and neighbours. And they have three boys all in the twenties, and the girl Sheila—she’s just a year younger than Ralph.”

“My word! Who’s being material now?”

“It isn’t material, it’s just—thinking of the children.”

“Women are wonderful,” muttered Lewis Wonnicot into his white stock, without raising his head. Mrs. Wonnicot swept to the door. Her thin lips were drawn in a firm straight line. Her refined hard little face appeared pinched and petulant. With her hand on the door-handle she said acidly:

“If you can spare half an hour from your grooms and pigs, I think you might at least do this to please me—call on Mrs. Burnaby to-day.”

And she went out of the room, shutting the door crisply.

“Oh, Jiminy-Piminy!” muttered Mr. Wonnicot. “Jiminy-Piminy!”

He stood up and shook himself. Then with feline intentness he walked quickly to the French window, and opening it walked down the steps into the garden. All the way to the sunk rose-garden he kept repeating, "Jiminy-Piminy!"

Once among the rose-bushes he lighted his pipe. (His wife objected to smoking in the house). He blew clouds of tobacco smoke amongst imaginary green-fly. Occasionally he would glance furtively out at the view across the downs. Half buried amongst the elms near Basted Old Church he could just see the five red gables of the Burnaby's capacious mansion.

"I can't do it," he thought, "I can't do it, and I shall have to do it."

It was perfectly true he had been introduced to St. John Burnaby and had spoken to him once or twice. It was also true that Burnaby had never given any evidence of wishing to follow up the acquaintanceship. Bit of a swell, Burnaby, connected with all sorts of people, member of half a dozen clubs, didn't race but went in for golf, and had a shooting box in Scotland. Some said he had political ambitions, and meant to try for Parliament at the next election. He didn't racket round in a check suit and a white stock and mix with grooms and farm hands; he kept up the flair of the gentleman, the big man, acres of conservatory, and peacocks, and a son in the diplomatic service, a daughter married to a bishop. His wife, too, came of a poor but aristocratic family. Over at the "Five Gables" they kept nine gardeners and twenty odd servants. Everything was done tip-top.

Lewis Wonnycott turned and regarded his one old man gardener, trying the new mower, which Mrs. Mounthead had been so rude about to Dorothy. Poor Dorothy! She was touchy, that's what it was. Of course she *did* think of the children—no getting away from it. She was ambitious more for them than for herself or himself. She had given up being ambitious for him. He knew that she looked upon him as a slacker, a kind of cabbage. Well, perhaps he had been. He hadn't accomplished all he ought to. He had loved the land, the feel of horse-flesh, the smell of wet earth when the morning dews were on it. He had been a failure . . . a failure. He was not up to county people. He was unworthy of his dear wife's ambitions. Jiminy-Piminy! It would be a squeeze to send Ralph up to Cambridge next year!

He looked across the valley at the five red gables among the elms, and sighed.

"Lucky devil!" he murmured. "Damn it all! I suppose I must go."

“You don’t seem to realise the importance of it,” said Gwendolen St. John Burnaby as her husband leant forward on his seat on the terrace, and tickled the ear of Jinks, the Airedale. “A career in the diplomatic service without influence is about as likely to be a success as a—as a performance on a violin behind a sound-proof curtain. There’s Lal, wasting his—his talents and genius at that wretched little embassy at Oporto, and all you’ve got to do is to drive three miles to Crawshay Park and put the matter before Sir Septimus.”

“These things, always seem so simple to women,” answered Sir John, a little peevishly.

“Well, isn’t it true? Do you deny that he has the power?”

“Of course he has power, my dear, but you may not realise the kind of life a man like that lives. Every minute of the day is filled up, all kinds of important things crowding each other out. He’s always been friendly enough to me, and yet every time I meet him I have an idea he has forgotten who I am. He deals in movements in which men are only pawns. If I told him about Lal he would say yes, he would do what he could—make a note of it, and forget about it directly I turned my back.”

Mrs. St. John Burnaby stamped her elegant Loyis heels.

“Is nothing ever worth trying?”

“Don’t be foolish, Gwen, haven’t I tried? Haven’t I ambition?”

“For yourself, yes. I am thinking of Lal.”

“Women always think of their sons before their husbands. He knows I’ve backed his party for all I’m worth. He knows I’m standing for the constituency next time. When I get elected will be the moment. I shall then have a tiny atom of power. For a man without even a vote in Parliament do you think Letter is going to waste his time?”

“Obstinate!” muttered Mrs. Burnaby with metallic clearness. The little lines round the eyes and mouth of a face that had once been beautiful became accentuated in the clear sunlight. The constant stress of ambitious desires had quickened her vitality, but in the process had aged her body before its time. She knew that her husband was ambitious, too, but there was always just that little something he lacked in the great moments, just that little special effort that might have landed him among the gods—or in the House of Lords. He had been successful enough in a way. He had made money—a hundred thousand or so—in brokerage and dealing indirectly in various manufactured commodities; but he had not even attained a

knighthood or a seat in Parliament. His heavy dark face betokened power and courage, but not vision. He was indeed as she had said—obstinate. In minnow circles he might appear a triton, but living within the same county as Sir Septimus Letter—Bah!

About to leave him, her movement was arrested by the approach of a butler followed by a gentleman in a check suit and a white stock, looking self-conscious.

Mrs. St. John Burnaby raised her lorgnette. “One of these local people,” she reflected.

On being announced the gentleman in the check suit exclaimed rapidly:

“Excuse the liberty I take—neighbours, don’t you know. Remember me at the Constitutional Club, Mr. Burnaby? Thought I would drop in and pay my respects.”

St. John Burnaby nodded.

“Oh, yes, yes, quite. I remember, Mr.—er—Mr.——”

“Wonnycott.”

“Oh yes, of course. How do you do? My wife—Mr. Wonnycott.”

The wife and the Wonnycott bowed to each other, and there was an uncomfortable pause. At last Mr. Wonnycott managed to say:

“We live over at Wimpstone, just across the valley—my wife, the girls are at school, boy’s up at Rugby.”

“Oh, yes—really?” This was Mrs. Burnaby, who was thinking to herself:

“The man looks like a dog fancier.”

“Very good school,” said St. John Burnaby. “Hot to-day, isn’t it!”

“Yes, it’s exceedingly warm.”

“Do you golf?”

“No, I don’t golf. I ride a bit.”

“You must excuse me,” said Mrs. St. John Burnaby, “I have got to get a trunk call to London.”

She fluttered away across the terrace, and into the house. Mr. Wonnycott chatted away for several minutes, but St. John Burnaby was preoccupied and monosyllabic. The visitor was relieved to rescue his hat at last and make his escape. Walking down the drive he thought:

“It’s no good. He dislikes me.”

As a matter of fact St. John Burnaby was not thinking about him at all. He was thinking of Sir Septimus Letter, the big man, the power he would have liked to have been. He ground his teeth and clenched his fists:

“Damn it!” he muttered, “I will not appeal for young Lal. Let him fight his own battles.”

VIII

On a certain day that summer when the sun was at its highest in the heavens, Sir Septimus Letter stood by the bureau in his cool library and conversed with his private secretary.

Sir Septimus was wearing what appeared to be a ready-made navy serge suit and a low collar. His hands were thrust into his trouser pockets. The sallow face was heavily marked, the strangely restless eyes peered searchingly beneath dark brows which almost met in one continuous line. The chin was finely modelled, but not too strong. It was not indeed what is usually known as a strong face. It had power, but of the kind which has been mellowed by the friction of every human experience. It had alert intelligence, a penetrating absorption, above all things it indicated vision. The speech and the movements were incisive; the short wiry body a compact tissue of nervous energy. He listened with the watchful intensity of a dog at a rabbit-hole. Through the door at the end of the room could be heard the distant click of many typewriters.

The secretary was saying:

“The third reading of the Nationalization of Paper Industries Bill comes on at five-thirty, sir. Boneham will be up, and I do not think you will be called till seven. You will, of course, however, wish to hear what he has to say.”

“I know what he’ll say. You can cut that out, Roberts. Get Libby to give me a précis at six forty-five.”

“Very good, sir. Then there will be time after the Associated News Service Board at four to see the minister with regard to this question of packing meetings in East Riding. Lord Lampreys said he would be pleased if I could fix an appointment. He has some information.”

“Right. What line are Jennins and Castwell taking over this?”

“They’re trying to side-track the issue. They have every un-associated newspaper in the North against you.”

“H’m, h’m. Well, we’ve fought them before.”

“Yes, sir. The pressure is going to be greater this time, but everyone has confidence you will get them down.”

The little man’s eyes sparkled. “Roberts, get through on the private wire to—Lambe; no, get through to all of them, and make it quite clear. This is not to be a party question. They’re to work the unctious rectitude stuff, you know—liberty of the subject and so on.”

“Very good, sir. The car comes at one-fifteen. You are lunching with Cranmer at Shorn Towers, the Canadian paper interests will be strongly represented there. I will be at Whitehall Court at three with the despatches. It would be advisable, if possible, to get Loeb of the finance committee. Oh, by the way, sir, I had to advise you from Loeb. They have received a cabled report of the expert’s opinion from Labrador. There are two distinct seams of coal on that land you bought in ’07. A syndicate from Buffalo have made an offer. They offer a million and a quarter dollars down.”

“What did we pay?”

“One hundred and twenty thousand.”

“Don’t sell.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Have you seen my wife lately?”

“I have not seen Lady Letter for some days, sir. I believe she is at Harrogate.”

The little man sighed, and drew out a cigarette-case, opened it and offered one to Roberts, who accepted it with an elegant gesture. Then he snapped it to, and replaced it in his pocket.

“Damn it, Roberts, Reeves says I mustn’t smoke.”

“Oh, dear!—only a temporary disability I trust, sir.”

“Everything is temporary, Roberts.”

With his hands still in his pockets, he walked abstractedly out of the room. A little ormolu clock in the outer corridor indicated twenty minutes to one. The car was due at one-fifteen. Thirty-five minutes: oh, to escape for only that brief period! Through the glass doors he could see his sister,

talking to two men in golfing clothes, some of the house party. The house party was a perpetual condition at Crawshay. He turned sharply to the right, and went through a corridor leading out to the rear of the garage. He hurried along and escaped to a path between two tomato houses. In a few moments he was lost to sight. He passed through a shrubbery, and came to a clearing. Without slackening his pace, he walked across it, and got amongst some trees. The trees of Crawshay Park—his trees! . . . He looked up at the towering oaks and elms. Were they his trees—because he had bought them? They were there years before he was born. They would be there years after his death. He was only passing through them—a fugitive. “Everything is temporary, Roberts——” Yes, even life itself. Jennins and Castwell! Of course they wanted to get him down! Were they the only ones? Does one struggle to the top without hurting others to get there? Does one get to the top without making enemies? Does one get to the top without suffering, and bitterness, and remorse? The park sloped down to a low stone wall, with an opening where one could obtain a glorious view across the weald of Sussex. The white ribbon of a road stretched away into infinity.

As he stood there, he saw a dark swarthy figure clamber down a bank, and stand hesitating in the middle of the road. He was a tramp with a stubbly red beard nearly concealing his face, and a filthy black green suit. In his hand he carried a red handkerchief containing his worldly belongings—a door-knob, a portion of a foot-rule, a tin mug stolen from a workhouse, some date stones, an onion, the shutter of a camera, and two empty match-boxes.

Sir Septimus did not know this fact; he merely regarded the tramp as an abstraction. He observed him hesitate, exchange a word with a field labourer, look up at the sky, hunch his shoulders, and suddenly set out with long swinging strides down the white road. Whither? There stirred within the breast of the millionaire a curious wistful longing. Oh, to be free! To be free! To walk across those hills without a care, without a responsibility. The figure, with its easy gait, fascinated him. The dark form became smaller and smaller, swallowed up in the immensity of nature. With a groan, Sir Septimus Letter buried his face in his hands and murmured:

“Lucky devil! . . . lucky devil! O God! If I could die. . . .”

THE SPOIL-SPORT

I can't remember how we got on to the question of "spoil-sports," but I know that the Colonel suddenly became very indignant about them. He, Jimmy Tamaren, and I were seated in a large flat-bottomed punt, tied up to stakes, in the middle of a backwater on the grounds of old Sir John Gostard, whose guests we were. We were lolling there, smoking and talking, and waiting for the sun to get lower in the heavens, at which time we proposed to do a little of what is known as rough fishing. I think the subject of spoil-sports must have arisen from the obvious beauty and attractiveness of our setting; a perfect place and time of day for lovers. It seemed absurd somehow that three men should monopolise it all. And there was something pleasantly ironical in the situation that the eldest of us, to whom erotic experiences could have been little more than a fragrant memory, was the one to wax indignant about this tampering with the prerogatives of lovers.

"These blackmailers that you hear of in the parks and on heaths," he said. "I'd like to wring their necks." He wasted three matches getting a light for his pipe, and then continued in a more subdued tone:

"I often think how damned hard it is on the lower middle classes, the artisan, and working classes generally, in the big cities. A fellow meets a girl and gets keen on her, and he never gets a chance to get her all alone to himself. Where can they go? Probably both his people and her people are living in more or less congested conditions. If he calls on her or she calls on him, they never get a room to themselves. There's nothing to do but to walk about the streets, or sit on a seat in the park. They are being watched all the time. How can you make love to a girl when you know that if you give her more than a brotherly peck on the cheek when you meet and when you part, you will be accused of some sort of criminal intentions?"

"They can always go to the pictures," suggested Jimmy.

The Colonel's eyes and moustache twitched in unison.

"That's a nice, stuffy, dirty solution," he spluttered. "The very worst atmosphere for young lovers. There's nothing to do there but grasp at each other in the dark. How can they talk, and say all the things that lovers want to say with a frowsy band playing nigger ragtime, and the people round them demanding silence? How can you make love to a woman if you can't

look into her eyes? How can you concentrate when you are being constantly distracted by close-ups of murders?”

“I leave it to you, partner,” said Jimmy, nonchalantly.

A motor-boat went “touf-toufing” down the main stream, and our punt rocked pleasantly under the effect of its back-wash.

The Colonel for the moment seemed to have spent his indignation, and Jimmy took up the thread:

“I’m not sure it’s not a salutary restriction for this particular class. You see, I’m frankly a snob. When I was very young I used to be a red-hot socialist like the Colonel.”

“A socialist!” barked that gentleman, from his layers of cushions. “What the devil——”

“Some genius once said that if a man is not a socialist up to the age of twenty-five it shows he has no heart. If he is a socialist after twenty-five it shows he has no brains. This fits in with my own case precisely. The Colonel’s age I wouldn’t like to guess at.”

“Who said anything about being a socialist?”

“The word was not used, but you implied that the lower classes in this respect were being abused at the expense of the upper classes. I’m rather inclined to think it’s the other way about. The passing of the chaperon has been a serious disaster to what is known as the upper classes. I’m not a prig—at least I hope I’m not—but I believe all our young people are being spoiled by too much freedom. It is not so much that they go morally wrong as that they go romantically wrong. Or rather that they lose romance altogether. What happens to that exquisite thrill you get in touching a girl’s hand in a crowded room, the mysterious and entrancing propinquity of her, when you know quite well you have only got to ask her to come up the river with you, and she will turn up, with her bobbed hair, her cigarettes, and her bare legs, and be quite content to spend the afternoon with you in an obscure backwater, and talk unblushingly about—well, the awful and intimate things that girls do talk about these days. In my opinion it would be to everyone’s advantage, instead of agitating for more freedom, to agitate for more chaperons, spoil-sports, and Nosey Parkers.”

“There is an element of bitterness in your comments, Jimmy,” I remarked.

Swallows were flying low, apparently supping on the swarms of midges, upon whom unfortunately they seemed to make no impression. An orange-coloured dragonfly darted hither and thither among the reeds. The Colonel was heard banging out his pipe.

“I met a spoil-sport once,” said Jimmy, reminiscently.

“It sounds like the beginning of a story,” I said. “Once upon a time there was a spoil-sport——”

“It does almost make a story,” he replied.

“Well, I hope you threw him into the river,” suddenly bawled the Colonel. “If you didn’t throw him into the river I shall go to sleep.”

“It happened in a country singularly free from rivers, although there were many dried-up river courses. It was indeed in Northern Africa quite near the desert.”

“Nothing will be rising for half-an-hour, Jimmy, so let’s have the yarn,” I said.

Jimmy relighted his pipe with slow deliberation.

“It happened a good twenty years ago,” he began. “I remember there had been a little dust-up at the time because I wanted to marry a girl, whom some people averred to be the first woman chemist. In any case, she used to make up prescriptions for her father, who had a chemist’s shop at Staines, where we were then living. I have entirely forgotten the girl’s face, although I believe she was dark, and used to wear bangles.

“I know that the upshot was that my father very generously sent me abroad for three months by myself to study and reflect. He was a great believer in travel and had already taken me with him to Holland once, and to France twice. But this was to be an entirely novel experience. I was, as it were, thrown into the deep end.

“I want to begin appropriately enough at Charing Cross Station. Since those days I have been on the Continent some fifteen or twenty times, and one thing always impresses me. You see the French satirical journals with caricatures of English tourists, and you are apt to say: ‘Absurd!’ but go to Charing Cross or Victoria Station and see the Continental Express go off and lo and behold! There they all are. Where do they come from, these people? You never see them in England, except at these stations. And then an hour before the train starts they come pouring in—elderly ugly women, with mackintoshes, and protruding teeth; fat, red-faced men, with walrus

moustaches, wearing cloth caps and plus fours. They swarm all over the train, and they swarm all over the Continent. Wherever they go they clamour for eggs and bacon, and marmalade, and whisky, and steak, and bass, and the *Daily Mail*, and cold baths at inconvenient moments.

“On the morning I left England there was this usual galaxy. My father, who came to see me off, had booked me a corner seat, which was fortunate, as the train was very full. When I took my seat I was relieved to find that the rest of the party in my carriage were not all of the ‘Englishman abroad’ type. There was an elderly gentleman with his wife, obviously cultured people, and their two good-looking daughters, who were probably college girls. In spite of my political creed the snob in me warmed to these pleasant people, and I felt correspondingly shy in their presence. The journey promised to be entertaining. About a quarter of an hour before the train started, however, there was a certain amount of commotion in the corridor, and in bundled one of my pet aversions—a living model of a French caricature. He was wearing loud tweeds and knickerbockers—we didn’t call them plus fours in those days—and he was thick-set, red-cheeked, and he had a fair drooping moustache. He had a seat right opposite me.

“I had of course no tangible reason to be aggrieved with this individual, except that he made himself immediately so very much at home, and in certain readjustments of the luggage rack he called me ‘ma lad,’ which made me feel young and ridiculous in the presence of those other people; and when my father made some suggestion about one of my bags, he said: ‘That’s all right, pa. I’ll manage it.’ Which made my father seem old and somehow absurd. I went hot and cold with the thought that these other highly respectable people might think he was a friend or connection of mine. Such is extreme youth!

“When the train started he immediately began talking to me in a broad Lancashire accent. He said he came from Blundellsands and was in the jute trade. I did not object to this so much; what exasperated me was the fact that he began to pump me in a loud voice about who I was, what I was doing, and what my business was. I simply detested the man, and quite deliberately snubbed him by muttering monosyllables over the top of a magazine cover. I had no chance of conversation with the charming family.

“On the boat I lost them, and never saw them again. That is one of the curses of travel, one is always meeting people whom you feel might be your bosom friends for life, and then Nemesis in the form of a guard or a ticket collector comes along and snatches them away from you.

“Of course I saw plenty of the man from Blundellsands. He was promenading the deck, smoking a bulldog pipe, and talking in a loud voice to all and sundry. Once or twice he came up and spoke to me—he seemed to have quite overlooked my attempts at snubbing. He apparently regarded me as a small boy.

“He repeated: ‘Well, lad, are ye all reet?’ (I can’t imitate Lancashire accent, so don’t ask me!) On the Paris train, to my delight, I quite lost track of him, I hoped for ever.

“My plans were rather indefinite. I intended in any case to visit Northern Italy, and possibly afterwards go South to Sicily. But I had booked nothing beyond Paris. I may say that I had not been many days in that intriguing city before my passion for the girl who made up prescriptions began to wane. Paris smelt good. There was that curious peaty, coffeeish smell about it that seemed to betoken adventure. I stayed there a week, and then I booked a ticket through to Milan.

“The night before I left I wandered around alone, and late in the evening strolled into the Olympia. The entertainment was singularly boring, consisting mostly of freak dancing or equilibrists. After a time I went to the long bar at the back, and had a demi-bock. I had only been sitting there five minutes when a hand slapped me on the back and a voice said: ‘Hallo, ma lad, how art thee gettin’ on?’

“I felt a curious sinking feeling at the pit of my stomach. What a nuisance the man was! A moment’s reflection told me that of course this was just the kind of place I should meet him. It was my own fault. I was as polite as I could be. He said: ‘Ay, lad, when thou’rt in a foreign country it’s soomtimes nice to meet one of th’ own people.’

“One of my own people! In this cosmopolitan place chiefly patronised by English and Americans it seemed rather an extravagant form of solicitude. There being no one else to talk to, however, and the evening being young for Paris, I stayed with him, and afterwards we took a taxi out to Montparnasse, and my youthful vanity was a little flattered by being able to show off my inner knowledge of night life to this ponderous Lancastrian, who must have been a good twenty years my senior.

“We parted in a friendly enough spirit, and he wanted to make an appointment for the morrow, but I gave some evasive answer. I felt I had done my duty by ‘one of my own people.’

“I left the next day for Milan, and forgot all about him, which was not surprising, for it was there that I met Desirée Freyre. I ran plump into her in the lounge of the Hotel Bristol, after dinner. I will not bore you with a description of her. It is sufficient to say that within five minutes of our meeting the girl who made up prescriptions and indeed all the other girls who had made my youthful heart to flutter, promptly became back numbers.

“I don’t even remember how I got into conversation with her. She was travelling with a companion, a very plain, genial soul much older than herself. Desirée was of the limpid, helpless sort, with large appealing eyes, a manner that suggested hidden fires beneath an easy-going companionable exterior. She was the kind of woman who called you ‘my dear’ on first acquaintanceship, and persuaded you that your troubles were her troubles.

“We spent the next two days doing the sights of Milan together, though what they were I couldn’t tell you, for my eyes were entirely occupied with my companion.

“I found that she and her friend had just done Northern Italy and were on their way to Genoa, and then by easy stages along the Côte d’Azur to Marseilles, where they had booked berths to Algiers. They proposed spending three months in Algeria.

“I had taken a ticket through to Florence, but when I suggested cancelling it, and accompanying these two ladies to Algeria, I found that the suggestion was accepted with encouraging readiness. I wrote rather a light-headed letter to my father, telling him of my change of plans, but of course not giving the reason.

“We left a few days later. I cannot describe that journey to Marseilles. We stayed days and nights at Genoa, Bordighera, Mentone, Monaco, and Nice. As my father wanted to eradicate the memory of the chemist’s assistant I’m sure he could not have chosen a more effective way himself, though I am a little dubious whether he would have chosen precisely these means. I was madly in love, and this love had for its setting instead of the familiar byways of Staines, a novel and romantic atmosphere of tamarisks, deep blue sea, orange groves, picturesque people, and the eternal accompaniment of bands of nomad musicians. I believe we were a fortnight getting to Marseilles, but it went like a flash.

“We spent the first few days there lazing in the sun, inhaling the perfume of early summer flowers, playing with the tame monkeys that used to come down and gambol in the wood beyond the garden, and occasionally going for a short drive in the vicinity. I got more intimate with Desirée here than I

had done before. There were times when she became serious, and told me about her mother, who had been an opera singer, and her father, who had been an engineer, and had invented some contraption for making thin steel plates, and had made a lot of money and lost it, and made it again, and lost it again. Both her parents were now dead.

“And one night, under a clump of pistoia trees, with the moon making patterns on the ground at our feet, and on the white shawl of my companion, she told me something which aroused my interests even more, about her—husband, a major in the Artillery, who had been killed in the war. And when she told me, I could not see her face, for it was pressed against my own, but I could feel her warm tears on my own cheek. She had a way, when I think she felt she was becoming too intimate, of giving me an almost savage pat on the cheek and saying: ‘Oh, you boy, you!’ She did so on this occasion, and I felt my love for her ennobled by a great wave of compassion.

“I must confess that there were moments when I was free from the embraces of my beloved that I had moments of apprehension. She was so entirely alien to the world I came from. I could not conceive her as fitting into the social environment of Staines! My father for instance—I dared not imagine a meeting between him and Desirée.

“In the hotel were many interesting people. I was not unmindful—and indeed a little proud of—the glances of envy that followed me about when I strolled on the terrace or into the dining-room, accompanied by the beautiful Desirée Freyre. Of course, the eyes were focussed on her, but I knew that they also looked at me to see who the lucky fellow was who had captured so dazzling a prize. On only one occasion was I made to feel a little disconcerted. One evening I was talking to the companion in the lounge, waiting for Desirée. She had some little business to discuss with the hall-porter, and was talking to him at the door. A party of French people—newcomers—came down the stairs. There was an elderly man with a black moustache. He glanced in the direction of Desirée, and then turned, and I heard him say to an old lady in French: ‘Gracious, mamma! Do you see who’s here?’

“The old lady looked in the same direction, and another woman came up. I could not hear what was said, but there was a good deal of whispering and laughing, and shrugging of shoulders.

“The table of these people was within sight of ours, and I saw Desirée glance once in their direction. I thought I observed a little frown pucker her brow as she turned away. She did not look at them again.

“The next day she was anxious to put into effect a project we had been discussing for some time. That was a visit to Constantine, a wonderful old town, built on a limestone plateau.

“It was nearly two hundred miles from Algiers, but we could take a train to El-Guerrah, and from there it was just a comfortable five hours’ ride in a diligence. I was hoping that I might have Desirée’s company alone on this trip—or in any case with only one companion—but as she could not resist discussing it rather animatedly with the other hotel habitués, several of them expressed a desire to accompany us, and it would have been churlish to refuse. It was not till late in the evening that I managed to get Desirée to myself, and then we escaped to a small summer-house in the grounds. That was an eventful night for me, for she promised to marry me.

“The night air was intoxicating with its rich aroma of flowers and unfamiliar herbs. My mind was in a whirl of ecstasy and anticipation. I little suspected the unpleasant little shock being prepared for me in the morning. Our diligence was to leave at eleven o’clock, and we were to have lunch at a caravanserai on the way.

“The diligence turned up rather before its time, and our party began to assemble. I was talking to a Russian princess, and feeling very much of the great world, when a thick-set figure in tweeds came out of the hotel with the Commissionaire and made straight for the diligence. I felt a wave of positive horror. It was the man from Blundellsands!

“He did not see me for a moment. He was busy giving instructions about luggage. Indeed, the whole party had collected and were ready to get aboard when he saw me. His face lighted up:

“‘Ay, laddie!’ he exclaimed. ‘Fancy seeing thee! Well, now, that’s fine. Art going Constantine by cooch?’

“I felt myself going hot and cold all over. I could tell by the faces of the others that they were thinking: Who on earth is this awful bourgeois person?

“But what could I do? There was no escaping from him. And he was quite as justified in taking the trip as I was. The worst of it was he insisted on sitting next to me, and bawling out about the places he had been to, and asking me questions. And of course he reiterated: ‘Ay, when thee gets right away in a foreign country, lad, it’s fine to meet a fellow-countryman!’

“Fellow-countryman! I didn’t want to talk to him, or have anything to do with him. I wished he’d die. I felt, in truth, that he had turned up as a kind of fate, an unpremeditated spoil-sport between myself and Desirée.

“We stopped at several Arab villages on the way and probed about in the markets which struck us as being curiously deserted. Desirée was angry with me. ‘Can’t you get rid of this awful person?’ she whispered. I could only shrug my shoulders and feel helpless. He was wearing in his buttonhole a ridiculously large bunch of purple heather. Seeing me look at it, he said: ‘Lad, see yon heather. Cooms all tha way from Blondellsands. Ma sister sent it wrapped oop in ma socks.’ ‘Rather like coals to Newcastle,’ I tried to sneer. ‘Ay,’ he answered. ‘But when it cooms from th’ own people—— There’s a bit of common just outside oor toon——’

“I managed to get to the other end of the diligence on the way to the caravanserai. There we partook of a strange and wonderful lunch, in which stewed bustard was a feature, I remember.

