The Old Card

Roland Pertwee

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THE OLD CARD

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BY
ROLAND PERTWEE

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TO
MY SON
AND HIS GODFATHER
HENRY AINLEY

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A FEW ELEMENTS

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FOREWORD

A visit to any modern French Art Gallery will reveal a number of canvases daubed all over with little patches of primary colours, almost as though the picture had been painted with confetti. Assuming you are unaccustomed to this form of application, you will declare against it with insular promptitude. But give the picture a chance—step back and view it from the far wall, and like as not you will find that these chaotic colours have blended and commingled, have ceased to exist as individual items and become merged in a single statement of meaning the artist intended to convey.

It is not always want of a single material that persuades the fashioning of a patchwork quilt. Patchwork, in its way, is as complete as are the green plush curtains that hang so soberly from the lacquered pole in your neighbour's parlour.

There is a motive in this preamble; I did not leap from a canvas to a patchwork quilt without purpose. When you have read these pages, if so be you have the patience and inclination, you will perceive what that motive is. Let me then forestall the inevitable criticism, "Why, this is but a series of events strung together by a mere thread of personality," and say at once, "Agreed; but that was the intention." And I would ask you to hold out the book at arm's length, get a fair perspective, and admit that it was not possible to deal with the subject otherwise, and that these disjointed clippings tumble together in a kind of united whole.

The life of a touring actor is as no other man's. It is a series of ever-changing pictures connected only by the Sunday train-journey. The most we can do is to catch a glimpse here and there as he halts upon the Road.

Here, then, are a few such glimpses for your approval or contempt.

ROLAND PERTWEE.

B.E.F.,
France, 1917.

THE OLD CARD

PART I. A FEW ELEMENTS

CHAPTER I
THE BIG CHANCE

Eliphalet Cardomay stepped from his first-class compartment to the platform. Potter, his dresser, having descended from the train while it was still in motion, respectfully held open the carriage door lest his august master should soil his beautiful wash-leather gloves.

It was gratifying to observe how the station porters touched their caps.

On the seat of the compartment he had vacated lay an open suit-case, several brown-paper-covered plays, copies of the *Era* and the *Referee*, an umbrella and a travelling cap. It was part of the dresser's duties to clear up the débris occasioned by Mr. Cardomay. A man who carries in his head all the emotions and all the lines—*Hamlet*, *Richard III.*, *The Silver King*, and countless other rôles of lesser importance—could hardly be expected to give attention to such a trifling matter as his own personal property.

Eliphalet accepted a bundle of letters from an obsequious advance agent, returned, with condescension, the tentative salutes of several members of his company, and passed down the long grey platform with springing step. The yellow smoke of the Midlands was as violets to his nostrils and as balm to his eyes.

With quiet satisfaction he noted how the ticket-collector at the barrier, instead of demanding his ticket, allowed him to pass with a polite "Good morning, Sir." After all, it is something to be known.

Mr. Cardomay invariably walked to his lodging, thereby giving a large section of his future public the opportunity of studying his features at close range, unadorned by the artifices of the make-up box or the beneficent influences of limelight. This walk also gave him a chance of seeing whether the effect of his billing justified the cost.

For twenty-five years had Eliphalet Cardomay "featured on the road," and there was little left for him to learn about Provincial Theatrical

Management.

The poster which preceded him to town displayed a well-proportioned man, whose head tilted fearlessly upon broad shoulders, and whose eyes shone as with a smouldering fire. A full growth of hair projected from under the curving brim of a Trilby hat. He wore a flowing tie, a fur-collared coat, and in his right hand carried an ivory-topped Malacca cane of original design. It was a striking poster, executed many years before, and everyone who knew it, and knew Eliphalet, marvelled how the original still continued to realise the picture in every detail.

The reader will have judged, and judged rightly, that our hero is one of the Old School—the school of graceful calisthenics, and meticulous elocution—but let him beware of anticipating too far; for, although Eliphalet Cardomay's histrionics might savour of the obsolete, he will not find in the man himself those traits usually allied to actors of this calibre.

In all his long career no one had ever heard Eliphalet address a fellow-performer as "laddie," nor a theatrical landlady as "Ma." Neither did he borrow half-crowns at the Bodega, nor absorb tankards of Guinness's stout in the wings. In fact, Eliphalet Cardomay was a very estimable fellow, hedged about and wing-clipped by stale conventions of his calling, which, in spite of his bitterly-learnt knowledge of their existence, he was never able to supersede by modern methods.

The almost impertinent disregard for old stage processes and old accepted technique which brings notoriety and admiration to the actor of to-day was as unattainable to Eliphalet as the peak of Mount Parnassus.

Twenty-five years before, a London newspaper had prophesied that he would mature and become big. He did mature, but on the lines of his beginning, and when at last he returned to London—the Mecca of his dreams—he was driven by laughter back to the provinces whence he had come.

In the hearts of provincial playgoers there were still warm places for Eliphalet Cardomay, and the rich cadences of his voice never failed to arouse strange emotions and irrepressible yearnings in the bosoms of impressionable young ladies, who wrote and confided their admiration with surpassing regularity and singular lack of reserve.

To his own company he was always courteous and considerate, but a trifle remote. He wrapped himself about in mystery, and as no one knew exactly how to take him very few made the attempt.

"The public man should always be an enigma."

He addressed this statement to a very voluble young member of his company, who frequented bars and lavished cigarettes upon total strangers.

"Be mysterious if you wish to succeed," he continued, developing the theme. "Your never-ceasing 'Have a spot,' and your ever-open cigarette-case, are the most obvious things that ever happened."

Naturally Eliphalet Cardomay was looked upon as something of a joke. A man with a name like that could hardly expect anything else. Yet to him the name Eliphalet, which his sire, a once-distinguished tragedian, had borne before him, was one of his most cherished possessions. Like a blare of trumpets it rang out from a hundred hoardings. It was electric—original—arresting. A title to juggle with; and yet, so strange is the human mind, so averse to aught but the copper coinage of the language, that his few intimate friends and the inner circles of all provincial Green Rooms knew, spoke and thought of him by no other appellation than "The Old Card."

Let it be clearly understood that no one called him the Old Card to his face; for, although regarded as a joke, Eliphalet was clearly loved by his fellows, and if at times they indulged in the gentlest of leg-pulling there was not one amongst them who would willingly have caused him the slightest pain or distress.

But to return to our hero, striding briskly over the cobble streets on the particular Sunday morning on which our narrative opens. Every feature of the ugly midland town was familiar to him and every feature good. Taking a turning to the right, he pursued his way through a narrow and deserted alley between two factories. There was an acute angle a little further down, and here on a wall facing him a full-length prototype of himself had been posted.

Eliphalet stopped and saluted his printed image.

"Old boy," he said, "we are back—back home again. I deserted you for a while—a little while—but I've learnt my lesson, old friend, and we will see the rest of the show out together."

There was a tremor in his voice as he spoke the words and an unnatural mist before his eyes. It was this same mist, perhaps, that delayed his noticing that the billsticker had applied the last sheet of the poster at least ten inches too high, with the result that the feet were practically attached to the knees. Mr. Cardomay made a note of the fact in a small book he carried for the purpose and continued his walk.

Two factory girls nudged each other as he passed them by.

"See who it was? Mister What-you-call Cardomay."

"Oh, I like 'im. 'E's good! When'll we go?"

The rest of their remarks drifted out of earshot, but Eliphalet Cardomay felt a tinge of pride warming his bosom. He was back again—back home.

The excellent Mrs. Booker, best of landladies, greeted him with every indication of respectful devotion.

"It's a treat to see you again, sir, it is indeed," she said, opening the door of the comfortable little parlour, where a jolly fire was burning in the grate and reflecting its rays on many framed and autographed photographs of the celebrated artists the room at one time or another had accommodated.

"When I heard you'd gorn to London, I said to Booker, 'There! we've lorst 'im,' and 'e says, 'I believe we 'ave,' and I says, 'That's what we 'ave done; for, depend on it, if London gets hold of 'im, it'll claim 'im as their own and never let 'im go.' "

Eliphalet's lips tightened a little. He drew off his gloves and cast them on the embossed green plush sofa, and quoted:

"The clinging magic runs,
They will return as strangers,
They will remain as sons."

"I returned as a son—and could not remain as a stranger." Then, observing that his remarks were entirely lost upon his audience, he concluded:

"Did you get me a small leg of lamb, Mrs. Booker?"

She nodded gravely.

"A beautiful leg," she replied; "with a black-currant tart to follow. I 'aven't forgotten your little likes, sir."

Eliphalet smiled beatifically.

"You are an excellent good woman," he said. Then, stretching himself luxuriously, "Yes, there is no doubt at all—it is very good to be back again."

He cast a loving and possessive eye over the homely surroundings, shook out his table napkin, and drew up a chair to the table, as a king might sit at a banquet.

Probably the reader is wondering what this story is all about, and certainly it might have been a distinct advantage to have begun at the beginning rather than the end. Having committed ourselves so far, however, there is no option but to retrace our steps to a period some three months prior to the foregoing incident.

It was at the conclusion of a long tour that Eliphalet Cardomay received a startling proposal from London that he should appear in the title-part in Oscar Raven's dramatisation of the Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini.

For weeks past the production had been boomed in all the dramatic columns, and the advertised cast practically made a corner in the biggest stage stars of the day.

Sir Owen Frazer, Actor-Manager and Knight (with danger of becoming a baronet), was to have appeared as Cellini, and had favoured several reporters with extensive interviews in which he sought to convey to the public mind the depths of his research into Cellini's character. He had even gone to the length of growing a real beard for the part, rather than relying on the good offices of Mr. Clarkson. Therefore, when at the eleventh hour his voice entirely forsook him, and Harley Street unanimously declared that it would forsake him altogether unless he gave it a rest for a month, consternation in dramatic circles ran very high indeed.

Eight days existed before the much-advertised first night, and the finding of a fitting successor was at once the most baffling and the most urgent affair.

After an all-night sitting, in which the name of every prominent male member of the profession was suggested, and in which Mr. Oscar Raven and his part collaborator, Julian Franks, nearly came to blows with every member of the Syndicate, each other included, the producer, a young man whose youth was only exceeded by his brilliance, rose and standing, flamingo-like, on one leg, addressed the meeting.

"For God's sake, get to bed," he said. "You are talking bilge, the whole lot of you. I'll find someone—in fact, I have already. You will say I am mad," he continued, in response to a chorus of inquiries which greeted his statement, "but even at so great a risk I will tell you his name. It is Eliphalet Cardomay."

Raymond Wakefield was quite right when saying they would accuse him of madness. Sir Owen Frazer wrote on a piece of paper the opinion that he was probably dangerous as well. But Wakefield only laughed.

"Commend me to authors for stupidity and to syndicates for lack of intelligence," he observed. "It is evident none of you have the smallest acquaintance with the character of Cellini or the art of Eliphalet."

"But the man can't act."

"My dear Raven!" expostulated Wakefield. "The man never ceases to act."

"But not the kind we want," from Franks.

"It will be my duty to stop him acting."

"He has no brains," contributed Sir Owen, more by gesture than sound.

"I, on the other hand, have plenty," the producer modestly remarked. "Just consider the character of Cellini, and what do we find? Conceit, bombast. Probably he had a beautiful voice, certainly a chivalrous manner, unquestionably an incapacity to realise his own ineffability. Turn to Eliphalet and you find the exact prototype. *Compris?*"

"By George, yes!" said Julian Franks.

But Oscar Raven stretched out a silencing hand.

"Does this man Cardomay strike you as the kind of personality that could ever have achieved the masterpieces which came from the hand of Cellini?"

"Well, of course, that is pure rot," returned Wakefield. "That was where Frazer was all over the place in the part. Trying to convey an undercurrent of massive brain-power. Believe me, the work of great artists is entirely spontaneous—they carry no stamp of genius. Look at Raven, for instance! He has written quite a remarkably good play. Does his exterior suggest it? No. Anyone'd mistake him for a haberdasher's assistant. But I'm off to bed. Fix it up amongst yourselves."

And that was how Eliphalet Cardomay was dragged from the provinces and hurled into the forefront of the London stage, with a great part and eight days in which to study it.

As the train bore him towards the Metropolis, he repeated over and over to himself:

"It has come at last. They want me."

His mind flew back to the old press-cutting of twenty-five years ago. "One day this young man will mature and become big."

"We'll show 'em, old boy!" he said. Yet behind it all was a strange fear—a queer, nervous doubt—the same doubt which had ever stood between him and his cherished dreams of appearing in the West End with a production of his own. He had never taken the plunge—he had never swum across the Thames from the Surrey side, and it is probable he never would have done. But now the great ones had stretched out their hands and said, "Come over."

London is a chilling place to the stranger, and Eliphalet felt the chill almost before his foot touched the platform. There was no genial cap-touching from the porters—no polite salutation from the official at the

ticket-barrier. He took a cab. There was no particular point in walking—he could scarcely expect to be recognised.

Fur-coated and Trilby-hatted, Eliphalet Cardomay entered the stage-door of the Duke of Connaught's and mixed with the company. It was curious what little notice was taken of him. He might have been nobody. Presently a business-manager came and asked if he were Mr. Cardomay, and, learning this was the case, carried him off to an office near the roof to sign contracts and discuss details.

"I shall require my own poster to be used," said Eliphalet.

The business manager shook his head. "Sorry," was all he said. Then added, "Reiter is doing the posters, you see." It was said so conclusively that argument was out of the question.

Eliphalet fell back on his second line of defences.

"I take it that my name will come first on the bills."

"No. Characters in order of their appearance is the way we are working it. Shall we get back to the stage?"

He was led down through countless corridors until they arrived at their destination. Here Oscar Raven came forward and introduced him to several of his fellow-players.

"Let's get at it," came a voice from the stalls. "How de do, Mr. Cardomay. You've read the part, I suppose?"

"I have not only read the part," he replied, "I have studied the first act."

"Sorry to hear that," Wakefield cheerfully replied. "You may have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Here, wait a bit. I'll come up."

Eliphalet turned in surprise to the author.

"Who is that very young man?" he demanded.

"Raymond Wakefield—our producer," replied Raven, as one who spoke of the gods.

"Indeed?" with raised eyebrows.

Just then Wakefield appeared through the iron door and skated on to the stage.

"I meant to read it to you first," he said, without any preamble. "But never mind. Now, what's your idea of the part?"

Mr. Cardomay had never been cross-examined before, and didn't like it; but he replied, politely enough:

"It's a very good part."

"Yes, yes; but I mean, how are you taking it? Comedy, tragedy, farce?"

"There can scarcely exist two opinions, Mr. Wakefield, Cellini is a great thinker—a poet—a philosopher."

"Lord, no! Light comedy is what we want; light comedy to the verge of farce."

"Mr. Wakefield, I do not appreciate jokes in regard to my work."

Here Raven intervened with, "You are so extreme, my dear Raymond. After all, Cellini was a great artist, and in my conception——"

"Look here, Raven," said Wakefield, running his fingers through his pinky-yellow hair, "you'll have to stop away from rehearsals if you can't shake those absurd ideas from your brain. The Cellini I want, and mean to have, is the man who had *liaisons* with his models, committed murders, and yet was an artist *malgré lui*. You see what I mean?" He fired the query at Eliphalet. "You've read the biography, of course?"

"I have little leisure for reading," replied the actor, feeling a trifle dazed.

"You must do so at once, then. Come on, and I'll go over some passages with you now at the Savage. Reynolds, take the crowd scenes—we'll be back by two." And he gripped Eliphalet to whisk him away.

But Eliphalet Cardomay would not allow himself to be hustled.

"Mr. Wakefield," he said, "I have eight days in which to study a long and important role. I do not choose to squander any of these precious hours in profitless discussion. Let us proceed to rehearse at once."

This was mutiny—rank mutiny. It is doubtful whether the great Sir Owen Frazer, at present seated at the back of the stalls, would have presumed to say as much.

Raymond Wakefield's cherubic face went into a series of straight lines. He had never before been openly defied and his sense of humour deserted him. It deserted him for eight consecutive days, during which time he gave Eliphalet Cardomay every kind of hell. Unmindful of the very characteristics which had prompted him to make the engagement, he caught up every stereotyped inflexion, each elaborate gesture, and subjected it to the most rigorous criticism, analysis and correction. In justice it should be admitted that, according to modern standards, there was a very sound reason for all his suggestions. Raymond Wakefield was never at a loss for reasons. He kept up a running fire of interrogation as to what Eliphalet was driving at, and Eliphalet never could answer.

"Why chant that passage as though it were a hymn, when the whole intention of the line is—Ouch! You speak the stuff like the ancients spoke

blank verse. There! When you are telling Pietro to bring you ‘raw gold’—you say ‘raw gold’ as though it were something sacred and divine. My dear fellow, it’s the stuff you’re working in every day of the week. Try and imagine yourself a plumber saying to his mate, ‘Get us a lump of putty, Jack.’ ”

At first Eliphalet resented this treatment hotly, but he was no match for this electric young man. On the third day of rehearsals he had been so ill-advised as to retort.

“You forget that I was acting many years before you were thought of.” He regretted the words almost before he had spoken them.

That night he sat down on his bed and reviewed the whole affair. His belief in himself was shattered. He realised that all the painful years of acquired technique were valueless. His entire stock-in-trade had been exploded and held up to ridicule by a young man who could scarcely need to shave more than twice a week. And the worst of it was that his resentment for that young man had died, and in his heart he confessed that all and everything he had been told was good and true and right, and that his own methods were bad and false and wrong.

Next morning he did a very gracious act. He apologised to Raymond Wakefield and promised to do his best in the future. Unhappily, the apology came at an inopportune moment. Both authors had been reviling Wakefield for letting them down, and had declared that the play would be ruined as a result of his casting. They insisted that Cardomay must be got rid of and the production postponed. Wakefield never admitted himself at fault, and a stormy scene resulted. Eventually Sir Owen Frazer was appealed to, and, to the general astonishment, he wrote on a sheet of paper, his voice being inoperative, that if either or both of the suggestions were carried out he would institute proceedings against everyone concerned. Being lessee of the theatre, nothing more could be said at the time, but subsequently Messrs. Raven and Franks foregathered and spoke hard words anent Sir Owen—who, they declared, being unable to play the part himself, desired nothing better than to see it mutilated.

One can understand, therefore, why Eliphalet’s apology was not so well received as it deserved. In fact, all that Raymond Wakefield said was:

“Glad to hear it, for we’ve any amount of lost ground to make up.”

The hours and days that followed were pitiful to the point of tragedy. The Old Card worked like a dray horse at the new art of being natural, which, despite his utmost effort, further and further eluded him. At the last

dress-rehearsal there was not a line nor a movement, from start to finish, which fitted him anywhere.

Both authors left the theatre in a state of speechless fury at the end of the second act, and when the curtain fell on the final scene of the play, Raymond Wakefield just looked at him, shook his head, and followed their example.

Eliphalet Cardomay, a perfect picture in his Florentine robes, stood like a statue in the middle of the deserted stage. An overmastering desire possessed him to hide his head and cry like a child in some dark recess. He moved unsteadily toward the prompt corner. The iron door beside it was open, and there, in the brightly-lit corridor leading to the Royal Box, stood Sir Owen Frazer, and he was laughing—laughing, it seemed, as a man had never laughed before.

Until that moment his feelings had been entirely of self-reproach. He had acquired the bitter knowledge that a great chance had been given him—the chance for which he had waited all his life—and he—he couldn't deal with it. To-morrow evening the public would witness an exhibition so execrable, so vile, that the veriest tyro might be ashamed of giving it. But the sight of Sir Owen Frazer's mirth brought about an instant metamorphosis. The self-reproach vanished, to be supplanted by a dull and smouldering rage.

With compressed lips he made as if to approach the Knight; then, turning about, he swept superbly from the stage.

Back at his hotel he came to a great decision. Failure on the morrow was certain. Well, fail he might, but not on the lines of Raymond Wakefield's laying. London should see Eliphalet Cardomay play Cellini on his own methods—play it, in fact, just as he had played "The Silver King," and a hundred other creations.

A rehearsal was called for his especial benefit next day, but he telephoned to say that he had no intention of being present.

Raymond Wakefield got into a cab and set forth to see what it was all about. He found his quarry, arrayed in a gorgeous kimono, discussing a late breakfast.

"Look, here, Mr. Cardomay," he began, "do you consider this is fair?"

Eliphalet motioned him to a chair and placed cigarettes within easy reach.

"My dear young Mr. Raymond Wakefield," he said, choosing his words with slow deliberation, "I have no intention to rehearse again, because it would be useless. You, with unexampled brilliance—and, believe me, no one is more sensible of your admirable gifts than I am—have devoted an

entire week in a fruitless endeavour to teach your grandmother to suck eggs. Doubtless grandmothers should know how to perform this delicate ritual, doubtless it is expedient and is expected of them; but many are too old to learn, and, right or wrong, prefer to decapitate the ova with a table knife and assimilate its albuminous contents with the aid of a teaspoon. I have done my best, and have failed—confessedly, I have proved an inept pupil, and, to complete the metaphor, have dribbled the yolk and the white all over my waistcoat like a child that knows no better."

"My dear chap," exclaimed Raymond Wakefield, striking one hand against the other, "if only you would play Cellini as you are talking now, I'd turn into a door-mat for you to wipe your feet on. Now, let's run over it just once more."

But Eliphalet Cardomay was adamant.

The Duke of Connaught's Theatre was packed to overflowing for the opening performance of "Benvenuto Cellini." Incidentally, every member of the dramatic profession, not otherwise engaged, made it a duty to be present, some even going to the extremity of paying for their seats.

The news that something unusual in the way of acting was likely to occur had spread with the rapidity of a fire. Be it said that most of his fellow-players were heartily sympathetic with Eliphalet for the failure they were confident he would make, but their sympathy did not take the form of staying away.

Before the curtain rose, each member of the company came forward to wish him luck, and he, with old-world courtesy, thanked them all and waited, apparently unmoved, for his cue.

The first scene in which he was to appear was a very Rabelaisian interlude wherein he made love, of a base kind, to his model. At rehearsals he had been worse in this than in any other part of the play. His efforts to acquire a light touch had been little short of bricklayer's pastry, and the poor girl with whom the scene took place was in an agony of dread at the coming ordeal. What was her amazement, then, when Eliphalet Cardomay acted the whole racy interlude as though he were reading a lesson from the Bible.