“Now in the strange occurrence that happened to me that day I was convinced that the stewed bustard played the leading rôle. I was to learn a long while later that it had nothing to do with it. But at the time I was dominated by this illusion. Hanging up in the caravanserai had been a stuffed bustard. I had never seen one before. In the middle of the afternoon, as we drove over the sandy waste thickly studded with scrub and halfgrass, the bustard I had eaten and the bustard that was hanging up became one and the same bird. It seemed to flutter against the roof of the diligence and make it darker and darker. I had the greatest difficulty in seeing, hearing, or breathing. I remember at one time a crowd of faces staring at me, and I was not certain who they were, and not particularly interested. I knew I was ill, and that all my powers of resistance were vanishing. My head seemed to be in iron clamps, and my body was throbbing as though stirred by a hundred fevers. I had no sense of time, only a sense of impenetrable darkness, that increased, that increased——”

Jimmy shook himself and gave a little shiver. The Colonel was silent and invisible behind my back. The sun had already tipped the horizon. There was no need for me to interrupt the flow of his story, and he continued:

“I don’t know whether you have even been unconscious for a long time under the pressure of raging fever. It is horrible. Apart from racking pains one is desperately unhappy in an inexplicable way. The fever seems to get right through to one’s soul. I had glimpses of semi-consciousness, in which all the people I had ever known became inconsequentially involved. After some interminable passage of time I had a glimpse of reality. I awakened in some dim light, and was aware of a woman in white gliding about the room.

‘I have been very ill’ was the first intelligible thought I had had for a long time, and then a name came involuntarily to my lips, ‘Desirée!’

“I know not how long passed between this brief return to consciousness and another more placid one. It was a twilight hour, and I felt cool, and master of myself. I waited patiently, and the woman in white came back. It was not Desirée. A wave of disappointment flooded me, and I tried to speak, to protest against this outrage. The nurse said in English: ‘There, there! that’s better! Don’t talk. I will give you something.’ She poured a white liquid between my lips. I gradually felt stronger, but she would not talk or answer my questions. A French doctor came and examined me. He came every day. At the end of nearly a week the nurse talked a little. She told me I was in a ward of the Isolation Hospital of the White Sisters at Algiers. ‘But what has been the matter with me? I feel as though I have had something awful—like typhoid.’ ‘You have had something worse than that,’ she said.

“‘What was it?’ I asked. ‘Typhus,’ she said quietly.

“‘Typhus!’

“There was a little epidemic of it in some of the villages along the coast, brought they say by a coaster from the Levant.

“‘But you are English,’ I said, fencing for time, my mind occupied with other aspects of the case.

“‘I am an Irish nun,’ she answered. ‘They put me to nurse you because I speak English.’

“I waited, not quite knowing how to frame the questions I was burning to ask. At last I said: ‘I was with a party, going to Constantine. Tell me, what happened to them?’

“‘When they heard what was the matter with you they fled. They hired a car and drove to El-Guerrah, and took the next train back to Algiers.’

“‘All of them?’ I faltered.

“‘No, one remained behind and nursed you, and somehow got you back here.’

“I sighed contentedly. My spirits rose. I knew that *she* in any case would not have deserted me under those conditions. After a pause I whispered hoarsely: ‘Where is she now?’

“‘It was a he,’ said the nurse in a low voice. ‘An Englishman. He said he came from Lancashire. Had it not been for him you would have died.’

“I turned my face away, for I did not want the Irish nurse to see it. I tried to speak as casually as I could.

“‘Oh,’ I said, ‘what was his name? Did he leave his address?’

“‘No,’ she answered, ‘he went away quietly one morning. He left neither name nor address. But look! he left his bunch of heather. He said it was for luck—“look” he called it. He waited till you were out of danger. On the morning he left he came and saw you and said: “Poor laddie! I had a boy like you.” He told me his boy was killed in the South African War. And then as though to apologise for his emotion, he said something about one must do what one can for a fellow countryman.’

“‘And then he went away?’

“‘Yes, we none of us knew his name. He was very generous. By the way,’ she added, ‘your father is here in Algiers. We telegraphed to him. As soon as you are free from contagion we shall send you to him.’”

“You never saw the man from Blundellsands again?” I ventured. “And what about the—your fiancée?”

“You must remember,” said Jimmy, “all this happened about twenty years ago. Honestly I have no clearer recollection of her face than I have of the girl who made up prescriptions. No, I never saw—any of the party again. But from what I since heard one other man came out of the affair with credit.”

“Who was that?”

“The Frenchman who laughed in that hotel at Mustapha. Come, let’s get busy. The fish are rising.”

“And the Colonel has gone to sleep,” I answered. “That’s because you didn’t throw your spoil-sport into the river!”

“Poor old chap! don’t let’s wake him up,” said Jimmy.

“I’m afraid we shall have to,” I said. “He’s gone to sleep on the gentles.”

ARPEGGIO

It was not a pretty company. There was Diehl, who apparently occupied the position of president. He had a square black beard, and sinister blood-shot eyes. His thin sneering voice was pitched on a high monotonous level. In this rather shabby little salon the fourth floor of the Hotel St. Just in the Rue Papinière, he dominated the rest by his bulk, and his insolent sense of mental superiority. It was apparent that he utterly despised the other four. A stranger entering the room would undoubtedly have been impressed by one characteristic of the whole company. To glance at them it was almost impossible to tell either their ages or even their nationalities. The plump little man they called Max, with his waxed moustache and his heavy eyelids, might have been Portuguese. On the other hand he might have been Belgian; his age anything between thirty-five and fifty-five. The thin, highly-strung Luigi, with his wild mop of dark hair and glittering eyes, might have been Levantine. On the other hand, he might easily have come from the mining districts of Yorkshire. His age was also indeterminate. Orman, with his reddish hair, pale pink cheeks, and clear expressionless eyes, was surely Irish. And yet there are many Scandinavian people like him, especially among the Swedes. Kettner was essentially Russian, but what does "Russian," with its sixty odd varied races, mean? As for Diehl, with the square black beard, he might have been the proprietor of unmentionable establishments in Singapore, the director of an Art Museum at Dresden, or the commissioner of a bible society in Boston. With a little more spirituality of mien he might even have passed as the Metropolitan of Constantinople.

But if this unpleasant quintette was divers in outward form and bearing, it appeared to be solid in its opinion on certain matters. That its mood was tense and "edgy" was evident from the way in which the members spoke and behaved, and their united irritation over the fact that a piano in an adjoining room was audible.

During the whole time the "conference" had been sitting—nearly an hour and a half—someone had been playing an arpeggio scale in the next room. Over and over again, up and down the keys raced the invisible fingers. There is something about this ceaseless repetition to try the strongest nerves. Every now and then one of the men would break off to curse "that confounded piano."

But now the “conference” was finished, and Diehl leant back, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, to give his last instructions.

“Well, Max and Luigi, my fine cabbages, we must congratulate you. Owing to the perfection of our arrangements, I fail to see how anything could go wrong. The good fortune of this opportunity of achievement has fallen to you. And if you carry it out with that discretion which you, Luigi, showed in connection with the Grand Duchess at Zurich, the blessings of the Fraternity will go with you. What is the matter with you, Luigi? You seem all on edge.”

Luigi was swaying restlessly, and passing his hands through his tousled hair.

“I wish there wasn’t forty-eight hours to wait. That’s all. And—and—that confounded piano gets on my nerves. . . .”

Diehl laughed. “The piano! my dear comrade, when we have gone, why don’t you call on the young lady with a bouquet? I’m sure that with your well-known fascination over the fair sex, the young lady will gladly desist, if indeed she is not willing to be more companionable. We will leave you and Max to make your final arrangements. Now listen to me once more.

“It was the genius of Orman which foresaw the magnificent opportunity afforded by this empty suite of rooms on the top floor of the block of office buildings in the rue St. Augustin. It commands on both the north and the east side the exact juncture where the president’s carriage will pass on Friday afternoon. It also has command of the roof. While paying tribute to Orman, we must also congratulate Kettner on the skilful way he has endeared himself to the old concierge of the building. The old dear has a curious penchant for anisette, it seems. Kettner is also a connoisseur of anisette. You will have no trouble on that score. At the moment when the—the—er—episode happens, the concierge will be enjoying, shall we say, a profound afternoon nap. The key of the top floor will be given you.”

He looked round with a sigh of relief, noticing that the arpeggio had ceased, and then continued:

“The work of our skilful young chemist, Cosimo Malatesti, is also complete. He will arrive from Lyons on Friday morning, carrying a small black bag, the kind usually carried by piano-tuners. He will go straight to the Café Pigalle, where you will all lunch together. And I implore you eat plenty and drink nothing but one glass of cognac. You should be in your position at 2.15. The carriage passes at 2.30. You want time to take your bearings, but

not long enough to draw attention to yourselves. As to which of you has the honour to carry the piano-tuner's bag, and to—er—administer, the last coup of justice, that of course you may settle between yourselves.”

The arpeggio started again, and the president scowled. Luigi mopped his brow and muttered:

“Damn that piano!”

Max took a long drink of water, and Kettner—perhaps the most fervent member present—exclaimed:

“Down with presidents, kings and capitalists!”

“And pianists!” interjected Orman. This frivolous addition made the company laugh uneasily. Diehl rose and put some papers together.

“These papers,” he said. “You had better keep till the morning of—till Friday morning, when they will be fetched. Remember they are the most secret papers of the Fraternity. There are here the two lists, one French and one foreign. There is also here the code. You will want these for warning our friends in Vienna, Rome, Berlin, and London. Never let these papers out of your sight.”

He re-lit the stump of his cigar, which had gone out, and reached for his hat.

“One moment,” said Luigi, with an hysterical catch in his voice. “Is it true that—that—the Mole is working against us?”

“Why should you think so?” said the president, frowning.

“You know, it's—it's common gossip. And after all it was he who got Schlotz in Vienna, and the Pirelli brothers in Amsterdam, and others . . .”

“How do you know? it was never proved.”

“No. It was never proved because—he works in the dark, underground. That's why.”

“Nonsense!” replied Diehl. “The Mole is a figment of the imagination. He has no reality. Hysteria invented him.”

“Moles can be caught in traps,” interjected Kettner.

“How is it all these Brothers met their death in the same way—a bullet through the keyhole or out of the darkness just a day or a few hours before —?”

“There are, of course, risks in our community. But it is absurd to ascribe these—er—accidents to the work of one man. Your nerves are in a bad way, Luigi.”

“Who is the Mole supposed to be, anyway?” said Orman.

“That’s the point,” said Luigi. “No one knows. No one has seen him. I heard that he was an officer, a colonel who fought with the White army under Deniken. But his nationality no one knows. They say he’s as clever as the devil, can speak eight languages, and is a dead shot with a revolver. Apart from that . . .”

Max twirled the ends of his little waxed moustaches.

“I’m not afraid of the Mole,” he said, a little unconvincingly. “It’s the building I want to know about. Suppose we are seen coming out of the empty flat just after . . .”

“I have already pointed out to you,” said Diehl, with a peevish drawl, as though reprimanding timorous school children, “there is no danger at all. The block of offices is eight storeys high, the roof concealed by buttresses and low brick walls. It will take several minutes to focus from which direction this bolt from Heaven, this engine of justice has fallen. Within a few seconds you may be back in the corridors or staircases. There will probably be a thousand people in the building on that occasion. It is a gala day, and the good bourgeoisie will be entertaining their wives and daughters. Who should take any notice of two handsome well-dressed men like you, mingling with this crowd? There are four exits, and Kettner will be waiting with a taxi, under the lamp-post by Lucien Bahar’s *comestible* establishment round the corner.”

He flung his cloak around him, with a gesture of finality and added:

“Good luck go with you!”

Kettner and Orman came forward and solemnly shook hands without saying a word, and the three of them tramped out. Max sat staring in front of him, occasionally twirling his moustaches, and then turning over the papers on the table, without looking at them. Luigi paced the room. In the middle of one turn he stopped, and exclaimed:

“Listen! that confounded scale has left off.”

“You didn’t want it to go on, did you?” said Max sullenly. “Now that they’ve gone I’m going to have a drink.” He rose and rang the bell by the

fireplace. After an interval of some seconds the door opened and a waiter with a pale, impassive face entered.

“Bring up a small bottle of brandy and a seltzer,” said Max.

“Certainly sir,” said the waiter. He was just about to leave the room when the arpeggio started again. Luigi called out:

“Wait!” Nervously plastering down his recalcitrant locks, he said:

“Will you please ask the young lady in the next room if she could desist from playing her scales for a bit, as there is a gentleman in here who is unwell.”

The waiter bowed and went out. After an interval the arpeggio stopped. Luigi heaved a sigh of relief, and continued his prow. Max began to peruse the papers. Their respite was short-lived, however. Just as the waiter re-entered with the brandy, seltzer, and glasses the arpeggio started again.

“Did you give her my message?” said Max savagely.

The waiter set down the tray, and said gravely:

“The pianist said the request was impossible, sir.”

The two men were so surprised they could think of no comment until the waiter had retired, when Max exclaimed:

“Confounded impertinence! some beastly Conservatoire student practising for a concert. Why the devil doesn’t she play a tune anyway?”

Then he growled:

“Come along, Luigi, let’s check this list together. We’ve got to go through with it anyway. Have a drink first.”

He poured himself a generous portion of brandy and added a little seltzer. Luigi, who was trembling, did the same, and sat down by his side.

“Now, then,” said Max. “There’s Karl Bonnard. He’s at Abbeville, I see . . .”

Luigi was staring abstractedly at the door. Suddenly he remarked:

“Did you notice one thing, Max?”

“What?”

“He said the pianist. He didn’t say the lady pianist.”

“Well, what does that matter to us, whether it’s a man or a woman making the damned row?”

“No. I was only wondering . . .”

“Don’t be an imbecile. With the help of the code book we’ve got to frame a general notification. So far as I can see it need be only three words.”

Luigi, who was not listening had again rung the bell.

“What are you ringing for?” said Max.

“I want to ask the waiter something.”

“Idiot!” growled Max.

The waiter entered noiselessly.

“Waiter,” said Luigi. “Just now you referred to the pianist. Is the pianist a man or a woman?”

The waiter appeared to hesitate, then he replied:

“A gentleman, sir.”

“Ah! what is his name?”

“It is not my custom, sir, to enquire the name of hotel guests.”

“Oh, well, look here. Will you go back to him, and ask him if he will kindly not practise for a bit as there are two gentlemen in the adjoining room engaged on important business. Perhaps he will understand that.”

“Certainly, sir.”

The door closed, and a moment later the arpeggio stopped again. But only for half a minute. Then it started again with renewed vigour. The two men glanced at each other and muttered curses. The waiter re-entered.

“The gentleman says he regrets he cannot comply with your request. He says he does not doubt the importance of the business you gentlemen have to discuss, but he himself has an important appointment this evening, and he is getting his fingers in.”

“He’s getting his fingers in!” exclaimed Luigi.

“An expression common, I believe, in the musical profession,” said Max.

“Getting his fingers in for what?”

“He’s playing at a concert, I suppose. All right, waiter, you can go. I shall ring up the manager’s office.”

When the waiter had gone Max shrugged his shoulders.

“After all, why should we worry about it? We’re not a couple of hysterical women. If I remember rightly, old cauliflower, over the affair of the Grand Duchess there was a Jazz band playing all the afternoon in the Square beneath.”

“A Jazz band! Yes, I could stand a Jazz band. It’s this infernal repetition, on and on, and on it goes, no change, no variety. . . . It’s like a kind of fate . . .”

“Come now, I’ll tick off the addresses. There are only about seventeen in all. If you’ll help me to frame the code message. We can finish the whole thing in half an hour, and go out.”

“It’ll be playing when we come back.”

“How do you know?”

“I feel it. I feel it!” He went up and banged violently on the wall with his fist and shouted: “Shut up, you devil!” The arpeggio did not stop. Then Luigi snatched up the telephone, lifted the receiver, and vibrated the bell. He called out: “Hullo! hullo! hullo!” He continued to call, but there was no answer. “The confounded thing’s out of order,” he barked.

His eye began to wander restlessly around the room, as though he were taking stock of an eventuality. The room had only one door, but opposite it was a French window leading on to a small iron balcony which ran along the front of the hotel. Between the division of each room the balcony was dissected by a low iron grille, less than a metre in height. As it was evening a curtain was drawn across the window which was nevertheless open, for the night was close.

“Come and sit down,” said Max. “You’re getting on my nerves. Why should I have to do all the work. Which brings me to the point—you know, the point the president has left to us to settle between us.”

“What point?”

“On Friday we meet Cosimo at the Café Pigalle. Unless your wits have gone completely astray you may remember that Cosimo will have with him a small black piano-tuner’s bag. One of us is to have the honour of carrying it to the rue St. Augustin. One of us is to have the honour of delivering it to its final destination. Hein?”

An expression of cunning and fear crept into the face of Luigi.

“Honour?” he whispered.

“Yes, isn’t it an honour?”

“If you consider it an honour you are welcome to it.”

“Come, my old cauliflower, is that quite the way to speak? I’m afraid such an expression getting to the ears of the president—in our Fraternity you know the iron law ‘There is no going back.’ There are special arrangements made for anyone who either retires from the brotherhood, or goes back on his obligations.”

“Yes, yes, I know, I know . . . well?”

Max drew a pack of cards from the drawer.

“We have the same rule, I take it. One cut, and the honour to the highest. Shall I cut or will you?”

Luigi trembled, but his eyes were still wandering. Suddenly he went up close to Max and whispered breathlessly:

“Do you see we could get him?—get him while he’s sitting there at the piano—— The balcony!—the door is open—his door too—one spring and we could settle him for ever——”

He produced a steel knife from his hip-pocket.

The eyes of Max rolled.

“What are you talking about? You can’t knife a man for playing the piano just because it gets on your nerves. Don’t be a fool!”

“Yes, but . . .”

“Since you seem all over the place I will cut first. Do you agree?”

Luigi suddenly seemed curiously indifferent. He merely nodded, his eye wandering from the pack of cards to the curtain. He saw Max cut, and hold the card up to him. It was the ten of clubs. Almost mechanically he cut the pack himself and drew the knave. He heard Max utter a gasp of relief, and then say in his suave voice:

“The honour is to you, comrade.”

Luigi put down the card and continued to prowl around the room like a beast of prey. Sometimes he drew his knife, stood by the curtain, then replaced it. Max said abruptly:

“I fail to understand your extravagant interest in this pianist.”

Luigi stared at him, took another turn up and down, and then came close up to him and whispered:

“You do, do you? You haven’t yet grasped the truth of the whole matter then?”

“Truth? what do you mean?”

“That man in there playing the piano is The Mole!”

Almost as though he had been overheard the music stopped. Luigi started and the slow sense of panic began to invade Max. It was Max this time who muttered:

“What has he stopped for!” Then as if to reassure himself he said:

“Nonsense! what makes you think so?”

Luigi again began to creep about the room. It was as though the moment had come when the silence was more nerve-racking than the playing. After some minutes to their relief the arpeggio started again.

Again approaching his comrade Luigi said:

“Don’t you remember the first thing we heard about ‘The Mole?’ Before he went into the army, before he took up politics actively, he used to be a famous pianist. He played at concerts all over the world. I believe they said he was a Lithuanian or a Pole. He only took up politics in middle life and even now he goes back to his first love for spells. He mixes the two, they say. Listen, Max, he’s playing now. Can’t you see while he’s playing there—his back to us probably . . .”

“Yes, you fool, but they would be bound to suspect us. They’d get us. What about our Cause? the president?”

“What better service could we render the Cause than to rid it of its greatest enemy?”

Max rang the bell.

“What did you ring the bell for?”

“I want to get a newspaper.”

“Why?”

“If he’s playing at a concert perhaps we can find out the name?”

“What does the name matter? It will convey nothing to us.”

“No, but we can tell the president. This is someone else’s job. We’ve got on all we want.”

“Yes, but in the meantime . . .”

“Why doesn’t that damned waiter come!”

He stood up and walked across to the door, and angrily turned the handle. To his amazement he could not open the door. He rattled the handle and banged on the panel. Then turned to Luigi:

“What does this mean? The bell, the telephone, the door—we’re locked in, we’re cornered, do you see! Oh, my God!”

It was apparent that Max had worked himself up into a greater panic than the highly-strung Luigi. Indeed the latter suddenly revealed himself as a man of action. Carrying his knife in his sleeve he made a gesture as though to calm the other.

“That settles it, then. There is only one way. And that while he’s playing.”

He made three stealthy strides across the room, and then the arpeggio stopped suddenly in the middle of a passage. He gave a low cry and dropped his knife, knelt and groped for it on the floor. While he was fumbling for it Max cowered in the corner and screamed faintly:

“Oh, God! hurry, hurry, Luigi! Get him. Oh, for a gun! Why the devil didn’t I have one? Turn the light off. Blast you!”

Luigi was on his feet again, the knife in his hand, moving towards the curtain.

Max continued:

“Hurry, damn you! he’ll shoot us! Mind the curtains! Look out! I saw it move. Hullo! Hullo! who is that there behind the curtain? Curse you!”

Luigi was within a yard of the curtain when two shots rang out in rapid succession. Luigi fell forward on his face; Max crumpled up against the wall. The curtain moved almost imperceptibly, and there was a silence. After a time the arpeggio started again.

Almost at the same instant the door opened quietly and the impassive waiter entered. He was wearing wash-leather gloves and in one hand he carried two revolvers. He shut the door after him and locked it. Then he glanced through the papers. He sorted out several, folded them neatly together, and put them in his pocket. Having satisfied himself that this part

of the performance was in order he went over to Max and put one of the revolvers in his right hand. He then crossed to Luigi, twisted the body round and placed the other revolver on the ground near the body. He then proceeded to turn over the side table quietly, scattering ornaments, vases and bottles over the floor. He did the same with two chairs and a screen. He then turned and surveyed his work, with his head on one side, like an artist regarding a picture to which he has put the finishing touches. No further accents apparently being required, he sat at the table and picked up the telephone receiver. After a brief pause he said quietly:

“Will you please give me room twenty-four.”

A minute passed and the piano stopped abruptly. Speaking in a low voice he said:

“Everything in order, colonel. My hearty congratulations! I have both the lists and the code. Exactly. I will now inform the management of this deplorable tragedy. There are all the evidence of a grim struggle. It may never be known what caused this quarrel which has ended so tragically. Exactly. Not at all, not at all. By the way, Monsieur Doumergue, the Conductor of the Philharmonic, rang up. He begged me not to disturb you if you were working. He only wanted to ask you if you would be so kind as to be at the concert to-night ten minutes early. Exactly. He just wants to consult you about a passage in the slow movement. He said he was under the impression at the rehearsal yesterday that you thought he took it a shade too slowly. Exactly. That will be eight-twenty, then, colonel. Very good. Not at all. Au revoir.”

The waiter hung up the receiver and looked around him. The piano started again, but this time the invisible pianist was not playing an arpeggio but the slow movement of the Emperor Concerto. The waiter smiled and sat there for a moment as though entranced, murmuring to himself:

“Exquisite! exquisite!”

Then, as though starting out of a dream, he arose, surveyed the scene once more, took off his wash-leather gloves and put them in his pocket. Having gone to the door, and unlocked it, he returned to the telephone, picked up the receiver, and said in an agitated voice:

“For God’s sake give me the manager’s office . . .”

“FACE”

It will not, of course, surprise you to know that it was at the Cravenford National School that he was first known as “Face.” The people of Essex are well-known for their candour and lucidity of expression. He was an exceptionally—well, plain boy. There was nothing abnormal, or actually mal-formed about him, it was only that his features had that perambulatory character which is the antithesis of classic. It was what the Americans call a “homely” face. The proportions were all just wrong, the ears actually protruding, the jaw too lantern, the eyes actually too wide apart. Moreover, his figure was clumsy in the extreme. He seemed all hands, and feet, and knees, and chin. It was impossible for him to pass any object without kicking it. Neither was his personality enhanced by his manner, which was taciturn and sullen, *gauche* in the extreme. The games and amusements of other boys held no attractions for him. He made no friends, exchanged no confidences, distinguished himself at nothing. Yet those of the impatient world who found time to devote a second glance to this uncouth exterior were bound to be impressed by the appeal of those deep brown expectant eyes.

They were not essentially intelligent eyes, but they had a kind of breadth of sympathy, a profound watchfulness, like the eyes of some caged animal to whom the full functions of its being had not so far been revealed.

It was the universality of this nickname, “Face,” which preserved it, for the boys of Cravenford National School knew that Caleb Fryatt resented it, and individually they feared him. That very clumsiness and imperviousness of his was apt to be overwhelming when adapted to militant purposes. Not that he was easy to rouse, but it was difficult to know when he was roused—he gave no outward manifestation of it—but when he was, it was difficult to get him to stop. He was a grim and merciless fighter, who could take punishment with a kind of morbid relish. It only inspired him to a more terrible onslaught. The boys preferred to attack him in company, and then usually vocally, by peeping over the churchyard wall and calling out:

“Face! Face! Oh, my! There’s a face!”

The tragic setting of his home life explained much. He had had a brother and two elder sisters, all of whom had died in infancy. He lived with his father and mother in a meagre dilapidated cottage a mile beyond the church. His father worked at a stud farm, at such moments as the mood for work was

upon him. He was a man of morose and vicious temper, quickened by spasmodic outbreaks of alcoholic indulgence. Of poor physique, he was nevertheless a dangerous engine of destruction in these moods, particularly in respect to the frailer sex. Caleb had been brought up in a code which recognised unquestioningly the right of might, which accepted tears and blows as a natural concomitant to its reckoning. He had stood powerless and affrighted at the vision of his little mother beaten unreasonably almost to insensibility, and he had never heard her complain. His own body was scarred by the thousand attentions of sticks and belts. He, too, had not complained. In some dumb way he suffered more from the blows his mother received than he did from those he received himself.

But he was growing up now—ugly, clumsy old “Face.” When at the age of fourteen he passed through the first standard and out of the school, he was already as tall as his father, and somewhat thicker in girth, more agile, tougher in fibre. The significance of this development did not occur to him at the time. He was sent to work at Sam Hurds’, the blacksmith, a dour, intelligent, religious giant, who instructed him in the intricacies of his craft with relentless thoroughness, but without much sympathy. The boy liked the work, although he showed no great aptitude at it. He had a way of plodding on, appearing to understand, serving long hours, and then in a period of abstraction forgetting all that he had been told. He loved the blazing forge, the clang of metal upon metal, the sheen upon the carter’s horses that came in to be shod, the sunlight making patterns on the road outside. . . .

He was two years with Sam Hurds. At seventeen his muscles were like a man’s. His overgrown, hulking body like a fully developed farm labourer’s. His appearance had not improved. Even the smith adopted the village nickname and called him “Face.” At first it was “Young Face,” then “Face,” then as their sombre familiarity developed, and the smith realised the boy’s sound qualities and the something far too old for his years, it became “Old Face.” He knew that his assistant had no powers of adaptability, little invention, not a very real grasp of the essentials, but at the same time he knew he could trust him. He would do precisely as he was told. He would stick to it. He could be relied upon like a sheep dog. Nothing could shift him from his post of duty.

The smith was right, but he had not allowed for those outward thrusts of fate which upset the soberest plans.

One night Caleb arrived home and found his mother crying. He had never seen her cry before. He regarded her spellbound.

“What is it, mother?”

“Nothing, lad, nothing. Come, your tea’s keeping warm upon the hob. There’s a pasty——”

“Nay, you wouldn’t cry for nowt, mother. Lift up your head.”

She lifted up her head and dashed the tears away, but as she moved toward the kitchen he noticed that she was trying to conceal a limp. He caught her up.

“He has been striking you again.”

“It’s nothing, lad.”

“Show me.”

He pulled her down to him and she wept again. Lifting the hem of her skirt, she revealed her leg above the ankle, bound up in linen.

“He kicked me, dear, but it is nothing. It will pass.”

Caleb ate his tea in silence. His table manners were never of the finest, and on this occasion he masticated his food, and swilled his tea, like an animal preoccupied with some disturbance of its normal life. Afterward he sat apart and thought, his mother busy with household matters. Later she popped across the road to a neighbouring cottage to borrow some ointment.

While she was out his father returned. It was getting dark, and a fine rain was beginning to fall. His father came stumbling up the cottage garden singing. Caleb blocked his passage in the little entrance hall, and said deliberately:

“You didn’t ought to have kicked mother.”

His father, emerging from the shock of surprise, scowled at him.

“What’s that?”

“You didn’t ought to have kicked mother.”

For a moment Stephen Fryatt was speechless, then he lurched forward and pushed his son away.

“What the devil’s it to do with you, whipper-snapper?”

Caleb thrust his father back against the wall and repeated:

“You didn’t ought to have kicked her.”