At first the audience did not know what to make of it, the reading was so utterly at variance with the lines. Then, like a wave, it struck them that here was originality at its highest. Here in these full-throated accents, these absurd parsonic gestures, was a brilliant satirical reading—a fragment of exquisite characterisation.

There was an ovation when Eliphalet left the stage.

In the author's box Sir Owen Frazer was heard to say, with extraordinary force, considering he had lost his voice, "I'm damned! Damn it!"

Oscar Raven plucked Wakefield by the sleeve. "What on earth do you make of it?" he said.

"It will make the play," came the reply.

"But I can't understand. Does he know what he's doing?"

" 'Course not. Our friend Eliphalet is shirking. He couldn't do what we wanted, so he's just turning on the old stuff, the old provincial tap."

"Then please Heaven," came from Franks, "he keeps up the flow till the end."

And he did. All the bad provincial fake was reeled off—mere vocalisation and attitudinising, utterly misplaced, fitting the part nowhere, and for that very reason accepted by the high-browed Press and the novelty-seeking public as one of the finest dramatic conceptions of the day.

The Press raved about it. They went into ecstasies over the Art of Eliphalet and his "epic cynicism." "Why had this marvellous depictor been denied to London?" they cried. "Doubtless," said one, "much praise is due to the intellect of Mr. Wakefield, the brilliant producer, but for the actor himself no adulation could be too strong."

And the "brilliant young producer" kicked himself heartily in that the praise should have been due to him for casting Eliphalet as Cellini, but that he had forfeited all claim thereunto by losing sight of his original intention out of pique.

The wonderful notices were brought to Eliphalet on the following morning as he lay in bed, and very gravely he read them through—and understood. There was no triumph in his eyes—the meaning of those cuttings was too clear. To Eliphalet they spelt failure, not fame. The words "epic cynicism" rang through his brain. Epic cynicism?—Yes, it was just that. And instead of rising, as for years he had dreamed he would do, and saying to his image in the glass, "Eliphalet, old boy, we've knocked 'em—knocked 'em hard," he pulled the coverlet over his head and buried his face in the pillow.

"Benvenuto Cellini" ran ten weeks, during which time the secret of Eliphalet's success was well preserved.

Oddly enough, Sir Owen Frazer, whose voice by this time was restored to him, was singularly free from enthusiasm with regard to the hit his *confrère* had made. People even went so far as to say that, had he been a lesser man, they would have suspected him of jealousy. Thus there was a

good deal of astonishment when it became known that he had offered Eliphalet Cardomay the second lead in his new production.

Eliphalet received the part in company with an invitation to supper. He went over it very carefully and very suspiciously. Then he put it in his pocket and went forth to seek Raymond Wakefield.

“Read this,” he begged, “and open up your wonderful brain as to its potentialities.”

Raymond did so, and explained with fluency and clarity the thousand subtle intricacies with which the part abounded.

Eliphalet Cardomay nodded gravely.

“Sir Owen Frazer is a very clever man,” he remarked.

On his way back he returned the part, with a polite refusal to sup. In a postscript he added:

“I am returning to the provinces for good. One should never destroy an illusion. You have had your laugh. It was generous of you to wish to share it with the masses.”

Eliphalet Cardomay stepped from his first-class compartment to the platform. Potter, his dresser, having descended from the train while it was still in motion, respectfully held open the carriage door lest his august master should soil his beautiful wash-leather gloves.

Dear me! this sounds strangely familiar. Why, of course! That’s the worst of starting a story at the wrong end.

CHAPTER II
PISTOLS FOR TWO

Let us avoid repetition, and return to Eliphalet Cardomay where we left him at the dining-table, to march backwards to a past episode.

Lack of concentration and cohesion are among the chief snares lying in wait for him who chronicles character rather than plot. One might, of course, hazard, by way of excuse, that the recently recounted reminiscence was of greater interest than a detailed account of a roast leg of lamb followed by black-currant tart would prove. But justifications are always dull. To Eliphalet Cardomay the London episode was a grief unspeakable, whereas the homely repast, consumed in such familiar and well-loved surroundings, was the very reverse.

He finished that black-currant tart unto the final morsel, till naught but the permanganate-coloured stains upon the plate remained in token of its recent being. There was something almost boyish in the liberality of his appetite. In using the term boyish the period of his own youth is not implied, for Eliphalet displayed no youthful traits until his hair was silvered, his brow furrowed, and his eyes deep-set.

There are certain men whose mental condition bears little or no relation to their years, and he was one of them. They are born with grown-up minds, sage and mature convictions, unsuited to youth and only really serviceable when they have reached that time of life with which such gravity accords.

Eliphalet Cardomay, even when a boy, was oppressed with a middle-aged manner and a professional mien. It might truthfully be said that his brain and body did not synchronise until he had passed the forty-year high-water mark. His body, or, to put it more gracefully, his externals, were prepossessing. His broad forehead, swept-back hair, bold eyebrows and dilated nostrils, gave suggestion of virility and power. To a maiden they were productive of second glances, an added colour and a quickening of heart-beats against the ramparts of her corsets. In this well-knit yet æsthetic youth she might be pardoned for presuming there lurked wells of high romance, tempered with humour and a knavish disposition. It was said of him in the company, where he played juvenile leads at two pounds two shillings a week, that he was “deep.” Furthermore, since it was never his custom to boast about deeds of love, the young men with whom his lot was

cast credited him with the proclivities of a Lothario and laid to his account many charming indiscretions in the glades of Eros. The older members of the company were wiser, or deemed themselves to be, and decided, not without a certain rough justice, that he was a bit of a prig. For this reason, Harrington May, who specialised in villains of the heavier kind, gave him the title of "Mother's Boy" and named him as such to his face.

Eliphalet was very grave (he had accomplished the forty-five manner twenty years before he was entitled to it), and replied:

"In so far as I was born of woman your accusation is correct. My mother died, however, when I was a year old. I presume, from your smile, you believe you have said something offensive, but since it is nothing but the truth I cannot allow myself to take umbrage, even though the truth is usually a stranger to your lips."

For one so young the speech was painfully pedantic, but it succeeded in putting Mr. Harrington May temporarily out of action, and established for Eliphalet a reputation for caustic repartee. He was frequently asked to repeat his words, but this he politely declined to do, thus giving further proof of age before accession to age.

Miss Blanche Cannon, a depictor of adventuresses on the stage and a great Bohemian off, had been present at the contretemps, and was greatly delighted by the young man's urbanity and calm. It is no infrequent occurrence for opposites to be attracted by each other, and she, with her scatter-brained, love-a-lark disposition, scented in Eliphalet a suitor of possible quality.

He, poor fellow, was quite unaware of this, for his thoughts were centred in Art and a desire to make a mark in dramatic history. Hitherto he had had no dealings with love, and many a maid had languished in vain on that account.

But Blanche was not of the languishing brand. Having decided to ensnare his affections, she set about making inquiries, and was greatly intrigued to learn, from several misinformed, but talkative, young actors, that he was "no end of a dog on the Q.T." One of them, with an imagination that would have thriven in Fleet Street, went to the length of describing a *liaison* with a certain titled lady, who had become enamoured of Eliphalet from the stalls and had lured him away to a castle, beside which Haddon Hall paled into insignificance. Charmed by these accounts, Blanche Cannon's desire developed exceedingly, and forthwith she began a tentative archery upon the heart of Eliphalet. It is always your student who proves the easiest prey to the wiles of love, and one day, when she had successfully

manœuvred a tête-à-tête tea-party in her own rooms, Eliphalet succumbed, and Blanche, picking up her cue with professional skill, dropped into his arms under a smother of kisses.

Eliphalet was entirely proficient in the art of love-making. It was part of his equipment as an actor. He knew the moment to fold to his bosom the form of an adored one, and how to brush the hair back from her forehead with just sufficient pressure to elevate the chin to the ideal angle for imprinting a kiss. He knew how to drop his voice to a quality of whispering and passionate vibration. All of these services he most faithfully rendered, with one or two minor improvements suggested by a productive mind. Repetition, however, if pursued beyond a given margin, is apt to weary the soul, and after a while Blanche began to yearn for variety, and to doubt if he were indeed the ideal lover. Certain misgivings also arose in his own mind. At first he was enveloped in the wonder of love new-born, but as time went on he was able to detect certain faults in the poetic composition of his destined bride. For instance, she did not respond very rapidly to the Shakespearian atmosphere he diligently sought to produce by passionately-delivered quotations from *Romeo and Juliet*. She showed a marked lack of interest in the story of Abélard and Héloise, and a greater enthusiasm at the prospect of a donkey-ride on the New Brighton sands than a lovers' wander in leafy solitudes. She became sick of holding hands, and more than once told him stories the humour of which would have been better suited to the court of Bluff King Hal.

To a sensitive mind these passages of wit were distasteful, but nevertheless Eliphalet Cardomay remained in love with praiseworthy constancy. He built palaces, masoned and mortared of their united talents, and spoke of the future that should be theirs—a future which would be spoken of in retrospect by posterity. With love and guidance he convinced himself that Blanche would in time come to a fuller understanding of the vast responsibility they jointly held for the furtherance of art. He pictured her as blossoming into a great emotional actress, and to that end tried to dissuade her from over-hilarity in public places, and to attach less importance to such trivial pleasures as ice-creams consumed in small Italian cafés. He spoke of the glory of mutual understanding, reciprocity, and many other long-worded matters, tedious to a person of light-hearted habit.

For her part, Blanche was heartily disappointed that none of the alleged characteristics displayed in the affair of the titled lady had been revealed to her. His behaviour had been of a scrupulous purity, and high-standing little short of ridiculous. It has been said that Blanche was a Bohemian, which implies a taste for the savoury diet. She enjoyed risky friendships—she liked

to see the eyes of her lover catch fire and to quell the fire by some cold drench of inconsequent nonsense. That was caviare! There was a relish in such intimacy—but with Eliphalet, and his erotic quotations, there was none. Wherefore, partly to stimulate more vivid emotions, and partly for her own entertainment, she adopted other methods, and in Mr. Harrington May and his natural villainies she found the desired means.

May was a heavily-built man with a hearty laugh and a bullying manner. He bullied his juniors and his lovers alike, and by so doing achieved something of a reputation for manhood. His principle in life was to take his fun where he found it, so, accordingly, when Blanche yearned towards him, he threw an arm around her with a strong man's zeal.

"Can't see what you found to amuse you in that young spring poet," he observed, after the first elaborately-resisted embrace had been achieved.

"Anyway," returned Blanche, who was a firm believer in tantalising methods, "he scored off you all right."

Harrington May did not deny the charge, but "I'm scoring off him pretty heavily at the moment," he said.

When, that night, Eliphalet suggested to Blanche they should take sandwiches and aerated waters and have a picnic in the pleasaunces of Jesmond Dene the following day, she shook her head and declined.

"But my dearest, there will be no rehearsal, and you and I could——"

"I've something else to do, I tell you."

She was very mysterious and roguishly declined to tell him what. Eliphalet, unlike most youths, was not in the least suspicious, but he thought it a strange violation of true love's laws to harbour secrets. When he observed as much, she put him off with a coquettish toss of the head.

For the next couple of days each proposed meeting met with the same answer, and at last he began to feel angry and injured.

Being of a philosophical mind, this sense of injury found expression in more practical ways than upbraiding his *fiancée*. He reflected that, if after so short a time she was able willingly to forego the charms of his company, it was reasonable to expect that serious breaches would arise should they engage upon more enduring relations. This reasoning led to the natural conclusion that Blanche Cannon was not the right woman to fill the post of his wife and helpmeet. It would be better, perhaps, to tell her so at once, rather than increase the embarrassment by untimely delay.

These thoughts were occupying his mind when Blanche herself pushed open his dressing-room door, and, violently rubbing her cheek, stepped

inside.

"You are a nice lover, aren't you?" she began.

"I have tried to be," he replied evenly.

"Well, you haven't succeeded. My idea of a lover is a knight in armour who protects his fair lady, not you. You sit down and shut your eyes to what's going on in front of your nose."

"I don't understand, my dear. You had some secrets, and I did not like to intrude on them without your permission."

"No, and I suppose you'd wait for my permission before going for a man who tried to kiss me."

Eliphalet rose and compressed his lips.

"No one would dare with the knowledge that we are engaged."

"Wouldn't they, just! Well, they just have—at least one has, the vile brute!"

"A member of this company kissed you against your will?"

"Of course."

"Who?"

"You'd do nothing if I told you."

"Who?" repeated Eliphalet, very white and calm.

"Harrington May."

"Thank you. I shall know what to do, my dear. Your honour is quite safe with me; and mine—mine has been outraged."

He threw open the door and closed it crisply behind him, leaving Blanche looking a little scared. She had not counted on producing the quality of dull anger his face had worn, but thought rather he would fly into a boy's rage—caress her with a savage intensity and curse the man who had sought to steal her favours. Then she would have told him that the whole thing was a joke, devised to buck him up and make him amusing. Afterwards, they would have gone out and had a jolly good beano. But somehow his looks did not give encouragement for such a recital, and, moreover, she felt a stirring of admiration for the manner in which he had strode to confront his rival.

Eliphalet went straight to Harrington May's room and entered uninvited.

The leading-man was removing his make-up, and he looked up over the brim of a very dirty towel.

"What d'you want?" he demanded.

And Eliphalet answered coldly enough:

"You are a blackguard—a low, thieving blackguard. A man to whom honour is a thing unknown."

"That's very pretty," said May. "Did you write it?"

"You dared to kiss my future wife."

Harrington May rubbed his face thoughtfully.

"Oh, and who would that be?"

"I refer to Miss Cannon."

"Oh, ah! I see. And I'm supposed to have kissed her, am I?"

"Do you deny having done so?"

"Well, I must make quite sure before answering. There's a note-book in the pocket of that jacket, if you'd pass it over."

But Eliphalet picked up a pair of gloves and flung them into the leading-man's face.

"Hey! Go easy! What's that for?"

"It is a challenge."

"A challenge, eh? To what?"

"To a duel."

Harrington May threw back his head and laughed aloud, but for all that he scrutinised Eliphalet shrewdly from the corner of his eye.

"As the challenged party, it is your right to choose the weapons."

"Ah, yes, so it is. I haven't fought a duel for a week or two, so I'd forgotten. What do you say to crossbows?—or, if they don't suit, I'm a pretty good hand with the lasso."

"The choice lies between pistols and swords."

May flashed another quick glance. Certainly the young man appeared to be in earnest—but the whole thing was absurd. He was on the point of selecting swords, as the first word to come to hand, but decided hurriedly against doing so. It was conceivable Eliphalet, in the heat of his anger, might snatch up a sword and make a dig at him. In the course of one or two previous productions they had fought a few stage-fights, and Eliphalet Cardomay had rather a pretty knack with a blade. Pistols and the thought of speeding lead would very soon destroy the foolish ideas that were possessing him, thought May; so with a world of dignity he said:

"I choose the trusty old bundook."

“We will meet at midnight by the ruined mill in Jesmond Dene,” said Eliphalet, and walked sedately from the room.

Harrington May sat motionless awhile, regarding his own image in the glass. He felt oddly cold, and his jaw showed a disposition to tremble.

“Whew!” he said, squaring his shoulders. “This is silly! That young upstart is trying to bounce me. Well, we must come back on him heavily, that’s all.”

He rose and finished dressing.

At the stage-door a few members of the company had gathered, and an inspiration seized him to narrate what had occurred. So, with plenty of noise and a liberal allowance of margin for his own repartee, he recounted the side-splitting exchanges that had led up to the challenge.

“What do you think, boys?” he shouted. “It’s pistols for two, at midnight.”

To a chorus of “No,” “Chuck it,” and “You’re having us on, old man,” he responded:

“Solemn fact, I give you my word. We meet in Jesmond Dene at the witching hour of twelve. Coffee for one at five past.”

Never before had the company enjoyed so rich a jest, and they fell about in ecstasies of rib-punching laughter.

“ ’Course I saw through it,” said May, “though he played his bluff well. I wish some of you had been there. I was as solemn as a judge. Lord! it was funny.”

“D’you think he was bluffing, then?” asked a very young man, whose name was Manning, and who secretly harboured admiration for Eliphalet Cardomay.

“I don’t *think* about it, darling,” responded May, and was greeted with a fresh burst of merriment, in which all but the aforesaid youngster joined.

“It ’ud be funnier still,” he ventured, “if it turned out that he wasn’t bluffing at all.”

But no one took any notice of that aside.

“What are you going to do, Mr. May?” asked one.

“I shall turn up, of course, dear boy, and, like as not, catch a cold waiting half the night, while our little friend is sleeping in bed. Tell you what: this joke is too big to keep to oneself. I’ll pay the hire of a wagonette, then you can all slip off after the show and see the fun.”

This spirited offer was received with enthusiasm, and the whole company was on the point of repairing to a hostelry to honour the occasion, when Eliphalet Cardomay, carrying a small polished wooden case, came quietly through the stage-door. At his approach the conversation died abruptly, and all eyes were turned upon him.

"Please," he said, asking for a gangway.

Someone touched his shoulder, and asked:

"Are you fighting a duel to-night, old man?"

"Mr. May will answer that question," he replied, and passed into the street.

"What did I tell you?" demanded May in his loudest tones. "Isn't it wonderful, eh?"

"Did you notice what he was carrying?" said very young Mr. Manning.

"Can't say I did, unless it was a soother."

"He had that old case of pistols from the property-room."

"Damn good!" roared May; but the laugh stuck in his throat somehow, and lacked the quality of genuine mirth.

The gifts bestowed by the gods upon Eliphalet Cardomay did not include a very generous measure of humour, or he would scarcely have set about his preparations with such precision and calm. Bearing the case of old pinfire revolvers, he entered a gunsmith's in High Street, and asked for cartridges.

The shop assistant examined the bore of the weapon and rummaged about among his stock.

"I think these'll do," he said, "but it's an old pattern pistol, and this stuff has been lying around some years. We've a range at the back, if you'd care to try a few shots."

"I should, very much. Perhaps you would lend me a wire bristle—these barrels are a trifle rusty."

Having little to occupy him, the amiable assistant spent half-an-hour in cleaning up the old weapons, and succeeded in imparting to them a greatly rejuvenated air.

"Don't get much shooting in your line, do you?" he asked. A provincial shopman recognises, by a kind of second-sight, every touring actor and actress who visits the town.

"I have practised a little," returned Eliphalet, "for you cannot use a weapon effectively on the stage unless you are acquainted with the right method."

They descended to the basement, where there was a miniature range, lighted with little whistling gas-jets. The assistant hung a target to a clip and despatched it on a drawn wire to its appointed place. Eliphalet loaded the pistols, and balanced them critically in his hand. Then, laying one aside, he drew a bead and pressed the trigger. The bullet cut the inner line at twelve o'clock.

"Throws up a shade," he remarked.

His second shot perforated the bull very neatly.

"That's sound shooting," exclaimed the astonished assistant. "Try the other one."

There was little to choose between the two revolvers, and when all ten shots had been fired, the target presented a very pretty pattern.

"You've a steady hand. Before I saw this I thought actors lifted their elbows too much to shoot that way. I like your light hold on the butt and the thumb straight with the barrel—it's stylish."

Eliphalet thanked him for his praises, paid for fifty cartridges, and after carefully cleaning the two weapons, bade him good afternoon.

He took his meal at a chop-house, and ate but sparingly. When he had finished, he called for paper and an envelope, and wrote a farewell letter to Blanche, to be delivered should misadventure overtake him. It was rather a grandiose composition, in which the word "honour" recurred with some frequency. He placed it in his pocket, paid the bill, and walked to the theatre.

The news of the challenge had spread like wildfire—even the stage hands and cleaners were in possession of every detail. Wherever he went he was followed by curious glances, and often after he had passed explosive but suppressed giggles would break out. It was clear the company was treating the affair as a joke. Personally, he could see very small provocation for laughter, but reflecting that with trivial minds mirth and calamity are close companions, he made no comment. He wondered whether Harrington May would laugh next morning.

Eliphalet had quite made up his mind not to kill his antagonist, but to place a bullet in his thigh, trusting this would prove sufficient punishment to meet with the requirements. He wished almost that the cause of their quarrel had been a woman of finer fibre, but that could not be helped, and the insult to his pride was the same in any case.

The business of the play proceeded on even lines. A private affair could not be allowed to interfere with a public duty; but once or twice he stumbled with his words and missed a cue. Harrington May observed this, was

delighted, and noisily declared in the greenroom, during one of his waits, that "Mother's Boy" was in such alarm that he couldn't "talk straight."

The wagonette had been ordered, and towards the end of the play had drawn up in a side street to wait the coming of the revellers. Nearly everyone had brought with them a warm coat or wrap, that the elements might not interfere with their perfect enjoyment.

When the curtain fell on the last act, Eliphalet carefully dressed himself, and was on the point of leaving his room, when Blanche came in.

"You are a little fool, aren't you?" she said.

It is discouraging for a man about to risk his life for a lady's sake to be addressed in such terms. It was a time for guerdons and not rebukes.

"In what manner am I a fool, Blanche?"

"Challenging May to a duel, like that. Everyone knows about it, and is laughing about it, too. Now, I suppose you are going to walk home as if nothing has happened. A nice idiot it'll make me look, and you'll be the laughing-stock of the theatre for ever."

"I do not understand you."

"Why couldn't you punch his head, like a man, and leave it at that?"

"I do not consider to do so would be punishment enough."

"Better than all this silly talking."

"There has been very little talking; indeed, I ought not to be talking now. There is not much time before the—the—appointment."

Blanche's eyes sought his face with quick interrogation.

"Cardy!" she exclaimed. "You're not serious? You don't really mean to ——?"

"Of course I am serious."

"But—you can't—you mustn't!"

"I can and will. There is no going back now. Please."

But she barred his way.

"No—no—no! I forbid you."

"Please."

"Oh, but you're joking—joking! You couldn't shoot him—not for that. Besides, you wouldn't know which end of the pistol to hold."

A man who is playing a part senior to his years will generally give himself away on a detail. It was sheer youthful arrogance when he drew

from his pocket the target he had decorated that afternoon, and cast it on the table before her.

"I did this at fifteen paces," he said.

The message of the target was plain, and Blanche needed no second glance. She flung herself at her lover's feet, and besought him to spare the life of Harrington May.

"It—it wasn't all his fault," she sobbed. "I did egg him on a bit, just—just to stir you up."

For a moment he was silent, and his face was ominously stern.