Then Stephen saw red. He struck at his son with his clenched hand, and the blow split the boy's ear. Caleb took his father by the throat and shook him. The latter tried to bring his knee into play. At this foul method of attack, Caleb, too, became angry. Those long powerful fingers gripped tighter. He closed up, and flung his father's body against the lintel of the door. He did not realise his own newly developed strength. When his mother returned a little later she found her man lying in the passage with the back of his head in a pool of blood, her son hovering ghost-like in the background. She gave a cry:

“What's this ye've done, Caleb?”

A hollow voice came out of the darkness:

“He didn't ought to have kicked ye, mother.”

She screamed and, kneeling upon the floor, she supported the battered head upon her knee. It appeared an unrecognisable thing, the hair so much blacker in the ivory-hued face, the eyes staring stupidly.

Followed then a shifting phantasmagoria, scenes and emotions incomprehensible to the defender. Neighbours, and doctors and policemen, talking and arguing, whispering together, pointing at him. He was led away. In all that early turmoil, and in the more bewildering proceedings which followed, the one thing which impressed him deeply was the attitude of his mother. She had changed toward him entirely. She accused him, reviled him, even cursed him. He would ponder upon this in his dark cell at night. He had never imagined that his mother could have loved his father—not in that way, not to that extent. His brown ox-like eyes tried to penetrate the darkness for some solution. He had no fear as to what they would do with him, but everything was inexplicable . . . unsatisfying. The days and weeks which followed—he lost all sense of time—added to the sense of mystification. He appeared to be passed from one judge to another, beginning with a gentleman in a tweed suit and knickerbockers, and ending with a very old man in a white wig and gold-rimmed glasses, of whom only the head and the thin pale fingers seemed visible. Yes, yes, why did they keep on torturing him like this? He had answered all the questions again and again, always giving the same replies, always ending up with the solemn asseveration:

“He didn't ought to have kicked her.”

At the same time he had never meant to kill his father. He had underestimated his strength. He had become very strong in the forge. His father had attacked him first. It was unfortunate that the back of Mr. Fryatt's head

had struck the sharp corner of the lintel post. He was in any case crazy with drink. The boy was only seventeen. He believed he was defending his mother. Of course, these pleas were not his. This version of the case had not occurred to him, but to his surprise a learned-looking gentleman, who had visited him in his cell, had stood up in Court and made them vehemently. And hearing the case put like that Caleb nodded his head. He hadn't thought of it in that light, but it was quite true. Oh, but the arguments which ensued! The long words and phrases, the delays, and pomp and uncertainty. Never once did the question seem to come up as to whether his father "ought to have done it," or not. According to his mother his father appeared to have been almost a paragon of a father.

It was all settled at last, and he was sent away to a "Home" for two years.

Home! The ironic travesty of the word penetrated his thick skull immediately he had passed what looked like a prison gate. There were two hundred boys in this home. It seemed strange to live in a home ruled over by a governor in uniform, policed by gaolers and superintendents. Strange to have a home one could not leave at will, where iron discipline turned one out at dawn, drove one like a slave to long hours of hard and uncongenial work. Strange that home should breathe bitterness and distrust that it should be under a code which seemed to repeat eternally:

"Don't forget you are a criminal. Young as yet, but the taint is in you!"

It was true there were momentary relaxations, football and other games which he detested, bleak and interminable services in a chapel, organ recitals and concerts. The other boys disgusted him with their endless obscenities and suggestions, their universal conviction that the great thing was to "get through it," so as to be able to resume those criminal practices inherent in them, practices which the home did nothing to eradicate or relieve.

If "Old Face" had not been of the toughest fibre, dull witted, impervious, and in a sense unawakened, those two years would have broken him. As it was they dulled his sensibilities even more, they embittered him. Those brown eyes had almost lost that straining glance of expectancy, as though the home had taught him that there was nothing for him in any case to expect. He was a criminal, hall-marked for eternity. When he had been there six months they sent for him to go and visit the chaplain. That good man looked very impressive, and announced that the governor had received information that Caleb's mother was dead, and that it was his solemn duty to break the news to him. He appeared relieved that the boy did not at once

burst into tears. He then delivered a little homily on life and death, and pointed out that it was Caleb's evil and vicious actions which had hastened his mother's death. He advised him to pour out his heart in penitence to God, who was always our Rock and Saviour in times of tribulation. He quoted passages from Leviticus, and Caleb stared at him dully, thinking the while:

“I'll never see my mother again, never, never.”

He did not give way to grief. The news only bewildered him the more. He went about his duties in the home stolidly. He was quite an exemplary inmate, hardly up to the average standard of quickness and intelligence, but quiet, obedient, and well behaved. At the end of his term of service he was sent up before the governor and other officials. The clumsy scrawl of his signature was demanded upon innumerable forms. He believed he was once more to be a free man. And so he was in a qualified sense. But he was not to escape without the seal of the institution being indelibly stamped upon him. In round-about phrases the governor explained that he was to leave the home, but he was not to imagine that he was a free agent to go about the world murdering whomever he liked. He was still a criminal, requiring supervision and watching. Out of their Christian charity the governors had found employment for him at a timber-merchant's at Bristol. Thither he would go, but he must remember that he was still under their protection. Every few weeks he must report to the police. Any act of disobedience on his part would be treated—well, by a sterner authority. On the next occasion he would not be sent to a nice comfortable establishment like the home, where they played football and had concerts, but to Wormwood Scrubbs or Dartmoor. Did he understand? Oh, yes, Caleb understood—at least, partly. He was to be free, free in a queer way.

The arrangement did not exactly tally with his sense of freedom, any more than this building tallied with his idea of home, but he was only nineteen and his body was strong and his spirit not completely broken. Any ideas he may have entertained that the new life was going to spell freedom in any sense were quickly shattered. The timber merchant at Bristol was a man named Barnet, a tyrant of the worst description. He knew the kind of material he was handling. Most of his employees were ex-convicts, ticket-of-leave-men, Lascars, or social derelicts. He acted accordingly. Caleb slept in a shed with nine other men, four of whom were coloured. They worked ten hours a day loading timber on barges. They were given greasy cocoa and bread at six o'clock in the morning, a meal of potatoes and little square lumps of hard meat at twelve, then tea and bread at four o'clock in the

afternoon. In addition to this he was paid twelve shillings a week. The slightest act of insubordination or slackness was met with the threat:

“Here, you! Any more of that and you go back to where you came from!”

Before he had been there a month he felt that the home was indeed a home in comparison. Strangely enough, it was one of the coloured men who rescued him from his thralldom, a pleasant voiced coon with only one eye. He appeared to take a fancy to Caleb. One night he came to him and whispered:

“Say, boss, would you like to beat it?”

It took some time for the boy from Cravenford to understand the coloured man’s phraseology and plan, but when he did, he fell in with it with alacrity. The following Saturday they visited a little public-house down by the docks and were there introduced to a grizzled mate. Hands were wanted on a merchantman sailing for Buenos Ayres the following week. The coloured man was a free agent and he signed on, and Caleb signed on in the name of J. Bullock. Two nights before sailing he hid in a barge and joined his ship the following morning. All day long he experienced the tremors of dread for the first time in his life. The primitive instinct of escape and the call of the sea was upon him. He could have danced with joy when he heard the rattling of the chains, and the hoarse cries of the deck hands as the big ship got under way at dusk.

The voyage to Buenos Ayres was uneventful. The work was hard and the discipline severe, but he was conscious all the time of sensing the first draught of freedom that he had experienced since he left his village. This feeling was accentuated at port when he realised that after being paid off, he was free to leave the ship. But the rigid magnificence of Buenos Ayres depressed him. He learnt that after unloading they were to refit and convey cattle to Durban in South Africa, so he signed on again for the next voyage. This proved to be a formidable experience. A week out they ran into very heavy seas. He was detailed to attend the cattle. The cattle superintendent was a drunken bully. The stench among the cattle pens, added to the violent heaving of the ship, brought on sickness, but he was not allowed any respite. The cattle themselves were seasick, and many of them died and had to be thrown overboard. The voyage lasted three weeks, and when he arrived at Durban he determined to try his luck once more as a landsman. At that time there was plenty of demand for unskilled labour for men of Caleb’s physique in South Africa, but it was poorly paid. He drifted about the country doing

odd jobs. He visited Cape Town, Kimberly and Pietermaritzburg. The fever of *wanderlust* was upon him. He never remained in one situation for more than a few months. He was the man who desired to see over the ridge. Perhaps further, just a little further, would be—he knew what not, some answer to the inexpressible yearning within him, deep calling unto deep. At the age of twenty-two he was working on the railroad near Nyanza. They came and told him about the great war, which had just started in Europe. A keen-faced little man, one of the gangers, tapped him on the shoulder, and said:

“It’s lucky for you lad you’re out here. Otherwise they’d be telling you that ‘your king and country need you.’ ”

The phrase disturbed him. Night after night he lay awake dreaming of England. Memories of the home and of the timber-merchant at Bristol vanished. He thought only of Cravenford, the grey ivy-coloured church, the rambling high street, the pond by Mr. Larry’s farm, the crossroads where he and another boy named Stoddard had fought one April afternoon, his mother’s cottage, now, alas! deserted, but always sacred, old Sam Hurds banging away in the smithy, the rooks circling above the great elms in the park—all, all these things were perhaps in danger whilst he lay sulking in a foreign land. They had called him “Face.” Well, why not? He knew he was not particularly prepossessing. The fellow workmen had always been at great pains to point this out to him. But still—stolidly and indifferently he went about his work, and then one day in the old manner he vanished. . . .

We will not attempt to record Caleb’s experiences of the war. He had no difficulty in joining a volunteer unit in Capetown, which was drafted to England. There he asked to be transferred to one of his own county regiments. The request was overlooked in the clamour of those days. He found himself with a cockney infantry regiment, and he remained with it through the whole course of the war. His life was identical to that of his many million comrades. In some respects he seemed to enjoy lapses of greater freedom than he had experienced for a long time. He was better fed, better clothed, better looked after. He had money in his pocket which he knew not what to do with. He made a good soldier, doing unquestioningly what he was told, sticking grimly to his post, being completely indifferent to danger.

Save for a few months on the Italian front, he served the whole time in France. He was slightly wounded three times, and in 1917 was awarded a military cross for an astounding feat of bravery in bombing a German dug-out and killing five of the enemy single-handed in the dark. Those queer

spiritual strivings so deep down in his nature derived no satisfaction from the war. It was all quite meaningless and incomprehensible. When he left South Africa he had an idea that the fighting would be in England. He visualised grim battles in the fields beyond Cravenford, and he and the other boys from the school defending their village. He had never conceived that a war could be like this. Sometimes he would lie awake at night and ruminate vaguely upon the queer perversity of fate which suddenly made murder popular. He had been turned out of England because he had quite inadvertently killed his father for kicking his mother across the shins, and now he was praised for killing five men within a few minutes. He didn't know, of course, but perhaps some of those men—particularly that elderly plump man who coughed absurdly as he ran on to Caleb's bayonet—perhaps they were better men than his father, although foreigners, although enemy. It was very perplexing. . . .

After a grey eternity of time, the thing came to an end. He found himself back in England. During the war much had been forgotten and forgiven. No one asked him for his credentials. The police never interfered with him. With his three wound stripes, his military cross, and his papers all in order, he was for a time a *persona grata*.

He had a bonus beyond the pay which he had saved, and he had never been so wealthy in his life. He stayed in London, and tried to adapt himself to a life of luxury and freedom, but he was not happy. In restaurants he was self-conscious, in theatres bored, in the streets bewildered. And so one day he set out and returned to his native village. Strangely, little had it altered! There was the church, the smithy, and the old street all just the same. He called on the smith, who was startled at the sight of him, but on perceiving his strips and ribbons, reasonably polite. He ransacked the village for old friends. Alas! How many of his school associates had gone, never to return. He called on Mr. Green, the miller, Mrs. Allport, at the general shop, Bob Canning, the carrier. Oh, dear me! yes, they all remembered him, were quite courteous, glad he had done well at the war, got through safely. Well, well! And soon the story got round. "Old Face has returned. Old Face! The boy who murdered his father!"

The novelty of his re-appearance and return soon wore off, and he knew that he was held in distrust in the village. He wandered far afield, and eventually obtained employment at a brickworks at Keeble, four miles down the valley toward Blaizing-Killstoke. Here the rumours concerning him gradually percolated, but they carried little weight or significance. He was a good workman, and time subdues all things.

Then the strangest miracle happened to Caleb Fryatt. He was nearly thirty, hard-bitten, battered, ill-mannered, with a scar from a bullet on his left cheek, little money, no prospects and no ambition—an unattractive chunk of a man. But what should we all do if love itself were not the greatest miracle of all? Anne Tillie was by no means a beauty herself, but she was not without attraction. She had a round, bright red ingenuous face, a heavily built figure with rather high shoulders and long arms. She was a year older than Caleb and inclined to be deaf, but there was a transparent honesty and simplicity about her. One could see that she would be honest, loyal, and true to all her purposes. She was the daughter of the postman at Blaizing-Killstoke. She and Caleb used to meet in the evenings and wander the lanes together. They did not appear to converse very much, but they would occasionally laugh, and give each other a hearty push. To her father's disgust, these attentions led to marriage the following year. They went to live in a tiny cottage on the outskirts of Keeble, ten minutes' bicycle ride from the works. Anne made an excellent wife. She seemed to understand and adapt herself to her husband's idiosyncrasies. She kept the cottage spotlessly clean, tended his clothes, and kept him in clean linen, cooked well, and studied all his little wants and peculiarities. She found time to attend to the garden, grow her own vegetables, and even see after a dozen fowls.

Caleb had never enjoyed such material comfort. In the evening they would sit either side of the fire, he with his pipe and she with her sewing. They were an unusually silent couple. Apart from her deafness, they never seemed prompted to exchange more than cursory remarks about the weather, their food, or some matter of local gossip. In the summer they sat in the garden, and watching the blue smoke from his pipe curl away into the amber light of the setting sun, Caleb felt that he had reached a haven after a restless storm. He worked remorselessly hard at the brickworks, and in two years' time was made a kiln foreman, receiving good wages. Malevolent people still whispered the story concerning the boy who murdered his father, and pointed an accusing finger at the back of his bulky form, but no one dared to remind Anne of that tragic happening. She knew the full details of it quite well, and woe to any unfortunate individual who dared to suggest that her man was in the wrong! In course of time he built a barn, and a toolshed, and they bought an adjoining orchard. They kept pigs, and then a pony and trap, and on Thursdays Anne would drive to market, and sell eggs, and chickens and apples. Oh, yes, they were becoming a prosperous pair. Caleb had surely outlived the ugly vicissitudes of his face. Was he happy? Was he completely satisfied? Who shall say? The promptings from the soul come from some

deep root no one has fathomed. He was conscious of a greater peace than he had ever known. He sometimes hummed quite unrecognisable tunes as he went about his work. The mornings enchanted him with gossamer webs gleaming with dew, swinging between the flowers. But the eyes still sometimes appeared to be seeking—one knows not what.

They had been married five years and seven months when the child was born. It came as a great surprise to Caleb. He had hardly dared to visualise such an eventuality. What a to-do there was in the cottage! Another room to be prepared, strange garments suddenly appearing upon the line in the kitchen, a visiting nurse somewhat important and discursive.

“A boy! Ho!” thought Caleb, as he trundled along on his bicycle the following morning. A boy who would grow up and perhaps become like himself. Well, that was very strange, very remarkable. Most remarkable that such a possibility had never occurred to him. All day long, and for nights and weeks after he thought about the boy who was going one day to be a man like himself. The thought at first worried and perplexed him. Was he—had he been—the kind of man the world would want perpetuated? He felt the fierce censure and distrust mankind had always lavished upon himself beginning to focus upon the boy, and gradually the protective sense developed in him to a desperate degree. The boy should have better chances than he ever had, the boy should be protected, cared for, shown the way of things. . . . Caleb ruminated. His wife became very dear to him. He was a man on the threshold of revelation. But before his eyes had fully opened to the complete realisation of all that this meant to him, a wayward gust of fever shattered the spectrum. The little fellow died when barely four months old. For a time Caleb was most deeply concerned for the health of his wife, who was a victim of the same scourge, but, as she gradually recovered, a feeling of unendurable melancholy crept over him. He began to observe the grey perspective of his life, its past and future. When Anne was once more normal, their intercourse became more taciturn than ever. There fell between them long, empty silences. There were times when he regarded her with boredom, almost with aversion. The years would roll on . . . wander-spirit would assail him. He would be tempted to pick up his cap and go forth and seek some port, where a ship under ballast might be preparing to essay the vast insecurity of heaving waters. But something told him that that would be cruel. His wife’s love for him was the most moving experience of his life, far greater than his love for her. She was middle-aged now, and her deafness was more pronounced than ever.

Once she went away to stay with her father for a few days. The morning after she left, a wall in the brickyard collapsed and crushed his right foot. He was carried home in excruciating pain. A neighbour came in and attended him and they fetched the doctor. They wanted to send for his wife but he told them not to bother her. All night he was delirious, and for the next two days and nights he went through a period of torment. As the fever abated a deep feeling of depression crept over him. He began to yearn for his wife profoundly. The neighbour, an elderly woman, wife of the local corn-chandler, was kindness itself. But everything she did was just wrong. How could she know the way Caleb liked things, and he lying there silent and uncomplaining?

On the third evening Anne arrived. She had heard the news. She came bustling into the cottage, dropped her bag, pressed her lips to his.

“Silly Billy, why didn’t you send for me?”

Silly Billy! That was her favourite term of raillery when he had behaved foolishly.

He choked back a desire to cry with relief.

“It’s nothing, nothing to bother about.”

But a feeling of deep contentment crept over him. His eyes regarded her thick plump figure moving busily but quietly about the room. There would be nothing now to disturb or annoy him. Everything would be done just—just as he liked it. She deftly re-arranged the positions of tables, and cups, and curtains. As the evening wore on she hovered above him, watching his every little movement, like a tigress watching over its cub. She eased the pillow, stroked his hair, and by some adroit manœuvre relieved the pressure on his throbbing leg. A deep sense of tranquillity permeated him. For the first time for three days he felt the desire to sleep, the cottage seemed so inordinately quiet, secure. Once when she was stooping near the chair by the bed, he seized her rough, strong forearm and pulled her to him. He believed he slept at last with her cheek pressed against his own. . . .

They treated him very well at the brickworks, and his wages were paid every week during his absence. It was nearly two months before he could get about again, and the doctors said he must expect to have a permanent limp. Summer vanished in the October mists, and a long winter dragged through its course. Spring again. Its pulse a little feebler than in the old days? Well, well, what could a man expect? Some of the old desires raised their heads and tugged at his heart-strings. He was very happy—off and on a

little soiled, perhaps, by the stress of bitter years, a little more ordinary, a little more sociable. He sometimes visited "The Green Man" and would drink beer with Mr. White, the corn-chandler, and old Tom Smethwick. And after a glass or two he would be quite a social acquisition, and would be inclined to boast a little of his deeds in the Great War, and of his adventures in foreign lands. No harm in it. Not such a bad sort, Old Face, the boy who murdered his father.

Heigho! But how the years ravage us! 'Twas but a while when things were so and so, and now. . . . He was forty-four when two disturbing factors came into his life, threatening to wreck its calm tenor, and they occurred almost simultaneously. There was a girl at the brickworks who came from London. She was the manager's secretary and she worked in his office. Oh, but she was a smart piece of goods, and the men never tired of discussing her. In the early twenties, distinctly pretty, with a mass of chestnut hair, pert manners and a wrist watch. Passing through the yards, she would sometimes chat with the men at the kilns, and in their dinner hour she would laugh and joke with them. Their estimate of her was not always expressed in very refined or flattering language. Old Ingleton, the time-keeper, swore she had given him the "glad-eye," but as one of his own eyes was glass, his confession did not carry great weight. She had never singled Caleb out for any particular attention although she was always friendly with him. The cataclysm came upon him quite suddenly one day in late September. He was digging a trench by a mound covered with nettles, and a few sunflowers. He rested on his spade and was enjoying the pleasant tranquillity of the scene, when the girl came round the corner and looked at him. She smiled and exclaimed:

"A lovely day, Mr. Fryatt!"

He instinctively touched his hat and said "Ay."

And that was the end of the conversation. But Caleb watched her walking up the narrow path toward the manager's shanty, and some restless fever stirred within him. She was unique. He had seen such women from a distance, smartly appalled, walking about the streets of London and Capetown, but he had always looked upon them as creatures of a different world from his own, and hardly given them a thought. But here was one smiling at him, speaking to him. After all, she was not so remote. She was a girl, indeed, a working girl, quite accessible and friendly. And what a lithesome, dainty figure! What an appealing pretty face! Those lips! Ugh! A large worm wriggled free from the side of the little trench, and quite unreasonably he cut it in half with his spade.

From that moment forward Caleb began to think of Agnes Fareham. Alas! He began to dream about her also. She was a note of bright and vivid colour in the drab monotony of his life. He began to lie in wait for her, to force his clumsy attentions upon her and she did not seem to resent it unduly. The affair became an obsession. His faculty for reasoning had never been considerable. In some dim way he felt that there was the solution of all those buried yearnings and thwarted desires which had accompanied him through life. Here was an explanation. He was content to be held by the experience, without formulating any plan or definite resolution. Whether the girl would ultimately succumb to his solicitations, whether she would go away with him, and if so how he was to manage to keep her; moreover, how he was to face the appalling cruelty of his own attitude toward Anne—all these questions he put behind him. For the moment they appeared immaterial to the blinding obsession. One day while still in this indeterminate mood he went home as usual to his midday dinner. As he dismounted his bicycle and leant it against the garden fence, Anne came out of the cottage and said:

“Caleb, there’s a gentleman to see you.”

He went inside and beheld a small keen-faced elderly man, who nodded to him and said:

“Mr. Caleb Fryatt?”

“Ay.”

The little man examined him closely.

“I will come straight to the business I have in hand. I am the head clerk of Rogers, Mason and Freeman, solicitors of Blaizing-Killstoke. You, I believe, are the only child of Stephen and Mary Fryatt, late of Cravenford?”

“Ay.”

“You may be aware that your father had a brother, named Leonard, in Nova Scotia?”

“I’ve heard tell on ’ee.”

“Your uncle died last year. He left a little property and no will. My principals are of opinion that you are the lawful legatee. They would be obliged if you would pay them a visit so that the matter may be fully determined. Here is my card.”

Caleb stared dully at the piece of pasteboard, but Anne who had entered the cottage just previously, asked to have the business explained to her.

Caleb shouted in her ear. Then she turned to the lawyer and said:

“And how much money did his Uncle Leonard leave? Do you know, sir?”

“Quite without prejudice, and entirely between ourselves, I believe it is a matter of approximately four thousand pounds.”

It took the whole of the afternoon for this news thoroughly to penetrate the skull of the fortunate legatee. Indeed, it was not till he had had a pint of beer at “The Green Man” on the way home that the full significance came home to him. It is to be regretted that after his supper he returned to “The Green Man,” and for the first time in his life Mr. Caleb Fryatt got drunk. He stood drinks lavishly and indiscriminately. He told everyone his news. The amount became a little distorted. It may have been due to the lawyer’s use of the word “approximately.” This orgy acted upon him disastrously. As he reeled up the village street, only one vision became clear to him. Agnes! He could take her away, buy her a mansion and smart frocks. He could take her to hotels and theatres in London. At the same time, he could settle money on Anne. He was a millionaire. The world belonged to him. With a tremendous effort he controlled his feet and voice when he reached the cottage, but he went to bed at once. In the morning he had a headache and Anne bound his head in damp linen handkerchiefs and brought him tea.

By Monday everyone on the countryside from Cravenford to Billows Weir knew that “Old Face,” the ugly man, known as the boy who murdered his father, had come in for a huge fortune left by an uncle in Canada. The first person he met in the brickworks on Monday was Agnes, who came up to him and held out her hand:

“I believe we are to congratulate you, Mr. Fryatt.”

He smiled at her foolishly and held her hand an unnecessarily long time. There was no doubt she had taken to him. She liked him. Could he stir her deeper emotion?

The weeks went by in a dream. He visited the lawyers. Everything was in order. They even offered to advance him money. He could not visualise the full dimensions of his fortune; neither had he the power to act upon it. He still went on at the brickworks and the cottage, listening to Anne’s sensible admonitions to invest the money in small amounts so as to have a nest egg for their old age. But he could not detach this miracle of wealth from the figure of Agnes. They had come together. They belonged to each other, fantastic phenomena jerking him violently out of the deep rut of his

existence. One day he went into the town and bought a gold locket, set with blue stones. He gave four pounds ten for it. He waited for Agnes that evening and gave it to her. He had been in an agony as to whether she would accept it, but to his delight she received it with gratitude and thanked him bewitchingly. This seemed to bind her to him indissolubly. A few evenings later he met her in the lane. There was no one about. Without a word he took her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers. She gasped and spluttered:

“Oh, Mr. Fryatt, please . . . no.”

But she wasn't angry. Oh, no, not really angry—just provocative, more alluring than ever. . . . They met frequently after that, in secret disused corners of the brick-field, in the lanes at night. He bought her more presents, and one Saturday they went secretly to a fair at Molesham and only returned by the last train. The men naturally began to get wind of this illicit courtship, but as far as he knew no rumour had penetrated the deafness of Anne. He was drifting desperately beyond care in either respect. Two months of this intensive worship and the madness was upon him. He said:

“You must come with me. We will run away.”

“Where, Caleb?”

“We'll go to London.”

“Where should we stay?”

“At swell hotels. We will have a carriage. I will buy frocks and jewels.”

The girl's eyes narrowed.

“What about your wife?”

“I'll make it all right. I'll settle some money on her.”

But Agnes was not so easily won. Oh dear, no! There were tears and emotion. You see, she was only a young and innocent girl. Suppose he deserted her? What assurance had she? This scheming and plotting went on for weeks. At length they came to an agreement. Agnes would go to London with him if he would first settle a thousand pounds upon her. It was very cheap at the price, and a fair and reasonable bargain. One Saturday they journeyed together to his lawyers at Blaizing-Killstoke. The deed was drawn up, and they both signed various papers. The elopement was fixed for the following Saturday. All the week Caleb walked like a man unconscious of his surroundings. The purposes of his life were to be fulfilled. True, he had odd moments of misgivings. He dared not think about Anne. Also at times he had gloomy forebodings concerning London hotels, how to behave,

whether the people would laugh at him, what clothes to wear, whether Agnes would quickly sicken of him. But still he had pledged himself. He jingled the money in his pocket. . . . His destiny.

Friday was a disastrous day. It was cold and damp, and to his disgust he awoke with a severe twinge of rheumatism in his left shoulder. It made him irritable and nervous all day. Agnes was very preoccupied. He had advanced her some money to buy frocks, and she went backward and forward to her lodgings with large cardboard boxes. He had selected the morrow, because Anne was going away to spend a few days with her father. In the afternoon his rheumatism became worse, and he became aware of the symptoms of a feverish chill. He left off work at his usual time and cycled home. The cottage was all in darkness. He lighted the lamp. Anne had left his supper ready for him on the tray. The little room looked neat and tidy. She had also left a note for him. He picked it up carelessly and held it under the lamp. This is what he read:

Caleb dear, I hear that you have made some money over to Agnes Fareham and that you are wishful to go away with her. My dear! I do not want to interfere with your happiness. I thowt I had been a good wife to you but you know best. I am goin to my father and I shall not come back. Please God you may be happy.

Your broking hearted wife,

ANNE.

Bless you dear for all you have been to me and the happiness you have give me.

And Caleb buried his face in his hands. Without touching his supper he carried the lamp into the bedroom and went to bed. Curse it! How his teeth were chattering! He would have liked a little brandy, but there was none in the cottage, and there was no one to go and fetch it. He wrapped himself up and rolled over, the interminable night began. What a weak fool he was! All the experiences and temptations of his life crowded upon him and tortured him. Idle dreams! Idle dreams! His shoulder ached insufferably. If Anne were here, she would rub it with that yellow oil. He could not rub his own shoulder and back. Then she would wrap it up in a thick shawl and say:

“Silly Billy, you must be careful of the damp.”

He could visualise her moving about the room, arranging the curtain so that there was no draught, stirring something in a cup, giving those little dexterous pokes to the bed clothes which meant so much, sitting placidly by

the window, his coarse woollen socks in her hand. She loved darning his socks . . . doing things for him, even all the unpleasant, ugly things of domestic life.

He ought to have some soup or gruel or something, but he could not be bothered to make it. He turned out the lamp. And all night long Caleb turned and fretted, and strangely enough he gave little thought to Agnes. She was now becoming the unreality, the vain fancy, a feather drifting on the ocean. She was nothing to him. She had no part in that deep consciousness, amongst whose folds he had sought so desperately to find inner relief. What was it? Where was it? Toward dawn he slept fitfully, struggling to keep awake on account of the disturbing dreams that crowded upon him. When things at last became visible the first thing he was aware of was an old shawl of his wife's on a nail by the door, and cap which she wore to do the housework in. The things became to him an emblem of the love she bore him, and truth came to him with the rising of the sun. Love—the deep secret her hand had sought; the love that struggles to endure through any conditions, the love that as far as human nature is concerned is permanent and indestructible. He observed its action upon his own career. His mother's love for his father, a love which he had so tragically misinterpreted. Later his love for his country, which had crept upon him across the years and whispered to him across the endless waste of waters. And lastly the love that existed between his wife and himself, a love that was so near and familiar to him that he could not always see it. He sighed and the dreams no longer worried him. It must have been some hours later that he awoke and made himself some tea. He was still shaky, and his shoulder hurt, so he went back to bed.

In the middle of the morning he heard the latch of the front door click, and his heart beat rapidly.

“She has come back,” he thought. He heard some one moving in the passage, his door opened, and on the threshold of the room stood—Agnes! It was queer that on observing her his first thought was with regard to his teeth. During the war he had lost three front teeth. A loving government had presented him with a plate and three false teeth which he always wore in daytime, but which at night, on Anne's advice, he always kept in a glass of water by the side of the bed. He stretched out his hand for the teeth, and then he felt that he would be ridiculous putting the plate in, so he left the matter alone. She advanced into the room, and neither of them spoke. It is difficult to know precisely what attitude Agnes had resolved to take, but the appearance and atmosphere of that room may have altered or modified it.

She merely grinned rather uncomfortably at Caleb. He could not have been an attractive sight. He had slept badly, and he had not washed or shaved. He was wearing a coarse woollen nightgown, and his three front teeth were missing. Perhaps it occurred to her abruptly that in the round of life one has to take the unshorn early morning with the gaily bedecked evening, and she was already wondering whether the combination was worth while. In any case she merely said:

“Well?”

And Caleb replied, “Hullo!”

They both looked a little ashamed then, and Agnes glanced out of the window as though dreading some one’s approach. As he did not speak further, she turned and said:

“You’re not coming then?”

He turned his face to the wall and answered “No.”

There was a definite expression of relief on the girl’s face. She was very smartly dressed in a tailormade coat and skirt. She edged toward the door. Then she said in a mildly querulous voice:

“I knew you’d back out of it.”

Caleb sat up and exclaimed feelingly:

“I’m sorry, Agnes.”

This seemed to quite appease her, and she said:

“Anything you want, Caleb, before I go?”

The man stared thoughtfully at the ceiling before replying:

“Yes; wait a minute, Agnes.”

He took a pencil and a sheet of paper, and wrote out a telegram addressed to his wife:

“Come back, dear, I want you.”

The girl took up the telegram and read it through thoughtfully. Then she once more edged toward the door. She fumbled with the latch. Suddenly she turned and said:

“That’ll be elevenpence.”

“Eh?”

“That’ll be elevenpence—for the telegram.”

He fumbled with his trousers on the chair by the side of the bed and produced a shilling.

“There, lass, I haven’t any change. Don’t bother about the penny.”

She took the shilling and went back to the door.

“Good-bye, Caleb.”

“Good-bye.”

When she had gone he thought it was rather queer of her to ask for the shilling. He had already given her a thousand pounds, and many frocks and presents. She might in any case have offered to give him the penny change. However, he soon forgot her in the fever of anxiety he was in as to the return of his wife. All day long no one came near the cottage. The day was wet, and a thick white mist drifted with the rain. He could not trouble to light the fire. He ate some bread and cheese at midday, and vainly tried to rub his shoulder with the oil. Soon after five it began to be dark again. He was in a terror of remorse and fear. Had he destroyed the lamp of his happiness? He buried his face in the pillow and groaned: “I didn’t understand! I didn’t understand!”

He began to feel so weak; he was losing sense of time. He awakened once with a start. The room seemed suddenly filled with an enveloping comfort. He held out his arms. He felt those wet cheeks pressed close to his. That voice so dear and familiar to him was whispering in his ear:

“Silly Billy, I knew ye would send for me.”

BURNEY'S LAUGH

After breakfast was a good time. Throughout the day there was no moment when his vitality rose to such heights as it did during the first puffs of that early cigar. He would stroll out then into the conservatory, and the bright colour of the azaleas would produce in him a strange excitement. His senses would seem sharpened, and he would move quickly between the flowers, and would discuss minor details of their culture with Benyon the gardener. Then he would stroll through the great spaces of his reception-rooms with his head bent forward. The huge Ming pot on its ebony stand would seem to him companionable and splendid, the Majolica plaques which he had bought at Padua would glow serenely. He would go up and feast his eyes on the Chinese lacquer cabinet on its finely-wrought gilt base; and his lips would quiver with a tense enjoyment as he lingered by the little carved Japanese ivories in the recess. Above all, he liked to stand near the wall and gaze at the Vandyke above the fireplace. It looked well in the early morning light, dignified and impressive.

All these things were his. He had fought for them in the arena of the commercial world. He had bought them in the teeth of opposition. And they expressed *him*, his sense of taste, his courage, his power, his relentless tenacity, the qualities that had raised him above his fellows to the position he held. The contemplation of them produced in him a curious vibrant exhilaration. Especially was this so in the early morning when he rose from the breakfast table and lighted his first cigar.

The great hall, too, satisfied his quivering senses. The walnut panelling shone serenely, and brass and pewter bore evidence that the silent staff whom his housekeeper controlled had done their work efficiently. It was early—barely nine o'clock—but he knew that in the library Crevace and Dilgeron, his private secretaries, would be fidgeting with papers and expecting him. He would keep them waiting another ten minutes while he gratified this clamorous proprietary sense. He would linger in the drawing-room, with its long, grey panels and splendid damask hangings, and touch caressingly the little groups of statuary. The unpolished satinwood furniture appealed to some special æsthetic appetite. It was an idea of his own. It seemed at once graceful and distinguished.

He seemed to have so little time during the rest of the day to feel these things. And if he had the time, the satisfaction did not seem the same, for

this was the hour when he felt most virile.

In the library the exultation that he had derived from these æsthetic pleasures would gradually diminish. It is true that Dilgerson had prepared the rough draft of his amendment to the new Peasant Allotment Bill, and it was an amendment he was intensely interested in, for if it passed it might lead to the overthrow of Chattisworth, and that would be a very desirable thing, but nevertheless his interests would flag.

He had a fleeting vision of a great triumph in the House, and himself the central figure. He settled down to discuss the details with Dilgerson. Dilgerson was a very remarkable person. He had a genius for putting his finger on the vital spot of a bill, and he had moreover an unfathomable memory. But gradually the discussion of involved financial details with Dilgerson would tire him. He would get restless and say, "Yes, yes. All right, Dilgerson. Put it your own way."

He turned aside to the table where Crevace, coughing nervously, was preparing some sixty odd letters for him to sign. A charming young man, Crevace, with gentle manners and a great fund of concentration. He was the second son of Emma Countess of Waddes. He had not the great abilities of Dilgerson, but he was conscientious, untiring, and infinitely ornamental.

He discussed the letters and a few social matters with Crevace, while Dilgerson prepared the despatch-case for the Cabinet meeting at twelve o'clock.

At half-past eleven a maid entered and brought him a raw egg beaten up with a little neat brandy, in accordance with custom.

He told her that Hervieu, the chauffeur, need not come for him. He would walk over to Downing Street with Mr. Dilgerson. As a matter of fact, there were still one or two points upon which he was not quite clear about the rights of rural committees. Dilgerson had made a special study of these questions. It was a great temptation to rely more and more on Dilgerson.

He enjoyed a Cabinet meeting. He felt more at home there than in the House. He liked the mixture of formality and urbanity with which the most important affairs were discussed. He liked to sit there and watch the faces of his fellow-ministers. They were clever, hard-headed men, men who like himself had climbed, and climbed, and climbed. They shared in common certain broad political principles, but he did not know what was at the back of any one of their minds. It amused him to listen to Brodray elaborating his theories about the Peasant Allotment Bill, and enunciating commendable

altruistic principles. He knew Brodray well. He was a good fellow, but he did not really believe what he was saying. He had another axe to grind, and he was using the Peasant Allotment Bill as a medium. The divagations of “procedure” were absorbing. It was on the broad back of “procedure,” that the interests of all were struggling to find a place. It was the old parliamentary hand who stood the best chance of finding a corner for his wares. The man who knew the ropes. He, too, had certain ambitions. . . .

It seemed strange to look back on. He had been in political affairs longer than he dare contemplate. Two distinct decades. He had seen much happen. He had seen youth and ambition ground to powder in the parliamentary machine. He had seen careers cut short by death or violent social scandal. Some men were very foolish, foolish and lacking in—moral fibre, that must be it. Moral fibre! the strength not to overstep the bounds, to keep passion and prejudice in restraint, like hounds upon a leash, until their veins become dried and atrophied, and they lack the desire to race before the wind. . . .

He had done that. And now he sat there in the sombre room among the rustling papers, and the greatest Minister of them all was speaking to him, asking his opinion, and listening attentively to his answers. He forced himself to a tense concentration on the issue. He spoke quietly but well. He remembered all the points that the excellent Dilgeron had coached him in. He was conscious of the room listening to him attentively. He knew they held the opinion that he was—safe, that he would do the best thing in the interest of the Party.

O’Bayne spoke after that, floridly, with wild dashes of Celtic fun, and they listened to him, and were amused but not impressed. O’Bayne, too, had an axe to grind, but he showed his hand too consciously. He did not know the ropes.

As the meeting broke up, Brodray came up to him and said:

“Oh, by the way, you know I’m dining with you to-night. May I bring my young nephew with me? He’s a sub, in town for a few days’ leave.”

Of course he smiled and said it would be delightful. What else could he say?

As a matter of fact he would rather not have had the young sub. He had arranged a small bachelors’ dinner—just eight of them—and he flattered himself he had arranged it rather skilfully. There was to be Brodray, and Nielson, the director of the biggest agricultural instrument works in the country, Lanyon the K.C., Lord Bowel of the Board of Trade, Tippins, a big

landowner from the North, Sir Andrew Griggs, the greatest living authority on the Land Laws (he had also written a book on “artificial manures”), and Sir Gregory Caste, director of the Museum of Applied Arts.

The latter, he felt, would be perhaps a little out of it with the rest, but he would help to emphasize his own aspect of social life, its irreproachable taste and patronage of the arts. It would be a very eclectic dinner-party, and one in which the fusion of the agricultural interests might tend to produce certain opinions and information of use in conducting the Peasant Allotment Bill, and a young red-faced sub dumped into the middle of it would be neither appropriate nor desirable. There was, however, nothing to be done. He and Brodray had always been great friends—that is to say, they had always worked hand in hand.

He rested in the afternoon, for as the years advanced he found this more and more essential. There were the strictest instructions left that under no circumstances was he to be disturbed till half-past four. In the meanwhile the egregious Dilgerson would cope with his affairs.

At half-past four he rose and bathed his face, and after drinking one cup of tea he rejoined his secretaries in the library. In his absence many matters had developed. There was a further accumulation of correspondence, and a neat typewritten list of telephone messages and applications for appointments. But there was no flurry about Dilgerson; everything was in order, and the papers arranged with methodical precision.

He lighted his second cigar of the day and sat down. The graceful head of Crevace was inclined over the papers, and the suave voice of Dilgerson was saying:

“I see, sir, that Chattisworth has been speaking up in Gaysfield. Our agent has written, he thinks it might be advisable for you to go up North and explain our attitude towards the Bill to your constituents. They must not be—er—neglected for long in these restless times.”

Yes, there was something satisfying in this. The sense of power, or rather the sense of being within the power focus, the person who understood, who knew what power meant, and yet was great enough to live outside it. Strange why to-day he should be so introspective, why things should appear so abstract! He had a curious feeling as though everything was slipping away, or as though he were seeing himself and his setting from a distance.

He gazed at Dilgerson with his square chin, and his neat moustache, deftly stowing papers into a file whilst he spoke. He momentarily envied

Dilgerson with his singular grip on life. He was so intense, so sure. . . .

“Yes . . . yes,” he said after a time, “we’d better go up there, Dilgerson. As you say, they get restless. You might draft me a rough summary of Chattisworth’s points. Let me know what you would suggest—precedents, historical parallels and so on. It is true; they so soon get restless.”

A feeling of apathy came to him after a time, and he left his secretaries and strolled out into the Mall. A fine rain was drifting from the south, and the tops of the winter trees seemed like a band of gauze veiling the buildings of Whitehall. He went into St. James’s Park and watched the pale lights from the Government Buildings. Some soldiers passed him, and a policeman touched his hat.

Usually these things moved him with a strange delight. They were the instruments of power, the symbols of the world he believed in. But to-night the vision of them only filled him with an unaccountable melancholy.

He suddenly remembered a day when he had strolled here with his wife twenty-five years ago. . . .

He passed his hand across his brow and tried to brush back a certain memory. But it would not be denied. It was a grey day like this. She had made some remark, something sentimental and—entirely meretricious. He remembered vividly that he had chided her at the time. One must not think like that; one must restrain and control these emotional impulses. They are retrograde, destroying. He had succeeded, risen to the position he held, because—he had always been master of himself.

After his wife’s death it had been easier to do this. His two daughters had married well, one to the Bishop of St. Lubin, and the other to Viscount Chesslebeach, a venerable but well-informed gentleman, who had been loyal to the Party. His son was now in India, holding a position of considerable responsibility. He was free, free to live and struggle for his great ambitions. He was fortunate in that respect; in fact, he had always been fortunate.

He made his way back across the muddy pathway of the Mall, imbued with a sudden uncontrollable desire for light and warmth.

Gales met him in the hall and relieved him of his coat. There was an undeniable sense of comfort and security about Gales. He glanced furtively at the ponderous figure of his head “man,” who had been with him now longer than he could remember. He muttered something about the inclemency of the weather, and it soothed him to note the ingratiating acquiescence of the servant, as though by addressing him he had conferred a

great benefit upon him. He heard the heavy breathing of Gales as he bustled away with his hat and coat, and then he warmed his hands by the fire, and strolled upstairs to dress.

As he entered his bedroom an indefinable feeling of dreariness came over him again. It was very silent there, and the well-modulated lights above the dressing-table revealed his gleaming silver brushes and the solid properties of the mahogany bed. He looked at the fire and lighted a cigarette, a very unusual habit for him. Then he went into his dressing-room and noted his clothes all neatly laid out for him, and the brass can of hot-water wrapped in the folds of a rough towel. The door half-open revealed the silver rails and taps in the bathroom, and a very low hum of sound suggested a distant power station or the well-oiled machinery of a lift. It was all wonderfully ordered, wonderfully co-ordinated.

He strolled from one room to the other on the thick pile carpet, trying to thrust back the waves of dejection that threatened to envelop him.

At last he threw his cigarette away, and, disrobing himself, he washed and dressed.

He felt better then, a little more alert and interested. He turned down the light and went downstairs. He felt suddenly curiously nervous and apprehensive about the dinner-party. He went into the dining-room and found Gales instructing a new butler in the subtleties of his profession. The table was laid for nine, and indeed looked worthy of Gales and of himself. There was a certain austerity and distinction about the three bowls of red tulips that were placed at intervals along it, and the old silver and the Nuremberg glasses, and the cunning arrangements of concealed lights emphasised his own sure taste and discrimination. Nevertheless, he felt nervous. He fussed about the table, and took the champagne-bottles from their ice beds to satisfy himself that Gales had brought up the right year. He fidgeted with one of the typewritten menu-cards, and told Gales that on a previous occasion Fouchet had overdone the Lucca oil in the Hollandaise. He must speak to him. He was not sure that Fouchet was not going off. His eyesight was failing, or he was becoming careless. The straw potatoes served with the pheasant had been cut too thick, and his savouries were apt to be too dry. Gales listened to these criticisms with a lugubrious sympathy, and, bowing, he left the room to convey them to the *chef*.

After that he retired to the small Japanese room on the ground floor. When he had a bachelor party he preferred to receive his guests there. There was something about the black walls, and the grotesquely carved fireplace,

and the heavily timbered ceiling, also carved and painted dark red, that appealed to his sense of appropriateness in a men's dinner-party. It was essentially a man's room, a little foreboding and bizarre. It symbolised also his appreciation of a race who were above all things clever; clever and patient, industrious, æsthetic, with some quality that excited the mystic tendencies of the cultivated Westerner.

He had not long to wait before two of his guests arrived—Sir Gregory Caste and Lanyon the K.C. They had met in the cloak-room, and, having previously made each other's acquaintance at an hotel at Baden-Baden, were discussing the medical values of rival Bavarian springs. It was a subject on which he himself was no mean authority. The conversation had not progressed far before Lord Bowel was shown in. He was a very big man with a heavy dome of a head, large pathetic eyes and a thick grey beard. He shook hands solemnly without any gleam of welcome, and immediately gave an account of an incurable disease from which his sister was suffering.

Tippins then arrived, a square-headed Northcountryman, who did not speak all the evening except in self-defence, and he was followed by Sir Andrew Griggs and Nielson. Sir Andrew was well into the eighties, and Nielson was a thin, keen-faced man with very thick glasses. There was a considerable interval before Brodray arrived with his nephew. They were at least ten minutes late, and Brodray was very profuse with apologies.

It was curious that the young man was almost precisely as he had pictured him. He was just a red-faced boy in khaki. He fancied that Brodray introduced him as "Lieutenant Burney," but he was not sure. It was in any case some such name, something ordinary and insignificant.

They then all adjourned to the dining-room without breaking the general level of their conversation, and sat down.

On his right he had Lord Bowel, and on his left Sir Andrew Griggs. Brodray faced him with Sir Gregory Caste on his right and his nephew on the left. Lanyon sat next to the lieutenant, and Nielson and Tuppins occupied the intervening spaces. He had thought this arrangement out with considerable care.

It was not until the sherry and caviare had fulfilled their destiny that Lord Bowel managed to complete the full description of his sister's disease. He spoke very slowly and laboriously, and moved his beard with a curious rotary movement as he masticated his food.

Sir Andrew Griggs then managed to break into the conversation with a dissertation on the horrors of being ill in a foreign hotel. He had once been suddenly seized with a serious internal trouble, and had had to undergo an operation in an hotel in Zermatt. It was very trying, and the hotel people were very unreasonable.

Brodray sang the praises of a new American osteopath during the removal of the soup plates, and the salmon found the director of the National Museum of Applied Arts dilating upon the virtues of grape-fruit as a breakfast food.

The host was in no hurry. He knew that the course of events would be bound to draw the conversation into channels connected with matters that were of moment to the construction of the Peasant Allotment Bill.

What more natural than that the virtues of grape-fruit should lead to the virtues of fresh air and exercise, and then obviously to horse-flesh. At the first glass of champagne, the company were already in the country. Horses and dogs! Ah! how difficult to eliminate them from the conversation of a party of representative Englishmen!

Lord Bowel was the first to express his views upon the Bill. The conversation led to it quite naturally at the arrival of the pheasant. They were better cooked to-night, and the potatoes were thinner, more refined.

He watched the curious movement of Lord Bowel's beard as he bit the pheasant, and said in his sepulchral voice:

"The Groynes amendment will in my opinion inflict a grave injustice on the agricultural classes. You may remember that in Gangway's Rural Housings Bill in eighteen ninety-five, Lord Pennefy, who was then on the Treasury Bench, said . . ."

The ball had started. He had a curious feeling that he wished Dilgerson were there. Dilgerson had such a remarkable memory. He particularly wanted to get Lanyon's views. Lanyon had a great reputation among the people who knew. Unfortunately he was not a good Party man. They said of him that he had a mind like a double-edged sword. He was keen, analytical, and recondite; and he did not mind whom he struck. The lawyer was listening to Lord Bowel intently. His skin was dry and cracked into a thousand little crevices, his cheek-bones stood out, and his cold, abstract eyes were gazing through his rimless pince-nez at his empty glass. For he did not drink.

Lord Bowel dwelt at great length on the Bill's unfortunate attitude towards the agricultural labourer, and at even greater length on the probable result of that attitude upon the agricultural labourer at the polls. When he mentioned the Party he sank his voice to a lower key, and spoke almost humanly.

The pheasants had disappeared, and little quails in aspic had quivered tremulously in the centre of large plates surrounded by a vegetable salad, the secret of which he himself had discovered when living in Vienna, before Lanyon entered the arena with a cryptic utterance, quoting from an Act of James II. He spoke harshly and incisively, like a judge arraigning a criminal. It was very interesting, for the host became aware that as Lanyon proceeded he was not speaking from conviction. He had heard that Lanyon had ambitions of a certain legal position. The Bill would not affect it one way or the other, but his reputation as a dialectician must be established beyond question. He had his game to play, too.

Nielson broke in and seemed to the host to agree with Lord Bowel in an almost extravagant manner. He, too, spoke feelingly when the Party was the theme. It was said that Lord Bowel was the power behind the Chief. He certainly exerted a great influence in the selection of office-holders. Men whose political reputation was not made invariably agreed with Lord Bowel, in any case before his face.

The game pursued its normal course, the even tenor of the men's voices sounded one long drone of abstract passionless sound. Under the influence of the good wine, and the solemn procession of cunningly arranged foods, they sank into a detached unity of expression. They looked at each other tolerantly, listening for signs and omens, and measuring the value of each other's remarks. There was no enthusiasm, no passion, nothing to belie the suave and cultivated accents of their voices. They seemed perhaps unreal to each other, merely a segregation of ideas meeting in a mirage, without prejudice, or bias, or any great desire for personal expression.

It was as the savoury was being removed that young Burney laughed. The host did not catch what it was that made him laugh, neither did he ever know. It was probably some mildly humorous remark of Tippins. But it came crashing through the room like the reel of pipes in a desert. It was not a boisterously loud laugh, but it was loud enough to rise above the general din. It was the quality of it that seemed to rend the air like an electric thrill. It was clear, mellow, vibrant, and amazingly free. It rang out with an unrestrained vibrato of enjoyment. It hung in the air and satisfied its purpose; it seemed to lash the walls of the room and hurl its message

defiantly at the ceiling. It could not be subdued, and it could never be forgotten. It was an amazing laugh. It was like the wind on the moors, or the crash of great high waves breaking on a rock, something that had been imprisoned and suddenly breaks free and rides serenely to its end. . . .

“And the saintly Cybeline”—

It was curious. Why, immediately he heard the young man’s laugh, did this line occur to him? Gales was standing by the sideboard looking flustered and perturbed. People did not laugh in the presence of Gales. He had a faculty of discouraging any flippant digressions from the dignity of politics or dinner. Lanyon was looking in the young man’s direction, his keen eyes surveying the wine-glasses set there.

Old Sir Andrew looked at him also and smiled dimly; but, surprisingly enough, the others hardly seemed to have noticed the laugh.

Lord Bowel was saying:

“If, therefore, we are prepared to accept this crisis which the Opposition—with a singular lack of insight, in my opinion—seem disposed to precipitate upon the country, we shall be—er—lacking in loyalty not only to the—er—Constitution, but to ourselves, and I said to the Chief on Wednesday . . .”

“And the saintly Cybeline”—

What on earth did it mean? What was Lord Bowel talking about? Why did the young man’s laugh still seem to be ringing round the room? He looked at him, the boy was talking animatedly to Brodray and grinning; he thought he caught something about “we didn’t sleep under cover for a fortnight.” He had not been drinking—certainly not to excess. No one had had sherry except the silent Tippins. He might have had three glasses of champagne. It certainly didn’t account for the laugh; besides, it was not that sort of laugh.

“There was something, something, something,
And the something will entwine,
And the something, something, something
With the saintly Cybeline.”

A shadowy vision glimmered past the finger-bowl in front of him. He remembered now—it was in Frodsee’s room at Magdalen. There was a tall chap, with curly dark hair, sitting on Frodsee’s table, swinging his legs. He was in “shorts,” and his bare knees and stockings were splashed with mud. Frodsee himself was standing by the window, declaiming his ridiculous jingle. And there was a third boy there who was laughing uncontrollably.

“With the saintly Cybeline.”

He wished he could remember the rest of the words. The sun was streaming through the window, and the young willows were whispering above the river. The jingle finished and they all laughed, and one laugh rang out above the rest. Strange that it should all come rushing back to him at that moment—the free ring of his own laughter across the years! He had something then, he couldn't think what it was, something that he had since lost.

“Even if in the end we have to sacrifice some of these minor principles, I am inclined to think, sir, that the broader issues will be better served. . . . The interests of the Party are interdependent. . . .”

Nielson was speaking, nervously twisting the cigar in his mouth.

He made a desperate plunge to find his place in the flow of this desultory discussion. He mumbled some inchoate remark upon the Land Laws. It was not in any way germane to what had just been said, and he knew it, only he wanted them to draw him back among them, to protect him from the flood of perverse memories that strove to increase his melancholy.

But the memory of that laugh unnerved him. He could not concentrate. He longed once more for Dilgerson, or for some power that would give him a grip upon his concrete existence. He rose from the table and led his guests back into the Japanese room. He lighted a cigar, and, contrary to his custom, he indulged in a liqueur. His guests formed themselves into little groups, and he hovered between them, afraid to remain with either long, in case they should discover his horror, that in that hour—all through a boy's laugh—he had lost the power to concentrate.

Perhaps something in his manner conveyed itself to his guests, for they broke up early. First old Griggs, then Nielson, then Brodray, and the boy. He shook the boy's hand, but made no comment.

Lanyon took his departure alone, and Tippins followed. Lord Bowel seemed the only one disposed to remain. He sank back in an easy chair and talked interminably, unconscious of any psychological change in the atmosphere of the room. He found a patient listener in Gregory Caste, to whom the discussions of a Government official were as balm.

The host moved restlessly, blinking at his two remaining guests. Sometimes he would sit furtively on the edge of a chair and listen, and nod his head, and say, “Yes . . . yes, I quite agree. Yes, that is so.”

Then he would rise, and walk to the fireplace and move some object an inch or two from the position in which it was placed, and then move it back

again. He drank a glass of lemon-water, a row of which were placed on a silver tray by the wall, and smoked another cigarette. Then the instinct of common courtesy prompted him once more to join his two remaining guests. He looked closely at Lord Bowel's heavy cheeks, and a curious feeling of disgust came over him. The voice of the Board of Trade official boomed on luxuriously about the arts of Eastern people, about ceramics, about the diseases of bees, the iniquity of licensing restrictions, the influence of Chaldean teaching on modern theology, on the best hotel in Paris, on the vacillating character of the principal leaders of the Opposition. There seemed no end to the variety of theme, and no break in the dull monotony of voice.

It must have been well after midnight that Lord Bowel suddenly sighed heavily and rose. He took his host's hand and said gloomily:

"It has been a most delightful evening."

He watched the two men pass out into the hall, and saw Gales come ponderously forward and help them with their coats. Then he drew back and looked into the fire. He pressed his hand to his brow. He had not a headache, but he felt peculiarly exhausted, as though he had been through some great strain. In the fire he saw again the nodding heads of willows and the young clouds scudding before the wind. . . . He started. He could not understand; he could have sworn that at that moment he again heard someone laugh. He looked round to convince himself that he was alone in the room. He shivered and stood up. He was not well. He was getting old. A time comes to all men — Anyway, he had not been a failure. He had succeeded, in fact, beyond his wildest dreams. His name was known to everyone in England. His features even graced the pages of the satiric journals. He was the "safe" man of the Party. One paper had nicknamed him "Trumps," the safest card in the pack. It was something to have achieved this, even if—he had sacrificed things, impulses, convictions, passions, the fierce joy of expressing his primitive self. Perhaps in the process he had lost something.

Ah, God! He wished the young man had not laughed.

There was a gentle tap on the door, and Gales came in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" he murmured softly.

"It's all right. I'm going to bed."

He rose weakly from the chair and went upstairs. Once more in the bedroom, the silence tormented him. The furniture seemed no longer his own, no longer an expression of himself, but a cold, frigid statement of dead

conformity. He touched the bed, and then walked up and down. What could he do? He had no power to combat the strange terrors of remorse that flooded him. He sat there silently waiting for the mood to pass. He knew that if he struggled it *would* pass. He would be himself again. It was all so foolish, so unworthy of him. He kept saying that to himself, but underneath it all something else seemed stirring, something that went to the roots of his being and shook him violently.

He waited there a long time, till the house seemed given over to the embraces of the night, then he stealthily crept downstairs again. It was all in darkness. He turned on the light in the hall and dining-room. He wandered to his accustomed chair at the dining-table and huddled into it. He struggled to piece together the memories of days of freedom and splendour, when he had sacrificed nothing, when life was an open book.