"You achieved your object," he replied at last. "We must talk more of this later, Blanche. For the rest, you need not be alarmed. I shall not kill this man, and you are free to take what is left of him, when I have finished." Thrusting her aside, he picked up the case of pistols and hurried away.

"Oh, God!" cried Blanche, and there was admiration as well as fear in her voice.

It was rather wonderful that he would risk death for her sake—but of course it must not happen. She must go at once and warn Harrington May of the danger. Then came the thought, "Suppose he, too, insists on fighting?" Her eyes glittered. This drama that centred about her was fantastic, thrilling. If he, too, were determined to enter the lists, where would her choice lie?

The corridors were deserted, for the company had dressed hurriedly and were well away towards the sheltering bushes of Jesmond Dene. As she hastened towards May's room she could hear Eliphalet Cardomay's fly rattling over the cobbles of the street below.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed May. "Not gone to the party? Better come in my cab. Pity to miss the fun."

"It isn't fun," she cried. "He's in deadly, awful earnest. He's going to shoot you."

The leading man licked his lips and smiled queerly.

"You can't bounce me," he said.

"I swear it. I've just left him. He's gone there with the pistols, and he can shoot straight—terribly straight."

"Then it isn't a joke?"

"A joke! He'll kill you. Oh, Harrington, you must fly—get away—hide somewhere. Look: it's Saturday night. I'll let you know if it's safe to come back on Monday—but you must go now."

“By God, if it’s like that, I will,” gasped May, and reached for his coat and hat.

“You won’t face him?”

“I’m not looking for a funeral. Thanks for telling me.”

As he clattered down the corridor, Blanche called the word “coward” after his retreating form.

It was a very formidable and grim young man who, half-an-hour later, alighted on the fringes of that pleasant dell known as Jesmond Dene. Under his arm he carried the case of pistols, and the lines about his mouth were set and hard.

“You will wait,” he said, addressing the cabman.

“Perhaps I won’t,” returned that gentleman, who was unaccustomed to so direct an order.

Eliphalet did not deign to reply, but he turned aside from the road and stepped briskly down the steep and wooded path. The moon shone serenely, casting dark violet shadows of the trees upon the grey undergrowth. He knew the way, for this had been a favourite seclusion when learning new parts, and took a short cut to the appointed place.

“Here comes May,” whispered one of the concealed company from his observation-post in the bushes. “Keep your hands down, you chaps.”

Eliphalet passed within a few feet of several unseen onlookers.

“That *was* May, wasn’t it?”

“Couldn’t see his face.”

“Must have been.”

Young Manning spoke.

“You’re wrong. It was Cardomay.”

There was a ring of triumph in his voice.

“Don’t talk rot.”

“Look for yourselves, then.”

Eliphalet stepped out into the clearing, and the light of the moon showed his features with a ghastly precision.

One of the girls gave a nervous laugh, and several men turned to each other with apprehensive glances.

“Lord, he’s turned up!” said one.

“This is going too far,” said another. “We ought to stop it. Here!”

A hand was clapped over his mouth by Harrington May's staunchest supporter.

"Don't spoil the fun. He's only bluffing."

Then Manning spoke again.

"Wish I knew which way they are going to stand," he said. "Likely as not one of us'll pick up a stray bullet."

Hearing which, Miss Mary Neville, the ingénue, did what she was accustomed to do in plays on such occasions—fainted.

Far away in the distance the Town Hall clock struck twelve. There was a general rustle, as everyone verified the time by their own watches in the little patches of moonlight.

"If May finds him here there'll be trouble."

"P'r'aps he won't come," volunteered Manning, and was advised to avoid folly and stupid speculation.

Eliphalet laid a white kerchief on the ground—stepped out fifteen paces, and dropped another. Then he took out the pistols and examined them. This he did at the precise moment Miss Neville emerged from her faint, and caused an immediate relapse. Satisfied that all was in order with the weapons, he laid them on the top of the case. His actions were very concise, and he appeared quite composed.

"Fact is, he guesses we're here, and he's putting up a big bluff," whispered Harrington May's supporter into a convenient ear.

Then there was silence, faintly disturbed by the rustle of the breeze and the clucking of water dripping from the mosses of the old mill-wheel.

Eliphalet removed his coat and looked at his watch. Ten minutes past twelve. The waiting was trying his nerves. There should be strict punctuality in an affair of honour. He began pacing up and down, slowly at first, but later with a savage intensity of movement; when the quarter past chimed, he tossed his head angrily.

"Can't make out what's become of May. He was almost dressed when we left the theatre."

"Perhaps——" began Manning, then stopped as the noise of approaching wheels and hoofs cut crisply into the silence.

Eliphalet heard it—drew a sharp breath, and squared his shoulders in the direction of the sound.

The excitement among the spectators leapt to fever-pitch as they heard the vehicle come to a standstill. There immediately followed the patter of

running feet and the smart crackle of breaking twigs.

"He's coming!"

All eyes turned towards the path as Blanche Cannon burst into view. Without a second's hesitation she flung herself into Eliphalet Cardomay's arms, gasping and crying:

"Oh, my hero, my darling hero! He was a coward—he wouldn't meet you—he's run away."

And in the exquisite relief of the moment Eliphalet folded her to his breast in a sobbing ecstasy.

Then the company, who had remained silent for longer than their natures allowed, broke cover and surrounded the happy pair with a chorus of hand-shaking, back-slapping congratulations.

When the enthusiasm subsided, which was not until three a.m. that morning, for everyone crowded to Eliphalet's room to do him continued honour, he was rather dismayed to find that he and Blanche were destined, by pressure of opinion, to be made man and wife before the month was out.

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Surmise, therefore, O wise and prophetic reader, the disastrous results, not alone confined to Art, that so often arise from humouring the popular prejudice in favour of a Happy Ending.

CHAPTER III
THE CURE THAT WORKED WONDERS

Of all conventions a happy ending is the most perilous.

It intrigues people into the most improbable situations. It fawns upon the unthinking and offends the thoughtful.

Happiness should arise from natural causes, and never be induced for the purposes of convenience or climax.

Eliphalet Cardomay's early life was saturated with plots which, passing through a morass of many tribulations, invariably ended with lovers embracing. It was as much the inevitable outcome of this saturation that led him to commit the fatal error of making Blanche Cannon his wife as it was to slacken his waistcoat after a repast and sink, with drooping eyelids, into a chair beneath an open window. The first was the accepted happy ending to a love episode, and the second the plethoric happy ending to a meal; and in neither case did the results justify the action.

His marriage ended sordidly in a cheap divorce; and his siesta, the one on that particular afternoon, in a cold.

Treacherous germs await old gentlemen who sleep beneath open windows. Riding at ease with the army of descending smuts that denote the industry of a Midland town, they enter the system and take command. Wherefore, ten days later, instead of walking with sprightly step down Brigan High Street, Eliphalet Cardomay was lying in bed, contemplating M. Dyson, of the Royal Theatre, Brigan, with a pleading and watery eye. But the manager was not a man to allow sentiment to stand in the way of business.

"Any other night, Mr. Cardomay," he said, "I'd have bitten on the bullet and said, 'Stop away'—but this is our biggest business day in the calendar, and if you go out of the bill . . ." He finished the sentence with an expressive gesture.

Poor Eliphalet, propped up with a pillow and two cushions borrowed from the sofa belowstairs, looked pained as well as old.

"Believe me," he plaintively remarked, "I feel very ill. I don't think I could play the Reverend Barnard Coles to-night, and I know I couldn't do

him justice. Really—really I should be grateful if you did not press me further."

"Last thing I should dream of doing. Only it comes a bit hard on me, after booking you solely for that date."

It being obviously useless to appeal for sympathy, Eliphalet fell back on his second line of defence.

"But, don't you see, the entire dignity of the part would be gone if he were played with a cold."

"No, I don't," declared Mr. Dyson. "What's to prevent the Reverend Coles, or old Hamlet himself, for that matter, from blowing his nose like any other mortal? Now, you take my advice—lie in snug all day, and have some rum and milk, and a couple of boiled onions for lunch."

"I am a teetotaler, Mr. Dyson, and also a rigid abstainer from onions, not so much from personal distaste as from the knowledge that he whose breath is impregnated with the aroma of that vegetable loses both friends and prestige."

Suddenly Mr. Dyson's face brightened.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "I saw a guaranteed cure in yesterday's *Herald*. Tip-top thing. Breaks the back of the worst cold in four hours. No humbug! There are photos of people who've benefited by it—in the Ad." His lynx eye lighted on a copy of the journal in question at the moment Eliphalet was drawing it into concealment beneath the quilt. "Hi! you've got it there—half a minute—now, listen." And, shaking out the folds of the crumpled news-sheet, he began to read.

"Mrs. Baxter's testimony on Enoch's Instantaneous Cold Cure."

There followed a letter in which the good lady set forth, with great lack of reserve, the painful and familiar symptoms of her malady, stating how, after a night of darkness, an angel from Heaven (disguised as a next-door neighbour) appeared, and urged her to try Enoch's Instantaneous Cold Cure. Whereon she, despaired of by the luminaries of the faculty, secured a phial of the magic decoction, which not only dissipated the cold, but actually relieved her of an almost chronic dyspepsia and a lifelong tendency to sciatic rheumatism.

"What do you think of that?" demanded Mr. Dyson, in conclusion.

"I am too familiar with the form to be greatly impressed."

"Will you try a bottle?"

"I had very much rather not."

Mr. Dyson's mouth shut like a trap. "Comes to this," he said. "You won't try to help me out."

The poor invalid waved his head from side to side.

"Oh, very well," he conceded. "I'll take it if it gives you any satisfaction."

"That's the style," cried the manager. "I'll get you a bottle right away. Mark my words, you'll be fit for anything by night." And, slapping a hat on his head, he clattered from the room.

He was back five minutes later with a neat chemist's parcel in his hand. "Bought one for myself, too," he said. "Felt a bit snivelly this morning. Now, come on and have a dose at once."

"I have just had a little beef-tea," replied Eliphalet, "but I promise to take it in half-an-hour. In the meantime, I believe, with your assistance, I could snatch a few moments' sleep."

"Don't see how I can help in that direction."

"Perhaps not," said Eliphalet; "but I daresay if you left me alone I could manage it by myself."

"Righto! See you at the theatre, then. Don't forget the physic, mind."

"I won't forget."

But he did forget. It was eleven o'clock when Mr. Dyson left, and it was after five when Eliphalet awoke from a profound slumber.

The room was quite dark, save for the light from a street lamp which percolated through the muslin curtains and cast strange shadows on the ceiling.

He sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. The troublesome itching behind them had abated. His nasal passages were clearer—they actually admitted air.

"I believe I am better," he said. Then, striking a match, he lit the gas-jet by the bed, and looked at his watch.

"A quarter past five! Old boy, if we are going to play to-night, we had better get up."

Very unwillingly he withdrew his feet from the cosy coverings and, as he came to a sitting posture and made a tentative search with his toes for the carpet slippers, his eyes fell upon the little paper parcel where Mr. Dyson had left it.

"Good gracious, I have broken my promise!" he exclaimed. "I must take the stuff at once."

He picked up the parcel, broke the pink string and extracted a small blue glass bottle bearing a label covered all over with microscopic print.

"Now, the question is whether I should not be just as well off without this," he mused. "However!"

He withdrew the cork and smelt the fluid critically. It had rather an agreeable smell—slightly sickly, perhaps, but on the whole pleasant. In placing it to his lips, he observed the label.

"Some people would read that," ran his thoughts, "but as it probably deals with just such another case as Mrs. Baxter's, I think I won't." And he swallowed the contents of the bottle unto the last drain.

The action was typical of Eliphalet. Small details, not connected with his calling, he invariably ignored. They fidgeted and oppressed him, and it is probable, but for the zealous attentiveness of his dresser, Potter, he would have strode the streets with buttonless clothes and laceless boots.

Certainly Potter would never have allowed his master to consume a bottle full of unexplored liquid without first ascertaining in what measure it should be taken. But Potter had been summoned to the bedside of a departing aunt, and Eliphalet, confronted with the problem of "doing for" himself, had set about it by the shortest route.

Messrs. Enoch had expressly stated on their unread label that not more than thirty drops should be taken at a single dose—and not more than three doses *per diem*. "Taken in excess," so ran the legend, "the cure might have effects prejudicial to the system."

Roughly speaking, Eliphalet Cardomay had consumed some three thousand drops, and already their subtle powers were at work.

Being a strict teetotaler, and unfamiliar with spirituous influences, he was at once sensible of exhilaration and a tingling warmth in his vitals.

With feet dangling, he sat on the edge of the bed, blinking and clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

"An original flavour," he soliloquised. "Yes—I think I like it." Then, donning a dressing-gown, he crossed to the fireplace and rang the bell.

"Saakes alive," said the worthy Lancashire landlady, "ye'll never be goin' to get oop with that 'eavy cold an' all?"

"Duty before ailments," observed Eliphalet gravely. "May I have a can of warm water here, and a plate of soup and a rack of toast when I come downstairs?"

When the water arrived, accompanied by advice to get back to bed, he set about to shave a twenty-hours' stubble from his chin. It was a spasmodic

effort, and he reflected how rapidly his cold had pulled him down.

"We are getting old and palsied," he confided to his reflection in the mirror.

While washing, he experienced a novel and peculiar sensation—just as if all his nerves were transmitting electric messages to their various centres—messages which seemed to run, "I'm having a riotous time here—what's the news with you?" Moreover, he had a curious conviction that his brain-cells were opening and closing in the most unusual way. Little glimpses of long-forgotten incidents raced across his mental screen, to disappear or be obliterated by some succeeding impression. During the process of putting on his collar and tie quite right such pictures came and went.

He saw himself as a tiny boy, dressed up in a white suit and white shoes and socks, going to a circus with his father. He remembered how Eliphalet No. 1 had stopped to speak to a friend, and how he had filled in the weary wait by paddling through a four-inch slough of mud, swept up by the roadside. He was on the point of laughing at the recollection when it struck him that there was nothing to laugh at in a man's last words to his wife—how vividly the trumpery appointments of that room recurred to him, and the silly threats she had made—and how—they applauded on his first appearance in "The Corsican Brothers." He had held his head high that night, and the pavement outside the stage-door was thronged with an eager and waiting crowd, and—all the theatrical profession were there when Eliphalet senior was laid to rest. "A Great Tragedian," old Toole had said, and he had replied, "A wonderful father, sir." And what a night of it they had (the early 'seventies, wasn't it)—He and a dozen other bloods put a barricade of beer-barrels across the top of the Hay-market—Jermyn and Panton Street—and no one was allowed to go past without a drink. He was not a teetotaler then. That had been proved by the magistrate's comments at the Police Court on the following morning. How his head had ached. Was his head aching now? Not a bit—a little dizzy, perhaps—that was from the cold—but the cold was better—much better. Fine stuff Enoch's Instantaneous—Enoch!

"And forty little laughing boys
Came running out of school."

Was that Enoch Arden—or Eugene Aram? Either or neither? What did it matter? Where was his coat?—where was it?

"Potter!" he called—then, "Dear me! how stupid!" Potter, he remembered, was at his aunt's funeral—or was it christening?

He found the coat on the far side of the bed, where, careless of everything, ill and miserable, he had cast it before flinging himself between the blankets. Strange he should have felt so ill overnight, when now——

He slapped his chest and sang an arpeggio.

"La-di-da-daa! Resonant, my boy, and of good timbre."

"Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate."

He stooped to pick up his hat, and kicked it clown-fashion right across the room. A second effort was more successful, but, oddly enough, the pattern of the carpet photographed itself vividly upon the retina of his eyes. He was still aware of it when he returned to the perpendicular.

There were angles and shapes in yellow and green on a red ground which danced before them as he descended the stairs—the stairs that had such an awkward twist he had never before noticed. "They tell me," he gravely announced to Mrs. Beecher, who had come into the hall at the sound of his approach, "they tell me that one of the most difficult achievements is to put a spiral staircase into perspective."

"Aye—well, a've put soup on table; you ought to take cab to theatre," responded the good lady.

Eliphalet was touched to a point of exaggeration.

"What a happy and fortunate man your good husband is to possess such a wife." And so saying, he took his hat from the hall stand and went out into the street.

The keen evening air felt like a cool hand upon his brow, and Eliphalet hummed to himself as he went. He turned into the High Street as the Town Hall clock struck six.

Six! He was very early. The curtain didn't rise until 7.30, and a quarter of an hour was ample time to assume the clerical garb of the Reverend Coles. Wherefore he had a full hour to spend as he liked, and it was a delicious evening for a walk.

Beyond the fringe of factory chimneys lay rolling downs and green valleys—valleys with light-hearted brooks chuckling among the stones. Years had passed since he sat beside a brook, with the water thrilling his bare toes—and all of a sudden a great desire possessed him to be alone in a solitude of water and willows.

There was a policeman standing a few paces away, and to him Eliphalet said:

“Could you direct me to a valley with a stream running through it—where I can be all to myself—alone?”

The policeman, a broad-beamed Lancashire lad, regarded him suspiciously.

“I can tell you where you’ll be alone all right,” he responded, “and happen you’ll find yourself there sooner than you expect unless you get a move on.”

“But why?”

“Get off.”

“But, look here,” said Eliphalet very seriously. “When I was a younger man I used to count the buttons on policemen’s coats.” And with this grave admission, he turned away. He had not gone more than twenty yards before his attention was attracted by two small boys and a little girl, their noses glued to the windows of a confectioner’s.

“Are you hungry?” he demanded.

All three turned their attention from the magnetic charms of mince-pies and Maids-of-Honour to the æsthetic and deeply-seamed features of Eliphalet Cardomay. There was something in his countenance which at once dispelled any inclinations to tell untruths. It was such an open and kindly face—like that of an old baby—and the child he had addressed turned from the contemplation of it to judge the effect his words had made upon the other two.

Presently the little girl replied, “Noa, us isn’t ’oongry, but us cud do wi’ soom of they there.”

“So could I,” said Eliphalet. “Come along.”

At the head of this little ragged band he entered the shop and addressed a comfortable looking matron who was arranging macaroons on a glass stand.

“We have come to eat cakes, madam,” he announced. “Chelsea buns, tarts with jam on them, doughnuts and sweet almond biscuits. We are not hungry, you understand, but we want these things, for the children do not know their flavours—and I have forgotten them.”

So the good lady, who was a motherly soul, established them at a little marble-topped table and brought many delicacies, and Eliphalet, an Easter cake in one hand and a marzipan potato in the other, began to talk. He told them many little incidents of his own childhood—his voice sounding very far away. He told them the plot of *Julius Cæsar* and how he would like to be a grandfather—or a father—and what he intended to put on for this spring

season, and about a villa at New Brighton where he would live when he retired.

And all the while the children swallowed the cakes and thought him amiable but mad.

It was seven-fifteen when the feast was suddenly broken up by the violent entry of Mr. Dyson.

He had called at Eliphalet's rooms and learnt of his unusual departure, and when the actor did not put in an appearance at the theatre, had hastened out in great alarm to search the neighbourhood.

"It was sheer luck that I saw you through the window," he cried. "Do you know what the *time* is?"

"How should I, since it waits for no man?" said Eliphalet.

"You've got barely ten minutes to get on the stage."

This startling announcement brought Eliphalet abruptly to his feet.

"Dear me! I had forgotten. There are so few children in my life. Madam, please," he placed half a sovereign on the counter, and shook his head at the proffered change. "Give it to them in a bag. Come, Dyson. Ten minutes, you said."

As they hurried from the shop one of the children asked, "Is yon his keeper, missus?"

Mr. Dyson gripped him by the arm and dragged him along.

"Gave me the scare of my life. How did you come to overlook what the hour was?"

"That's what I must have done," replied Eliphalet hazily.

"Hope you took that stuff all right?"

"Yes—I think so. Fancy I ought to have another dose. Let's stop and buy some more."

"No time. I'll give you some at the theatre. Hurry along."

The local dresser was not a man of marked intelligence or great celerity of action, but he contrived to get Eliphalet into the outer coverings of the Reverend Barnard Coles in less than quarter of an hour.

Mr. Dyson, busily employed in the front of the house, sent round his bottle of Enoch's Instantaneous, half of which Eliphalet drank. He would probably have drunk the rest, had not the cork been pushed inwards and floated across the neck of the bottle before he had finished the contents.

Just before his entrance, Mr. Dyson rushed round with a few words of warning.

"Clinkin' house," he said. "Packed out—but they may want holding."

"Thass all right—we know."

"Feeling pretty good in yourself?"

Eliphalet took a deep breath, closed his eyes and exhaled heavily. At that instant he heard his cue. Alert at once, he opened the door and walked on to the stage. The lights dazzled him. He was struck with a consciousness of something left undone. What was it? Ah! he had failed to answer Mr. Dyson's question. Wherefore he promptly replied:

"No, I feel rather funny."

There was the usual burst of complimentary applause, and in an instant he was the Reverend Barnard Coles, about to be deserted by wife and child.

Eliphalet played the first act of "The Broken Heart" very cautiously. Without suspecting that anything was radically wrong with him, he felt that he must be wary. Once or twice his articulation had struck him as peculiar. He had shied badly over the word "constantly"—"consanny" was the nearest approach he had been able to make to the correct pronunciation. Then again, sundry speeches had become unexpectedly involved. For example, he had to say, "You with your great eyes, your scarlet mouth and your white face, are ever before me, a barrier which shuts me off from God."

What he actually said was:

"You, with your white eyes—your great mouth—and your scarlet face," etc. Fortunately he had put so much passion into the lines that no one noticed the slight confusion of adjectives. That is to say, no one on the audience side of the curtain; but Freddie Manning, the stage-manager, who had known Eliphalet as a man of temperance during a constant association of countless years, tipped his bowler hat to the back of his head and quoted briefly from the Bible.

"Syd," he said, addressing the call-boy, "slip along for a glass of cold water and stand with it at the door the Guv'nor comes off by."

The call-boy grinned and went on his errand whistling a song, the words of which dealt with the pleasures of alcoholic excess.

Catching the implied suggestion, Mr. Manning, nothing if not loyal, directed the toe of his boot at the seat of the young musician's trousers.

"I say! What's wrong with the Guv'nor?" asked the lady who played the villainess.

"Nothing, my dear," was the curt reply.

"But he's been saying the most extraordinary things," she persisted.

"Has 'e? Well, don't you bother about it."

This conversation took place just before the series of events leading to the finale of Act I.