He visualised little incidents of his childhood and schooldays, but they seemed trivial and without significance or humour.

Ah, God! if he could laugh!

He started suddenly at the sound of someone moving in the hall. He knew instinctively it would be Gales. He jumped up. He did not want his loyal retainer to think him a fool. It would be the most terrible thing of all to appear ridiculous to Gales. He walked round the room nervously peering at the floor.

Gales blinked at him. He was in a dressing-gown, and he mumbled:

“I beg your pardon, sir?”

He glanced at Gales but said nothing. He continued searching the floor. Gales advanced into the room and coughed, and looked at him curiously. He had never known Gales look at him before in quite that way. He felt suddenly angry with the servant and wanted to get rid of him, but at the same time he was self-conscious and afraid. He was aware of the level tones of Gales’s voice murmuring:

“Excuse me, sir, may I help you? Have you lost anything? Can I——”

The horror came home to him with increased violence as he glanced at the puffy cheeks of the butler. He felt that he could not endure him for another moment. He almost ran to the door, calling out in a harsh voice as he did so:

“Yes . . . yes. I’ve lost something.”

He brushed past the butler, his cheeks hot and dry, and his eyes blazing with an unforgiving anger. He did not turn again, but hurried away, like an animal that is ashamed to be seen, and ran whimpering upstairs to his bedroom.

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH

Reuben and his brother Isaac went trudging across the wet grass on their way back from cousin Hermann's funeral. A cold penetrating rain was falling, and suddenly Reuben emitted a loud sneeze, followed by a cough.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Just what Rebecca warned me about! These confounded funerals!"

As though in fraternal sympathy Isaac also suddenly sneezed and coughed, and answered: "Beathly!"

Before reaching the cemetery gates it was obvious that both brothers had caught cold at the funeral. They were sneezing and coughing for all they were worth. Outside the gates stood an enormous car, the outside shaped like a bladder, the inside upholstered like a mannequin parlour. It belonged to Reuben. I must mention at this point that in appearance the brothers were very much alike, and in their almost identical mourning clothes there was nothing to betoken the fact that whereas Isaac was a poor man Reuben was enormously rich. Isaac owned a small stationer's shop in Notting Hill and he lived above the premises with his wife and five young children. The business just paid its way, and the family seemed quite comfortable and satisfied.

Reuben had started out in some business in connection with corsets, but he had branched out into other lines, and was now so rich as to be notorious wherever men foregathered in search of wealth or success. In fact, one of the political parties, feeling presumably that some recognition should be paid to such a lot of money as all that, had presented him with a knighthood. He was now Sir Reuben.

"Come on," said Sir Reuben at the cemetery gates. "I'll drop you."

I'm afraid I must again break off to do a little moralising. Oh, you who are rich and have large cars, don't go in for "dropping" people. Either leave them alone or take them right home to their doors. The few extra minutes makes little difference to you, but you have no idea what a difference it makes to your temporary guest. After travelling so luxuriously it spoils all the pleasure to have to get out and walk, or scramble on to a 'bus for the last part of your journey. Sir Reuben was by nature a "dropper." Kind-hearted and well meaning, he was all in favour of generosity up to the point where it didn't interfere with his own comforts and convenience. And so he

“dropped” his brother Isaac near the Marble Arch and left him to make his way home as best he might, while he himself rolled on to his pseudo-Italian palace in Kensington.

It must not be imagined from this that Reuben did not love his brother Isaac. He did, but his mind was very preoccupied with all this coughing and sneezing. He detested illness and discomfort. Moreover, he detested and dreaded the idea of death. So one may say that when he dropped his brother at the Marble Arch he dropped him also from his mind for some time to come. Arrived in his own noble hall he called out for his wife, but as she did not respond at once he clapped his hands. (This was a trick which found great disfavour in the eyes of the head butler, who, however, having a delicate wife and two children, was not in a position to protest.) Then Rebecca came. She was a good wife, and she bustled him to bed, gave him two hot water bottles, and telephoned to Sir Angus McHeath, their family physician. The latter arrived two hours later. He came armed with stethoscopes, tubes, and mysterious gadgets. He took the patient’s pulse, respiration, temperature, blood-pressure, and other things. He said: “Ah!” and “H’m!” a number of times. Then he sent for Rebecca and said: “I think we had better send for a night nurse. This is a very sharp attack.” And he mumbled something that sounded like Latin. Reuben had a bad night, worrying about his illness, and when he nearly fell asleep the night nurse would come and administer a powder. The next morning Sir Angus arrived early and a day nurse was requisitioned. Sir Angus made a more prolonged examination. He appeared disturbed and more mysterious than ever. At last he said: “I don’t like the look of that uvula at all, Sir Reuben. I think if you don’t object I should like my friend Sir Alan Blaikie to have a look at it.”

Sir Reuben, who was very frightened, nodded his head, and said: “Yes, yes.” Sir Alan came that same afternoon. He also made an exhaustive examination, but after a consultation with Sir Angus it appeared that the root of the trouble was not in the uvula, but in the larynx. Now there was only one man in London who really understood the larynx, and that was Sir James Baird McHoick. Fortunately Sir James was in town and he managed to spare time for a visit the next morning. After his examination he and Sir Angus and Sir Alan (Good old Scotland!) held a consultation. It lasted an hour. At the end of that time Sir Angus came back to Sir Reuben. He said they were of opinion that a “teeny-weeny” operation on the throat would be advisable. Quite a slight one, but they were anxious to avoid all risks. The small eyes of the patient glowed as he muttered: “Yes, yes. Avoid all risks.” In the meantime, continued Sir Angus, there was just a shade of uncertainty as to what extent the lung might be affected, and he would like his friend Sir

Bryan Buggesley to just go over it. “Yes, yes,” said Reuben. The lung proved to be quite sound, but the next day Sir James Baird McHoick arrived, accompanied by Sir Angus and also by Dr. Hector Brown-Browne McIntosh, who was said to be the best anæsthetist in London. And the “teeny-weeny” operation was performed quite successfully. (The “teeny-weeny” account for same followed in the course of a few posts.) And Reuben recovered, and when he was well enough to sit up, Sir Angus came and discussed climates. “Well, now, I think, Sir Reuben, a month at Las Palmas or Teneriffe would set you up properly.” In the end they compromised with Madeira, and Reuben went off with his beloved Rebecca and spent a month at Funchal. And Reuben sat blinking in the sun, thinking what a lot of money he might be making were he in England.

And then one day they returned, and the morning after their arrival Reuben went down to business as usual. He left early in the afternoon as the doctor advised him. Driving back home he suddenly remembered his brother Isaac. Lordy! Lordy! how he had forgotten Isaac! The day of Hermann’s funeral came back to him, and he and Isaac tramping across the grass, both coughing and sneezing. They were both apparently in a similar condition. What had happened to Isaac? Reuben at that moment realised that he loved his brother. He called through the speaking tube and told the chauffeur to go to an address in Notting Hill. Suppose—suppose Isaac were dead! *He* had no money to hire expensive doctors or to visit sunny climes. Oh, what had happened to Isaac? A bell rang crazily as he entered the shop, and the assistant, Meyers, who recognised him, smiled and ushered him into the back parlour. And Isaac came, followed by his wife Emma, both looking quite well and smiling friendly. “Well, well, Reuben?” “Well, well, Isaac?” They talked of indifferent things for some moments, and then Reuben said:

“You remember the day of Hermann’s funeral, Isaac? and how we both coughed and sneezed?” “Why, I should think I do,” answered Isaac. “I came home feeling dreadful, dreadful. And Emma pushed a spoon into my mouth and said, ‘Why, Isaac, you’ve got a relaxed throat!’ ”

“Yes, and then what did you do?” asked Reuben.

“Oh, Emma sent me to bed, put on a cold water compress, gave me a stiff whisky toddy, and I was all right the next day.”

Oh, Holy Fire and Water! Jiminy-Piminy! Reuben stared at his plump hands resting on his knees. Unreason and unfairness everywhere! A cold water compress! Oh, Lordy, Lordy! All right the next morning! Figures flashed through Reuben’s mind. Specialists, nurses, the operation, the trip to

Madeira, somewhere round about twelve hundred pounds—apart from losses in business through absence. Unreason and unfairness! A cold water compress, indeed! Someone was speaking to him. He looked up to see Emma's shining face.

“You'll stay and have a cup of tea, Reuben?”

He nodded his head vigorously several times. Not that he wanted tea; he never touched the stuff. The room smelt faintly of cooking and carpet soap. Somewhere upstairs children were making an infernal noise. But he didn't want to go. He felt at that moment that, as it were, he might learn something from these people, that indeed he might *gain* something.

A cold water compress, indeed! Oh, Lordy, Lordy!

TWO OF THOSE WOMEN

When travelling on the continent one must always be impressed, I think, by curious types of Englishwomen whom one never sees in their own country. One regards the French caricaturists' impression of the Englishwomen as a piece of absurd extravagance until one joins the Paris express at Charing Cross or Victoria. Very often they are middle-aged or quite elderly, and they go about singly, or in pairs, or sometimes in a party of three or four, like flocks of drab swallows. There is something terribly pathetic in their demeanour, particularly when one begins to realise the fact that they are not tourists, but hotel habituées. For there is a difference. The tourist is there temporarily for pleasure or sight-seeing, but the hotel habituée is a permanent, tragic, and often inexplicable figure. All over the South of France and Italy particularly there are thousands of these women staying at pensions and small hotels, drifting from place to place, rudderless, unwanted, and patently unhappy. They have the atmosphere of exiles, as of people who have committed some crime in their own country, and dare not return. And in many cases the crime that they have committed is, I suspect, the unpardonable crime of poverty. Women who have held some kind of social position in their own country, and become impoverished, develop the not unreasonable idea that they can live more cheaply, and with more dignity in a foreign hotel. Some are exiled for reasons or illusions of health, or because some one has disappointed them or broken their hearts. These women in any case never give the impression that their mode of life is an entirely voluntary one. Although they may assume a perfunctory interest in the life and activities of the place of their sojourn, I have noticed that their chief concern is invariably—the next mail from England.

The story that I am going to tell is about two such women, and if I appear as a rather unscrupulous eavesdropper, you must please understand that I was a very unwilling one. In fact, I derived no actual enjoyment from it at all.

The accommodation in the little Hotel Beau-sejour at Antibes is very limited. I was trying to write something at the only writing table in the lounge, when two of these women—as I will call them—came along and seated themselves opposite me, and began to talk in languid voices.

Now I don't know what your powers of concentration are, but personally whenever I hear people talking I am bound to listen to what they say,

however banal and trivial it may be. On this occasion I honestly did try to concentrate for a time, but their conversation soon usurped my entire attention. I realised that it was going to be no good, and so I drifted into the dishonest but popular habit of drawing diagrams on the back of hotel envelopes.

One of these women was about sixty, the other could hardly have been thirty, and they were obviously strangers to each other. But they had one thing in common. It might be called a kind of soul-weariness. Both were tired and bored, existing only in reminiscences. And it became very apparent that neither wanted to listen to the other. The old lady wanted to talk about her son. The younger one wanted to talk about some other man, and having missed the opening sentences I could not gather at first whether it was her brother, her lover, or her husband. But I could not help being impressed by the impatient attitude of either, while the other was speaking. They kept on interjecting: “Yes, yes. No. Really! Fancy! and the way they said it showed that neither had taken in a word of what the other had said.

“I shall never forget the pranks he used to play at Bolsover House School,” the elder woman was saying. “There was a Euclid and gymnastic master there none of the boys liked . . . what was his name? I have forgotten. And there was a Miss Beaswyck, the matron, a very prim and severe person, who always wore black kid gloves. One day she annoyed Georgie very much. I have forgotten why. And Mr. Raynes—yes, that was his name, funny how it comes to you when you’re telling a story, and not trying to remember—well, he had punished Georgie for not doing his home work. When Mr. Raynes went to bed that night he found Miss Beaswyck’s black kid gloves, filled with cold porridge, in his bed. And Miss Beaswyck found Mr. Raynes boxing gloves filled with cold porridge in *her* bed. Oh dear! there was a to-do!”

“Really! how amusing!” said the younger woman, without enthusiasm. “Well, it happened in the very early spring . . .”

“Of course, where Georgie was so splendid was, he confessed. He confessed simply because the master suspected one of the other boys, and although nothing could be proved, he couldn’t bear the idea of the other boy living under this eternal stigma.”

“Quite right,” said the younger woman. “There are so few people with any sense of altruism. Now when I first met Peter, I was coming off duty at the base hospital at Amiens. We had had a terrible thirty-six hours. I was feeling awful—done up and finished. I must have looked awful. It was just

after dawn. In the courtyard I suddenly felt my knees sagging. I was talking to an orderly, when I heard a voice say ‘Can’t you see she’s going to faint?’ Before I did faint, I just had time to glimpse a pair of deep blue eyes, and the kindest face I have ever seen. He carried me somewhere. He never asked my name. He just did the kind thing and went away——”

“Ah, yes, my dear, there were some wonderful men in the War. Some vile, some sublime. My son, for instance. Ah, yes, we women. . . . We women. . . . It was wicked of me, I suppose, but oh, how I used to pray that it would be over before my Georgie came of age! Oh, why couldn’t they have come to some arrangement!”

“I know. I believe we women who . . . who had some one in it we loved all felt that. Of course, I did see him again, otherwise, I shouldn’t be telling you all this . . .”

The elder woman uttered a deep sigh.

“We were so helpless though. Georgie never told me. He joined up a year before he was qualified, as a *private*, mind you! a private! and to think that my uncle commanded a brigade in the South African War! Of course he was such a splendid boy. He stood nearly six feet when he was eighteen. He looked every inch an officer even in his Tommy’s uniform. A lot of the others used instinctively to call him ‘Sir.’ He wrote me such lovely letters, so cheerful, so gay, even when he was down with fever in those dreadful swamps in Greece. He used to write home about—oh, about everything except the war. It was just as though he were more interested in our little doings at Battlinghurst than he was in—in himself and the war.”

“Yes, yes,” said the younger woman wearily. “I met Peter a few days later quite by chance in a narrow street near the railway station. He walked straight up to me and gravely asked me how I was. I was amazed that he remembered me. He looked, in the curious outfit they used to wear in the trenches, like one of those mediæval knights. He told me he was going up to the front line in two hours’ time. We had only a few hurried words and then he went.”

The elder woman clicked her tongue with what was meant to be a display of sympathy and interest, but her aged and shortsighted eyes were elsewhere.

“Games! that was what he was so good at. Cricket, football, all those things. They said there were several colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge anxious to have him because he could run a hundred yards in—ten minutes,

was it? and he could knock anybody over at football. And yet the wonderful thing was he was so gentle with it all. He wouldn't hurt a fly if he could help it. Of course he got his commission, my dear, did I tell you?"

I saw on the face of the younger woman a sudden expression of utter disgust and annoyance. She was, I am sure, thinking: "Oh, you tedious old fool! What do I care about your ridiculous son! Don't you understand I'm trying to tell you about Peter. Peter! you know, my Peter, the most wonderful person in the world."

The old lady was continuing:

"It seems strange to me, my dear, that after all these years, that part of it seems unreal. I can remember very little about it. Nothing at all about names and places and regiments and all those things. It was just a terrible nightmare coming between me and Georgie. When I think of him it is always of him when he was a baby or a boy. Everything, everything, I remember everything of those early days."

The expression of the younger woman suggested: What was the interest of a baby and a schoolboy compared with the interest of a young man in the first flush of virile manhood? She fidgetted in her chair, and there was a silence. The two of them seemed to fall apart and forget each other. After a pause they drifted together again like migratory birds on a long flight. Strangely enough, it was the elder woman who seemed first conscious of their need for some kind of communion. Perhaps her conscience stabbed her that she had occupied too much of the conversation. She said hesitatingly:

"Did you marry this—did you marry the young man, my dear?"

It was evident that the question moved the younger woman profoundly.

She put her hand to her throat, and whispered almost inaudibly:

"No."

Then controlling herself with an effort she continued:

"No, no, no. But you may guess the reason."

"He was killed?"

The younger woman shook her head, and her voice shaking with tears, said:

"I do not know. In the war it was so easy to lose touch with people. We only met four times. But he swore that he loved me at our last meeting. God knows I loved him. Soon after he went I developed typhoid fever. I was

terribly ill and sent to England. When I recovered I could find no trace of him. Whether he had been killed or sent to another front, perhaps killed there, perhaps married to someone else . . . I don't know, I tell you, I don't know. I shall never know. It was more than ten years ago this coming April, when the chestnut trees were blossoming along the banks of the Canal . . . I was only a girl then . . . oh, my God!"

She was trembling from the effect of this little outbreak, but in the pause she seemed to realise that it was she who had been monopolising the conversation. It was comforting to have *anyone* to tell all this to, you could see. And after all, the poor old lady had lost her son. Could it be as terrible to lose a son as a lover? Controlling herself she said:

"Where was your boy killed?"

The older woman was apparently reacting to this emotional display. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, and her tongue was beating a little tattoo between her lips. She did not answer the question.

"That dreadful uncertainty!" she suddenly exclaimed, "how it has eaten me up. Men have never quite known what it means. Why do they have these wars? Why can't they come to some arrangement, I say? You are young, my dear. You may yet have a son, and pour out all your substance into making him a man. And when he has arrived at that . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders helplessly, and the younger woman said:

"No, I shall never have a son. I could never, never, love anyone but Peter."

It was quite apparent that during the last few minutes the women had been drawn more closely together. A link was formed by their common grief. Neither of them was any longer entirely preoccupied with her individual trouble. The younger woman repeated her question:

"Where was your boy killed, Mrs.—er—?"

In her effort to appear interested she was handicapped by not knowing her companion's name, and she plainly did not like to address her as she herself was addressed as "my dear." What did it matter? They had drifted together, as they would drift apart. A name or a term meant nothing. Then the elder woman made a remark which surprised me:

"My son was not killed. He is still alive."

I think this interested me more than it did the younger woman. Indeed, her brow puckered into a little perplexed frown, as though she thought that

the other had not been quite playing the game. Why all this extravagant grief if she had not lost the boy after all? What was the old woman making this fuss about? The latter was continuing:

“He was captured by the Turks, you know. Did I tell you? Was it the Turks or the Arabs? some of those dark people, anyway, over there . . .”

She made a vague gesture in the direction of the North Pole.

“Georgie was two and a half years in one of their foul prisons. Ah! how vile it is that a man should be sent to prison for merely serving his country! Oh, and the conditions of it, the misery, the torture, the anguish! No, I think for part of the time it was a Russian prison. I can’t remember all that. I was so distracted. He lost an eye, a leg, and memory to a large extent. He had fever, I know. He hardly told us anything. And when in the end he came back, everything about him seemed to be lost. All his youth, and spirits. He hardly seemed to remember or care for me. Before he went out he was engaged to Millicent Brander, our vicar’s daughter, as nice a girl as you could wish to meet. He would have nothing to do with her. And she was quite willing to marry him in spite of his missing eye, and leg, and memory. In delirious moments he swore he loved some other woman he had met on the Continent. I’m not sure it wasn’t other women—vague names he mumbled. Absurd, of course, it all was. The doctors tried to persuade me that he would get right. He was chock full of illusions and panics. . . . But eight years have passed, and he is little better. He takes little interest in anything except carpentry, and flowers, and keeping bees.”

“Where does he live?”

“At present he is in Switzerland. Someone persuaded me, I’ve forgotten who. He’s staying with one of these new German doctors, they make so much fuss about these days. You know, what do they call it? men who treat the mind. I don’t believe in it, but he might as well be there as anywhere. Oh, yes, I believe it was my brother who persuaded me, and he is a doctor himself. A qualified medical man, but he dabbles in this other business. But why should I distress you, my dear, with all this? I’m an old fool, I know. Tell me more about your—Stephen, wasn’t it? What is he like?”

The younger woman heaved a deep sigh. I could see that she considered the story unsatisfactory and inconclusive. Then as though relieved to turn to a more congenial subject, she said:

“Peter? oh, Peter . . .” A long pause. “He had deep blue eyes, very wide apart, a square chin, clean shaven. He was tall and strong, and there was a

kind of—kind of elasticity about him. Elastic in mind and body. Beneath the gay exterior you were conscious of something profound and strong.”

The elder woman’s interest appeared vaguely aroused.

“But,” she said, “didn’t you—didn’t you enquire at the War Office? the Records Office, wasn’t it? they knew pretty well.”

“That was the absurd part about it. I—we—” a girlish blush came to the younger woman’s face. “You see, well, when we first met it was just a flirtation. I christened him Peter. He made up a name for me. Life was so unreal in those days. Death seemed to be the only reality. What did it matter what we were called, who we were, or, for that matter, what we did? Oh, yes . . . we did flirt. We had . . . lovely times together. It was not till that last meeting when we both realised that the thing had gone far—become very serious. Just before he was leaving when it dawned upon us that neither knew the other’s real name, and we had of course promised to correspond! There were other officers at the station, and he took out a card, scribbled his address on it, and thrust it into my hand. I didn’t look at it, but slipped it into my purse. When I got back to the hospital the purse had disappeared! He had gone and I did not even know his name! So absorbed had we been with all the foolish little things that—people like us talk about—you’ve no idea how in those days we conspired together, men and women, to ignore the War—I did not even know his regiment. I only knew that he was in the heavy artillery.”

“Heavy artillery,” repeated the elder woman dully.

“Three days later I developed my fever. Oh, I’m not sure—I was so worried—I think the fever started before—I nearly went out of my mind.”

“You are sure it was the *heavy* artillery?” said the elder woman.

The younger one dabbed her nose and nodded. Both seemed to have fallen apart once more. The elder appeared to be ruminating. As though to herself she muttered, “These German doctors say that there is only one thing that could cure my Georgie . . . but suppose . . .”

She took off her spectacles, wiped them, and regarded the other with the impaired vision of her naked sight, as though by this means she could observe something, unobserved herself.

“What was the pet name he called you, my dear?”

The younger woman appeared to hesitate. This was sacred ground. This old woman had no right to trespass. And yet, after all, she had already said

so much. Greed for sympathy and understanding, she said in a quiet clear voice:

“Little Wind-flower.”

The elder woman stood up and faced the window. She was still not wearing her glasses. The girl could not see her face, but I could. And I have never seen a stranger expression on the face of any living creature. Her eyes were wide open, and probably seeing nothing, but to me they seemed to absorb all the phenomena of existence at a glance. They were alight with amazement, and questioning. She was trembling violently, her lips were shaking, and I quite expected her to swoon. I felt most terribly embarrassed, as though I had stepped into a forbidden sanctuary. I did not know how to act. Neither of the women had taken the slightest notice of me. They had spoken in the quiet normal voices which women of their kind usually employ in an hotel, rather indifferent as to whether they are overheard or not by the other hotel guests. They had probably been aware of me at first, when the conversation opened so conventionally, but had forgotten me when they began to exchange their profound confidences.

But the elder woman did not swoon. After considerable effort she repeated in a perfectly controlled voice:

“Little Wind-flower!”

She turned and glanced overtly at the younger, but whether she could see her or not I could not say. Then she sat down, put on and carefully adjusted her spectacles. With a motherly gesture she put her hand on the other’s, and said casually:

“What are your plans, my dear?”

The younger woman shrugged her shoulders, in the manner of one to whom plans have no longer interest or significance.

“Listen, then,” said the elder. “Will you do me a favour? I am leaving on Thursday for Lausanne to see my son. Will you come as my companion?”

The younger woman hesitated, and the elder seemed to press her hands harder, and she spoke earnestly and vehemently:

“Please do, my dear. I had a companion, and she had to leave because of illness in her family. I don’t know what your position is, but I would gladly pay you. I am not badly off. My uncle, the brigadier, left me money last year. Please come. Oh, do please come.”

“You are extremely kind,” said the younger woman. “I must think. I—have no plans, but this is—oh, please forgive me if I go away and think. It is most generous of you. I have just enough to pig along at these little hotels. But still—please forgive me.”

She gave both her companion’s hands a tight squeeze and hurried out of the lounge. The old lady removed her spectacles once more. She wiped them with her handkerchief, and again dabbed her eyes. She was entirely oblivious to my presence. Her whole character seemed to have changed. She was still shaking, but it was with a kind of elation. For several minutes she sat there, mumbling to herself. Twice I heard her mutter:

“Little Wind-flower! Peter, she called him, did she?”

Unaccountable tears clouded her old eyes. Pressing her hand to her temple she whispered hoarsely: “Oh, if it should be——”

She rose very slowly, and appeared to grope her way out of the room.

I sat there for a long time until it began to get dark.

A waiter came in.

“Shall I turn on the light, monsieur?”

“No, please,” I said, “leave it all just as it is.”

And I continued to stare at my empty writing pad.

Two of those women? God forgive me!

LITTLE WHITE FROCK

When their careers are finished, the painter, the author, the architect, the sculptor, may point to this or that, and say “Lo, this is my handiwork. Future generations shall rejoice in me.”

But to the actor and the executive musician there is nothing left but—memories.

Their permanence lies in the memories of the people who loved them. They cannot pass it on. Someone may say to you: “Ah! my boy, you should have heard Jean de Reske.” Or: “You should have seen Macready play that part.” And you are bound in all politeness to accept this verdict, but if you have not heard Jean de Reske, nor seen Macready, it leaves no definite impression on you at all. Indeed the actor is in worse case than the musician. For at the present time there are ingenious mechanical devices for caging the performance of a musician with varying degrees of success, but no mechanism could ever imprison the electric thrill of Joseph Jefferson or Henry Irving on their great nights of triumph. They are gone for ever, cast away among the limbo of the myths. These melancholy reflections occurred to me on the first occasion when I visited Colin Brancker. I met the old chap first of all in the public library. He had a fine distinguished head with long, snow-white hair. He was slim, and in spite of a pronounced stoop, he carried himself with a certain distinction and alertness. I was a fairly regular visitor to the library, and I always found him devouring the magazines and newspapers which I particularly wanted to read myself. A misunderstanding about a copy of “The Saturday Review” led to a few formal expressions of courtesy, on the following day to a casual nod, later on to a few words about the weather, then to a profound bow on his part, and an inquiry after his health from me. Once we happened to be going out at the same time and I walked to the end of the road with him.

He interested me at once. His clear, precise diction, with its warm timbre of restrained emotion, was very arresting. His sympathy about the merest trifles stirred you to the depths. If he said “What a glorious day it is to-day!” it was not merely a conventional expression, but a kind of paean of all the joy and ecstasy of spring life, sunshine and young lambs frisking in the green meadows.

If he said: “Oh! I’m so sorry,” in reply to your announcement that you had lost your ’bus ticket coming along and had had to pay twice, the whole

dread incident appeared to you envisaged through a mist of tears. The grief of Agamemnon weeping over the infidelity of Clytemnestra seemed but a trite affair in comparison.

One day with infinite tact he invited me to “his humble abode.” He occupied the upper part of a small house in Talbot Road. He lived alone, but was apparently tended by a gaunt middle-aged woman who glided about the place in felt slippers.

The rooms were as he expressed it “humble” but not by any means poverty-stricken. He had several pieces of old furniture and bric-a-brac, innumerable mementos and photographs. It was then that I realised the peculiar position of the actor. If he had been a painter I could have looked at some of his work and have “placed” him, but what could you do with an old actor who lived so much in the past? The position seemed to me pitiable.

Doubtless in his day he had been a fine and distinguished actor and here was I, who knew nothing about him, and did not like to ask what parts he had played because I felt that I ought to know. Neither was he very informing. Not that he was diffident in speech—he talked well and volubly—but I had to gather what he had done by his various implications. There was a signed photograph of himself in the character of Malvolio and in many other Shakespearian parts. There were also signed photographs of J. L. Toole, and Henry Irving, and innumerable actors, some of whom were famous and others whose names were unfamiliar to me. By slow degrees I patched together some of the romantic tissues of his life. Whatever position he may have held in the theatrical world, he certainly still had the faculty of moving one person profoundly—myself. Everything in that little room seemed to vibrate with romance. One of Irving’s photographs was inscribed: “To my dear old friend, Colin Brancker.” On the circular table was an enamel snuff-box given him by Nellie Farren.