The scene, as written, ran thus: The worthy Vicar, deserted by wife and child—beset by an intriguing woman—sinks down before his writing-desk and buries his face in his hands. After a few seconds of silent agony he rises, straightens himself—like a man determined to bear his burden with unbent back—and strides from the room.

No sooner has he gone than two paid desperadoes make burglarious entry by the French windows, and steal from his safe papers proving him to have been guilty of a crime years before. As they are escaping, the Reverend Barnard Coles returns, and cries "Who's there?" He tries to arrest their flight, and is brutally struck down.—CURTAIN.

Now when the wicked lady left the stage, on this particular night, Eliphalet was perfectly clear about what he had to do. It was the author's intention he should stagger to his writing-table—and stagger he did, most realistically. He supported himself with one hand and switched off the table lamp with the other, leaving the stage in darkness, save for the crimson rays from the fireplace, which encarmined his form during the few moments of grief and prayer before his exit.

With the reduction of the light Eliphalet experienced a totally unlooked-for sensation in his head—a dizziness, a vertigo. He sank into the chair and buried his face, and then——

I would not dream of suggesting any reader of this story would be likely to have personal knowledge of the sensations which sudden darkness brings to persons who have over-stepped the margins of sobriety. I am credibly informed, however, by contrite, but experienced authorities, that peculiar and various illusions occur. As a general rule, either the floor comes up, or the ceiling descends, and this with a rotary and oscillating motion.

So long as the darkness prevails there is no escape for the unhappy sufferer, and, strange to say, he is seldom wise enough to escape from the darkness.

Eliphalet Cardomay had not been drinking. On the other hand, who but an analyst could say what potent drugs went to the manufacture of Enoch's Instantaneous?

No sooner had his head fallen into his hands than he felt himself borne aloft—spirally ascending to some giddy pinnacle, rising above and above the level of earthly clay.

He could not combat the forces at work—they were irresistible. He could only cling to the edges of the writing-table and wait—and, waiting, ascend. "And singing, ever soaring—and soaring as thou singest," he quoted.

A frantic assistant stage-manager deserted the prompt corner and grasped Freddie Manning by the arm.

"The Guv-nor's stuck on," he gasped. "Ought to have been off half a minute ago. Looks as if he won't move."

Mr. Manning dived into the O.P., and took in the situation at a glance.

"Shall I ring down?" queried the A.S.M.

"No. Check your red arc in the fireplace. Here, you chaps," he addressed the two burglars. "Go and pretend you don't see him. Play the scene quiet, and just as you come off, spot him and use the life-preserver. Got it? Right away, then!"

He was Napoleonic in crises, was Mr. Manning. "One could always rely on Freddie," was a byword in Cardomay's company.

The two miscreants climbed noiselessly over the window-sill, just as the audience was beginning to find the Reverend Coles' anguish a shade protracted; with panther steps they approached the safe, inserted the key and withdrew the incriminating papers.

And all the while Eliphalet clung on to the table and wondered where he was and what strange machinery was hoisting him heavenward. He solved the mystery at the exact moment the thieves had finished their work.

He was in a lift, that fierce little lift at the Army and Navy Stores. He was a liftman—he had been a liftman for years. In another half-second they would arrive at the first floor.

He pushed back his chair with a clatter—flung up his head, and the words rang out:

"This is the drapery, stationery and ironmongery departmins——"

The affrighted burglars staggered back as Eliphalet rose to his feet, and cried, "This is the jewelry, toys, games, and saddlery departmins."

The hindmost burglar pushed his companion forward.

"Slash him, Jake!" he hissed.

The blow was struck—Eliphalet fell, and with him the curtain.

Up went the lights, and Freddie Manning rushed on to the stage.

"No calls," he shouted. "Clear, everyone. Strike, boys!"

The big scene flats split up into sections and marched miraculously away.

"Come on, Guv'nor." He stretched out a hand and helped Eliphalet to his feet.

"I think," said Eliphalet in a dazed sort of way, "I am not very well to-night."

"You're all right," said Manning. "I'll give you a hand to your dressing-room."

Half-way down the long stone corridor Eliphalet hung back and resisted.

"Dunno whether iss struck you, but I think we're having an allfully jolly evening, ol' boy."

"You get changed," remarked Manning grimly, and handed him over to the dresser.

When he returned to the stage he found several members of the company talking together in animated whispers.

He at once projected himself into their midst.

"If I hear man or woman saying the Guv'nor's drunk," he said, "he or she gets the sack—quick. Got that?" And, cocking his hat over his right eye, he marched off.

Before the curtain the simple audience were discussing the play.

"What's he mean when he says that bit about the drapery department?" demanded the young lady.

Her companion shook her head darkly, and volunteered: "It's the grief 'as turned 'is brain."

"Ah! that must be it. Gone loopy like."

Eliphalet, in his dressing-room, was in a fine rage.

"Get that cork out, d'y'hear!" he admonished. "How the deuce am I to take med-cine with the cork in?"

"A didna knaw tha wanted any more," said the dresser.

" 'S no excuse. Get it out! My cold's worse—mush worse. Le's have it." And, snatching the bottle, he knocked off its neck and drank what remained of the fluid.

"You don' seem to—t'understand I'm a ver' important pers'n—great actor—Eliphalet Card'may. You're a low feller—but a good chap—one of the nicest and mos' delightful chaps I ever met——"

"Second act beginners, please," yelled the call-boy.

Eliphalet passed a hand over his brow. “Dear me!” he said. “I dunno. Yes, yes—I’m coming—I’m all ri’, qui’ all ri’.”

And he made his way to the stage.

By a Herculean effort he struggled through Act II. His voice was a shade thick—his gait a thought unsteady—his rendering distinctly heterodox; but the audience was mainly composed of simple, uninitiated folk who accepted what was placed before them without much questioning. They had been assured for three weeks past, on every hoarding in the city, that Eliphalet Cardomay was a great actor. And since the ways of the great are ever incomprehensible, it behove them, as groundlings, to give genius its due and applaud exceedingly at the end of the act.

Unhappily, Mr. Dyson, manager and part owner of the theatre, did not reflect the feelings of his supporters. He had seen the act, with growing indignation, and realised he was not getting what he had paid for. In short, that Eliphalet Cardomay was giving a rotten show for the simple reason that he was “boosed.” Mr. Dyson was not a man to shirk duty, however unpleasant it might be. Accordingly he hurried round to Eliphalet’s dressing-room, pushed open the door and stalked inside.

“You get out,” he said to the dresser, and when the man had gone, “Look here, Mr. Cardomay. You’re boosed—*boosed*.”

“Boosed” was a favourite word of Mr. Dyson’s, and, on certain occasions, a favourite pastime. This circumstance, however, did not make him any more tolerant of the failing in others.

Eliphalet was lying full-length in a dilapidated arm-chair, his hands hanging limply over the sides. Certainly his general appearance gave ample excuse for Mr. Dyson’s charge.

Through a mental fog he became vaguely aware of the manager’s presence. With a faint smile he murmured:

“Whassay?”

“You’re boosed.”

“Boosed? Who’s boosed? Wha’s boose?”

“You are—and you’ve got to pull yourself together. See?”

Eliphalet blinked, then sat upright.

“Good God!” he exclaimed. “D’you sugges’ I’m drunk?”

“I know it—and what’s more, the audience’ll know it, too, if you aren’t jolly careful.”

The old actor rose to his feet, his face working as under a great emotion.

"You dare say that t'me! I—I'm a tee-to-tootler—for twenty—twenty-five years. Loathe drink—nev' touch it. I'm—I'm one—one—"

"You're one of the rowdy-dowdy boys to-night," cut in Mr. Dyson crisply.

The fog descended again, and Eliphalet swayed on the back of the chair.

"Tha's it," he said. "One of the dowdy boys—all in a row."

Mr. Dyson flung open the door, shouting:

"Where's your understudy?"

At that moment Freddie Manning came down the corridor.

"What's the row?" he demanded.

"He's drunk!"

"Drop that," said the loyal S.M.

"Look at him!"

Eliphalet was leaning on the door, and he sang:

"Then next morning before the beak we're feshed."

"He's ill," came from Manning.

"Ill! He's boosed, and I won't have him go on—see?"

Mr. Manning shoved his hat on the back of his head and said:

"If he is, no one is going to say so before me."

"Where's his understudy?"

"You look after the front of the house and leave the back to me. Clear out!"

"He's blind to the wide."

Mr. Manning jerked back the cuff of his sleeve and shut his teeth tight. The faces of the disputants were barely two inches apart. The dresser came into the room, and Eliphalet passed noiselessly out. Chuckling stupidly, he made his way to the stage.

"Take up the curtain," he ordered, and the assistant stage-manager, accustomed to years of implicit obedience, touched the bell, and the curtain rose.

"Excuse me," the dresser was saying. "A doan't think t' poor gentleman's droonk. A think t'is physic as 'as oop-set 'im. 'E's been taking doases very free from this 'ere." And he held aloft the empty bottle of Enoch's Instantaneous.

The stage-manager seized the bottle and read the label.

"Did he take the lot?"

"Aye, and another bottle beside."

"Drugged!—p'raps he's killed himself." Then, in a roar: "Where the hell did he get the stuff?"

Mr. Dyson fell back a step and covered his mouth guiltily.

"You?" Manning jerked out the monosyllable threateningly.

"I did mention—I—I told him it was good," faltered Mr. Dyson.

"Then," said Freddie Manning, "you'll go right on before the curtain and tell the house just exactly what's happened. The Guv-nor's going home to bed right now, and, look here again, you'd better state the facts pretty lucid, for I swear I'll break your neck if it gets about that the Guv'nor was tight."

From the distance came the sound of a mighty roar of laughter. Simultaneously they turned and saw, for the first time, that Eliphalet Cardomay had gone.

"He's on!" exclaimed Manning and, followed by Mr. Dyson, made a dash for the wings.

He was on! That was the opinion of the entire audience.

One of the great dramatic moments of the play had been wrecked and lay in splinters on the stage. A scene, the moving nature of which would have wrung tears from a stone, had, by a single line, been turned into an ecstasy of laughter.

The wife and child of the melancholy but Reverend Coles, having seen through the falsity of the life they had chosen, and battered by the glittering villainies of Black Moustache's patent leather boots and doubtful champagne, had returned weepingly, to implore his forgiveness and his blessing, and he, instead of replying, "I forgive and bless you," had smiled idiotically and said, "Chase me!"

The house rocked and fell about with laughter.

The unprecedented success of his sally made a profound impression upon Eliphalet. He saw himself as a comedian—a funny man. The last of his self-control fell from him, and he gave himself over to rickety horse-play and clumsy mafficking. He overset chairs and tables, and laughed stupidly, He turned tragedy into farce, and the Reverend Coles from a figure of pathos became a figure of fun.

The "mother" and "daughter," friends of many preceding tours, strove nobly, but without avail, to keep the scene together, and were eventually driven from the stage in desperation, and genuine tears. Then the temper of

the audience, who knew real tears from the acted variety, underwent a complete change, and became nasty.

" 'Ee! Tha's droonk, man!"

"Shame to un! Pull un orf."

"Booooo-booooo!"

"Ought to 'ave our money back."

"Comin' on like that."

"Spoiling of a fine play!"

"Get orf—get orf!"

"Sling summat at un!"

"Shame! Booooo! Ssssss!!"

While the tumult progressed Eliphalet leaned upon a palm pedestal and surveyed the house with a mystified expression. He thought they were applauding him, and bowed his acknowledgment (incidentally knocking over the palm and pedestal!). There was a fresh uproar. Evidently they were not applauding—something must be wrong. What? He held up his hand, and his great bass voice rang out with unexpected volume.

"Silence!" And they were silent. "I was warned you'd want holding, and I'll hold you."

A shout of derision was hurled from the gallery.

"I'll hold you yet," said Eliphalet, rocking to and fro.

Then a carrot whizzed through the air and fell with a plump at his feet.

A carrot! The vegetable of derision—the symbol of contempt—the food of asses—to him, Eliphalet Cardomay!

And the mists cleared from his brain and the waywardness from his limbs.

"Ladies—gentlemen!" he cried. "I am ill—very ill! I can't understand—never—never before have I failed my audience. Let me finish the play—give me a hearing, or break my heart."

There was a lull, and Freddie Manning, in the wings, seized the character with whom the next scene was played, and with, "Get on and don't give him time to think," hurled him on to the stage.

Twice before the end of the act the mists rose before Eliphalet's brain, but he battled them down by sheer force of will, though the effort brought beads of sweat to his brow. With grim determination he hammered out his lines until the last one had been spoken, and there remained naught else but

the heart-attack—the clutching at his breast—the broken cry of “Mary!” and the fall into peace—oblivion.

The curtain had barely touched the boards before Mr. Manning had thrust the manager before it.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Mr. Dyson, “I have not come here to make an apology, but to say that you have been privileged to-night to witness a performance under, perhaps, the most remarkable circumstances under which a man has ever appeared.” And to the best of his ability he told them what had happened. When he had finished it was obvious to the meanest intelligence that the applause savoured of the sceptical.

“Won’t do,” said Freddie Manning, and pushed his way before the footlights.

“Easy there! You’re not going yet,” he cried. “Some of you believe it was a yarn the manager has just put over. But I tell you it’s true, and if any man here to-night goes home and says that my Guv’nor and my friend, Mr. Cardomay, was drunk, he’ll be steering a straight course for the libel court—and what’s more, he’ll get this,” and he held up a closed first with a row of shiny knuckles turned outward. “He’ll get this between the eyes—an’ that’s a promise I’ll keep.”

Right into the hearts of those hard-bit Lancashire lads went those “straight-flung words,” and such a roar of enthusiasm followed them as would have wakened the dead.

But it failed to waken Eliphalet Cardomay, who lay on his back and snored, with his head on a rolled-up stage cloth and his mouth wide open.

CHAPTER IV
THE ELIPHALET TOUCH

Eliphalet Cardomay was not, in the true sense of the word, a Bohemian. In his own particular way he was rather conventional. He knew he had not been drunk by any intentional intemperance of his own, yet the memory of the affair at Brigan was a nightmare to which even Manning was not permitted to refer.

To a man who has formed for himself certain high standards of behaviour, even the inadvertent collapse of any one of these is a matter of acute distress. Eliphalet Cardomay hated insobriety. The word conjured up in his mind a vision of a last scene in his married life. He regarded drunkenness as the thief of virtue, and with Eliphalet virtue was of supreme account. So far as lay within his power he suppressed any tendency in his company toward what is inaccurately termed by laymen, "theatrical arrangements."

To prevent some little wanderer from committing a false and foolish step he would take any amount of trouble. Eliphalet Cardomay was, despite the failure of his own marriage, a romanticist. He would gladly walk ten miles to a wedding, and an equal distance on his hands to a christening.

There is a sentimental kink in most childless old men. A wise and loving parent Eliphalet Cardomay would have made, had the fates not willed it otherwise, for he was the very type of sentimentalist who gladly would have given his every possession to have his dress-tie—on the rare occasions he wore one—tied by dainty daughter-fingers. But no daughter bore the name of Cardomay—he was alone and self-contained, and watched all around him a world of apathetic parents seemingly insensible to the happiness that was theirs. And so, in his little way, Eliphalet fathered his flock, guided and ferried them over rough waters, gave them gentle, easy advices, and, without saying much about it, contrived to do a deal of good.

Some girls are always old enough to be on their own—others are never old enough to be on their own, even when middle-age has made their girlhood a sham.

Of the latter order was Miss Eunice Terry, whose real name was Mary Kent. She became Eunice Terry on her accession to the stage because she foolishly believed such verbal extravagances would facilitate her ascent of the ladder of Fame. The foolishness of Eunice did not stop with her choice of a name, for the stage had scarcely claimed her as its own before she adopted the practice of calling everyone "My dear," of colouring her naturally pretty face with unnatural pigments, and of wearing clothes, and particularly boots, of a type which no man admires, except on evenings of frivolity removed from the home circle.

Had Eunice Terry been a wise little girl she would have remained Mary Kent even though on the stage. For Mary Kent was quite an attractive person, and far more likely to figure in the cast of a play than any amount of Eunice Terrys. But she was not a wise little girl, she was a very foolish one, and her folly was the cause of a growing grief in the heart of Henry Churchill, who had loved her with joy as Mary, and continued to do so with melancholy as Eunice.

Henry Churchill was a big, conventional young man, with a disproportionately small salary derived from an estate agent. He had first met Mary when the latter was employed by the same firm as typist, and had succumbed at once to her fascinations.

They spent four delightful months getting engaged, and, after working hours, would sit on the pebbles of Bognor beach and make delicious plans for the future. There was only one cloud to dim the skies of these pleasant discourses, and that was Mary's constantly expressed ambition to go on the stage.

"I should have gone ages ago," she would say, "if it hadn't been for Auntie, and you know what she is."

And Henry secretly thanked Heaven for Auntie, for, knowing nothing whatever about the stage or stage-folk, he very properly disapproved of both.

Auntie, it appears, was the stumbling-block to many joyous enterprises. It was she who insisted that he must earn fully two hundred a year before she would consent to the match.

"Mary wants any amount of looking after," she said, "and you're not old enough yet to look after yourself."

A premature marriage was thus averted, and the young lovers consoled themselves by privately condemning Auntie's tyranny and common-sense.

Then one day Auntie died, unexpectedly and inconspicuously on the horsehair sofa in the parlour, and Mary Kent was left alone in the world to

work out her own destiny.

It might be imagined that Henry embraced the opportunity to make her his wife then and there, but Auntie had left, by way of a legacy, a certain amount of the one-time detested common-sense. Reviewing his financial position by the clear light of before-breakfast sunshine, he was forced to admit that a salary that barely sufficed to satisfy his own needs would inevitably prove insufficient for two. He conveyed this weighty decision to the ears of his adored one, who, deprived of the same clarity of vision that had been given to him, accepted it as a token of waning affection.

"If you can't keep me," she sobbed, "then I'll keep both of us."

Sorely perplexed, he asked her what she meant.

"I shall go on the stage and earn a huge salary, and then perhaps you'll be sorry."

"Don't talk like that, Mary," he begged.

"I always meant to go when Auntie died, as it makes no difference, anyhow, and now I shall."

These remarks being somewhat involved, Henry Churchill scarcely knew how to answer, so he said the worst thing possible.

"I don't see how you can go on the stage without knowing anything about acting."

"I do know something about it, and when you see me driving about in my carriage I sha'n't take any notice of you, and that'll pay you out!"

Henry pondered for a moment before replying:

"Surely you have more respect for your poor aunt's memory than to go talking about carriages, like that?"

But Mary only pouted, and never said another word during the whole walk home.

Next morning Miss Mary Kent's place at the estate agent's was unoccupied, and when Henry, after an agonising three hours, rushed round to her abode, he found a letter awaiting him, the gist of which was she had gone to make her fortune on the stage, and though she would always love him she must give rein to her artistic abilities before the consummation of their happiness could be achieved.

Beginner's luck is no fable, and it was certainly exampled when Mary Kent presented herself at the stage-door of the Theatre Royal, Brighton, at the psychological moment Eliphalet Cardomay decided that another lady-guest was required for the reception-scene at the Ambassador's.

The Brighton *Herald* had commented upon the quality and lack of guests in this important function, and Eliphalet, viewing the scene from the wings, was bound to confess there was justice in their observations.

It is not pleasant for an actor of his standing to read in the "What People are Saying" column that "The Ambassador at the Royal this week hasn't many friends, and what he has hardly seem worth knowing."

As a general rule, guests can be made to double in other acts with peasants, gardeners, or policemen, but in this particular play there were no peasants, policemen, or gardeners; hence, to invite more than a select few to the Ambassadorial rout was a distinct extravagance. Nevertheless, it would not do if people got hold of the idea that he was cheese-paring. Accordingly, at the end of the matinée, he called the stage-manager, and addressed him as follows:

"Mr. Manning, you will endeavour to find a girl and a young gentleman to walk on in the third act; the stage is not sufficiently dressed."

"Right you are, Guv'nor," said the stage-manager. "There was a girl asking for a job at the stage-door five minutes ago. Nip down the road, Sydney, and try and catch the young lady."

Sydney, the call-boy, departed with speed, and came up with Mary at the corner of the street.

"The Guv'nor wants to have a look at you, miss," he said. "Might be a shop going."

With fluttering heart Mary retraced her footsteps, and was led by Sydney to that most hideous of structures, the back of the stage.

But it was all wonderful to Mary, especially when she found herself within a few paces of the great Mr. Cardomay, irreproachably attired in evening-dress, with a velvet collar, and wearing many mystic orders on his white shirt front.

Mr. Manning detached himself from his employer, who melted into the wings, and, twisting the card she had left at the stage-door between forefinger and thumb, approached her.

To the tyro Mr. Manning was rather terrifying. His bowler hat, which he always wore either on the extreme back or the extreme front of his head, seemed menacing, as also did the extinguished cigarette which stuck to his lower lip and engaged upon the strangest evolutions as he spoke.

"Y-e-es," he said, looking her up and down. "Um! Of course I know what you can do. What have you done?"

"Nothing," said Mary, startled into speaking the truth.

Mr. Manning sucked his teeth and shook his head. At this juncture Eliphalet Cardomay appeared from behind the scenery, and said:

"All right, Manning, make the engagement. She will enter after the French Consul and his wife—cross down right and sit in chair below settee until music cue, then off; on again at finale by door right. Walk it through and see the wardrobe-mistress. Tell Boscombe to make a duration of tour contract." And without another word he vanished into the shadows.

"Am I really engaged?" panted Mary. "Is it a good part?"

"No worse than other walk-on," replied Manning. "Come on through this door; you'll have to go on to-night, and I want some tea."

It is questionable whether the inclusion of Miss Eunice Terry at the Ambassador's reception greatly improved the scene. For certainly never was a guest more awkward.

With jealous amazement she viewed the natural ease of the other young ladies in the crowd, and envied them their mellifluous laughter. Earlier in the evening she had listened with awe to the conversation in the dressing-room, and had marked how each, according to her own tale, was usually to be seen in highly important rôles, but being sick of "resting" had accepted a "walk-on" as a "fill-in." From the way the Christian names of stage celebrities flew about Mary judged them to be well in with the *élite* of the profession. After a few days she learnt that it was not essential to be personally acquainted with such persons as Julia Neilson or Marie Löhr, before speaking of them as "Julia" or "Marie."

These familiarities intrigued her greatly, and before the week was out she was able to refer to H. B. Irving as "Harry" or Dion Boucicault as "Dot" without the slightest embarrassment. Eliphalet Cardomay was the only person never spoken of by an abbreviation. He was and remained "The Guv'nor."