When he spoke of his mother his voice sounded like some distant organ with the *vox humana* stop pulled out. I gathered that his mother had been a famous French actress. On the piano was a fan given her by the Empress Eugenie. He never spoke of his father. Nearly everything had some intimate association. I formed a habit of calling on old Brancker on Thursday evenings when my wife usually visited an invalid aunt. The experience was always a complete entertainment. He knew nothing of my world and I knew nothing of his. I came completely under the spell of his imagery. I had only to touch some trinket on the mantel-piece to set the whole machinery of retrospection on the move. He came haltingly to his subject as though he were feeling for it through the lavender-scented contents of some old

drawer. But when the subject was discovered, he brought the whole picture vividly before my mind. I could see those people strutting before the footlights, hear them laugh and joke in their stuffy lodgings and their green rooms, follow their hard life upon the road, their struggles and adversities, and successes, and above all the moving throb of their passions and romances.

And then the picture would die out. It had no beginning and no end. It was just an impression. The angle of vision would alter. Something else would appear upon the scene.

After a time, touched with pity for this lonely and derelict old actor, my wife and I occasionally sent him little presents of game and port wine, when such things came our way. I would like to explain at this point that my wife is younger than I. Her outlook is less critical and introspective. To use her own expression, she is out to have a good time. She enjoys dances and theatres and gay parties. And after all, why shouldn't she? She is young and beautiful and full of life. Her hair—but I digress! In spite of the pheasants and the port she had never met old Brancker. But one day we all happened to meet at the corner of the Talbot Road. I then enjoyed an entirely novel vision of my hero. He was magnificent. The bow he made, the long sweep of the hat would have put D'Artagnan to shame. When I introduced them, he held her hand for a moment and said:

“It is indeed a great pleasure!”

It doesn't sound very much in print, but Alice completely went under. She blushed with pleasure and told me afterwards that she thought he was “a perfect old dear!” The affair lapsed for several weeks. I still continued to call upon him, and we nearly exhausted the whole gamut of his belongings. We even routed through old drawers where faded remnants of ancient fustian would recall some moving episode of the past. I became greedy for these visionary adventures.

One night rather late I found the little white frock. So familiar had I become with my old friend that I was allowed to poke about his rooms on my own and ask him questions. It was a child's frock and it lay neatly folded on the top of a chest in the passage. I brought it into the room, where he was sipping his rum and water, and said:

“What's this, Mr. Brancker?”

He fixed his eyes upon the frock and instantly I was aware that he was strangely moved. At first an expression of surprise and bewilderment crept

over his face, then I observed a look of utter dejection and remorse. He did not speak, and rather confusedly I went up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “Doubtless there is some story. . . . I ought not to have——”

Instantly he patted my arm in return and muttered:

“No, no. It’s quite all right, old boy. And I will tell you, only not to-night. No, not to-night.”

He stood up and took one or two turns up and down the room in silence. I did not dare to intrude into the secret chamber of his memories. Suddenly he turned to me, and putting his arm round my shoulder, he exclaimed:

“Old boy, come in to-morrow. Come to dinner. Bring the wife. Yes, you must both come. Come to dinner at seven-thirty. And then—I will tell you the story of that little white frock.”

It happened that a dance my wife had intended going to the following night had fallen through. To my surprise she jumped at Mr. Brancker’s invitation. She said that she thought it would be extremely interesting. I felt a little nervous of taking her. An invitation to dinner for the first time is always a doubtful number. The social equation varies so alarmingly and unexpectedly. My wife frequently dined at what she called “smart” houses. How could old Brancker possibly manage a dinner in his poky rooms? I warned her to wear her oldest and shabbiest, and to have a sandwich before we started. Needless to say my advice was ignored. She appeared in a wonderful gown of pearl-grey. Experience told me it was useless to protest, and I jogged along the street by her side in my tweed suit. And then I had my second surprise. Old Brancker was in immaculate evening dress. Cunningly modulated lights revealed a table glittering with silver and glass. I mumbled some apology for my negligence but in his most courtly way he expressed his pleasure that I had treated him with such friendly lack of ceremony. Nevertheless this question of dress—as so often happens—exercised a very definite effect upon my whole evening. I felt a little out of it. My wife and old Brancker seemed to belong to one world and I to another. Moreover, their conversation flowed easily and naturally. The old actor was in his most brilliant mood, and Alice sparkled and gurgled in response. Although she was younger and Brancker older than I, I felt at times that I was the oldest of the three, and that they were just children playing an absorbing game. And the dinner was the third surprise.

The gaunt woman served it, gliding in and out of the room with a quiet assurance. It was no lodging-house dinner, but the artful succession of little dishes which symbolises the established creed of superior living creatures. Wine, too, flowed from long-necked bottles, and coffee was served in diminutive cups. At length Mrs. Windsor collected the last vestiges of this remarkable feast, but left on the table a silver tray on which were set four liqueur glasses and a decanter of green Chartreuse.

“Let us all sit round the fire,” said our host. “But first, let me press you to have a little of this excellent beverage. It was given me by a holy brother, a man who led a varied life, but who, alas! died in disgrace.”

He passed his hand across his brow as though the memory were too sacred to be discussed. I sighed involuntarily, and my wife said brightly:

“Not for me, Mr. Brancker, but you help yourself. And now you’re going to tell us the story of the white frock!”

He raised his fine head and looked at her. Then he stretched out his long arm across the table and gently pressed her hand.

“I beg of you, dear lady,” he said gently, “just one drop—in memory of my friend.”

The implied sanctity of the appeal could not be denied. Both my wife and I partook of half a glass, and though I am by nature an abstainer, I must acknowledge that it tasted very good. Old Brancker’s hand trembled as he poured out the Chartreuse. He drank his at a gulp, and as though the emotion were not yet stilled he had another one. Then he rose and taking my wife’s arm he led her to the easy chair by the fire. I was rather proud of my intimate knowledge of the old actor’s possessions, and I pointed out the snuff-box which Nellie Farren had given him, and the photograph of Irving with its inscription: “To my dear old friend.”

Brancker sighed and shrugged his shoulders. Perhaps one does not boast of these associations. Perhaps it is vulgar, but I knew how interested Alice would be. When we had done a round of the rooms, whither in his fatherly way he had conducted my wife by the arm, and occasionally rested his hand ever so lightly on her shoulder, we returned to the dining-room and Alice said:

“Now, show me this little white frock!”

He bowed and without a word went out into the hall and returned with the frock, which he spread reverently over the back of a chair.

“How perfectly sweet!” said my wife.

For a few moments he buried his head in his hands, and Alice and I were silent. I could not but observe the interesting *mise-en-scène* in which I found myself. The dim recesses of the room heavy with memories. My wife cosily curled up in the high arm-chair, the firelight playing on her fresh—almost childlike—face, a simple ring sparkling on her finger, and on the pearly glint of her diaphanous gown. On the other side of the table where the little glasses stood, the clear-cut features and long snow-white hair of the old actor, silhouetted against a dark cabinet. And then like some fragile ghost recalled to bear witness to its tragic past, the dim outline of the child’s white frock.

“It was before your time, *mes enfants*, long long before your time,” he said suddenly. “You would not remember the famous Charles Carside Company who starred the provinces. We became known as the Capacity Company. The title was doubly-earned. We always played to full houses and in those days——”

He turned to me with a penetrating, almost challenging, look and added:

“There were *actors*. Comedy, and tragedy, history, everything worth doing in the legitimate was in our repertoire. We changed our bill every night and sometimes twice a day. Ay, and we changed our parts, sir. I remember Terry O’Bane and I reversing the parts of Othello and Iago on alternate nights for two weeks at a stretch. I played Lord Stamford to his Puttick in ‘The Golden Dawn.’ He played Shylock to my Bassanio. I will not bore you with these details. Ah! Poor old Terry! Poor dear old Terry!”

He stopped and looked down at his hands, and neither of us spoke.

“When I say that Terry O’Bane and I were friends I want to tell you that we were friends as only artists can be friends. We loved each other. For three years we worked together side by side—never a suspicion of envy, never a suspicion of jealousy. I remember one night after Terry’s delivery of Jacques’s speech on the fool he did not get a hand. I found him weeping in the wings. ‘Old fellow!’ I said, but he gripped me by the arm. ‘Colly boy,’ he answered, ‘I was thinking of you. I knew how distressed you would be!’ Think of that! His only concern was that I should be distressed. Ah! in those days . . .”

He stretched his long white fingers and examined them, then turning suddenly to my wife he said:

“I want to ask you, mademoiselle” (he persisted in calling her mademoiselle all the evening) “to make allowances in what I am about to tell you for the *tempora et mores*. In my young days love had a different significance to what it has now. In this modern world I observe nothing but expedience and opportunism. No one is prepared to sacrifice, to run risks. The love between O’Bane and me was an epic of self-sacrifice, and it ran its full course. It found its acid test on the day when Sophie Wiles joined our company at Leeds.”

He stood up and his voice trembled in a low whisper. Looking at Alice he said:

“She was as beautiful, as fragile, as adorable as you are, mademoiselle. Strange how these great secrets are conveyed imperceptibly. O’Bane and I looked at each other, and instinctively we understood. We said nothing. We made no comment about her. We were entirely solicitous of each other’s feelings. We referred to her as ‘Miss Wiles’ and we addressed her as ‘Miss Wiles.’ Before we had been three weeks on the road I know that if I had not known O’Bane’s feelings I should have gone to her and said, ‘Sophie, my darling, my angel, I love you, I adore you. Will you marry me?’ But would it have been chivalrous to do this, knowing O’Bane’s sentiments? We were two months on the road before the matter reached its climax. And during that time—under an unspoken compact—neither of us made love to Sophie. And then one night I could bear it no longer. I saw the drawn and hungry look on my colleague’s eye as he watched her from the wings. I went up to him and whispered: ‘Old fellow, go in and win. She’s worthy of you.’ He understood me at once and he pressed my hand. ‘Colly,’ he said, ‘you’re right. This can’t go on. Meet me after the show and come round to my rooms.’”

The old actor’s lips were trembling. He drew his chair nearer to my wife’s. “I cannot tell you of the heartburning interview I had with my old friend that night. Each tried to give way to the other. It was very terrible, very moving. At length we decided that the only solution would be to put the matter to a hazard. We could not cut cards or throw dice. It seemed profane. We decided to play a game of chess. We set out the pieces and began. But at the end of a few moments it was apparent that each was trying to let the other win. ‘Stay’ I said, ‘we must leave the verdict to impartial destiny after all,’ and I rose. On the sideboard—as it might be here—was a large bowl of gloire-de-Dijon roses. I took the largest bloom and said ‘Terry, old boy, if there are an odd number of petals in this rose she is yours. If an even number, I will pay her court.’ He agreed. Slowly and deliberately, petal

by petal, I destroyed the beautiful bloom. There were fifty-eight petals. When Terry saw the last petal fall he turned white and swayed. I helped him to the easy chair and handed him a little grog. It was nearly dawn. Already the birds were twittering on the window-sill.”

He turned and gazed at the window as though even now the magic of that early morning was upon him.

“The dawn was clear for me, but for my friend how dark and foreboding! Or so it seemed to both of us at that hour. But as Mahomet said ‘With women, life is a condition of flux.’ At eleven o’clock that morning I was on my bended knees to Sophie. I poured out all my pent-up feelings of the two months. There are some things too sacred to repeat even to those who are—dear to us.”

He gasped and stretching out his arm poured out another glass of the Chartreuse.

“She refused me, or if she did not actually refuse me—indeed she did not; she was sympathetic almost loving, but so—indeterminate that I was almost driven to a frenzy of despair. When one is young, one is like that. One must have all and at once, or go crazy with despair. For a week I courted her day and night, and I could not make her decide. She liked me, but she did not love me. At the end of that time I went to O’Bane and I said, ‘Old man, it is your call. My part is played!’ Under great pressure from me he consented to enter the lists and I withheld my hand as he had done. Even now the memory of that week of anguish when I knew that my greatest friend was making love to my adored is almost unbearable. At the end of the week he came to me and said, ‘Old boy, I don’t know how I stand. She likes me but I hardly think she loves me.’ I will not burden you with the chronicle of our strange actions which followed. We decided that as the position was identical it should be an open fight in a fair field, otherwise between us we should lose her altogether. We would both pay court to her wherever and whenever the opportunity occurred. And we would do so without animosity or ill-will. The tour lasted three months and I knew that O’Bane was winning. There was no question about it. He was the favourite. Every minute I expected to hear the dread glad tidings. And then a strange thing happened.”

He leant back in his chair and passed his hands through his hair with a graceful gesture.

“An uncle in Australia died and left O’Bane an enormous fortune. He was rich beyond the dreams of avarice. The company all knew of it and were

delighted, all—all except one person.”

He glanced towards my wife and sighed.

“I have lived a good many years and yet I seem to find the heart of woman as unfathomable, as unexplorable as ever. They are to me the magic casements opening on the night. There is no limit . . . every subtle human experience is capable of endless variation. Sophie refused to marry O’Bane because people would think she married him for his money. The anguish of those last weeks I shall never forget. She definitely refused him, and I was torn between my love for O’Bane and my love for Sophie. I can say with perfect truth—literal truth—that the fortune killed O’Bane. When we arrived in London he began to squander. He drank, gambled, and led a depraved life, all because the woman he loved would not marry him. In the spring he left the company and took a house in town. It became the happy hunting ground of loose characters. It is needless to say that if Sophie wouldn’t marry him there were plenty of other women willing to marry a young millionaire. He became entangled with a fast and pretty creature called Annabel Peacock. He married her and in the following year they had a child.”

The fire crackled on the hearth; my wife did not take her eyes from the old actor’s face. A black cat strolled leisurely across the room and stretched itself before the fire. He continued:

“It was then that I experienced an entirely novel vision of woman’s character. Sophie who would not marry O’Bane because he was rich and who shivered with disgust in the presence of Annabel Peacock, developed an amazing affection and interest for their child. We were out again in the Capacity Company. I had her all to myself. I laid siege to her heart. I was patient, tactful, importunate, imploring, passionate. But it was all no good, my boy . . . no good at all. Heigho! would you believe it for ten years of my life from that date I was that woman’s slave, and she was the slave of Terry’s child. Company after company I joined in order to be with her. I gave up good parts. I sacrificed leads and in place I even accepted a walk-on—anything to be with Sophie. Sophie, who would not listen to me, who treated me like a little pet, to run hither and thither, and who spent all her money and time on toys and clothes for Terry’s child. Would you believe it?”

To my surprise my wife spoke for the first time. She said: “Yes.”

Brancker looked at her keenly and nodded.

“Yes. In any affair between a man and a woman, a man finds himself at a disadvantage. Mademoiselle, you see, understands. Women have all kinds of mysterious intuitions and senses which we wot not of. She is armed at every point. She has more resources. She is better equipped than man. Sophie even made a friend of Annabel. She wrote her loving letters and called her ‘my dearest.’ For you must know that two years after his marriage my old friend Terry O’Bane went under. He awakened one night feeling ill; he groped in a chest where he usually kept a flask of brandy. He took a gulp. The liquid he drew into his throat was pure liquid ammonia which Annabel had been using for photographic work. She was a keen photographer. He rushed out into the street in his pyjamas and died in the arms of a policeman at the corner.”

The horror of this episode was written plainly in the old man’s face. He delivered it with a kind of dramatic despair, as though he knew it had to be told and he could not control himself. Then he seemed to fall to pieces, and lay huddled at the back of his chair. I looked at Alice furtively and I could see a tear swimming on the brink of her eye. It was some moments before he could continue.

“These were all the best years of my life, mes enfants, when my powers were at their highest. My old friend Toole offered me a good part in London. He said to me, ‘Brancker, old man, you’re wasting yourself in the provinces. Come to town and take a lead.’ I could only press his hand and thank him. In another week or two I was on the road again with Sophie. As the years went by she became more and more absorbed by Terry’s unattractive child, and more and more distressed concerning it. For you must know that in spite of his profligate life, Terry still had left a considerable fortune, and Annabel continued to live in the same way. And it was the worst possible atmosphere to bring a young child up in. Annabel was kind to the child in a spasmodic way, passionate and unreliable. She would pet it and coax it, and buy it expensive toys and dresses and then suddenly neglect or scold it. Sophie knew this, and all the time she could spare she went to London and tried to help the situation. She humoured and flattered Annabel, who was quite manageable if you treated her like this, and she did what she could to influence the early training of the child for good. But as you may imagine, the little minx grew up the spit and image of her mother. She was vain, fickle and spoilt. By the time she was ten she thought of nothing but her looks and her frocks, and she was indeed a very pretty child. She all had the prettiness of her mother, with something of her father’s grace and charm. She was encouraged to amuse the vulgar people who came to the house, and she was allowed to listen to all the loose talk, and to sit up to any hour she

liked, unless Annabel happened to be in a contrary mood, when she would slap the child and lock her in her room.

“‘Aunt Sophie’ as she called her was a favourite with Lucy, but only, I’m afraid, because ‘Aunt Sophie’ gave her expensive toys, and lavished her love persistently upon the child. She wrote to her nearly every day wherever she happened to be, and sent her little gifts.”

The old man mopped his forehead. He was evidently labouring under the severe strain which the invoking of these memories put upon him. He walked to the sideboard and poured himself out a glass of water, into which he poured—as an afterthought—a tiny drop of rum. After taking two long meditative gulps he resumed his seat. He seemed to have forgotten all about our presence. He was living in the past. But suddenly he turned to my wife and said:

“I have many of the beautiful frocks which Sophie made for little Lucy. They have come down to me. If it would not bore you to call one afternoon, mademoiselle, I could show you some that might interest you.” There was a strange eager appeal in his voice. It seemed a matter of tremendous moment that Alice should go and inspect the frocks. My heart bled for him. “Of course she will go,” I thought, but to my surprise she said nothing. She just looked at him with that queer watchful expression that women alone are capable of. Perhaps it is part of what the old chap referred to—their equipment. She toyed with the chain on her frock and his eye meditated upon her movements. He hesitated, and then rather nervously proceeded, as though talking to himself.

“Frocks! What a part they play in our lives. Carlyle was right. Sophie was extraordinarily clever with her needle. She had a genius for combining materials. Her theatrical experience helped her. She made the most alluring frocks. The child adored ‘Aunt Sophie’s’ frocks, They always looked so striking and so professional. The crisis in my life, and which I am about to tell you of, was indeed occasioned by one of the frocks which Sophie made for Lucy. It came about in this way.”

He paused again, and tapped the top of the table with his beautiful white hands.

“That last year—that year when Lucy reached her tenth birthday, the excesses in Annabel’s house reached their zenith. The place became notorious. Annabel had taken to herself a drunken lord, Lord Starborough. He was a dissipated young roué. He rather took a fancy to Lucy and he spoilt her in the same way that Annabel did. We heard stories of the goings

on. The child was taken to houses to dance. I believe she was even taught to put on rouge. There was a rich family called the Arkwrights who also had children and who had lived a similar life. These children were Lucy's great friends. They vied with each other in their infantile snobbery. The parents gave elaborate parties and tried to outshine each other in the lavishness of their entertainment, and the overdressing of the children. It was very, very painful. Even I, whose life was being wrecked by Sophie's adulation of this child, felt sorry. My heart bled for my old friend's daughter."

"We had a long tour that autumn, Sophie and I. We were out in 'The Woman Who Failed.' Sophie had a lead, but I was only playing the part of a butler. It was a long and trying tour up North. The weather was very bitter. There was a good deal of sickness, and our chief was a hard man. Early in December Sophie caught a cold which rapidly developed into bronchitis. She had a narrow escape. She was, however, only out of the bill for ten days. She insisted on returning and struggling on. The tour was to end on Christmas Eve. One day she had a letter from Lucy. I remember the exact words to this day. 'Dear Aunt Sophie, do make me a lovely frock for Christmas Eve. The Arkwrights are having a lovely ball and I know Irene is having a gold and green with a sparkling veil. Your loving Lucy.'

"When Sophie got this letter she smiled. She was happy. She was always happy when doing a service. Ah me . . . ! For nearly a week she thought and dreamt about the frock she was going to make for Lucy for the Arkwrights' party. She knew what the child wanted—a frock to outshine all the others. Then another story reached us. I have forgotten what it was; some distressing record of these Arkwright people. One night after the show she sent for me. I could tell she was very agitated. She clutched my arm and said: 'Old man, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to make Lucy a frock which will outshine all the others. And it will be just a plain white frock with no adornment of any sort. Just think of it, amongst all those vulgar, overdressed children, one little girl, as pretty as Lucy—in plain white. And they will be bound to appreciate it. It will tell. And perhaps she will realise—what it means. Good taste and refinement will always tell against vulgarity.' I applauded Sophie's idea, and I went with her to get the material. But she fainted in the shop. During those last few days I began to realise that Sophie was very ill. She was simply living on her nervous force, keeping herself going in order to complete the tour, and to deliver Lucy's frock in time for the ball.

"Our last journey back was from Nottingham. We arrived in London at five o'clock on Christmas Eve. I was in a fever of dread. I believed that

Sophie was dying. She kept swaying in the train as though she was going to drop. Her face was deadly white, her eyes unnaturally bright, and her fingers were still busy on the frock. So absorbed had I been in Sophie's affairs, I had made no arrangements about lodgings in town. Neither had she. But my old friend, Joe Gadgers, seeing my distress, said: 'Old boy, leave it to me. I know a snug little place where they'll take you in. I'm not stopping. I'm going straight through to Hastings.' I thanked my old friend and embraced him. When we got to Euston, we got Sophie into a four-wheeled cab, and Joe Gadgers came with us to arrange the introduction. I hardly noticed where the lodgings were—somewhere in Clapham, I think. We arrived there and a good lady took us in without hesitation. We put Sophie to bed. She was almost delirious, but still the frock was not quite finished. Joe left us, and I sat by her bedside, watching her busy fingers. I knew it was useless to protest. The clock on the mantel-piece ticked and outside the snow was beginning to fall."

Colin Brancker stood up, and suddenly picked up the little white frock from the back of the chair. He held it in his arms reverently and tenderly. His voice was strong and resonant. He stood there and acted the scene vividly before my eyes.

"At ten minutes to seven I left the house holding the frock in my arms. I rushed out without a hat, without a coat. I flew along the street, calling out for a cab like a madman. . . . At last I got one. I told the driver to drive like the furies to the address I gave him in Kensington. In the cab I stamped my feet and rocked the dress in my arms as though it were a fevered child. I don't know how we got there. It seemed an eternity. I flung into the house, calling out 'Lucy! Lucy!' I found her in the drawing-room. She was dressed in a flaming orange and silver dress with a sparkling tiara in her hair. She was looking in a mirror and putting finishing touches to her hair. She cried out when she saw me: 'Hullo, I thought Aunt Sophie had forgotten me. I've hired a frock from Rocos.' 'Child,' I said, 'your Aunt Sophie has been working out her life's blood for you. Here is the frock!' She grabbed it and examined it. 'Frock!' she said. 'It looks more like a nightdress. I don't want the beastly old thing,' and she threw it across the room. I believe at that moment I could have struck the child. I was blind with fury. Fortunately, I remembered in time that she was my old friend Terry O'Bane's daughter. I picked up the frock. 'Ungrateful child!' I exclaimed. 'You don't know what you're doing. You're murdering an ideal. You're killing your aunt.' She tossed her insolent head and actually pressed the bell for the butler to see me out! Just like a grown-up person! Dazed and baffled I clutched the little white frock and staggered out into the street. The night was dark, and the

snow was still falling. Christmas bells were beginning to peal. . . . I plunged on and on my heart beating against my ribs. People stared at me but I was too distressed to care. How could I go back to Sophie with the insulting message? Suddenly, at the corner of Hyde Park, a most appalling realisation flashed through my mind. *I had made no note of the address of the lodgings where Sophie and I were staying!* . . . God in heaven! What was I to do? The only man who could help me, my old friend, Joe Gadgers, had gone to Hastings. What could I do? Could I go to the police and say, ‘Will you help me to find the address of some lodgings where an actress is staying. I think it’s somewhere round about Clapham. I don’t know the name of the landlady, or the name of the street, or the number?’ They would have thought I was mad. Perhaps I was mad. Should I go back to Lucy? The child wouldn’t know . . . and all this time Sophie was dying. Ah! merciful God! perhaps she would die. If she died before I found her she would die in the happy belief that the frock had been worn. Her last hours would be blessed with dreams, visions of purity and joy . . . whilst I . . . I should have no place in them, perhaps . . . but I, too, after all I’d suffered for her sake. Who knows? . . . Who knows? . . .”

His voice broke off in a low sob. I leant forward watching his face, wracked with anguish. The room was extraordinarily still. I dare not look at Alice, but I was conscious of the pearly sheen of her frock under the lamp. Away in the distance one could hear the rumble of the traffic on the High-road. The remorseless tick of the clock was the only sound in the room. Once I thought it ticked louder and then I realised that it was someone tapping gently at the door. The door opened a little way and against the dim light in the passage appeared the gaunt face of the old serving woman, phantom like, unreal. . . .

“Excuse me, sir.” She peered into the room. The old actor gazed at her with unseeing eyes. He stood with one hand on the back of the chair, and across the other arm lay the white frock, a dignified and pathetic figure.

“I’m sorry to trouble you, sir.”

“Yes, Mrs. Windsor?”

“My little niece ’as just called. I can’t find it anywhere. That little white frock I made for ’er last week. I put it in the chest. I thought perhaps you might ’ave. Ah! there it is, sir. Do you mind——? Thank you very much sir. I’m sorry to have disturbed the company.”

In the sanctuary of our bedroom that night, my wife said:

“Did you really believe that that writing on the photograph was by Henry Irving?”

“My dear,” I answered. “When their careers are finished, the painter, the author, the architect or the sculptor may point to this or that and say ‘Lo, this is my handiwork.’ But to the actor nothing remains but—memories. Their permanence lies in the memories of those who loved them. Are we to begrudge them all the riches of imagination? After all, what is the line of demarcation between what we call reality and what we call imagination? Is not the imagery invoked by Shelley when he sings of dubious myths as real a fact as the steel rivets in the Forth Bridge? What is reality? Indeed, what is life?”

“I don’t know what life is,” answered my wife, switching off the light. “But I know what you are. You’re a dear old, perfect old—BOOB!”

“Alice, what do you mean?” I said.

She laughed softly. “Women are ‘equipped,’ you know,” she replied enigmatically, and insisted on going to sleep.

THE GRAYLES

Henry Cottesby Grayle was a publisher of architectural and archæological books. He was a widower and lived with his son and two daughters in a small house to which was attached a studio and a large garden in the neighbourhood of Regents Park.

At the time of which I write the Grayles had become the centre of a set of people of varying degrees of celebrity in the artistic and dramatic world and it is perhaps a little difficult to account for this. They were certainly a very devoted and likeable family, and the children called their father "Harry." One felt at once their innate kindness, and their loyal affection for each other, but the mentality of neither of them was of a very high order, and I do not remember hearing any one of them express any particularly original or individual point of view. They were physically unattractive, having badly proportioned figures and they were all shortsighted, both the girls, Wanda and Olivia (or "Pan" as we called her) as well as the father wearing thick glasses. The son, Arthur, was less shortsighted, he only wore pince-nez for reading, but he was an awkward looking chap with a head that seemed too heavy for his shoulders. To say that they were unselfish would be putting too mild a term to their dominant characteristic. I should imagine that they were one of the most elaborately unselfish families that ever existed. They carried this system of unselfishness to such a degree that it was always defeating its own end. For instance, Mr. Grayle, who hated the East Coast, would get an idea into his head that the East Coast was good for the girls, so he would let fall a hint that he would like to go to the East Coast for his holidays. Now Wanda and Pan also hated the East Coast, and a doctor had told Pan that it was bad for her, but they would pretend that they loved the East Coast, and would not like to go anywhere else, because they secretly thought that their father wanted to go there. And Arthur would give up an invitation to go and stay with friends in Devonshire—a county that he adored—in order to enjoy the dubious benefits of the east wind, for the same reason. And so neither member of the family hardly ever got what he or she really wanted, except the satisfaction of feeling that they had done the right thing. Perhaps one of the most attractive features of the Grayle establishment was the tennis court and garden. It was really an excellent court backed by a dark hedge on three sides, and the garden was remarkable for London, with a very alluring terrace just above the tennis court, where tea went on at sporadic intervals from four o'clock till half-past six. The house was easy of access from any

part of London, and it was very pleasant to pop in there in the afternoon and to be certain of finding people who were pleased to see one, and to play tennis and to talk. Besides there was always an element of surprise at the Grayles, one never knew whom one would meet. And then there were two extremely pretty girls, and great friends of Wanda's and Pan's. Their names were Toni and Mildred Sholt. They were actresses by profession, although they never by any chance seemed to have an engagement, except to play at special matinees for some society for the advancement of the Drama, but they were fluffy companionable girls. They seemed to know every member of the dramatic profession by some intimate nickname, and they were always bringing new people to the tennis court. They even brought two of the Russian dancers from Drury Lane one day, and Guy Haveling, the famous Comedian, who set everyone in roars of laughter by his antics when serving.