Mr. Manning, the stage-manager, automatically became "Freddie," not to be confounded with Fred, which, as everyone knows, was reserved for Fred Terry.

"Freddie" was the subject of much conversation, indeed about forty per cent, of the entire output either started with "Freddie is a brick, you know," or "Freddie is a perfect beast."

Another twenty per cent, was given over to the doings of the call-boy, "that little devil, Sydney," and the remaining to reminiscences of past successes, or such remarks as:

"I feel a perfect rag to-day."

"Have you seen the show at So-and-so?"

"My dear, he was perfectly awful!"

"There was nothing but paper in the house."

"But I always do love Marian; she makes me cry, of course."

"She's such a dear off the stage." And so forth and so on.

Harmless stuff for the most part—not, as a rule, scandalous—always and without exception vapid and silly.

They are dear, kind-hearted, empty-headed little ladies who sail their boats round the fringes of the lake of dramatic art. They belong to a *genus* of its own. They never play parts—in the main they couldn't if they tried—in the main they don't want to. They are content to talk big, to walk on and on in one "show" after another, until at last they have walked away their good looks and disappear to an even greater obscurity than that of the peasant or the guest.

But Eunice Terry was not in all respects the counterpart of these other girls. At least she was ambitious. She desired success, fame—that is to say, she desired the advantages these conditions carried with them. It did not occur to her that to be successful and beloved of the public one must give the public something by way of return. She was out for her chance without even considering whether or no she would be able to make good if she got it. So, instead of thinking about her profession, she devoted herself entirely to acquiring silly habits of speech and little vulgarities of attire which robbed her of all her good taste and most of her good looks.

On the day Eliphalet Cardomay engaged her he made the following note in a little book kept for that purpose. "18th January. Engaged Eunice Terry. A guinea for eight performances and one-fourteenth for any addition. Looks about twenty years of age, pretty, slightly wistful; evidently inexperienced. Might be suitable for very sympathetic parts. Note: the name Eunice Terry seems strangely out of keeping—Dorothy or Mary would be more appropriate." Having made this entry he forgot all about her until one day when he decided to revive "East Lynne," and then, in looking through his first-impression book for a suitable "Joyce," the faithful nurse, he came across the paragraph, and at once dispatched the call-boy for Mr. Manning.

"Manning," he said, "I've been thinking of Miss Terry for the part of Joyce. Is she still with us?"

"Yes, Guv'nor. Of course, we've never tried her out."

Eliphalet nodded.

“That should hardly matter. I have a note here that she is simple and sympathetic. With these attributes the part will play itself. Will you send her to me?”

There was a tremendous flutter in the dressing-room when Mr. Manning popped in his head and said:

“Guv’nor wants to see you, Miss Terry. Look slippy!”

Eunice, dressed for the street, felt her hour of triumph was at hand.

“If I’d only known in the morning,” she gasped, “I’d have put on my fawn coat and skirt. This old thing’s a rag. Does this white fox look dirty, dear?”

“No; you look sweet, dear.”

Followed some frenzied powdering—some dexterous touches with a be-rouged hare’s-foot—the borrowing of a pair of white gloves from one girl, “that lovely parasol” from another, and a hurried departure to meet her fate.

At the door of Mr. Cardomay’s room she halted. It would not do to appear flurried. She must be calm and remember all the wonderful things she had learnt during the last six weeks. She must stand her ground as an artiste, and it was comforting to reflect upon the irreproachable plinth provided by her patent-leather boots, with the uppers that soared upwards to the height of her knee. She knocked, and heard the answering “Come in.”

Mr. Cardomay was engaged in writing in an autograph book as she entered, and he laid it aside and turned his eyes towards her. What he saw seemed to surprise him, for he contracted his brows a little. He had expected to find the same little rosy-cheeked runaway from Bognor, but, instead, here was a young lady all over white fur, white boots, white powder, long gloves and short skirts.

“There’s some mistake, I think,” he said. “I asked for Miss Terry.”

“I’m Eunice Terry.”

“Tch-tch! dear me, you will think it very strange that I hardly know the young ladies in my own company.”

“Oh, not at all,” she replied. “One knocks up against so many people on the road, doesn’t one?”

He nodded gravely. Evidently the young lady was no use for the part, but, being kind-hearted, he hardly knew how to get rid of her.

“I sent for you,” he said untruthfully, “to ask if you were any relation of the Terrys.”

Eunice’s high hopes came down with a bump.

“Not really a relation,” she answered. “Of course, we know Fred very well.”

“Um!” said Eliphalet. “Well, I trust you’re happy in the company. Good afternoon.”

Eunice turned to go, then, with sudden courage stayed and said: “I was hoping, Mr. Cardomay, you had got something for me in the next show. I’m simply dying to play a part—a big part.”

The unsatisfied fatherly instinct in Eliphalet Cardomay came to the surface, and pointing to a chair, he said:

“Sit down a minute. How old are you?”

“I’m twenty.”

“Have you a father or a mother?”

“No. I used to live with an old aunt. She was a frightful ogre, Mr. Cardomay. Wouldn’t let me go on the stage. So silly.”

“She is dead?”

“Yes.”

“What a pity. And you are not engaged?”

“Well, only in a way. I don’t think I shall ever marry him; not, at any rate, until I’m famous. You see, he’s foolish about the stage, too. Seemed to think it would spoil me.”

Eliphalet’s eyes wandered to the white boots elaborately displayed for his benefit.

“Poor young man,” was his comment.

“He’s a great dear, of course, and I like him very much, but I couldn’t let him stand in the way of my career, could I?”

“He won’t.”

“I’m so glad you agree with me.”

“Real love does not stand in the way of an artistic career, it advances it.”

“I’m madly keen to get on.”

“What do you call getting on?”

“I mean to have one’s name and photograph in all the papers, to keep a motor, and be recognised—all that sort of thing.”

Eliphalet smiled ironically. “At least it was an honest answer,” he said. “The last girl to whom I put the same question replied: ‘To play Lady Macbeth better than anyone else.’ ”

“How silly!” said Eunice.

And Eliphalet rose to put an end to the interview.

"Do you think you will have something for me?" she hazarded.

"Advice at any time you need it, and, as a little to go on with, don't lose track of that poor young man."

Everyone had waited in the dressing-room to hear the result of her interview, and a salvo of "Well's" and "Did you fix anything?" was fired from the expectant circle.

"I'd rather not say," she answered evasively. "He particularly said I mustn't mention it to anyone."

These were brave words, and brave also was the gaiety of the song she sang as she left the theatre. But that night, after the gas had been turned out in the lodging she shared with another girl, Eunice Terry found herself crying, and seemed in no great likelihood of stopping.

Flora Wayne, her companion, heard the sobs in her sleep, and, instantly sitting bolt upright and wide awake, as only a woman can, demanded what was the matter. Whereupon Mary Kent forgot that she was Eunice Terry, and whimpered with piteous grief, because she hadn't got on and didn't understand why Mr. Cardomay should have sent for her and given her nothing.

"Why don't I get on?" asked the tear-stained one pathetically.

And Flora, like the fool she undoubtedly was, whispered various reasons by which, according to her study of human beings, it appeared that to rise upon the stage was only possible for those who consented to fall in other ways.

"It's the only way to get a start," said Flora. "Because I wouldn't take it is why I have always stuck where I am." And having sown the canker of this perilous seed in the fertile soil of the silly little brain beside her, Flora turned over and continued her broken sleep.

But Eunice lay awake and turned the matter over in her mind. It was a disturbing thought that art and virtue could never be allied, and she wondered very deeply if it were so, approaching the subject as fearfully as a child with a strange dog.

She had been in Mr. Cardomay's company four months when this mental crisis occurred, and during these months Henry Churchill, to bury the sorrow of her loss, had plunged himself so deeply into work at the Real Estate Agent's, that he had attracted the favourable attention of his superiors. One bright day he was sent for to the inner office, where he found Mr. Robins, senior partner of the firm of Robins, Robins and Crusoe, who

informed him of their intention of starting a new branch at Lancingdon and placing him in charge, as manager, with a salary of two hundred and fifty a year and a commission on business transacted. This momentous interview took place on the day before Henry Churchill's annual holiday, and it was not unnatural, after a night's rest in which he set his mind in order, he should have packed a bag and after studying a theatrical paper hastened off to the town where his Mary was playing, to tell her the wonderful news and seek to rescue her from the paths of unrighteousness and sin.

Having arrived and taken a room at a temperance hotel, he lost no time in seeking out the theatre. To a young man of gentle upbringing it required no small courage to turn down that narrow alley towards the stage-door—that alley which in his imagination was at the conclusion of each evening performance probably chock-a-block with the gilded youth of the city, each one bearing a bouquet of exotic flowers designed to anæsthetise the blossom of his heart into accepting their addresses.

Fortunately he was spared the indignity of asking for her at the stage-door, for at the moment of his arrival she herself stepped out. For a moment he failed to recognise her—so little of the original Mary remained under the mask of pink powder and the screen of white fox, but the features of the little figure were the same.

The "Mary!" he exclaimed savoured more of rebuke than recognition.

"Why, it's Harry!" she cried, with a genuine pleasure in her voice.

But he was so shocked by the silly little changes she had made in herself that the tone of welcome was lost to his ears, and it was only with difficulty he restrained himself from saying many foolish things.

"Is there anywhere we could go and have a few words together?" he gravely asked.

"Yes, rather! How about the Mik?"

"Mik?"

"Mikado," she replied. "It's much better than the Royal, you know; the Royal's always so full. Fancy your turning up! I'm real glad to see you, boy!"

Henry had never been called "Boy" before, and it grated on his ears as the powder offended his eyes.

All the way to the Mikado Eunice kept up a sharp rattle of dressing-room remarks, about poor dear Flo who couldn't act a bit, but was such a dear for all that; about Sydney Lennox, who had played second leads with Fred, and was reported to have ticked off Dot before an entire West End

company; and endless other showy fragments intended to impress him with the manner of her success, since the day they had parted.

As a matter of fact she had another reason for talking, and that was to hide her own feelings, which had been sorely upset by a short interview she had forced on "Freddie" Manning half an hour before.

Like all good stage-managers, Manning assiduously avoided persons who sought to converse with him on business subjects—but this time Eunice had caught him unawares at the end of a passage that led to a blank wall.

"Mr. Manning," she had said, "do be a dear and tell me straight out what my chances are."

Manning rubbed his small, round ended nose and screwed up his features, like a child before a dose of physic.

"Dare say there'll be a walk-on for you in the next show," he said at last.

"But I mean my chances of a part—a real part."

"Umph!" remarked the stage-manager. "What do you want to play parts for, anyway?"

"But I do. Please tell me, and don't tease."

Mr. Manning could be very straightforward when he wished.

"Acting's like everything else," he said. "It's got to be learned. No one's going to give you a part unless you give something in return."

It was a perfectly innocent speech, but, thanks to the vapourings of Flora, Eunice Terry read its meaning all wrong.

"And that's the only way to get on?" she asked nervously.

"Sure!" responded Freddie. "You don't get anything for nothing in this life." Then very dexterously he slipped past her down the passage.

Henry listened to her chatter with growing displeasure, but it was not until they had seated themselves at a table in that Japanese-fanny, coffee-smelling restaurant known as the "Mik" that he really spoke his mind.

"Now, look here, Mary," he said. "I want to talk to you very straight. Mr. Robins has offered me the managership at the Lancingdon branch, with the salary of £250 a year."

"Oh, I am glad!" said Eunice Terry, laying a white-gloved hand on his sleeve. "That's fine!"

"The question is whether you will throw up this business and marry me."

For a moment she made no answer. Awhile she turned over in her mind the words of Flora and Freddie Manning. Here was this big, honest young man, who really did love her, and there was that remote phantom of possible

success, with its barrier of the price to be paid. It would be very nice to set up house with Harry with two-fifty a year, for after all the thirty shillings a week she earned didn't go far, and really and truly there was nothing very sensational or exciting in her present life. When she lifted her head she was smiling very prettily, and it was on her lips to say "Yes," when some demon, possibly the ghost of Auntie, inspired Henry Churchill to say:

"Of course, if you consent, there must be an end to all this making-up business."

"Oh!" gasped Eunice. "How dare you speak to me like that!"

"It's better we should understand each other. I dare say all this is very suitable to your present mode of life, but it wouldn't do in Lancingdon."

"You beast!" she said. "If you think I'd marry you and be a rotten little estate agent's wife, you're wrong. You talk about the stage like that, and know nothing about it. I'd be a pretty sort of fool if I gave up the stage for you!"

"Is this the little Mary I used to know?" inquired Henry Churchill, employing an old formula.

"No, it isn't. I've grown up a lot."

"Grown into bad ways," said Henry Churchill, getting deeper into trouble. "Come, come, Mary, let us forget this unhappy chapter of your life and begin again with a clean sheet."

"I've got a clean sheet." She stamped her foot. "How dare you talk to me as if I was a wicked woman!"

"I am trying to prevent such a thing."

"Funny way of doing it. If anything does happen to me, it'll be your fault. I hope—I hope I go thoroughly to the bad—just to pay you out."

"I forbid you to say such things."

"You forbid! You have no control over me. I lead my life in my own way—with my art."

Considering that Henry's main desire was to placate her wrath, his response of "I don't see how you can call being one of a crowd 'Art,' " was as infelicitous as you could wish.

Mary rose with the single word "Cad!" and, flinging the white fox about her shoulders, swept from the room.

Henry did not attempt to follow her, but sat gazing into a highly-decorated coffee-cup and chewed the cud of tragedy. The love of his life was ruined—his beautiful image destroyed by the vile pollution of the stage. A

great resentment surged through him that such destructive machinery should be allowed to exist to lure the righteous to their undoing.

On the table before him was a throw-away of the week's play. He picked it up and held it at arm's length, as though it were a tract of the devil. The name Eliphalet Cardomay shrieked from the page in block type. That was the fellow—he was the man at whose door her ruin must be laid. Henry Churchill crumpled the paper fiercely, and as he saw the name twist up in his grasp a thought came to him.

That evening, at ten o'clock, he was at the stage-door, demanding that his card should be conveyed to Mr. Cardomay.

"Never sees anyone till after the show," said the doorkeeper, and returned to his football edition.

It was well after eleven before Henry eventually found himself in Mr. Cardomay's dressing-room. Possibly he expected to see some Satanic apparition, for certainly he was a little astonished to find himself in the presence of a grey-haired and elderly gentleman, with a deeply-seamed face, which he was thoughtfully wiping with a towel. Over the edge of the towel peered a pair of shrewd but kindly eyes.

"Yes? What can I do for you?"

"I—My name is Henry Churchill."

"I had already gathered as much from your card."

"I am here on a matter of very important business."

"You are seeking an engagement, perhaps?" It was said very kindly.

"No—far from it," replied Henry. "In fact, I may say that I despise the stage and everything to do with it."

A whimsical smile played round the corners of Eliphalet's eyes.

"You appear to have chosen an odd place to make such an assertion," was all he said.

"Perhaps, but I didn't come on that score. You have a girl here named Mary Kent."

"Not here, believe me."

"There's no use denying it. She—she's a member of your—troupe."

Eliphalet held up his hand. "Mr. Churchill," he said, "would you mind going away and not returning until you have bettered your vocabulary and learnt a modicum of good manners?"

The distinction with which this speech was delivered quite took the wind from Henry's sails.

"I—I am sorry," he said, "but what would you say if your affianced were ruined—spoiled and painted up like a Jezebel?"

"Do you accuse me of ruining, spoiling and painting up a certain Miss Mary Kent? Because I assure you I have never before heard the lady's name."

"You know her better, perhaps, as Eunice Terry?"

"Miss Terry? Dear me! Really! So you are the young man of whom she spoke. The young man I advised her not to lose sight of."

"You advised her?"

"Certainly. I sensed that you might prove a valuable sheet-anchor to—well, rather a will-o'-the-wisp little craft. I hope, Mr. Churchill, you have come to carry her away to the hymeneal altar?"

"That's what I did come for, but, thanks to your teaching, it's all knocked on the head."

"My teaching?"

"Yes. Since you taught her to get herself up—talk a lot of silly theatrical shop, and put on stagey ways."

"My dear young man, those very stagey ways you speak of are none of my teaching. Indeed, but for their existence I might have done something to advance the little lady in her profession. It was their presence dissuaded me and also caused me to advise her not to lose touch with you."

"What do you mean?"

"There are many young and very foolish girls whom the glamour of the stage attracts—who are in no way suited, nor try to suit themselves, for success upon the boards. Oddly enough, they solace their souls with trumpery talk and silly vanities. They are good enough in themselves, but weak, do you see? Unable to grasp the essentials of a fine picture while hypnotised with the glitter of a cheap gilt frame. With a little care—a little sympathy—a little tact—they can be won away from where they are not wanted to where they are wanted. Now I advise you to talk to this little runaway very gently. Condole with her on the lack of opportunity she has had, but plead your love as a finer and greater outlet for her self-expression. Do this, Mr. Churchill, and upon my word, within a month you'll be happily house-hunting, with her hand upon your arm."

"It's no good," said Henry Churchill. "I have talked to her."

"What did you say?"

"Told her I heartily disapproved of everything she was doing."

"That was unwise."

"I believe in saying what I think."

"Yet people who always say what they think rarely have the privilege of doing what they like. You have made a regrettable mistake, and there is nothing left for you to do but leave her horizon until the memory of it has vanished."

"But I want to marry her."

"Precisely. Hence my suggestion."

"Look here: will you promise not to re-engage her after this piece?"

"Why should I?"

"I want to get her out of this business."

"You would not achieve your object that way. She is pretty enough to ensure her getting another engagement, and while she is with me she is unlikely to come to any harm. No; I shall engage her and re-engage her for one crowd after another, in the hope that she will surfeit of walking on, and that it will soak into her little head that she is not destined for a great career. And now, good night, Mr. Churchill—some matters of business——"

But Henry did not move at once.

"I am not at all sure," he said, "you are going about this business in the best way."

Eliphalet smiled. "Of course you are not. But then you are not a student of human nature, and by profession I am. Good night, again."

But Henry Churchill disregarded Mr. Cardomay's advice, and wrote a letter to Mary urging her to abandon a profession in which she was doomed to failure, and accept his hand in marriage. This foolishly-constructed affair fired her determination to show him, at all costs, that she could succeed, and moreover to say that she never wished to see or hear from him again. Both letters, in a fit of emotional confidence, she showed to Flora, who, being a meddlesome little busybody, decided that it was merely a lovers' quarrel, and determined to act as intermediary and secretly keep the unhappy young man informed as to his sweetheart's doings.

Now it was just at this critical time that Sydney Lennox (he who was reputed to have ticked off Dot Boucicault before a West End company) chanced to cast a favouring eye upon the cherry-lipped Eunice. Sydney Lennox was attracting a good deal of attention in the company, for it was common knowledge that in a few weeks' time he was taking out a tour of his own. The younger members would haunt his exits in the hope of a chance word with him, and many there were who besought him to give them

work. Then one night, during one of his waits, Eunice boldly bearded the lion and asked if he couldn't find her a part to play.

Mr. Lennox blew a cloud of cigarette-smoke towards the ceiling and watched it disappear.

"Can you act, then?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'm certain I could if I had the chance."

"And you want me to back the chance you can, eh?" It was not a pretty speech, but Mr. Lennox was like that. "Nothing doing, my dear," he finished up.

"I'm sorry," said Eunice, and turned sadly away.

Something in the cut of her retreating little figure made an appeal to Sydney Lennox, for he called out:

"Here! Come back a minute."

She turned expectantly, and he allowed his eyes to wander over her. Certainly she was pretty, very pretty. Quite an asset on a summer tour.

"Got any people?"

"No; I'm an orphan."

"On your own, then?"

"Yes; and I'm awfully keen to get on."

Mr. Lennox rubbed his chin.

"Find things pretty dull, don't you?"

"I'm bored to tears with being in the crowd. I'd give anything to get out of it and play a part."

"You would? I see—I see. Right! Well, come and talk to me again." He touched her shoulder with a light, familiar touch, and walked towards his entrance.

A week later Flora noticed a great excitement in her companion's manner.

"What's the matter, Euny?" she asked.

"I—I'm to play second lead in Mr. Lennox's tour."

"Euny!"

"Yes. Isn't it splendid?"

But Flora made no answer for a moment; then she said very slowly, "Is it splendid?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"I'd like to know the terms that got you that shop."

Then Eunice burst out with:

"You told me yourself it was the only way to get a start. I shouldn't be the first, and——"

But Flora interrupted.

"Don't you touch it, Euny," she said. "Don't be a fool. You'd never forgive yourself, and it isn't as if you're likely to get on."

Ah! that unhappy string! Why must all her advisers harp upon it?

"Isn't it? Well, I will get on, you'll see. I'm not going to be an old stick-in-the-mud all my life—like—like some people."

That night Flora wrote to Harry for the last time, and told him the state of affairs.

On receipt of the letter Henry Churchill went quite mad. Seizing his hat and an umbrella, he rushed to the station and steamed Mary-wards by the first train. Had he possessed such a thing, he would probably have taken a revolver rather than an umbrella, for his intentions were certainly lethal.

The great length of the railway journey had the effect of partially flattening his effervescence, and surely the hand of Providence was evident in the fact that the first person he met on arriving at his destination was Eliphalet Cardomay. The sight of the old actor peaceably pursuing his way brought about a fresh paroxysm of anger.

Had not Eliphalet been a man of ready perceptions, it is probable that he would have made neither head nor tail of the torrent of reproaches and threats that fell from Henry's lips; but through it all he was able to discern that here was real tragedy, and that the need for action was immediate. With great presence of mind he piloted the distraught young man into an adjacent dairy and, placing before him a bun and a glass of milk, besought him to drink and assuage his heat. And since no one can be really violent in the butter-smelling coolth of a dairy, he managed to extract the story and at the same time bring the narrator to a more rational mood.

"If you will leave it to me," he said, "I promise you on my word of honour I will put this matter right. I only ask you to go away and wait until I send for you. Do this, and all will be well." Thereafter he piloted Henry back to the station and waited until the south-bound train bore him out of view. Then his brows came together and the lines of his mouth hardened.

That night he sent for Lennox, and after a few small formalities, including the offer of a chair and a cigarette, he said:

“I hear you are thinking of Miss Terry for the second lead in your new production.”