There seemed an endless procession of girls who were Wanda and Pan's "dearest friends," there were people who were just beginning to be talked about, architects, writers, musicians and Pagans of every description. In the winter, or when the weather was unpleasant in the summer, we used to go into the studio, and Wanda and Pan roasted chestnuts and we played most preposterous paper games, and talked. If the conversation at times became a little "precious," it had the compensating advantage of being extremely naive, and often engagingly personal. We were always talking about each others' characters, and fiercely criticizing each other behind our backs. This was not done in a spirit of tittle-tattle or malice. It was pure interest, and a love of analysis.

People began to refer to the "Grayle set," but I am not sure that the Grayles themselves were the pivots of this set, though their garden and studio were undoubtedly its headquarters. I'm afraid many of us used to laugh about the Grayles even on their own court and in their own studio. In spite of the open house they kept, and the erratic company that enjoyed their hospitality, they had peculiar fussy little mannerisms. And they encouraged each other in these. There were certain things that had always been and consequently *had* to be. Arthur had to have porridge with his breakfast—although the others never touched it—and he had to have a tray of biscuits and anchovy paste and a glass of lime juice to take up to his bedroom at night. "Harry" must not under any circumstances be disturbed between the hours of six-thirty and seven-thirty in the evening, which he spent alone in the room upstairs. Pan had to have a glass of hot milk at eleven-fifteen every morning, and always scrambled eggs on toast for breakfast. Wanda would not touch tea if the milk had been put in first, and no one would dream of

interfering with the tradition that gave her the right to take the rest of the family to three lectures at the Royal Society of Arts every year. She had at some remote period joined this Society, and although the lectures bored the whole family to death, they would come out chatting gaily, and persuade each other that the lecture was even more interesting than the last.

In fine, the family was intensely sentimental. They would not have acknowledged that, in fact they laughed at and scorned sentimentality as expressed in sentimental plays and stories. They simply did not realise that the only difference lay in the fact that they did not express it. Of course they all kissed each other, but they never gave expression to any extremely endearing or emotional terms. But they watched each other with a sort of furtively erotic zest, they pampered each others' whims, and silently studied and prophesied each others' desires. The girls would scheme together to forestall their father's and brother's wishes, and the father or brother would lie awake at night thinking how best to please the girls. One shuddered to think of the effect of the emotionalism of these good people if they had given it rein.

In addition to the people who came to tennis and tea and supper, there were invariably people staying in the house, cousins, and various deserving people working in obscure causes. I remember also that there was an American woman who was nearly always there. She rejoiced in the name of Florence Cheesewright Cannifer. She was not so formidable a person as her name might suggest, in fact she was delightful. She was broad—in every sense—she had broad shoulders and hips, and a broad low brow and deep set kind grey eyes. I could never quite locate her, she may have been some sort of relation. All the family kissed her (including Mr. Grayle) and they called her "Bee." She was the sort of person that one kissed automatically. It always surprised me how badly all the Grayles played tennis, considering they played nearly every day in the summer and had done so for so long as anyone could remember. This may have been due largely to their defective eyesight. They were extremely good at indoor games, being very quick, and all having a mathematical sense. They had a most bewildering repertoire of games of all sorts, and they would sit in the studio with all the windows shut, and the air blue with tobacco smoke, and play games with frenzied excitement very often till two or three in the morning.

I need hardly tell you that all of us in the Grayle set were Socialists, at least when I say Socialists, I mean that we were people supremely discontented with existing social conditions, although this discontent manifested itself in different ways. Mr. Grayle who was a little more inured

to these social conditions, voted Liberal as a sort of compromise, but both the girls and Arthur belonged to some Socialist organisation in Gray's Inn, and pursued an active propaganda; the majority of us limited our activities to the point of sneering at Constitutions, and monarchies, and politicians, and of adopting an attitude of extreme superiority to these mundane things.

When the War broke out, the news dropped like a bombshell into the security of our comfortable ideals. I knew that the Grayles, with their intense humanitarian instincts, and their hatred of cruelty in any form, would be upset; but I hardly expected them to be as affected as they were. On the evening when it was announced that England had declared war, I found the whole family in the studio with Florence Cheesewright Cannifer, and the Sholt girls and a sculptor named Rohan Lees who was supposed to be more or less engaged to Mildred Sholt. They were sitting round in a circle immersed in newspapers looking scared and tragic and what surprised me most—definitely angry.

“It's detestable!” Wanda was muttering.

“Disgusting patriotism!” Pan ejaculated.

Toni Sholt tried to be facetious but was hushed up, while Rohan Lees' occasional attempts to sing “Land of Hope and Glory” in falsetto were received in chilling silence. It is true that later in the evening we tried to play a game called “Ware Wilkins.” It was a poor game at its best, but on this evening it fell particularly flat. I forget the rules, but I remember that it was played with cards and just before you suspected someone of playing a certain card—I think it was the Queen of Diamonds—you had to call out “Ware Wilkins” and then there were forfeits and so on. It was a game that Mr. Grayle usually shone at, but on this occasion he was always at fault, which was deplorable, in-as-much-as Wanda and Pan had obviously suggested the game to distract his mind. His mind was not distracted, and he only played because he imagined that the girls wanted to. The only member of the family who seemed at all reasonable about it all was Arthur, who confessed to me on the quiet that he was reserving his judgement, but at present he had to say that he could hardly see how Sir Edward Grey could have acted otherwise.

After that it became a sort of understood thing that the War was a subject not to be discussed in the Grayle family. It was avoided—like an unclean thing. Occasionally people would be brought who did not understand this, and they would launch into discussions about the War, but they found

themselves isolated, talking in detached groups, and the conversation never became general.

Certain events which followed were precipitated by the oratory of a certain Mr. Robson, who appeared at that time. I don't know where he came from or what his relationship was. He seemed to be a friend of Mr. Grayle's. He was an elderly man, with a sour lugubrious countenance and a stoop. He had lived on the East Coast of Africa for seven years, and had contracted some chronic internal trouble that doctors agreed was incurable, but he might live for a long time. He spoke with a deep booming voice like a park-keeper at closing time. He seemed quite out of his element at the Grayles, but indifferent to the fact. One got the idea that he would boom on in that voice, enunciating his unpalatable sophistries, in any climate or in any society. It made no difference to him if he were addressing a gang of coloured plate-layers on an African Railway or a young ladies school on the South Coast. The mere fact of us calling him *Mr. Robson* showed that he was not one of us. He seemed like some vague impersonal force, against which all our most cherished ideas dashed in vain. One knew of course that the Grayle family thought about the War. In fact they thought about it too much, and they each secretly devoured the newspapers. With their quick intuitions and sympathies they suffered many of the horrors of the whole thing, only the ambition of each was that the others should not suffer these horrors. But Mr. Robson had no such scruples. He boomed on about the War from morning to night. He might have been Hansard himself doomed to an eternal punishment of declaiming the redundant products of his volumes. Nothing could stop him, but occasionally some member of the family or their friends would flash biting across his path, and interject some facile argument. He would look at them with an expression of unutterable sadness like one who has lost the faculty of listening but who deploras any diversion to a prescribed idea, and would then continue from the point at which he was interrupted.

I remember Arthur telling me one day that any doubts he held that the War was in any way justifiable were entirely dispelled by listening to Mr. Robson.

"I don't mean to say," he said, "that the English Government is any more culpable than the German, probably, it's not. But there's not much to choose between them. Civilisation is rotten to the core. The whole thing has been worked by contractors, politicians, and wire pullers all over the World. This Robson represents the official mind. You can do nothing with it. It has no fluidity, no sympathy, no intelligence. It's just an atrophied organ."

It was surprising therefore to hear Arthur that same evening break a lance with Mr. Robson, and even get angry with him, and he was vigorously seconded by Wanda and Pan, and in a more cold-blooded manner by Rohan Lees. No one could ever quite understand how Mildred Sholt got engaged to Rohan Lees. He was a queer little chap, and looked rather dirty. He smoked about sixty cigarettes during the day, was a sort of Art madman. He did impressionist sculpture that no one could make head or tail of, and always suggested that his work was the sort of thing that *Rodin* was trying to do. For some reason or other Mr. Robson fixed on Rohan, and suddenly asked him if he weren't going to join the Army, and do something for his King and Country. Now we all knew that if Rohan held any political views at all they were entirely anarchical, and we all laughed. But Rohan took the matter up, and said: "I tell you what, Robson" (he was the only one of us who didn't call him *Mr.* Robson) "I'm an outsider. I never *have* done anything conventional or fashionable, why should I? I don't care a damn about Society. They don't appreciate me or want me. Well, I mean to stick like it. When it's been fashionable to go grouse shooting, or go to bridge parties, or play golf, I've stopped at home and gone on with my work. Now it happens to be the thing to go out and do a bit of killing or being killed. Well, let those people who always have to do the right thing, keep on doing it. I'm going to remain unconventional."

"Do you never consider what you owe to your country? Liberty, freedom—Power?"

"Yes," interposed Pan, "or slums, wretchedness, and disgraceful society inequality?"

"The social system," continued Mr. Robson, "was not invented in a night by some fiend as some of you young people seem to think. It is the result of the steady growth of thousands of years, history, character, environment, the survival of the fittest."

"Of the physically fittest," said Wanda. "It's no good, Mr. Robson. Nothing can justify War. It's simply a return to the beast age."

Florence Cheesewright Cannifer took pity on the poor man and told us we were not to bully him for being a patriot. "It's natural to love one's country," she said. We all agreed with her, but protested that one should not love one's country at the expense of other countries. The discussion took its normal course, that is to say, round in a circle without leading anywhere, when "Harry" Grayle came in. I thought he looked tired, and I knew that as a matter of fact he was a little worried by a newspaper agitation for

conscription. Of course he said nothing about this, but I noticed him looking narrowly at Arthur, and I believed he was summing up the physical attributes of his son, and wondering whether he would pass the Army doctor, if conscription were brought in. There was a little chap called Skinner who used to come and play tennis sometimes. I don't know what he was by profession. We used to call him "Scaly Skinner." I think because he used to get very hot, and his nose peeled in the summer. Directly the War broke out Scaly Skinner rushed off and joined something, and was made a Corporal. We were all very much amused about this, and often laughed about Corporal Scaly Skinner! When Mr. Grayle came in on this evening, he told us quietly that he had just heard that "Scaly Skinner" had been killed. I need hardly say that this news caused a profound impression. Pan, with genuine tears in her eyes, emphasized her view that the whole idea of War was more unspeakable and disgusting than ever, and we all felt that if Mr. Robson said much more we should jump on him.

As a matter of fact, this gentleman said very little more, but he made one cryptic utterance, that was destined to have a far-reaching effect. He looked lugubriously round the studio and sighed, as though he had gathered the full complement of our idealistic thoughts and then his voice once more boomed forth in level tones.

"Do you ever realise that you are only allowed to have these ideas, and to express them, by virtue of the fact that men like your friend, Mr. Scaly Skinner, are out at the Front fighting for you and giving their lives for you?"

There was an imperceptible pause, and then Mr. Grayle glancing at his son, nodded and said—"That's very true." I believe he glanced at Arthur apprehensively because he dreaded what effect this unarguable remark might have on his impressionable son.

He muttered "That's very true," almost automatically because he realised that it *was* an abstract truth. It came out before he had had time to consider the effect. I saw Arthur catch his father's eye, and take in his pale worried glance, and I know that in a flash he thought "Father thinks I ought to join. He's too decent to say so, but he's a little ashamed of me." Incidentally, too, he thought of Scaly Skinner. It seemed appalling to think of a chap like Scaly Skinner whom they had all despised, going out and fighting so that he (Arthur) should be safe at home, and free to express any views he liked.

I remember very little more of what was said that evening. I think Florence Cheesewright came to the rescue by talking about "some dandy

ponjee she'd bought that afternoon at a store on Oxford Street." I know we didn't play any games and we broke up early.

My next intimation of a development in the matter came by way of a visit from Wanda two days later. She said she and Pan were in trouble. It was like this. They—the girls—had come to the conclusion that Arthur was worrying. They believed that he felt a call to join the Army. Of course he was much too unselfish to worry *them* about it, and they believed that he thought too much about their feelings. They didn't think he *would* join, simply because he knew how unhappy it would make them. It was very difficult for them. Of course they simply *loathed* the idea of his going, at the same time it would be selfish to impose their own feelings to such an extent that he acted against his own conscience and inclination.

I asked them what their father thought, but they said that he had not spoken, and they should not worry him about it, especially as there might be nothing in it. I said that if it would be satisfactory to them, I would sound Arthur and find out what he did think.

I tackled him the same evening, but he would only talk about Scaly Skinner. Mr. Robson's remark about Scaly Skinner seemed to have bitten deep, but I believe he was really thinking more about his father's glance, and his acquiescence to Mr. Robson's view. I could only report to Wanda that it *did* seem as though his conscience troubled him in the matter. After that the girls, I thought, behaved very splendidly. In an almost imperceptible manner they mollified their views. By gentle degrees they allowed that under certain circumstances War might be possibly justifiable, if honourably conducted. They listened more leniently to Mr. Robson's diatribe, and took a more technical interest in the operations on hand. This change of view was not lost on Arthur. He thought "The girls think I ought to go." And Mr. Grayle thought "The girls think Arthur ought to join. It would be selfish of me to interpose."

I do not want to dwell on the heartburnings that went on in the Grayle family up to that time when Arthur walked down one morning to a recruiting office in the Strand and offered himself as a private. I can only say that he joined the Army in the way that he went to the East Coast, because he somehow believed his family wished it. Everybody was tremendously surprised that Arthur was accepted, for he was the most unmilitary looking person you can imagine. But when it comes to a fine point, one found that there was nothing really radically wrong with him, and he was fairly wiry, and occasionally had camped out in August. He was sent first of all down to a place near Bedford and occasionally got a few days' leave. The

atmosphere of the Grayles house seemed entirely altered. This was in October, so of course the garden was deserted, and the girls and "Harry" seemed to prefer the drawing-room or their bedroom to the studio. Mr. Robson had taken his departure, as though his mission were fulfilled, and we were at liberty to scatter the seeds of his moribund philosophy in some other clime. Florence Cheesewright was still there and I must say that she was splendid all through that time, mothering the trembling fabrics of the Grayle family in turn. We never played games and the girls started their interminable knitting.

They always spoke of Arthur in cheerful voices, but they could not control their strained faces when one heard the cold rain driving down on the studio roof on the dark evenings. One instinctively thought of anchovy biscuits and lime juice, and wondered how Arthur was faring. When he came home on leave he looked surprisingly fit, and spoke cheerfully, though he told me on the quiet that "it was damnable" and that "he was heartily fed up with it."

On those occasions we always held high revel, and played "Ware, Wilkins," or some such game in the studio and the Sholt girls came in and anyone else who got wind of it. I got the impression that the Grayle family did not desire tremendously to be alone on these occasions, I think they were a little afraid. It is so much easier to keep bright and gay when there are others about.

Arthur did not go till April, and I had the doubtful privilege of being present at his last leave. I must say candidly that it was awful. It was so horribly strained and unreal. We played games desperately and talked of most trivial things as though they were matters of tremendous moment. When it came time for Arthur to go the only person who was allowed to cry was Florence Cannifer, and this she did right loyally. He might have been going to post a letter for all the effusion there was between his family and himself. They pecked at each other as though they were kissing through a glass screen, and thought it rather amusing but impossible. Arthur said "So long, Harry" to his father, and the latter said "Bye-bye! have you packed that stuff for your feet?"

They watched him go furtively, hovering amongst each other, and afraid to look at each others' faces. We went back to the drawing-room after he had gone, and I talked to Mr. Grayle about early French renaissance architecture and the girls encouraged me. I felt that it gave them power to look at their father's face. I admired old Grayle very much that evening, he controlled himself amazingly, for I believe he was much more upset than the girls. I

wondered whether at night they all lay shivering apart, but they undoubtedly showed the traces of anxious dread upon their faces the next day.

Of course the very thing happened that one would expect to happen to a family nervously constituted like the Grayles, and it happened with dramatic suddenness. Arthur had been out there less than a month, and they had received three letters from him, all couched in cheery terms. He did not seem to have received any of the elaborate packages that had been sent, but he was apparently having the time of his life. And then one day the news came crashing across the horizon of three strained lives. Arthur was "missing, believed killed." This is perhaps the most disturbing news any family can receive, and the Grayles no longer pretended to ride serenely. They were terribly distraught, and Pan developed an illness which served the useful purpose of distracting the other two. It seemed she had been taking sleeping draughts, and had taken too much. Wanda and her father did not acknowledge that they also had been in the habit of taking sleeping draughts. But they nursed Pan assiduously, and Pan kept up her illness as long as possible, because she saw that it was doing the others good.

A week later a correction appeared in the official announcements. Previously "missing believed killed" should now read "wounded, not missing."

MIDDLESUSSEX, 7th (T.F.): GRAYLE, 9093. A.G.

When I saw the face of old Mr. Grayle reading this correction I thought that the gods could not have chosen a more unfortunate victim for their unholy jest. He cried in front of the girls. Of course the matter only lasted inside a minute but it was the most terrible minute I ever lived through.

Then they all went to the War Office. They spent ten days there asking questions of most unlikely people, and making each other drink copious draughts of hot milk in an A.B.C. in Westminster Bridge Road. It was a time of great congestion, and they got no information till they heard that Arthur was back and in a hospital at Folkestone. The poor chap had been badly wounded and had lost his right leg below the knee and had a shrapnel wound in his back. I did not see the Grayles when the news of this arrived, they had all gone to Folkestone, and there they remained for three months till Arthur was well enough to be moved. But in the meantime more surprising news had arrived which was nothing less than that Arthur had received a D.S.O. or was it a D.C.M.? It was not in any case a V.C., but it was some high order given in recognition of conspicuous gallantry in face of the enemy!

The official story was that he held a section of a trench single handed, when all the other defenders had been killed or wounded for seven hours, till reinforcements arrived, and thus saved an important position in the line.

I went down to Folkestone twice and saw Arthur when he was on the move again. He seemed quite cheerful, and they had fitted him up with a very nice artificial leg. He seemed disinclined to talk about his experiences, so I naturally avoided referring to the War. The family were living in rooms down there, and Mr. Grayle came up to town twice a week to business. It was not till about two months later—when Arthur had been invalided out of the Army—and the family were once more back at the house in Regents Park, that he gave me any intimation that he would care to talk. We were sitting in his room upstairs after dinner one evening, and finding him in the mood I asked him if he could tell me how he won his medal. He puffed at his pipe for a long time and then he said:

“Honestly my dear chap, I only have the vaguest notion. I knew I should be frightened, but I never thought it possible to have such a ghastly fear. When I first came under fire I was sick—actually physically sick. . . . I don’t remember a bit how long the whole thing lasted. I blazed away from the trench with my rifle whenever there was an excuse, it seemed to comfort me. One felt that one was looking out over the edge of creation and trying to keep back things that wanted to prove one had never lived. I was horribly frightened. Believe me, I wasn’t thinking of the guvnor or the girls, I was in a stark staring terror of death and damnation. . . . For I felt that after this there could be nothing . . . it was just pre-neolithic, as though man had never been born, as though there was nothing. . . . When night came I didn’t believe it had ever been daylight. A shell struck the angle of our trench, four chaps were blown to nothing, a chap named Rettison—he was rather a cad as a matter of fact—he was smashed up near me. . . . I felt his blood running over my boots. The trench was crumbling—honestly I went mad—There was a whole bunch of those damned little things you throw—you know ‘grenades.’ I picked them up one at a time and threw them about. . . . I threw one at the dead body of Rettison—I felt I couldn’t stand it there—if even I saw anything move I flung a grenade. I denied God and I believe I foamed at the mouth. I may have thrown them at English or French or anyone—I should have thrown one at our Colonel if he had been there—perhaps I did—I had lost all cosmic sense. . . . I was nothing—just a crumbling negation waiting for the earth to close up. And then something vital happened—I believe I dropped one of the damned things on my foot. . . . I swung out into a darkness.”

Arthur coughed and rolled his pipe round in his mouth. His lips were trembling in a peculiar way, and I said I thought I heard someone downstairs calling. I thought it better for us to go, so I took Arthur's arm, and we found them all in the drawing-room. On a table there was the medal that Arthur had lately received from the King. They were looking at it as we came in, and they all looked round at us. There was a curiously strained moment, in which a jumble of emotions seemed to vibrate through the room. I did not know why this should be so, or how much of Arthur's story the others knew, but it was Florence Cheesewright's suave voice as usual, with its soothing upward inflection that seemed to relieve the tension.

“My! what a dandy ribbon!”

ARMISTICE

On the evening of November 10th, 1918, a French officer, in the pale blue uniform of a Captain of Artillery, was ambling slowly up and down Little Compton Street. There was about his slow but watchful movements the air of a man who is being kept waiting. And such indeed proved to be the case. For after some minutes there came hurrying in his direction a fellow-countryman, of somewhat similar build to himself, but in mufti. And the greeting of the latter was:

“Pardon, my dear Anton! I was detained.”

They shook hands with cordiality, and repaired to the Monaco.

Over glasses of vermouth they carried on the following conversation in their own language:

“You have heard the news, of course?”

“The Armistice?”

“It is to be signed to-morrow morning.”

“Thank God! But that I imagine is not the urgent matter you wished to discuss with me.”

“As you say, Max, that is not the matter. But listen, the war is to all intents and purposes over. Our cause and our country have claimed four and a half precious years of our lives. During that time one had no right to claim any consideration for one’s own interests, if they were in any way likely to affect the great issue. Am I right?”

“Perfectly, my dear Anton.”

“But now that it is over one may perhaps indulge a little in the consideration of one’s own personal affairs, eh? Passions that have—that have slumbered may be assuaged. You remember that little affair of your own at Chambéry many years ago?”

“With that upstart lieutenant in the Dragoons?”

“I had the honour to be of assistance to you. And at the time you said _____”

The face of the officer in mufti looked startled.

“My dear Anton, do I understand that you wish to fight a duel?”

The officer addressed as Anton bowed solemnly.

“Can it be that—that English officer, Captain Hignett? I remember you telling me that there had been trouble. Pauline! . . . Wasn’t that the girl’s name?”

“She was my fiancée.”

“But a duel! My dear old man, the English do not fight duels. Even in our country it is no longer——”

Anton rapped his fist down upon the table.

“There shall be a duel even if it is the last one in the story of the world. A duel, or a thrashing, or a murder.”

His eyes rolled, his pale cheeks shook as though with an ague of passion. It was clear from his restless movements that his nerves were all on edge. His neck was scarred by the track of a piece of shrapnel. He was barely thirty-five years of age, but his close-cropped hair was nearly white. His face was lined and twisted, like a man who for a generation has been observing the tortures of the damned.

“I regret this extremely,” said his friend.

“You gave me a promise,” answered Anton de Thiepval, almost sullenly.

“Which I shall most assuredly keep, old friend. I only repeat—I regret this extremely. The War is over. Let us bury all animosities.”

“There are some things which only cowards and poltroons bury.”

“Come then. Remind me of the details. It was, I think, two years ago. Things move so rapidly these days. I am myself submerged in the vibrations of tragedy.”

“You will remember, my dear Max, I was liaison officer at that time attached to the British 97th Division. I was slightly wounded during the first week of the war and sent to a base hospital at Rouen. It was there I met Pauline. She was the daughter of an advocate at Lamballe, an old Breton family. When I met her she was a ward sister, one of the most beautiful, adorable women who ever lived. I fell desperately in love, and I had every reason to believe she reciprocated my affections. But she was a difficult woman to understand, Max. She made me jealous from the very first. She loved everyone. At first I thought it was the men, and that she was flirting with them. In time I came to understand that it was her way. She had no

capacity for flirting at all. She loved everyone, men, women, children, even dogs. She was lavish with her affections. And so absorbed was she with her work that you could safely aver that love with her was a pure abstraction. I ceased to be jealous, but I told her plainly that I loved her and wanted to make her my wife. Her answer was always the same. She would smile—oh, ever so kindly and murmur: ‘We are all mad, Anton. Wait till this is all over.’ I never got anything more satisfactory out of her than that, but it satisfied me. She could not look at me as she did and not mean more. I set my mind, like an alarm clock, against the day when it would all be over. I repeated to myself again and again: ‘We are all mad. But one day we shall be sane, and Pauline will be my wife.’ When I was discharged from the hospital I was passed as unfit for active service, but owing to my knowledge of English, I was, as I just told you, appointed liaison officer to this British division. It was then that I met Captain Hignett. He was a good-looking man of that lean English kind, reserved but entirely friendly. He too had been wounded while serving with a machine-gun company, and was now a transport officer at Amiens. My work brought me in close touch with him, and we spent many pleasant days and evenings together. I saw nothing of Pauline, although I wrote to her regularly. Her replies were brief and perfunctory, although couched in affectionate terms. I could not complain of this. I knew the poor girl was worked to death, and the world was ‘not yet sane.’ A whole year passed. And then one day to my delight I heard that she was coming to Amiens. She had been very ill, and her father having some important Government post at Amiens she joined him there for a brief rest. I need not say that I lost no time in paying the family my respects. I found Pauline looking pale and worn, but more adorable than ever. She was surrounded by her family—there were two sisters, a cousin, and an aunt in the household—so I had great difficulty in getting her by herself. But when the chestnuts began to bloom along the side of the canal she would sometimes go there to sit or read, and there I would pour out my heart to her. She appeared to be in a yielding mood, and again and again I imagined she was on the point of succumbing to my entreaties. But it always came back to the same story—*The World was insane*. It was impossible to form judgments, to do things rationally. In such a mood one might act, and then live to repent. Men and women were all behaving in a crazy unbalanced way, eating, drinking, loving, knowing that there might be no to-morrow. I accepted her attitude as a compliance upon the terms of the war being over.

“And then one evening, I made my fatal mistake. I took this Captain Hignett to visit her. I little knew the anguish this was to bring me. He talked in his quiet voice to the father about fishing and shooting.

“You know what these English are. You could not tell from his manner what he was thinking or feeling. He almost seemed to ignore Pauline. He certainly paid her no compliments, and expressed no great anxiety to see her again. Walking home from the house he made no comment about her, or about the family. He talked shop.

“The father, however, had invited him there to dinner the following Sunday. It was on this occasion that I became aware of the preoccupation of Pauline. When I was talking to her I observed her eyes following the stranger. . . . My dear Max, the English are our good Allies. I do not propose to offer any criticism. But I am convinced that they and we will never understand each other. This man embodied in himself the salient characteristics of his race. As the days passed I could not determine whether the man was a fool or a consummate actor. He was almost *gauche* in his attitude towards Pauline, nor could I get him to speak of her. But I saw him glance at her once or twice in a way I did not like. It was the expression of a man either dreaming, mad, or struggling with temptation. I tried to draw him out by enlarging upon my own love for Pauline, and he infuriated me with his attitude of detached patronage. It was as though he could not be bothered with *my* troubles, but he had to work some problem out by himself. A week later I met them walking side by side by the canal, Pauline doing all the talking, and the Englishman frowning and looking very solemn. When they saw me coming Pauline looked distinctly flustered, but Hignett appeared quite unconcerned and he greeted me as though the position were quite normal. I need hardly say that after that there was a coldness between us.

“I was of course prepared to concede that this meeting may have been an accident, but my hopes in this direction were quickly dissipated. They were seen together day after day. My friends brought me reports of clandestine meetings. Pauline, I could see, was profoundly disturbed in my presence. I suspected that she arranged things so that I could never get her alone. She began to adopt towards me that attitude which every lover detests, the attitude of sisterly pity. I consoled myself with the memory of her reflection that the world was not sane. I felt convinced that she would do nothing until the war was over, and then we should all meet on equal ground. Hignett had the advantage of me in that he was stationed at Amiens. My duties called me all over the place, and I was away for days and weeks at a time. But my rage at the perfidy of this Englishman was beginning to reach boiling-point. One day I was under orders to go to the other end of the line, and I knew that I should probably be away for months.

“The night before I left I met Captain Hignett in the street. After a formal greeting I told him I was going and I said sternly: ‘Captain Hignett, you have an English expression—*It isn’t done!* I would ask you to ponder that carefully in relation to your actions.’ He looked surprised, then answered coolly: ‘I’m not conscious of doing, or being about to do, anything dishonourable.’ I replied: ‘Very good! I trust to your honour as an officer and a gentleman,’ and I turned on my heel.

“Barely a month passed, Max, barely a month, when the whole world came tumbling about my ears. I was at Bapaume when a friend sent me the soul-destroying news. One of my sources of comfort had been that a few days after my departure Pauline was due to return to Rouen. Now came the news that instead of going to Rouen she had gone to England with Hignett. She had married him at Amiens. I cannot tell you what I suffered. I tried to be sent back to the firing line. I craved for death, extinction. I was only sustained by the slumbering passions of revenge. My soul raged with blind anger against this perfidious traitor and the woman who said that such a thing as marriage was not to be considered ‘till the world was sane.’

“Sane! God in heaven! Was I sane? Was Pauline sane? Or was this a prankish reaction to the world insanity? I couldn’t sleep. My thoughts were poisoned. I had never had a fair chance. While my back was turned this cool snake had crept in and robbed the nest that should have been my future home. I developed a fever, and spent many months lying on my back, raging against Fate and the universe. When I recovered I promised myself that when the world was sane again I would shock its smugness with my insanity. Honestly, old friend, I nurtured the darkest inclinations in my heart. I understood how men have been driven to the last extremity of the *crime passionelle*. It has only been by reminding myself constantly that I am an officer, and that this treacherous friend wears the uniform of an officer of an allied race, that I am able to force myself to give him the opportunity of satisfaction.”

Max regarded his empty glass thoughtfully.

“You are fully determined, then, to see this thing through?”

“But yes.”

“And you demand my assistance?”

“As you say.”

“And when is this—this challenge to be delivered?”

“To-night, my friend. We go straight from here.”

II

In the library of a square-brick house, with its lawns sloping down to the river, at Teddington, a tall slim young man was sorting out a collection of army forms. His clear grey eyes were alight with eagerness. He had just heard the news on the telephone of the probable Armistice on the morrow, and he hummed gaily to himself at his work. After some minutes he rang the bell, and an ancient butler entered. He looked up and said:

“Ah, Mason! I’m expecting a friend to-night to dinner. An American gentleman, Lieutenant Frazier Brandt. He may be here at any moment. Show him in.”

“Very good, sir.”

“What time did my wife say she would be home?”

“Madame said she might be a little late, sir. About eight o’clock. Shopping, I think, sir.”

“Very good. How is my father to-day?”

“The General is pretty well, thank you, sir.”

Mason had been in the family thirty-five years, and he adopted a proprietary interest in his master, even when the solicitude came from the son.

“All right, Mason, thank you. Show Lieutenant Brandt in when he comes.”

“Very good, sir.”

When the butler retired the young man continued to sort his papers, but his manner was restless and preoccupied. Armistice! The war over! Pauline! Thank God! Plans and anticipations jostled each other in a joyous riot. He would be able to resign, to return to civil life. He would be able to take his wife for a real honeymoon at last. Italy, Algeria, Egypt! Then they would return and he would go back to scientific research, and they would start that wonderful home they had dreamed of and planned during the last years of horror and suspense. Home, security, Pauline, children! It seemed too wonderful to be true! . . .

Nearly half an hour passed amid these pleasant reveries when the butler re-entered and announced:

“Mr. Frazier Brandt.”

A thick-set young American in officer's uniform swung into the room and gripped his hand:

"Why, Hignett, I'm mighty pleased to see you. How are you?"

"Fine, and how are you, Brandt?"

"Bully. I had some little difficulty finding this place."

"Yes, it's my father's house, you know. He's a widower, lives here with odds and ends of relatives. Pauline and I are just camping here till we can find a place of our own."

"Well, that's fine. I'm real glad to see you, Hignett. You've heard the news, of course?"

"Yes, they're signing to-morrow, I'm told."

"Gosh! Isn't it wonderful? I just can't realise it. All the boys getting away back home. No more of these ghastly horrors, broken homes, broken limbs. Fancy being just a free man again, Hignett, and feeling you can do and act like a human being. I feel just crazy."

"I know. I shall go crazy to-morrow myself if it comes off. One has got so used to it one simply can't believe that there can ever be the old life again. Where and when do you think you'll be going, Brandt? I don't believe you ever told me anything about your people, when we met in Paris."

"I have a wife and three kiddies and an old mother and two sisters, waiting for me in the little burg of Trenton, and I am going to get right back on the first boat I can crowd on to going west. Oh, it's great; it's fine! Golly! there's some good times coming to us yet, Hignett!"

Hignett stood up and laughed, and the two young men banged each other on the shoulder in sheer exuberance. They had met by pure chance at a cabaret in Paris, and had formed one of those quick war friendships, which in some cases lasted a lifetime.

"I'm just crazy to meet your missus," said Brandt.

"I'm crazy to show her to you," replied Hignett, and he pointed at a photograph in a silver frame. "She'll be home to dinner about eight."

"My! that's fine," said Brandt, examining the photo. "It makes me feel real home-sick. Gosh! She's a peach—French, isn't she?"

Hignett nodded.

“I met her at Amiens. She’s one of the best, Brandt. Poor child! It hasn’t been much of a married life for her so far. But if the Boche signs to-morrow we’ll be able to make all that up.”

He was holding the photograph in his hand when there was another tap on the door, and Mason entered. He was carrying two visiting cards on a tray. He approached Hignett and said:

“These two gentlemen wish to see you, sir.”

Hignett picked up the cards, examined them, and looked a little puzzled. Then he said quickly:

“Show them in, Mason.”

When the butler had withdrawn he murmured:

“Anton de Thiepval! That’s a queer thing, Brandt. This was the very chap who introduced me to Pauline. I didn’t think he was friendly with me. I believe he was very keen on Pauline himself. I didn’t get the whole story from her. I know he had been hanging about a lot. I know she liked him to a certain extent at one time. It’s difficult to understand Frenchmen when it comes to their relations with women. You never can quite get the hang of how much they mean. They protest so much that their affairs are apt to lose all sense of proportion——”

The events of the next two minutes were so sudden and so astounding, that Brandt would be likely to remember them all his days. He saw the butler enter, announce two names, and retire. On his heels followed two very intense-looking men, one in the pale blue uniform of a French artillery officer. He heard Hignett exclaim:

“Hullo, de Thiepval!”

The next moment without a word of warning he saw the French officer give his friend a sharp rap across the face with an open glove. He exclaimed, “Gosh!” and sprang forward as though to come to his assistance. He felt Hignett’s hand grip his forearm. He could tell by the latter’s tense face and clenched fists that his instincts were the same as his own, but his startled expression seemed to be struggling to focus the amazing situation, and in some manner to keep it under control. He stood very erect, and merely muttered:

“This is my father’s house.”

The two Frenchmen were obviously waiting for him to make some further move.

After a momentary hesitation, he said quite calmly:

“May I ask, de Thiepval, what is the meaning of this—this unexpected attention?”

With a dramatic gesture de Thiepval declaimed:

“You are posturing, Captain Hignett. You know quite well you betrayed my trust in your honour. While my duties called me away to serve my fatherland, you ran off with the woman who was affianced to me!”

“Pauline was never affianced to you to my knowledge.”

“You lie! I loved her. She told me to wait till the war was over, *till the world was sane*. I trusted her. I trusted you. If the world was insane for me it was insane for you.”

“Love, so far as I may judge, is not dependent upon any degree of sanity or insanity of an outside world. . . . I am sorry you take it like this, de Thiepval. It was an open field.”

“It was not an open field. You crawled in whilst my back was turned! You are, in your own language, a dirty traitor.”

“I must ask you to withdraw that statement.”

The other officer then stepped into the breach.

“I would draw your attention, Captain Hignett, to the fact that you have been insulted by my friend, Captain de Thiepval.”

“I am vividly aware of that, Major Fougeret. And I deplore the fact that your friend should have thought it necessary to behave in this manner here, in my father’s house. If he wants any kind of a rough house there are other places——”

“Goody!” exclaimed Brandt suddenly. “You see what he’s after, Hignett? He wants to fight a duel.”

This, surprisingly enough, had not so far occurred to Hignett. His expression was one almost of angry disgust. The situation seemed to him a little ludicrous, like a scene from an *opéra-bouffe*. People don’t fight duels these days. Controlling himself as well as he could, he said:

“This is absurd. You have no right to come here and behave in this ridiculous fashion. If this were my house I’d kick you out. But my father upstairs is old and an invalid. If you wish to be rude to me please do it outside, or anywhere you like to choose.”

Fougeret bowed.

“I regard this, then, as an acceptance of my friend’s challenge. May I assume that this gentleman here will act for you?”

“Oh, come now,” said Brandt, in his heavy paternal voice, “let’s cut all this out. To-morrow there’s to be peace. Surely there’s been enough blood-letting these last four years. Why can’t you boys pull yourselves together? I’m sure my friend, Hignett, wouldn’t play any underhand games. He’s a gentleman. My view is that there was an open field for the hand of Mrs. Hignett and you didn’t just happen to pull it off, Captain. Hignett won and that’s all there is to it.”

“He won while my back was turned.”

Fougeret turned towards Hignett, and exclaimed:

“This is an affair in which my friend’s honour is at stake. I shall be glad to know what you propose to do about it.”

Hignett was still maintaining his puzzled, rather contemptuous attitude. He spoke testily.

“The whole thing is childish. I have no intention of fighting a duel.”

The face of de Thiepval turned a shade paler. He said acidly:

“After these four years during which England and France have been allies it pains me to have to call an English officer a coward!”

Hignett was patently uncertain how to act. His face was beginning to flush with anger, which he was at pains to control. At the same time his feelings appeared to be more bewildered by the unexpected outrage than profoundly stirred. Secure in his own sense of rectitude in the matter, conscious of the completeness of his triumph, absorbed in his own happiness, he could not but harbour a sneaking pity for de Thiepval.

As he hesitated, de Thiepval suddenly stepped forward and spat upon his uniform!

The face of Hignett underwent a strange transformation. Bewilderment, hesitation and forbearance vanished, nothing seemed to be left but the hard, cold anger of the fighting man. He turned to Brandt and said:

“Brandt, I think you understand the situation. I leave it to you to settle the details with Captain de Thiepval’s friend. When you have done so, will you kindly ring the bell. The butler will show these gentlemen out.”

With that he walked deliberately out of the room, closing the door very quietly after him.

Brandt was dumbfounded. When he had trundled out in a taxi to this dull-looking house at Teddington, he little expected to be suddenly whirled into the midst of a deplorable tragedy. He felt as though he had been chloroformed and awakened to find himself trajected across the centuries, or taking part in the sham posturing of a film. With Hignett absent he felt his powers of protestation to be useless. He listened attentively to the incisive suggestions of Fougeret.

One memory jumped vividly to the forefront of his mind. Whilst in Paris he and Hignett had visited a "Tir des Pigeons." He had discovered that his friend was a deadly shot with a revolver. He promptly rejected Fougeret's suggestion of sabres or épées. For all he knew, Hignett had never handled "the darn things." He found himself making arrangements concerning duelling pistols for dawn near a small village in the pas de Calais, the affair to take place two days later. He made a note of the details. After the officers had gone, he sought for Hignett, but the butler told him he was upstairs "reading to the general." It was half an hour before he came down. Brandt met him on the staircase.

"Gosh, Hignett," he said, "why did you do it?"

"He spat on the King's uniform," replied Hignett quietly. "Listen, I hear my wife. Come on downstairs and I'll introduce you to her."

III

At eleven o'clock precisely the maroons went off. The King and Queen came out on the balcony of Buckingham Palace. A massed band of the Guards played "Land of Hope and Glory" in the courtyard below. The great concourse, which had already assembled, cheered. But their cheers had not the fervour and the frenzy which was to be their character later in the day. Drugged by the misery of four and a half years of war, the people appeared to regard this manifestation as one further episode in the story. They had not yet grasped the full significance of it. There was nothing about the familiar figures of their King and Queen, or the grey coats of the Guards, or the drab, characterless November sky, to suggest that this was one of the most momentous days in history. Nevertheless, the forecourt of Buckingham Palace remained throughout the day the pivot of the people's activities. From that hour they began to stream in the direction of the Palace, as though the news they had received by word of mouth, or in the newspapers,

required some kind of material confirmation. When they had seen the King and Queen, or heard the solemn melodies played by the Guards, they turned to each other and exclaimed:

“My God, it’s all over!”

And they went away with light hearts. By twelve o’clock the crowd was so dense that no traffic could get within half a mile of the Palace gates. And what a strange traffic it was! Every conceivable kind of motor and horse vehicle merged to this centre, weighted down by indiscriminate humanity. At the stupendous realisation all social barriers snapped. Every vehicle was a public conveyance, restricted only by its cubic capacity. By midday the countless millions began to roar themselves hoarse in frenzied yells—of relief. For it may be said that throughout that day there was one simple emotion which stirred the multitude as though it were a unit, the emotion of intense relief. There existed no spirit of triumph, malice, recrimination—there was indeed little interest in the terms of the pact—there was only one thought expressed in the common formula of the day:

“Thank God, it’s over!”

Having completed his business at the War Office, Hignett was one of the early arrivals outside the Palace gates. He too was not so far deeply affected by the significance of the affair. He was still shaken and exasperated by the events of the previous evening, still dominated by the claims of his personal preoccupations. His anger and disgust were being slowly penetrated by a greater disquiet. The previous evening’s contretemps appeared so foolish, so unnecessary. The days that he had been living for, the days when he was to devote himself to Pauline, and to realise their united dream of happiness, were abruptly jeopardised at the very last moment. To have survived that awful war and then perhaps to fall to a bullet in a foolish quarrel! Or even to kill the other man! . . . And he could not tell his wife. She would not understand. And somehow it did not seem quite fair to her.

He wandered down the Mall, watching the crowd. In spite of himself its exuberant quality began to excite him. He saw officers and privates walking arm in arm, veteran “brass-hats” lying back in their cars surrounded by screaming little munition girls, waving flags. Flags seemed to spring up from everywhere. And the most surprising and un-English attitude was that everyone was talking to everyone else. All class distinctions had vanished; and not only were they talking, they were talking excitedly, and laughing, cheering, and singing, and even embracing each other.

He had appointed to meet Pauline, Frazier Brandt, and two women friends of Pauline for lunch at the Barbarotti restaurant on the Embankment, and he arrived there well before his time. It was the natural instinct to share the magic of this hour with those one loved. The gay restaurant was already crowded with cheering people, the band was playing, and excited couples were dancing between the tables. New-comers were greeted with shouts of "Hurrah! hurrah!" as though by their presence they were contributing to the entertainment of this wonderful experience. Frazier Brandt was the first to appear, with two other American officers, whose names Hignett did not catch—Brandt made some light-hearted apology for bringing them. One of them was an exceptionally tall man in uniform, but wearing a shiny black topper, which he had purloined from somewhere, and which he insisted on wearing all through lunch. Pauline arrived with an even larger party, some of whom were quite unknown to her. As the restaurant was so crowded, they all had to sit where they could. But their party was quickly absorbed into the larger party. There was in effect only one party, but Hignett, Pauline and Brandt managed to sit at the same table.

They drank champagne, not that they needed stimulant, but because champagne seemed the appropriate symbol of festivity, and their eyes shone as though with the lustre of revelation. They toasted each other, and life, and men, and strangers and even ideas. Suddenly two of them would rise and dance, or grip the hands of strangers.

At their table sat Dr. Caswell, the well-known osteopath, an elderly man with horn-rimmed spectacles and the manners of a judge.

"Watch them, Hignett," he said between the courses. "The readjustment of the rhythm of life has already begun. It is a notorious fact that after any such great upheaval the primary instinct of every people is to dance. For years now everyone will be dancing mad. When the street-bells have been jangled, out of tune and harsh, and all the ordered rhythms blown to pieces, the vital energy that survives instantly starts to re-establish the rhythms. War is a cacophony, but life is rhythm."

The tables were cleared, but the dancing went on. Some went and others came. They wanted to be everywhere at once, to meet old friends and to make new ones, to feel the warm vibration of human life around them, to know that everyone regarded his fellow-creature as a friend. Hignett was dancing with his wife, their bodies swaying in perfect unison. Suddenly he thought:

"Rhythm! . . . rhythm! and in twenty-four hours I may be dead."

“Darling,” she whispered, “let’s ask them all out to Teddington to-night. Everyone. Let us make what you call—a night of it.”

To-night? Well, why not? There was no reason why one shouldn’t dance *to-night*. “Make a night of it!” By all means. Ask everyone. Light up the old hall with youth and gaiety, and let his old father rejoice in the sight.

“Why, yes, Pauline, you are a genius! We will ask them all.”

Hignett was seated talking to Pauline, who was breathlessly discussing the arrangements for the evening, when he was startled by the abrupt approach of two figures towards the table. It was de Thiepval and his friend! De Thiepval’s eyes were glowing with a strange light. He appeared to be on the point of tears. Hignett jumped up, but the French officer gave him a ceremonious bow, then turning to Pauline, he took her hand and kissed it.

“Madame,” he said, and his voice was hoarse with emotion, “you once said to me, ‘When the world was sane.’ Now . . . now I understand you.”

Then he turned to Hignett and held out both his arms.

“Captain, forgive me. I have—I have seen a people *sane*. Everything false suddenly falls away from me. Madame was right, and I was wrong. I cannot—I cannot—you understand—forgive me for my rudeness——”

Hignett felt a lump come into his throat. For a moment he could not speak. Then he took the other’s hand in a firm grasp, patted his shoulders, and said in that shy English manner:

“My dear chap!”

There was something childlike and a little pathetic about de Thiepval as he bravely tried to control his tears.

“I did not know—I did not think—there could ever be such a day, such a spirit. One sees everything clearly.”

Frazier Brandt had been watching this reconciliation. He suddenly put his arm around the Frenchman and exclaimed:

“De Thiepval, old man, that’s fine! Come and have a drink with us, and your friend too. I’ve forgotten his name. I’m a little drunk, as a matter of fact. Put it there. We’re all friends now—eh? No more wars, no more troubles, all good friends—eh? Waiter, another bottle of Pol Roger.”

The wine was brought, and the toasts started again.

“To France! To England! To America!”

“How will they be feeling in Berlin?”

“Relieved I should think. Poor devils!”

“Poor devils!”

Pauline suddenly stood up, her beautiful eyes aglow. She raised her glass to the two Frenchmen.

“My dear Anton, my dear Max, you must both come to-night to Teddington. We make a night of it.”

“Teddington! But how——”

“There are no ‘hows.’ There is Dr. Caswell’s car, and some taxis, or munition vans. One gets there. Then one either gets back or does not get back. There are beds and shake-downs, and sofas, and some food, and much dancing, and all goodwill, and love, and friendship. Anyone who says he is my friend comes back to Teddington, if only to prove that the world is sane. Will you come, Anton?”

De Thiepval bowed solemnly.

“Whatever the goddess decrees.”

IV

The impromptu party arranged by Pauline on Armistice night at General Hignett’s house at Teddington consisted of about thirty-five people, of whom no less than fifteen stayed the night. The telephone was kept busy, and the guests came and went in bewildering fashion. The old general himself dressed and came down, even donning his Boer War medals. He did not join the party at dinner, but he appeared soon after for a short period, and insisted upon being presented to the young officers, to each of whom he made a ceremonious little speech, formally thanking them for their services to the allied cause. The irresponsible gaiety of the evening seemed to puzzle him a little.

A gramophone was already emitting the strains of a foxtrot, and with it the glamour of Armistice Day seemed to take on renewed life. Young men and young women, strong of body and keen of mind, and the gloomy menace of four and a half years abruptly removed by the stroke of a pen! To be free to make one’s life as one desired! How simple seemed the claims of personal love and personal success unhampered by the grinding machinery of State control!

The young people glanced over their shoulders to admire the wonderful diamonds of Madame Beneventuros. She was the wife of an Argentine senator and cattle king. Her diamonds were famous. Hignett had met her husband over Government business, and as Beneventuros had to go to Barcelona for a few days on family affairs, he and Pauline had asked Madame Beneventuros to stay with them. These gleaming gems seemed symbolic of the unexplored riches of this newly awakened world.

De Thiepval had quickly succumbed to the spirit of the day. His jealousy had evaporated. His spirits were as gay as they had formerly been morose. He danced with Pauline, and in a quiet corner of the hall spoke freely of the quarrel and of his contrition.

By midnight Frazier Brandt was garrulous. He had drunk more champagne than he was accustomed to, and the result had heightened his natural bias towards kindness, good-fellowship, and universal love. He was disposed to embrace everyone, men and women alike, and tell them what fine and noble specimens of humanity they were. There had been a halt in the evening's activities, and the whole company had reassembled in the dining-room, where more drinks and sandwiches were being served. It was at this moment that his garrulousness received an inspiration. He got on to his legs and made a speech.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I love you all. This is the greatest day in the history of the world. The greatest day, believe me. You will come to know it and look back on it. What we have to do, my good friends, is to keep it up. Keep up Armistice Day for ever, and ever, and ever. D’you get me? And it’s not only in the big things, it’s in the little things. Armistice Day! No more wars, no more envy, jealousy or malice. No more petty quarrels. Just all good friends, free . . . free men, free women, loving one another. Now I’m going to put across a proposition. All of us in this room, we’ve determined there’s going to be no more war, no more bloodshed. There was very nearly —no, I can’t tell you, it’s a personal affair; anyway, I guess it’s not up to me to talk about it. But, listen, I want to suggest that right here and now all we officers, and any others of you who’ve got guns, stilettos, or any other implements, put the whole lot into a sack, and that we then proceed down the garden to the boat-house and solemnly commit the whole kiboosh to the bosom of your ancient River Thames. And we make a prayer and say:

“ ‘Oh, Thames, here is our burnt-offering. See to it that there is no more war, no more strife, but that henceforth all men live in peace and goodwill towards each other.’ ”

Brandt's speech somehow fitted into the mood of the party. Everyone laughed, clapped, or cheered. Hignett was specially enthusiastic, although he was laughing too. A sheet was procured, and every man who had a weapon of any sort deposited it in the heap, which was then tied up. Then the whole party, including the women, some in overcoats and mackintoshes, and some even carrying umbrellas, formed into a procession, and, to the strains of "The Marseillaise," played on combs and whistled, they marched down to the boathouse. Hignett took the bundle, and, leaning over the edge of the platform, he said:

"Oh, Father Thames, at the inspiration of our bright young friend from America we commit this bundle to your keeping. We are fed up to the teeth with war and strife, and envy and jealousy. We pray you see to it that these things never happen again. Let the world remain free, and simple, and pure in heart as it has been on this Armistice Day. Amen!"

The bundle went plomp into the dark waters. The action produced on the whole company an almost involuntary effect of awe, then they turned and marched solemnly back to the house to the strains of "Land of Hope and Glory." . . . And still the dance went on.

Sometimes they would break up into little groups and talk, but for the most part dancing held sway.

Madame Beneventuros retired at half-past one.

It was not until nearly 3.30 that the rest of the party, with final embraces and benedictions, eventually retired to their various shake-downs and sleeping quarters, and it was not until they lay down that each member realised his or her extreme fatigue. For within a quarter of an hour or so all were in profound sleep.

In order to follow the amazing event which happened within the next hour and a half it is necessary to visualise roughly the plan of the ground floor of General Hignett's house.

The main entrance door, which was in the centre, led into a small vestibule, serving no other purpose than that of a buffer between the front door and the lobby which led into the large central hall. This lobby was about fifteen feet long and eight feet wide, and had one door leading into a cloak-room on the right. The other rooms on this floor, the dining-room and the L-shaped drawing-room on the west side and the library and billiard-room on the east side, all had doors leading into the central hall. In line with the entrance door and the lobby was a staircase which led up to a balcony on

the north side, overlooking the hall. On the west side, but separated from the main balcony, and entered by a separate staircase, was another small section of balcony. This was the part occupied by the General and his personal servants. The only three guests sleeping on the ground floor were the two French officers in the library, and an American—the same who had paraded the streets of London in a topper—who was comfortably ensconced on a lounge in the billiard-room. All the others were scattered in various rooms upstairs or above the garage.

By half-past four the whole household was in a profound sleep, with the possible exception of Hignett, whose mind was still semi-active with the events of the extraordinary day. He was half dreaming—pleasant riotous dreams interlarded with airs of foxtrots and jumbled phrases, and a sense of the promise of some newly awakened happiness. When suddenly the penumbra of his mind was pierced by a loud scream. He jumped out of bed and ran to the door. The balcony and hall were in complete darkness, but he was vaguely conscious of movement. There was the sound of a banging door, a rustle, and a dim vision of something white, and then, pitched on an hysterical note, the voice of Madame Beneventuros:

“He’s got my diamonds!”

He called out at random. “All right, Madame!” and groped for the switch. For some moments he could not find it. During that interval he heard the louder screams of Madame Beneventuros, and the opening of other doors, and voices calling out:

“What is it?”

When he got to the switch it only lighted the balcony, the switch for the hall being below. The hall, however, was dimly visible. He saw two figures, one lurking by the lobby entrance, the other hurrying across the hall. They were both masked.

Hignett’s mind came out of its torpid condition with a violent jerk. A crowd of small facts impressed themselves upon him at the same instant. One salient feature was that the men were armed, for he saw the tall American standing by the billiard-room door, holding up his hands. He was covered by the revolver of the man from the lobby. He could also hear the muffled throb of an automobile engine outside the front porch. The other man was moving with professional deftness in the direction of a cabinet that held some gold plate and gems. He hardly appeared to be in a hurry.

“This is a carefully arranged plot by highly skilled expert thieves. They came for the diamonds of Madame Beneventuros, but this gentleman thinks he might have a few extras as well. We’ll see——”

Hignett made an instinctive spring on to the staircase, and an equally instinctive spring back, for a bullet grazed his elbow. He scrambled towards his bedroom only to bump into Pauline.

“Get back, darling, get back! It’s all right,” he said, and then uttered a curse. He had gone back to the bedroom for his revolver. And suddenly the ironic truth struck him. Every single weapon of defence had been consigned to the gentle care of “Father Thames”! Of all those men in the house, not one had a weapon. These men must have been watching their every movement. It was a damnable situation. He heard other cries and screams, and crept back to the balcony. Quite a number of men were there in dressing-gowns and pyjamas, all helpless! For one of the thieves had his revolver covering the whole scene of operations, whilst the other calmly began to remove the contents of the cabinet into a large black bag. And then in a flash the whole bizarre business had reached a crisis of tragedy.

Without observing how she got there, Hignett suddenly observed Pauline at the foot of the stairs rushing in the direction of the thief and crying out, “No, no!”

He sensed in an instant the cause of her onset. In the cabinet were the jewels and little trinkets which had belonged to her mother and which had been temporarily placed there. His heart gave a throb of dread as he rushed after her. He sprang down the stairs in two bounds, but even that was not quick enough to avert the tragedy. The one thief continued to pack, but the other fired, and the bullet went clean through the heart of—de Thiepval!

The French officer had made a spring from the library door! Hignett caught Pauline in his arms and turned, and as he did so he was aware of a new element in the conflict. For there was the ping of a rifle-shot followed by a scream of pain from the man who had fired. In spite of the danger of his position with his beloved burden, Hignett could not help but turn, and the truth became evident to him at a glance. Up in his own section of balcony the General was busy with an old Lee-Metford rifle, such as was used during the Boer War. He was taking cover behind the projections in the balustrade, and calmly proceeding to snipe the enemy.

At this unexpected onslaught both the marauders dashed into the lobby and through the front door, each leaving a trail of blood. A car was heard to start. They had the diamonds, it was true, but little else, and each was

wounded. Some of the men rushed after them, others hastened to the telephone. The police were informed and a doctor sent for, although all knew, alas! that the doctor's services were a mere matter of form. De Thiepval had died in the gallant way that he would have chosen. They placed his body in one of the bedrooms and, setting two candles, Pauline, weeping a little, knelt and prayed for his soul. . . . With the raw light of dawn came the news that the thieves had been captured, and a bedraggled company met over tea and coffee and rolls and discussed the night's adventure.

The old gentleman had been badly shaken, but he insisted that he wished to see all the young officers and speak to them.

"It's an order from G.H.Q.," said Hignett, shrugging his shoulders, and he went upstairs, the others following him. The old man was sitting up in his bed; his eyes were very bright, and his lips moving jerkily. The men stood around the bed, and he looked at them, nodded and smiled. Then he said:

"Where is that other young Frenchman?"

Hignett coughed. "He—he fell in the conflict, sir."

The old General nodded slowly. Almost inaudibly, as if talking to himself, he suddenly said:

"You young men! . . ."

Then he raised himself and called out as though it were a military command:

"The strong man may lay down his arms, but he does not throw them away."

He lay back as though exhausted after that, and smiled once more.

"You young men . . . you young men . . ."

He closed his eyes, but his lips continued their jerky movement. . . .

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

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[The end of *Ups and Downs* by Stacy Aumonier]