“I had thought of her,” conceded Lennox.

Eliphalet placed his finger-tips together.

“Is that quite wise?” he asked. “She is young and very inexperienced.”

“Quite so; but one can but try her.”

“I see no reason why you should try her. There are many others far more suitable.”

“Very likely, but I’ve promised this girl. Of course, if the audiences don’t like her, it will be easy enough to take her out of the bill.”

“Will it? Will it?” There was an insistent note in Eliphalet’s voice.

“Why not?”

“Would your obligation towards the young lady be fairly discharged if you did?”

“What obligation?”

“To be frank, Mr. Lennox, I understand you have made certain proposals —er—conditions to her—which I regret should have come from a member of my company.”

Sydney Lennox rose rather stiffly.

“I don’t admit your right to interfere in my private affairs, Mr. Cardomay. What I may choose to do or not to do is no possible concern of yours.”

“No?” came the mild rejoinder. “But it happens that I take a personal interest in this young lady.”

“Indeed?” said Lennox, then added unforgiveably, “First come, first served.”

One assumes that Sydney Lennox had played in his time many villains, for he deported himself throughout the offensive inspired by his previous remark, with a cynical calm little short of remarkable. Briefly and very much to the point Eliphalet Cardomay spoke his mind, and what he said could hardly have been pleasant hearing.

At the conclusion, Lennox bowed and walked towards the door. Here he turned with:

“What a pity so much eloquence should have been wasted. Doubtless your next move will be to warn the little Eunice against my machinations, but let me assure you that her ambition to get on will certainly outweigh your most moral representations.”

"That being so," replied Eliphalet, "I must think of other means."

"There are no other means." And with this Parthian arrow Lennox withdrew.

It was a challenge, and Eliphalet Cardomay bit his nails over it until he was "called."

While in his bath that night, after a period of much brain-racking, the "other means" suddenly illumined his brain, causing him to rise so abruptly that nearly a gallon of water splashed on the oilcloth, percolated through the ceiling of the parlour below and figured to the extent of fifteen and sixpence on his week's account.

The next morning he said to Manning:

"I am going to give a special matinée at Birmingham the week after next. Second Act of 'The Corsican Brothers'—Trial Scene from 'The Merchant of Venice' and—and—well, I shall think of something."

Freddie Manning politely asked what the idea was.

"I wish to—er—to try out some of our younger members."

At the stage-door he encountered Miss Terry, and beckoned her into his dressing-room.

"They tell me you are to play a part in Lennox's tour. Hum?"

"Yes," said Eunice, with a slight increase of colour.

"It is, in a sense, unfortunate, since I myself had possibilities for you."

Eunice almost seized his arm.

"Oh, Mr. Cardomay," she exclaimed, "do you really mean that? Oh, I wish you would!"

"Some other time, then, perhaps."

"No, now. I'd much rather now."

"But your contract with Mr. Lennox?"

"I haven't signed one. Please——"

"Perhaps it would be a mistake, since what I have to offer is only a single performance. Naturally, if your success merited it, I should look after your future."

In her excitement Eunice rose and paced up and down.

"Please, please let me do it. I don't really want to take the other engagement—not a bit, I don't. What was it you thought of me for?"

"A special matinée in three weeks' time. Selections from my favourite plays. I should want you for the Trial Scene in 'The Merchant of Venice.'

For—for Portia, in fact."

"Portia!" repeated Eunice. "Is it a good part?"

"It has made many reputations," he gravely answered, without a shade of a smile.

"I'll accept. I'll tell Mr. Lennox at once. Oh, thank you ever so much."

"There, there," said Eliphalet, patting her shoulder with a kindly hand. "Don't be too grateful. One never knows!"

Sydney Lennox played a losing hand rather creditably. He even refrained from expressing his views on the reason for Eliphalet's action. Possibly he thought that to do so would have reflected but little glamour on his own personality.

At the rehearsals everybody remarked to everybody else on the extraordinary lack of guidance Eliphalet gave to the youthful Portia.

"She's simply awful, my dear," said her dressing-room companion, "but he doesn't seem to mind."

A day or two before the matinée Eliphalet sent a letter to Henry Churchill, saying he had to give Miss Terry a "chance." "Doubtless," he wrote, "you will think I am behaving unfairly towards you by so doing, but I am convinced that it is the wisest course. I want you to be present and to come round after the performance (not before) and pay your respects to the little débutante."

To be sure of a good attendance an early-closing day was chosen, and a general invitation issued to the Hepplewhite Steel Works Shakespeare Society.

"Don't know what they'll think of our Portia, Guv'nor," said Manning.

"But we *shall* know, whatever they think," replied Eliphalet sweetly.

He had chosen an act from one of his most popular melodramas to complete the programme, and the Trial Scene was reserved for the final item.

Certainly it was a meaty audience who were gathered in. The theatre was packed with a cheerful "How-do-you-do" whistling crowd, who hurled recognitions and shrill pleasantries from one part of the house to the other.

In the second row of the stalls sat Henry Churchill. He had the look of a man attending his own funeral.

Within his bosom there surged a great resentment against Eliphalet Cardomay, a resentment which would certainly find expression when their meeting took place after the performance. His anger was not lessened when

he found himself greatly enthralled by “The Corsican Brothers,” and worked up to a keen pitch of excitement by the act from “The Weir.” It was infuriating that this shameless mummer could be capable of inspiring sensations other than those of disgust in his properly ordered brain.

Then he found himself overtaken by a feeling of great nervous apprehension. In a few minutes he would be seeing his beloved bathed in the effulgent glow of the lime—treading the first stage of the road to ruin.

Then the curtain rose on the Trial Scene.

It must be confessed, after the generous and lurid fare that had been accorded them, the audience (not excepting the Hepplewhite Shakespeare Society) failed to look forward with any pleasurable anticipation to this example of the Bard’s genius.

Very naturally they felt aggrieved that William Shakespeare should have been dragged into an afternoon’s entertainment, when the time allotted him might have been more profitably spent with the work of some lesser littérateur. Consequently their attitude was disposed to be hostile.

Wonderful to relate, Eunice Terry felt no apprehensions. She was quite certain of herself. She had spent long hours “getting” her “silly old lines,” and she had “got” them. True, she thought the part was a “dud and a stuma,” and she didn’t pretend to understand half the things she had to say—still, that was the way with Shakespeare, and she had a “perfect duck of a make-up.” Violet O’Neal had helped her with it, and never were lily tints and rose more happily blended. She was as sure of her success as though already her picture postcards had gone into the hundredth edition.

Before going on, she approached Mr. Cardomay, sombre and Semitic as the Merchant, and asked, more for something to say than from any doubt on the point, “D’you think I shall be all right?” and he gravely replied, “You will do everything I expect of you.”

It would not be fair to follow the performance through its disastrous stages of incompetence and “dry-up” to the abrupt and unfinished climax. The Shakespearean Society were chiefly responsible for the disturbance. From the moment of Eunice’s first entrance they felt an insult had been placed upon their intelligence, an insult that called for immediate reprisals. The Quality of Mercy is all very well, but when you are told about it by someone who evidently hasn’t the slightest idea what she is talking about, the most lenient is apt to change his mercy to a Quality of Justice.

To borrow a phrase from the parlance of “the road,” Eunice Terry asked for, and got, “the Bird.”

At first she didn't understand, and floundered on hopelessly through a quagmire of unbalanced lines. Then, to an accompaniment of shouts and whistles, the truth dawned on her, and her little lower lip shot out and began to work spasmodically.

Seeing which, Henry Churchill got up and "engaged" the gallery.

"You cowards!" he cried.

And Freddie Manning from the prompt corner took advantage of the tumult to shout:

"Shall I ring down, Guv'nor?"

"No," said Eliphalet, but he had to shut his eyes to hide the grief on the little face before him. "Go on, Miss Terry."

"I—I can't."

"You must."

"I can't—I've forgotten—I don't want to——"

"Rotten!" shouted the house with one accord. "Rotten!"

Then Eunice burst into tears and rushed from the stage, and simultaneously Henry Churchill fought his way out of the stalls.

"I am very sorry, ladies and gentlemen," said Eliphalet Cardomay, and the curtain fell.

Eunice Terry was crying brokenly against a scene flat, but he offered her no word of comfort or condolence. He had seen Henry Churchill's furious exit from the stalls, and he hoped he wouldn't be long.

"I am afraid you have done yourself very little good, Miss Terry," he said.

"I—I'll never act again!" she sobbed.

Then, at the psychological moment, when all the world was against her, came Henry Churchill, with a broad shoulder, to soak up her tears.

"As for you, sir, to expose her to such—such brutal treatment," he exploded over his enveloping arm, "if you were a younger man, I'd—I'd ——"

"Why?" said Eliphalet.

"As it is, I shall take her away here and now. Yes, and if you sue us for breach of contract, we shall fight."

"Don't fight," said Eliphalet quietly. "Rather live happily ever afterwards."

"Go, dear, put on your things, and I'll get you out of this."

“Yes, Henry.”

And so anxiously did she obey his instructions that she took off her stage make-up and forgot to put on the one for the street. She even forgot the white fox in her haste to be off.

Through his dressing-room window Eliphalet Cardomay watched Henry Churchill, still scarlet with indignation, place Mary Kent in a cab and drive away.

“I have often remarked, Manning,” he said, “one gets very little thanks for doing things for people.”

CHAPTER V
GETTING THE BEST

Despite his remark at the conclusion of the foregoing chapter it was not Eliphalet Cardomay's habit to look for thanks, and on the rare occasions when it was offered he usually murmured something quite incoherent and sought to escape. His real lode-star was to obtain a result, and no amount of personal inconvenience counted in this most vital of all obligations. To obtain the best result from the material at hand was practically his religion. Not as a rule given to boasting, yet he might frequently be heard to say:

"I can always be sure of getting the best from any member of my company, be it in or out of the theatre."

It was a harmless enough little foible and saved many an inept actor or actress from reproaches. Eliphalet would argue that even though the quality of art with which they served him was indifferent, it represented the high-water mark of which they were capable, and so he forebore to criticise.

Like the martyrs of old, Eliphalet lived his ideals and was ready to uphold them by any sacrifice, as the succeeding episode goes to demonstrate.

No first-class provincial touring company need despise the Pier Pavilion at Brestwater-super-Mare. It boasts a stage of bold proportions, a capacious be-mirrored and luxuriously-upholstered auditorium and a façade that compels instant admiration. The design, a happy mixture of all the exhibition buildings which have ever sprung into existence, combined with a strong vein of Moorish architecture, is a triumph of skill and ingenuity.

Well, indeed, may the happy manager who has been fortunate enough to book a week there swell with pride as he passes the turnstile of the Pier, without the prepayment of twopence, and sees the majestic domes and spires of the Pavilion whitely silhouette themselves against the turquoise Channel waters. In such inspired surroundings, with the chuckle of sea beneath his feet, and the singing of the wind in his ears, who could choose but feel carefree and joyous, and give both-handedly of his artistic best?

But Eliphalet Cardomay, one of the mildest creatures God ever placed upon earth—a man of most even temper and lovable qualities—sensitive to an extreme of the influences of his environments—was in a dark and forbidding mood. The beauty of the day, the music of the water, the rococo

architecture, were as nothing to him. With hands clasped behind his back, stickless and hatless, he strode the pier boards like a man possessed.

The importunities of peroxided young ladies who, from the vantage of their little kiosks, besought him to buy chocolates, local views, frozen roses —or to solve the mystery of a certain walking-stick which in adept hands would transform itself into a useless pen—he almost rudely ignored.

"Phtsss!" he exploded aloud. "The man's a coward—an incompetent."

He gripped the railings of the Pier and gazed fiercely out to sea, while the wind played cornfields in his long grey hair.

A photographer, ever alert for fresh victims, approached and commenting upon the favourable condition of the elements, suggested that the gentleman might feel disposed to have a "likeness" taken.

"I do not feel disposed," returned Eliphalet, curtly.

"I have some most amusing backgrounds," continued the photographer, in no wise rebuffed, and proceeded, to describe how, in his professional opinion, Eliphalet would prove a suitable subject to place his head through a hole in a large canvas upon which was painted an astonishingly-clad individual riding on a rocking-horse. He wound up with the words, "Causes roars of laughter."

Eliphalet spun round and fixed two pin-points upon his frock-coated persecutor.

"Are you seeking to amuse yourself at my expense?"

"No, sir—I assure you."

"Then go away."

But the photographer was not a man to be trifled with. His hand flew to his hip pocket, in the manner of a mining-camp desperado, and withdrew a neat fan of samples of his craft.

"I am sure," he blandly ventured, "after a glance through these, I should number you among my patrons."

With a view to scattering the photographer's examples upon the waves, Eliphalet Cardomay snatched them from the extended hand; but before he had accomplished his intention he abruptly checked himself. The top photograph had caught his eye. It depicted a knock-kneed individual dressed in a close-fitting striped garment, shivering upon the steps of a bathing-machine.

"Ha!" exclaimed Eliphalet, surveying the image at the length of his arm. "Ha!"

"Most amusing, is it not?" volunteered the photographic artist, with an accompanying smile usually employed as a pattern for his more serious sitters.

Eliphalet regarded him with one eyebrow raised high above its fellow.

"Amusing! Appropriate, if you like, but amusing—no—it is contemptible." And so saying, he slapped the photographs into the astonished artist's hand and, throwing back his head, stalked off, past the line of melancholy fishers in the direction of his dressing-room.

Upon the stripped stage were assembled the various members of his company; for the most part they had composed themselves in little groups and were talking in animated whispers.

Out of the medley of subdued tongues occasional fragments of speech were audible.

"But these juveniles are not like they were in our day, Kitterson."

"You could see Mr. Cardomay was in a rage," said Violet O'Neal.

"He'd have sworn if he hadn't gone out," returned Miss Fullar.

"Can't think what Cartwright's making such a fuss over."

"Any fool could jump six feet into a net."

"Wish they'd give me the part."

"You can't get away from it, old man, Cartwright's no actor."

With his back against the proscenium and fiddling with an unlighted cigarette, stood an isolated figure, over whom seemed to hover a spirit of tragedy. Ever and anon his eyes sought a wooden structure at the back of the stage. The structure was in the nature of a rostrum, about ten feet in height, beneath which was stretched a substantial net some thirty inches clear of the boards.

This young man was Mr. Aloysius Cartwright, the new *jeune premier* for the forthcoming production.

Up and down before him, his bowler hat eclipsing his right eye and the major portion of the right side of his face, walked Mr. Manning, the stage-manager. Presently he halted in his stride and addressed Mr. Cartwright.

"Look here, why don't you have another packet at it while the Guv'nor's away? Make up your mind to do it, and it's as good as done."

"No, really, Manning, I've—I can't."

Freddie Manning sniffed noisily.

"It comes to this, o' man. You'll put the kibosh on the whole show if you don't. I can't see what you're raising the wind over. You told me you were a

swimmer, too."

"Oh, I can swim a bit, but that has nothing to do with it. What I——" He stopped, for at that moment Eliphalet Cardomay appeared through the swing-doors.

His entrance caused something of a nervous flutter, for everyone had felt the effects of the rehearsal which had ended in his abrupt departure.

The wrath of a naturally quiet-humoured man is always somewhat alarming, for no one can be sure of the direction in which it will vent itself. But apparently the thunder-clouds had passed away, for when Eliphalet came to a halt in the glare of the bunch light, his features were almost seraphic in their calm.

"Come, Manning," he said. "We will go on, ladies and gentlemen, please. Mr. Cartwright, I apologise for my hasty departure a while ago, but you—well, I was upset. It is a matter of personal pride with me that I have always—and in using the word I speak advisedly—have always been able to get the best out of any actor or actress I have employed. For a moment I feared that you—that I was to sacrifice that reputation; and I am sure, Mr. Cartwright, you would not willingly cause me so much distress."

"Well, I——" began Aloysius Cartwright—but the senior man held up his hand in a gesture compelling silence.

"Perhaps you have not fully realised the essence of the scene and what I have here may help you to do so." So saying, he unrolled a large sheet of paper he had been carrying and displayed a very lurid poster of a young man in evening dress leaping from a lock-gate into a canal. It was a striking composition in which black shadows and a much-reflected moon played important parts.

"Now, Mr. Cartwright, with this as your guide I am certain I shall not appeal to you in vain." And Eliphalet Cardomay, having made the *amende honorable* for his previous ill-humour, smiled a kindly smile of encouragement.

But Aloysius Cartwright failed to seize the opportunity of reinstating himself in his manager's good graces.

"It—it is all very well, sir, but I wish to say that I am neither an acrobat nor a cinema actor—my tastes are for—for legitimate work."

The lines about Eliphalet's mouth drew down and hardened. "I think," he said, "you are confusing the issue. The question appears to me to turn more upon personal valour than upon anything else." Then, speaking with sudden enthusiasm, "Why, my dear, dear boy—consider a moment. Put

yourself in the hero's position. Imagine your own sweetheart bound hand and foot and struggling in the waters of the canal. Would you hesitate for a second? No. Would you falter before the task of saving her from the clutches of the stream? No, no. Then be the man whom you're portraying. Play upon the impulsiveness of your nature, the gallantry of your youth, the pluck—the enthusiasm—the *élan*: lift up—grip us—thrill us, and——" with an abrupt change from the inspired to the finite, "do remember that we're producing the day after to-morrow."

"I'll try," said Mr. Cartwright.

"Clear the stage," shouted Manning, clapping his hands to support the order. "Up left, Miss Maybank, please. Come on, Fieldfare—for goodness' sake, o' man. Now where's that rope? Props! PROPS!!" An old man wearing a green baize apron thrust his head through the opening to the scene dock. "Get that rope—quick—and try and remember some of us live by eating, and don't want to be here all day. There you are! Catch hold, Denton! Where'll they start, Guv'nor?"

"Miss O'Neal's entrance. I'll go into the stalls."

"Your entrance, my dear. Ready, sir? Right."

Violet O'Neal the *ingénue*, stepped out from behind an imaginary wing and began to walk between two chalked lines on the stage, indicating the bank of the river on one hand, and the ancient mill on the other. In the excitement of the moment she overstepped the margins of the line.

"Don't do that," said Eliphalet, rising from his seat. "It is not the intention you should fall in the water before being thrown there."

"Back, please," from Manning. "Once more, please."

Violet retraced her steps and came on again with the nervous air of an amateur walking the tightrope.

Eliphalet tapped with his stick on the brass rail of the orchestra pit.

"A little more natural grace, please," he suggested. "And shouldn't you be singing here?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot."

"Quite—but please don't forget."

Then Mr. Manning, "Once more, please!" And a glance at his watch, for the stage-manager was a person who took lunch seriously.

This time she succeeded better with the manœuvre and produced a humming sound intended to indicate a carefree damsel enjoying the evening air.

Then from the assumed shadow of the mill leapt two figures and barred her way.

"Sir Jasper—you!" cried the girl.

"Yes, me."

"I," corrected Eliphalet.

"Yes, I," amended Fieldfare. "You little counted on the pleasure of renewing our acquaintance so soon—eh?" (Sinister words with a hint of dark deeds behind them.)

"Please let me pass." This imperiously from the girl.

"Pass! There is but one passing for you, and that lies there." With a gesture towards where the water would be on the night. "Unless——"

"I am not a child to be frightened by such threats, Sir Jasper. Stand aside, or I shall cry for help."

"Cry, will you?—and who will answer it? The trees—the hills—the river?"

Mr. Cartwright placed his foot in the lowest rung of the ladder leading to the rostrum.

Miss Maybank: "I command you to let me pass."

Fieldfare: "You little fool! Don't you realise that at this moment you are utterly mine?—that I could flick out your life as easily as—er—" he fluffed for his words, "as easily as I could crack a nut in a door?"

"What are you talking about?" interrupted Eliphalet. "Beneath my heel is the line. Persons of quality do not crack nuts in doors."

Fieldfare: "Crack a nut beneath my heels."

"HEEL—singular. It is not a cocoanut that requires both feet."

"Beneath my heel," pursued Fieldfare with a nervousness which reflected itself in Mr. Aloysius Cartwright's lick-lipping, collar-in-finger perturbation. "Choose, and choose quickly—life with me, or death, and death alone."

"God help me!"

"Choose."

"Then I choose."

Like lightning she whisked round to make good, but the second man was upon her, and bound her wrists with cruel dexterity.

"Frank—Frank!" she cried.

Fieldfare: “Little fool! by now your Frank is in the arms of the Duchess of Cleeve.”

“It’s a lie!”

“No, the truth. So make up your mind quickly—your lover is false to you—which shall it be—life or death?”

“If life means life with you—then death a hundred times.”

Fieldfare: “Well, die, then—die!” And with a coward’s blow he pushed her over the river-bank.

Prompter: “Splash! Two handfuls of rice, and that’s your cue light, Mr. Cartwright.”

For a moment it seemed that the panic had deserted Aloysius, for he clattered up the steps three at a time, crying:

“Doris! Doris! Where are you? Doris, I say!”

Fieldfare: “H’st! Quickly away!” And he and his companion flitted into the shadows as Cartwright, like a human whirlwind, dashed on to the lock bridge.

Like a man distraught, he gripped the bridge rail and cried:

“Where are you, my love? Where are you?”

From the water below came a faint cry of:

“Fraaank! Fr—a—!” gugle—gugle.

Cartwright: “My God!—in the river—drowning! I—I am coming!”

Eliphalet Cardomay leaned forward tensely in his stall, as with superb abandon the hero whipped off his dress coat and, casting it from him, sprang on to the rail of the bridge. With hands high above his head—posed for a magnificent dive—he stood there for one breathless second—then suddenly his body went all limp, his hands fell to his sides, and he faltered:

“It’s no use—I can’t do it, sir.”

And Eliphalet Cardomay, for the first time on record, swore before his entire company.

“Damnation!” The word rang out like a tocsin. Then, tearing off his hat, he kicked it across the auditorium and high up into the dress-circle.

“Lamentable creature!” he cried. “Wretched poltroon!”

Mr. Cartwright slowly descended from the rostrum.

“It is not part of my professional ambition to leap into a net,” he faltered.

“Leap!” echoed Eliphalet wildly. “Leap! Dare you employ such a word? I have seen a tile fall from a roof with more grace. I have seen a blind man

stumble on a banana-skin with greater dignity. But a more pitiable craven-hearted exhibition than yours I—I——" Words failed him. "You have ruined my belief in the younger generation—you have shattered my belief in myself. Manning, Manning! what are we going to do about it?"

"Have a bit of lunch, Guv'nor, and talk it over quietly afterwards."

So attractive did the proposition sound that without awaiting the sanction of the master, the entire company trooped to the wings and, grabbing their hats and coats, made for the nearest exit.

Never before in the recollection of the oldest member of the company had "the Guv'nor" given way to the slightest exhibition of temper, and the occasion had seriously unnerved them. That he should have lost control of himself to the extent of using violent language, and kicking his defenceless hat, was a revelation which could only be conversationally approached in the fresh air and sunshine.

Some form of belated courage induced Mr. Cartwright to remain, after the others had departed, brushing his Homburg hat upon his sleeve and buttoning and unbuttoning his gloves. He of all others had the greater reason for flight, and to his credit be it entered that he lingered.

But Eliphalet Cardomay was in no mood to spare him on that account. Like a destroyer circling a troop-ship, he revolved round the unhappy Aloysius, ever and anon firing salvoes of reproach and opprobrium.

Even when, unable to endure longer the whips and scorns of the managerial tongue, Mr. Cartwright sought to escape, Eliphalet was close upon his heels, jerking out verbal grenades of the most poignant nature.

Past the lines of melancholy fishers they pursued their way, hunted and hunter; through the turnstile of what might be called the super-pier upon which the Pavilion was situated, they made their way—Mr. Cartwright doing his best to preserve an air of stoic endurance, and Eliphalet Cardomay following with periodical explosions of artistic wrath.

Above the box-office, the lurid poster of the hero leaping into the canal insisted upon recognition.

"Look!" cried Eliphalet, restraining his quarry with the crook of his stick. "Look, and be ashamed! That is what I have led the public to expect, and——" His eye fell upon the photographer's booth, not five yards distant, beside which sat a young lady, tilting back her chair against the chain bulwarks of the pier. "HA! It is not too late to make amends. I have never yet cheated my public. Come!" And seizing the youth by the arm, he dragged him protestingly towards the temple of photographic art.

The photographer was seated within, indulging his appetite with a cut from the joint and two vegetables imported from a neighbouring café. He rose, politely masticating, as the two came in, and inquired, to the best ability of his well-filled mouth, in what manner he could be of service to them.

"I have brought you a subject," said Eliphalet. "I wish you to take this gentleman with his head thrust through the hole of that vile canvas of the shivering creature on the bathing-machine steps."

"I protest," began Cartwright, but Eliphalet talked him down.

"I shall want it enlarged to the size of the poster yonder, which it is destined to supplant. I shall placard it on every hoarding in the town. I shall ____"

But the sentence was never completed, for from immediately outside came a sharp, wild scream. Through the windows of the studio they had a momentary glimpse of a pair of white shoes and stockings pointing towards Heaven for a fraction of time. Followed another shriller scream and a deep, resonant splash.

"Good 'eavens!" cried the photographer, rendered aitch-less by surprise. "That girl's fallen in."

By common consent they rushed out, and were confronted with a view of an upturned chair, a swinging chain, and in the water below, the flash of a white skirt and an outstretched hand.

"She's drowning!" gasped Eliphalet, in genuine horror.

Then spoke Aloysius Cartwright, and his words tumbled over one another like the waters of a cataract:

"Here's a chance, sir—a chance! You—you've slanged and vilified me all the morning for making a muddle of the rescue scene. Here's the real thing! Here's a chance to show me how to do it now!"

The walking-stick fell from Eliphalet's hand and a fine colour flushed his cheek, as he said, articulating each word with biting emphasis:

"I am sixty-two years of age, Mr. Cartwright."

But Cartwright, his temper roused by much pricking, was beyond the touch of sarcasm.

"I merely said it was a chance," he replied. "I didn't expect you would take it."

The old man's face went very white, and with trembling fingers he released the buttons of his long coat.

"Did you not?" he said. "I have never asked a man to perform what I lacked the courage to do myself, Mr. Cartwright, so kindly observe me." And, throwing aside his coat, he sprang head-first into the water.

"Good God!" exclaimed Cartwright, and fell back a pace.

Naturally, by this time a crowd had assembled. With the light of hope in their eyes, and greatly to the confusion of their lines, the melancholy fishermen came hurrying to the spot. The various sweet and novelty shops swiftly gave up their complement of be-pearled, peroxided maidens. A very worldly-wise young man, in a blue suit, which seemed to be entering into a colour competition with the sea, on the not unnatural assumption that a cinema play was in course of production, asked his friend where the camera was situated. From the far side of the pier a boatman, whose duty it was to guard the destinies of bathers, aroused himself from lethargy and plied a busy oar among the pier-piles, beneath the spectators, towards the confusion in the water. An old lady in a bath-chair, who, that very morning, had confided to her fellow-guests at the boarding-house her utter inability to walk unaided, alighted from her conveyance with surprising alacrity and managed to secure a place in the front row, while, in token of the mistake of leaping rapidly to conclusions, from the back of the crowd came a querulous and oft-repeated cry of "Fire!"

"Make a passage there," shouted a compelling voice, and shouldering his way through the crowd came Mr. Manning.

Seeing Cartwright, he demanded:

"What the hell's up?"

"The Guv'nor! A girl fell into the sea, and—and he—he went in after her."

"What! But he can't swim, man—he'll drown!" And gripping the pier railings, Mr. Manning leant perilously over the side.

"You don't mean that," gasped Cartwright.

"Mean it! Look for yourself, you fool!"

And Cartwright looked.

The young lady on whose behalf Mr. Cardomay had committed himself to the deep had already disappeared. A kindly wave had washed her to within easy grasp of an iron cross-tie, where, gripping tenaciously, she moved in rhythmic sympathy to the motions of the channel tide. But the case of Eliphalet was none so good. Neither was Rome built, nor are divers made, in a day. Eliphalet had landed (to use a contradiction in terms) full-length and flat upon the waters, and as a result suffered the loss of every vestige of

wind his lungs contained. Wherefore the process of drowning was but a matter of moments. Already he had made one of his allotted three excursions among the laminaria of the ocean bed, and the second was in active course of preparation.

"Oh, Guv'nor!" wailed Mr. Manning. "You can't swim, and neither can I."

And then the unexpected came to pass. Mr. Aloysius Cartwright—one-time coward and craven—of a sudden became a hero and a man. Disregarding the sensibilities of the feminine element in the crowd, he peeled off his coat and vest, kicked his beautiful brogue shoes right and left (incidentally breaking one of the photographer's windows), and performed a dive so faultless in its athletic perfection as to excite a cry of rapture and amazement from all present.

He "took off" at the precise moment Eliphalet came to the surface for the second time, and it was only by a miracle he failed to torpedo that unhappy man or alight head-first in the prow of the boat which had unexpectedly shot out from beneath the pier.

It is certain and beyond dispute that had he delayed another second he would have broken his own neck, sunk the boat and driven Eliphalet finally to the bottom. But the tragedy was averted, and he cleft the waves with scarce a bubble to mark his entry. Reappearing with a strong side-stroke some twenty feet away, he made for the boat, where his assistance was instrumental in considerably delaying the work of rescue.

It was a sorry-looking and draggle-tailed trio who eventually came to port at the little iron stairway by the pier-head. Between them Cartwright and Mr. Manning conveyed Eliphalet Cardomay to a couch in his dressing-room. The young lady who caused these sensational happenings was carried off by one of the peroxide sisterhood, and departs from our field of vision in a semi-hysterical condition.

It was Mr. Manning who took entire charge of the work of bringing "the Guv'nor" round, and did it with that thoroughness which distinguished all his undertakings.

Eventually Eliphalet opened his eyes and let them drift round the room until they came to rest on Aloysius Cartwright, who was forming an island in an ocean that dripped from his clothes. Eliphalet regarded him with a puzzled expression which suddenly cleared and was supplanted by a rare and almost beautiful smile.

"That was a wonderful dive, Mr. Cartwright," he murmured. "Just what I wanted." The smile transformed itself into a look of great contentment. "I

have always believed I could bring out the best in any member of my company. I think I am justified in holding that opinion still."

This is an advertising age, and the success of a commodity depends not so much on its quality as the quality of the advertisement bringing it before the public eye. Nevertheless, and despite the packed houses which patronised his new production, Eliphalet Cardomay was highly incensed when asked by a reporter to confide to the columns of the *Brestwater Mercury* the precise sum he had paid in gold to the young lady who fell into the sea.

CHAPTER VI
QUICKSANDS OF TRADITION

People who imagine an actor's life is all honey forget that he has to read plays, and the reading of plays is at once the most onerous and exacting of all tasks.

Not one in a hundred is fit to be read, and scarcely one in a thousand deserves production.

Nearly everyone believes he can write a play, and most of these believers have a shot at it—and good, bad or indifferent, each one of these shots is stuffed into the barrel of a quarto envelope, charged with the address of this or that theatrical manager, and propelled by means of a given number of postage-stamps to its billet upon the managerial desk. Should the desk pertain to one of the more illustrious lights of the stage, the envelope is carried off by some erudite young gentleman, employed for the purpose, who cons the manuscript by the light of midnight oil, and directs its future career forward or backward, as the merit of the work suggests.

In pursuance of this melancholy vocation the optic nerves and digestive organs invariably become impaired. The reader loses interest in life and sense of appreciation. He becomes a confirmed cynic and usually blights his own career by throwing out an obvious winner, and being thrown out himself for so doing.

But those who work upon the Road, who have no swing-door offices in the Haymarket or Shaftesbury Avenue, who travel year in and year out dragging their productions from one town to another, who live in cheap hotels or cheaper lodgings, who have neither house nor home nor any household goods to call their own—naught save a succession of ugly theatrical baskets—for these no such luxury as a reader of plays exists. It is part of the price they must pay for billing their names so wide and large on the provincial hoardings that all odd hours and the pleasant magazine-time of the Sunday train journey should be spent in the consideration of unsought-for dramatic effusions.

No one could compete with Eliphalet Cardomay's energy in this direction. He had made a strict rule to read two plays on week-days and three on Sundays, and he never departed from it. Yet, despite his diligent inquiry into the realms, or rather, reams, of the unknown, never once, in

thirty years of provincial management, did he discover and produce a new play. He just went on doing the old repertory routine of revival and re-revival, and then back again to the beginning. Sometimes he would vary the order by purchasing the touring rights of a successful London melodrama, but these ventures were few and far between. Yet always at the back of his head was the belief that one day he would chance upon and present an entirely original and unexploited work.

It was at a time when he was debating on the advisability of making an offer for the latest Lyceum success that a copy of "A Man's Way" came to hand.

He started to examine it on a journey between Glasgow and Brighton, and before arriving at his journey's end he had read it three times, and his stage-manager, Freddie Manning, had read it twice.

"What do you think, Manning?" he queried.

"Not too bad," replied Manning, who was not given to superlatives.

"A good title, 'A Man's Way'—an arresting title."

"Might be worse."

"And an ingenious plot."

"M'm!"

"Something very original about it."

"Wants a lot of cutting."

"Oh, yes—too long."

"Damsite!"

"This Mr. Theodore Leonard—ever heard of him, Manning?"

The stage-manager picked his teeth negatively.

"No, neither have I. A first play, probably. Very fresh and ingenious—modern, too. Yes, yes! The part of the doctor—with a little alteration—I think we could get away with it. H'm! read it again, Manning—read it again."

The result of Manning's second excursion through "A Man's Way" was reassuring. He repeated his former verdict that it "wasn't too bad."

That night as he lay in bed Eliphalet Cardomay digested "A Man's Way" and revolved the possibilities of doing it in his mind. It was so essentially unlike anything he had ever done before that the prospect pleased. The central character of the doctor was his firm, purposeful way—his manner of treating wife and patient with the same unvarying but just dictatorship—it

was new, and yet true to life—very human, if only on account of the unemotional quality of the work.

From beginning to end there wasn't a single set speech—no lofty periods of crescendo to induce those rapturous outbursts of applause by means of which members of provincial audiences seek to convince their immediate neighbours that they are sensible and appreciative to the influences of uplifting thought.

To produce such a work would be a step up. It would present him as an actor in a new light. He would encourage a deeper-thinking public. He would, *ipso facto*, become a modern. Modern influences were afoot on the stage nowadays, and he, Eliphalet, still floundered in the dead seas of rodomontade. Why should he live in the past, when here was "A Man's Way" to lead him to the future? Eliphalet sat up in bed and lit the candle. Somewhere in the second act were some lines that struck the key-note of what was and what had been. They arose from where a poor, half-starved penitent came with a piteous tale to tell, and he, the doctor, made answer, "It'll keep, won't it? Get some grub and a good sleep. We'll fix the rest in the morning."

Eliphalet suddenly remembered a play he had done years and years before, in which a somewhat similar scene occurred, in which he had said, "Not to-night, my brother. Your body needs nourishment, your brain needs rest. Go—take what my poor dwelling has to offer. Eat, sleep, and pray to Him to visit your dreams with peace."

Probably for the first time in his life it dawned on Eliphalet Cardomay that this kind of talk was bosh—stilted bosh. People didn't say things like that; wherefore it was sheer dishonesty to proclaim such stuff to an audience.

He would have done with this nonsense—he would rise superior to these absurd stage conventions, and for the future devote himself solely to reproducing the actualities of life and the actualities of speech. And having arrived at this sensational resolve, Eliphalet rose, donned a dressing-gown and seating himself at the little davenport desk by the window, drew pen and paper towards him.

Finally and absolutely he had made up his mind he would "do" "A Man's Way," and then and there he wrote to Mr. Theodore Lennard and said that, though his work had made a distinctly favourable impression, he could see no prospects immediate or otherwise of producing the play. Nevertheless it might be to their mutual advantage to meet and discuss the matter.

This done, he paddled across the moonlit street in gown and carpet slippers, and dropped the letter into the pillar-box at the corner, and it was not until he heard it fluttering down against the iron sides of its cage that the first doubt assailed him.

It was a gentle night and warm. Fifty yards away the iron railings of the esplanade traced black lines across the luminous sea.

Eliphalet forgot his unconventional attire, and a few moments later was leaning over the railings, listening to the swish and rustle of the pebbles as the water washed them to and fro.

"The same old sea," he thought, "just the same as ever—unchangeable—from Christ's time to mine." Then aloud, and with startling emphasis, "Get some grub and a good sleep—we can fix the rest in the morning. I don't know," said Eliphalet, "really I don't know. 'Eat, sleep and pray to Him to visit your dreams with peace.' "

Realism and Art—if it were Art.

For thirty years it had passed for Art with him—thirty unchangeable years. Did reality for the stage actually exist, or was it a mere modern fetish? Change—Futurism—Realism! What were they but ugly likenesses of nature—the human frame with all its bones showing?

The moon was a fairy over the sea, and the sea a playground for the moods of light—unchangeable, unreal, as it was in the beginning.

"There is no realism," mused Eliphalet. "It plays no part in our spiritual lives."

Then a rubber-soled policeman came down the esplanade, and spoke harsh words regarding folk who walked the night in carpet-slippers and dressing-gowns. He instanced cases where heavy penalties had been awarded for lesser offences, and followed Eliphalet to his lodging with flashing bull's-eye and threatening mien.

"Yes—yes—yes," said Eliphalet testily. "Very sorry, and if you are not satisfied, come round and we'll fix things up in the morning."

Slightly distressed, he returned to bed. It was surprising he should have used the word "fix." Curious how one adapts oneself to a change—even of vocabulary. "A Man's Way" was certainly a fine play—realistic—human!

Mr. Theodore Lennard lived at Worthing and duly received the letter on the following morning. A young man was Mr. Lennard, shy and retiring to a fault but gifted with strong faculties for literary force. He could make his characters express themselves most vigorously—in fact, say things which he himself, under similar stresses of emotion, would never dare to utter. He

wrote easily, frankly and honestly, and he loved his characters and envied them their vigour and lovable qualities. It was pitiful to reflect that he, with his knowledge of how a strong man should act, should be as pliable as a reed in the wind.

Beyond question the world should have known the works of Theodore Lennard long before this story was written, and the reason why he was still obscure was because never before had he had the courage to submit any of his writings for approval.

This was his first experiment, and lo, within three days of posting it, came a letter from an established stage personality expressive of admiration.

Mr. Lennard read and re-read Eliphalet Cardomay's non-committal communication, and his elation knew no bounds. He felt he had been discovered—a stupendous feeling. America must have been conscious of it when Christopher Columbus hove over her horizon.

An hour and a half later, not without misgivings, he presented himself at the stage-door of the Theatre Royal, Brighton. Mr. Cardomay, he was informed, was not within—he was probably lunching at his lodging. A request for the address of the lodging was sternly refused. It is an unwritten law that stage-doors never give addresses, however inconvenient the withholding of them may prove. He would do well, the doorkeeper advised, to call again that evening after the performance.

The prospect of spending several hours on the esplanade somewhat depressed Mr. Lennard, but he was rescued from such an unpleasant necessity by the opportune arrival of Freddie Manning, who thrust a long arm through the little window of the doorkeeper's box and seized a handful of miscellaneous correspondence.

Realising he was in the presence of a man of importance, Mr. Theodore Lennard coughed discreetly.

"Yes?" said Manning, shuffling the letters from one hand to another.

"I—Good morning—afternoon—my name is—or rather, I was hoping to see Mr. Cardomay."

"What about?"

Mr. Lennard stuttered, and after a period of incoherence produced Eliphalet's note and handed it to the stage-manager, who read it through and frowned.

"I see," he said. "Well, the Guv'nor's busy at the moment. He's—er—working on a play we shall probably be producing." (This was pure fiction, or, as Manning would have said, a business stroke.) "If you come round to

15 St. James's Place at 4.30, I'll try to get you a hearing. Morning." And tilting his hat well over his right eye, Manning hurried off in the direction of his master's abode. He found Eliphalet at lunch, and started abruptly with:

"What's this business about Theodore Lennard, Guv'nor? You're never seriously thinking of doing that play of his—are you?"

Eliphalet consumed a mouthful of Bartlett Pear anointed with Bird's Custard before replying:

"When I wrote to him last night I firmly intended to do so—but this morning I am a little undecided."

"The author's turned up, and he's coming along here at 4.30."

"Dear me! Is he indeed?"

"So you'd better prepare a choke-off right away."

Eliphalet mused.

"Why should I choke him off, Manning? You said yourself it was a good play."

"I said it wasn't too bad," corrected Manning exactly. "Besides, I thought you'd fixed on the Lyceum piece."

"Which is exactly like every other drama we have ever produced."

"Well, we're exactly like all the other characters we've ever played. No good changing our play if we can't change ourselves to match it."

Eliphalet looked sad.

"But why can't we change ourselves?"

Freddie Manning quoted briefly the proverb of the leopard and the Ethiopian.

"You're not very charitable this morning, Manning."

"This is a business talk."

"Then if we ourselves are immutable we must change the substance of the play."

"Or cut it out and do the other."

"But 'A Man's Way' is so original," came from Eliphalet, with a plaintive note.

Freddie stuck his hands deep into his pockets.

"Granted," he began, "but it don't fit us. It don't fit us anywhere. Look at the leading part—a smart Harley Street surgeon! Ever seen a Harley Street surgeon, Guv'nor?"

"No, but I could go to Harley Street, and for two guineas——"

"It 'ud cost you more than that before you'd done. Why, Guv'nor, you'd have to turn yourself inside out. You couldn't wear the clothes—and you couldn't play the part in the clothes you do wear."

The old actor's hand sought his flowing tie with an affectionate touch. "There's something in what you say, Manning."

"There's a lot in it. Bar a parson or a Silver King fixture, you're not the type for modern parts. Then, again—would you cut your hair short? Not you!"

"No," said Eliphalet. "Such as I am I have always been. I should certainly decline to transfigure myself."

"There you are, then! Stick to the old stuff, I say."

"But I have a yearning for the new."

Manning shrugged his shoulders.

"You're the boss," he said.

"I want to do this play, Manning—very much indeed." Suddenly he rose dramatically. "Manning!" he exclaimed. "If I am unsuited to the rôle of a Doctor of Medicine, why not alter him to a Doctor of Divinity?"

"Mean changing the whole thing."

"Well, why not, and what of it?"

"Then how about the 'Pauline'?" said Manning, opening a fresh field of opposition. "None of our girls 'ud do, and they're all on long contracts."

"Miss Morries."

"Tss! She's *ingénue*—Sweet Nancy—sun-bonnet and long strings. She'd never get away with that cold-storage class of goods."

Eliphalet drew patterns on the table-cloth with a long sensitive forefinger.

"It should not be difficult," he hazarded, "to alter her part as well."

"If the author consents?"

"That is a point we can decide at half-past four. Please don't throw any more cold water on the scheme. I am really anxious to be associated with modern thought, and this forceful young man has shown me the way—'A Man's Way.' "

At precisely four-twenty-nine the forceful young man in question was ringing the bell of Number 15, St. James's Place, and as the skeleton clock on the half-landing proclaimed the half-hour he was ushered into Mr. Cardomay's august presence.

If Eliphalet expected to see in Mr. Lennard a pattern of masculine virility he was grievously mistaken. Nothing could have been more ineffective or retiring than the young man's demeanour.

So strange is the working of the human mind that this outward display of weakness at once affected Eliphalet's appreciation of "A Man's Way." He felt that it was impossible that originality and power could flow from such a source. Subconsciously he was offended that that high, narrow forehead and the thin, nervous hands before him could have produced in literature such vigorous characteristics.

And while these thoughts were passing through his brain Mr. Theodore Lennard stuttered out his apologies and excuses for intruding.

"Not at all," said Eliphalet. "I am very pleased to see you. Sit down, and we will have some tea."

It was not until tea had come and gone that the subject of the play was broached. Freddie Manning was the one to introduce it, and he did so as though it were of secondary interest to a tooth he was picking with the whisker of a recently-devoured prawn.

"To be sure," echoed Eliphalet. "The play! Well, Mr. Lennard, we have read it and, with certain reservations, we like it."

"Think it not too bad," amended Manning, who had broken the prawn's whisker at a critical point of leverage and was naturally put out about it.

Mr. Lennard smiled from one to the other to show his willingness to accept praise or censure with equal avidity.

"Granted certain minor alterations," pursued Eliphalet, "we might even be prepared to put the piece into rehearsal."

"That's most awfully good of you. Very, very kind indeed," bleated Mr. Lennard.

"I imagine this is your first play," and scarcely waiting for the nod of affirmation, Eliphalet went on, "and that being so, you understand the—er—remuneration would not be large—would, in fact, be—er—small."

"Sort of honorarium," put in Manning, "You'd get a royalty or a sum down for all rights."

"Whichever you prefer," interposed Mr. Lennard hastily, although not half-an-hour earlier he had resolved under no circumstances to sell out his interests in the play.

"It is of course difficult to get a first play produced at all," said Eliphalet, "and the thirty or forty pounds expended may well prove money thrown away for the manager."

"I see that—I quite see that." (He had fixed his lowest price at one hundred down and 20 per cent. royalty, but such is the elasticity of the artistic mind that these barriers were instantly swept away.)

"Right," said Manning. "Then, taking for granted you carry out the alterations satisfactorily, you are ready to take £30 to cover all claims?"

The talented author hesitated.

"Mr.—er—Cardomay mentioned forty."

"Figure of speech, that's all."

"No, no, Manning, I think we might say forty. The extra ten payable if the play is a success."

"That's not business, Guv'nor."

"But it's an agreeable suggestion," said Mr. Lennard, who was poor as well as honest.

"It would be a more agreeable suggestion if you paid back the thirty if the play's a failure."

Manning's arguments were too much to cope with, so the author subsided.

"So far so good," said Eliphalet, and produced the manuscript of the play. "Now, what I chiefly want you to do in these alterations is to retain the present spirit of the play as exactly as possible. It is admirably suited to the title, and the title pleases me greatly."

Mr. Lennard looked grateful and asked what was required of him.

"To begin with, the character of the doctor must be changed to that of a clergyman."

"A clergyman!"

"Precisely. I don't play doctors, but I can and do play clergymen. After all, in a healer of the body or a healer of the mind there is no great difference."

"Well," said Mr. Lennard nervously, "it's rather—I mean—a tall order. Aren't some of the lines and—er-situations slightly unsuited to a cleric?"

"Change 'em, then. Make 'em suitable. That's an author's job, ain't it?" demanded Manning.

"But I made a particular study of a Harley Street surgeon in the character of Dr. Wentall—a most careful study, in detail."

"Well, go round to the Vicarage and make a fresh study there. You've got a fortnight."

“Then, again, the whole scheme of the play would be affected. There would be insuperable difficulties in getting my characters on and off the stage. As patients visiting a doctor their comings and goings are in perfectly natural sequence.”

“You can fix that all right.” Manning dismissed such a trivial objection with a wave of the hand.

“And now,” said Eliphalet pleasantly, “about the part of the wife, Pauline?”

“You wouldn’t alter her? I—I thought she was rather good.”

“Admitted. But as it happens we have a young lady in our present company who, although charming, is scarcely capable of realising your intentions in this part.”

“But wouldn’t it be better to engage someone who was capable?” suggested Lennard.

“That would be rather shirking a responsibility, when it would be easy for you to modify and simplify the emotions she would be asked to portray.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Look here, then,” Manning explained. “Cut out all that highly-strung, neurotic bosh and make her a simple, loving creature.”

“That’s it! With a vein of sunshiny humour.” And Eliphalet leant back and smiled.

“But how am I to adjust the quick, ill-considered actions of Pauline, as I’ve conceived her, to the type of character you suggest?”

“That is for you to decide, Mr. Lennard. We are here simply to reproduce your thoughts—not to inspire them. All I ask is that you should retain the present spirit of the play.”

The poor author looked utterly bewildered, but before he had recovered his powers of speech in came Manning with a bombshell.

“And now,” he detonated, “comes the question of Comic Relief.”

“Ah!” said Eliphalet. “I had quite forgotten the Comic Relief.”

Theodore Lennard essayed an epigram.

“I have seldom found it comic,” he said, “and never a relief.”

Both his hearers frowned.

“We must not consider only ourselves in these matters,” said Eliphalet gravely. “A large percentage of the audience rely for their pleasure exclusively upon this branch of the entertainment.”

"But I can't see how I'm to get it in with the people as I've written them, Mr. Cardomay."

"Then write some more—we have quite a large company."

"What sort?"

Eliphalet fixed his eyes on the ceiling.

"A good deal of harmless fun," he said, "can be extracted from highly-characterised domestic servants of opposite sexes. Their mispronunciation of words, their little *amours*, and perhaps some good-natured horseplay among the chairs and tables."

"Are you serious, sir?"

"I am seriously suggesting a vein of humour. And now, Mr. Lennard, if you will consider these minor alterations, I trust we shall come to an arrangement satisfactory to you and to myself."

Mr. Lennard rose and fumbled with his hat.

"I—I'll do what I can," he said. Then, with unexpected courage, "But how would it be if you produced the play as it is?"

"Look here, that's hardly playing the game, o' man," said Manning. "You waste an hour of the Guv'nor's time, and then put up a suggestion like that!"

"Yes—yes—I see. I beg your pardon, Mr. Cardomay. I apologise. Good afternoon, and thank you very, very much."

After ten days the second version of "A Man's Way" was delivered, and Eliphalet started to read it in great excitement. When he had finished, he was possessed with the curious conviction that he was mad. Accordingly he sent for Manning, and fluttered round while the stage-manager snorted through the manuscript.

"Well, Manning?"

"It's all wrong. Parsons don't act like that."

Eliphalet nodded. "And they don't talk like that," he added.

Manning whisked over some pages. "Look at this bit, Guv'nor. 'Get some grub and a good sleep.' " (Odd he should have chosen that line.) "People wouldn't stick it."

"Yes, yes—absurd! He should be soothing—inspired!"

"Then, again, this stage direction: 'Takes Pauline by the shoulders and pushes her through the French window into the night, saying, "As you can't be mentally cauterised, you'd better be mentally cooled." ' "

"Shocking!"

"They'd throw things."

"And, curiously enough, in the first version I thought that scene was good. He has made a mistake in keeping that hard note in the character. Besides, now that the Pauline has been sweetened, there is no longer any occasion for such drastic measures. And the Comic Relief, Manning?"

"Horrible, Guv'nor. Out of place."

"I felt the same. Send Lennard a wire, Manning."

"Saying it's all off?"

"No, no—but I want to talk to him."

On his way to the Post Office, Manning almost ran into Theodore Lennard, who had followed in the wake of his play. The stage-manager buttonholed him at once.

"You've fairly done it," he opened fire. "Your play's like a bit of bad joinery where the joints don't fit, and rattle. It's a hash, old man, a hash!"

"But what I cannot understand," Eliphalet was saying five minutes later, "is how you could put such words into the mouth of a clergyman."

"I didn't," came the plaintive reply. "I only left them in."

"But no cleric would say such things."

"Think for yourself—would he, o' man? 'Mentally cauterised,' and all that kind of stuff! Bad form!"

"But Mr. Cardomay expressly asked me to keep the spirit of the play."

"You took me too literally, Mr. Lennard. No self-respecting member of the Church would turn his wife out of doors in the middle of the night. He would wrestle with her mentally. There is a fine chance in that scene for inspired rhetoric. Think! Something that starts gently and gradually, crescendoes as the wealth of this theme reveals itself. Why, it comes to my brain as easily as if the trouble were my own." He began to pace up and down, saying, "God gave you into my keeping, and I shall not let you go. For the sake of that great love that once was ours—love consecrated by holy matrimony, cemented by the hands of little children—put behind you these dark thoughts, my dear, these sinful, useless hopes. Shun this evil phantom that rises like a—a—something—in our path. Bear your part in the great trust—the trust of a wife and a mother." He paused dramatically.

"That's the stuff," chipped in Freddie Manning. "And the girl finishes up by crying in his arms, and the house shouts itself sick."

"According to my way of thinking," hazarded Mr. Lennard politely, "no woman would stop in the room if her husband talked like that."

“Well, there you are,” said Manning. “That’s a jolly good way of getting her off—much better than pitching her through the window.”

“Let us approach the matter rationally,” suggested Eliphalet, although he was not a little distressed at the reception given to his oratory. “Having gone so far, I am not anxious to relinquish the play. Even if only on account of the title, I confess I am drawn towards it. I suggest, Mr. Lennard, that you leave the manuscript with me to work upon. It would save much fruitless discussion. I should bring to bear a fresh eye, cultivated to observe and remedy the existing faults. What do you say?”

“Just as you please,” said the young man hopelessly. “I don’t suppose I should ever get what you want.”

During the fortnight in which Eliphalet laboured at “A Man’s Way” he had constant resource to manuscripts of old plays in his repertory, most particularly to one called “The Vespers,” in which a clergyman and his wife passed through troubled waters. In this work Right throve persistently, mainly through the good offices of much Homeric matter delivered from the centre of the stage and etherealised by the influences of the Spot Lime or Red Glow from Fire.

Eliphalet was not an author, and he began to work tentatively. But after a while he found that to give any real tone value to the scenes and characters it was necessary to carry out very extensive alterations. It is possible to keep gold-fish in an aviary. In certain elements only a certain class of life can exist. Influences in one breath to say “Chuck it and clear out” in the next. Wherefore, for every line Eliphalet altered there arose an immediate obligation to alter a hundred succeeding lines. And this duty, with the aid of his reference library, i.e., the Repertory Plays, he most conscientiously performed.

But, alas! with the change of text came a fresh trouble. Situations had to be re-constructed to fit the new psychology. Nothing daunted, Eliphalet dipped afresh into his old lore, and emerged with stilted and stereotyped scenes which he faithfully paraphrased and transplanted.

And the finished article bore about as much resemblance to “A Man’s Way” as a cow to a nightingale.

Poor Eliphalet Cardomay! The quicksands of tradition would not let him go.

“Yes,” said Freddie Manning, “it’s more like our usual stuff now.” He took out a cigarette, which he licked thoughtfully before lighting “But I was thinking——”

“What?” said Eliphalet.

“Hasn’t it struck you, Guv’nor, that the title ‘A Man’s Way,’ doesn’t fit any longer?”

Eliphalet looked quite scared.

“But I like the title enormously. It’s so original—er—modern.”

“But it don’t belong, Guv’nor. It gives the wrong idea.”

“Ye-es, I see what you mean. With this more ascetic character, eh?”

“Exactly.” He rubbed his nose productively. “ ‘A Man’s Prayer’ would be better,” he hazarded.

Eliphalet thought it over and shook his head.

“No, it ain’t good. How about ‘The Great Trust?’ ”

“Sounds a shade American, Manning.”

“It does.”

Eliphalet struck the table. “I have it,” he said. “ ‘His Prayer.’ ”

“That’s the note!”

“Then let Lennard know we have decided to call it that. And you might take back some of these to the theatre.” He indicated the pile of plays on his table from which his alterations had been quarried.

Freddie Manning carried off these veterans of the Road, and having nothing better to do for an hour he perused the four acts of “The Vespers” and became pregnant of an idea. He said nothing about it at the theatre that night, but the following morning, when, faithful to his usual routine, he paid his eleven o’clock call on his master, he had every intention of doing so.

In the meanwhile Eliphalet had passed a troubled night. Dispassionately and clear-headedly he had been through “His Prayer” (late “A Man’s Way”) and had given it deep thought.

He had chosen this work because he believed it would lift him from the Old School and place him among the moderns, and lo! it was even as all his other plays. He had been deceived. There was not a spark of originality in it. It was set and stereotyped, lifeless and dull.

“Why, why did I ever believe in the thing?” recurred over and over again in his mind.

So before Manning had a chance to speak a word, he was saying:

“I have made a most grievous error in the matter of ‘A Man’s Way.’ It’s no good, Manning—no good at all, and I cannot conceive how I ever thought it was.”

“We are all liable to mistakes, Guv’nor.”

Eliphalet shook his head. “Perhaps I am getting old,” he said, “and losing my sense of good and ill. Why, even with the alterations I have so laboriously contrived, it does not compare with the poorest play in our repertoire.”

Manning slapped his hat on the table.

“Guv’nor,” he said, “that’s what I’m here to say. It all comes of trying to get off our own railway system. Now what’s wrong with doing ‘The Vespers’ instead?”

“ ’Pon my soul,” said Eliphalet, “I believe it would bear reviving.”

“It would—and not a cent to pay, either.”

Eliphalet leant back and rubbed his fingers together.

“ ‘The Vespers?’ ” he spoke the title lovingly. “Why, Manning, it must be twenty years since I played ‘The Vespers.’ Ah, Manning, they knew how to write—those old ’uns. They had poetry, understanding. This ultra-modern business is all wrong, Manning, all wrong.”

“It’s all wrong for us, Guv’nor.” He did not overstress the “us,” but it had a meaning which Eliphalet was not slow to perceive.

“Let the cobbler stick to his last,” he said.

Manning rose abruptly.

“Well, I’ll send Lennard a letter and return the script.”

“No,” said Eliphalet, “I’ll do that.”

Manning eyed him doubtfully.

“You are under no obligation to pay him anything, Guv’nor.”

“No—no—no. Of course not.”

But nevertheless there was a cheque for forty pounds in the letter he posted. Perhaps subconsciously, he was paying for a lesson and not for a play.

It was the Eliphalet touch. He, too, had had his disappointments, and maybe, this was one of them. No man should raise hopes and dash them to the ground.

CHAPTER VII
GAS WORKS

The effects of international politics are far-reaching. But for them Eliphalet Cardomay would certainly have produced "The Vespers." The declaration of peace in South Africa was the direct cause of his abandoning the project. A wave of patriotism seized him, and on its impulse he purchased the touring rights of a great military melodrama, entitled "The Flag," which had been accorded considerable success in a London theatre.

In this play he figured as a dashing, if rather improbable Colonel, whose courage was to be relied upon in any extremity. The extremities were many and dire, but never failed to find our hero alert, sententious, resourceful and with an inexhaustible supply of cigarettes.

Truth to tell, the part was not eminently suited, either to his personality or method. Colonels do not, as a rule, wear much hair upon the temples or nape of the neck, nor do they engage unduly in gesture or vocalisation. Eliphalet, on the other hand, did all these things—declining to sacrifice his established traditions on the shrine of convention. His "Colonel," therefore, was an indifferent impersonation less like unto a soldier than unto Van Biene in "The Broken Melody."

In the last scene of the play there was a great "to do"; nothing less, in short, than a bombardment and assault upon the Consulate which the Colonel and his brave followers were defending. With heavy odds against them, these gallant few contrived to hold out until the opportune arrival of a rescue-party headed by the Colonel's young and lovely daughter, and heralded by a fife-and-drum band.

While the bombardment was in progress the Colonel and a faithful orderly had the stage to themselves. The courageous soldier spent his time between an open cigarette-box and an open window, from which latter vantage he was able to control the movements of his troops, and supply the audience with details of the attack.

Eliphalet Cardomay had been at great pains to make the sounds of the battle convincing. He had bought large drums and employed extra hands to beat the stage with canes. As a final *tour de force* half a dozen squibs were let off, a single maroon was exploded in an iron bucket, and red fire was burnt with liberality in an adjacent frying-pan.

It was a stirring entertainment. Eliphalet felt he was upholding the best traditions of the race and drama.

During the second week of the tour his satisfaction received a shock.

He was staying at an hotel, the rooms in that particular town being indifferent and unclean, and had returned thither after the performance to sip a cup of cocoa and smoke a small cigar before retiring to rest. He had found a secluded palm-sheltered recess in the lounge, and, at the time the shock occurred, was reflecting that he had, perhaps, allowed himself too free an expression of criticism when discussing with the theatre manager the matter of exits from the auditorium.

His own production was a heavy one, and to give it stage room the manager had moved a quantity of stock scenery and stored it in the two emergency corridors which, in case of necessity, would empty the theatre into a narrow thoroughfare at the back. Eliphalet did not approve of this measure and had quoted the Lord Chamberlain's rules in support. Mr. Gimball, the manager, had replied, with singular lack of courtesy, that he was quite capable of running the front of the house without interference. To this Eliphalet answered, "Your first duty to your patrons is to provide them with a speedy means of leaving the auditorium."

And Mr. Gimball returned:

"I can get them out all right if you can get them in."

An uncalled-for observation, the memory of which rankled. Eliphalet did not aspire to be a master of repartee, and had not engaged in the discussion with a view to sharpening his wits. It seemed obvious every precaution should be taken, especially in the case of a theatre situated next-door to a small-arms and cartridge-making factory and abutting the local gas-works.

Thus it is not unnatural that, in the shade of the hotel palms, he should have sought for more quieting influences. He was sipping the cocoa, when he chanced to overhear the following conversation:

"I shan't forgive you for this, Bryan, when we might have spent a pleasant evening at a music-hall."

"Sorry," said an older voice, "but after all it wasn't such a bad show. Certainly the battle scene was a bit indifferent—still, one can't expect everything."

"A bit indifferent! It was deplorable. But, apart from that, the way that old actor, what's his name, played the part of the Colonel was enough to drive a man to drink. Going about, smiling, cracking jests, and lighting cigarettes! I've been through a decent few shows—Dundee, Barterton, and

some others that were pretty warm, too—and I can tell you, people don't behave like that under shell-fire—they've too much to think about to play the mountebank. Carry on with the work and show decent pluck—yes. But behave like that old idiot—no, no!"

"You're blasé with too much of the real thing, my dear Raeburn. Let's have a drink and talk about something else."

But the South African warrior was not to be denied. He had things to say, and meant to say them.

"Half the time," he continued, ignoring the interruption, "these actor-Johnnies don't know what they're doing. A slack, idle crowd, lolling over a bar by day and messing up their faces with grease-paint by night. They've no experience of life, or death, or danger, and wouldn't know how to cope with it if they had. They're gas-works, that's all. Lord, it makes me sick to see a man attitudinising and throwing the heroic pose, when if it came to a pinch he'd take to his heels at the sight of a runaway horse half-a-mile away."

"That statement," said Eliphalet Cardomay, rising and approaching the two gentlemen, "is offensive and unjust."

The man who had been speaking, a broad-shouldered, well-built fellow of middle age, spun round in his chair, and eyed the newcomer with disfavour.

"I'm not aware we invited you to join our conversation," he said.

Eliphalet Cardomay acknowledged the thrust with a fencer's gesture.

"True; but I feel justified in upholding the honour of my profession, as doubtless you would feel for any person or ideal you may happen to cherish."

Captain Raeburn cocked his head at a somewhat insolent angle.

"Come on, then, draw up a chair and let's have it out. It would simplify matters to exchange names. Mine is Raeburn—Captain Raeburn—and this is Mr. Bryan."

The old actor bowed ceremoniously to each in turn.

"And mine," he said, "is Eliphalet Cardomay."

By the expression of surprise on their faces it was clear, until this moment, they had failed to recognise in him the gallant Colonel of an hour before.

"Is it, begad?" said Raeburn. "Then our conversation must have been devilish unpleasant overhearing." He offered no apology, however.

Eliphalet shrugged his shoulders and, dividing the tails of his long, old-fashioned frock-coat, sat down at the small table.

Mr. Bryan was of more sensitive metal than his companion, and felt the need to smooth some of the creases from the situation.

"Raeburn," he said, with a conciliatory laugh, "says a good deal he doesn't mean. You know what it is! Personally, I am sorry you should have overheard his criticisms—very sorry indeed."

"I am glad I did," was the response, "for it gives me the chance of refuting them. It is not very agreeable for us to have people saying in public that we lack the essential elements of courage."

"Well, well, well!" said Raeburn with brusque heartiness, "a word spoken is a bullet fired. No use pretending you didn't touch the trigger, eh?"

"But is it not unwise to tamper with firearms when you are not acquainted with their mechanism?"

Raeburn coloured a trifle and remarked, "That's hardly applicable to me, Mr. Cardomay."

"I was merely enlarging a metaphor you introduced."

"Ah—I see. Yes. But how about a drink before we start? You won't refuse a whisky, eh?"

"You may find it hard to believe, but I shall refuse; for oddly enough, and at the risk of destroying one of your illusions, I do not drink alcohol."

"Ha! Well, that's a score to you."

"I wish I could shatter other beliefs as easily. You said we of the stage have no real experience of life, death and danger, and could not cope with it if we had."

"I did."

"I, on the other hand, maintain that we have a greater experience than almost any other class. We must know what to do for every occasion, for otherwise we would need at once to seek a fresh means of livelihood—or starve. We live amidst a turmoil of ever-changing emotions——"

"Acted emotions!"

"But very real to us. What we depict is merely what we have known or seen or felt. All our lives we are moving in different scenes and different places—we are rubbing shoulders week by week with different men, different women, and human events, both great and small, which even you, with your battle-field experiences, would find it hard to outrival."

Raeburn made no reply, but the angle of his nostrils was distinctly sceptical.

"Yes, all the time we are drawing our experiences—learning our lesson from the book of life. A child pricks its finger—and we can study from the child's mother the measure of sympathy she offers for so small a sorrow, yes, and deduce therefrom how great her sympathy and concern would be if the pricked finger were, instead, a mortal malady. There is no happening too small to be of use to us, to help us with our lesson; and every hour of the day or night we are piecing together the minute mosaic which goes to fashion the broad patterns of our art."

"H'm! That's all very nice and very interesting, but forgive me if I don't exactly see what it's leading up to."

"Merely this: that from the lesson we have learnt, we, of all people, are to be relied upon to do the right thing in any emergency."

Captain Raeburn found the loophole he had been seeking, and fired his shaft unceremoniously.

"Then why, my dear sir, play that last scene in 'The Flag' in the manner you do? Surely you don't imagine a Colonel would really behave like that under similar conditions?"

"Although I have never been in a battle, I can see no reason against his doing so."

"You can take it from me that he wouldn't."

"At the risk of appearing disputatious, I contend, if it were his wish to allay a spirit of panic, that is precisely the way he would set about it."

"Why, the men would laugh at him."

"In which case he would have achieved his object."

"Well, well, well! You could talk from now to dooms-day and not convince me."

"I am very sorry," said Eliphalet, rising. "It was good of you to hear me so patiently. Good night." He hesitated. "I was wondering—you fought in South Africa?"

"Yes, all through the campaign."

"And have heard and seen many stiff engagements?" Raeburn nodded. "You were commenting unfavourably upon the effects of the battle that I introduce in the play."

Captain Raeburn produced a cigar and lit it. " 'Fraid I was," he agreed.

“Would it be asking too much from you to—to explain in what direction our effects differ from the reality?”

“That’s an awkward question to answer.”

“Meaning we are entirely at fault?”

“Something of the kind.”

Eliphalet sat down again and looked worried. “That’s a pity,” he said. “A great pity. I should like to have it right. Perhaps, if you—er——”

Raeburn spread out his legs. It was evident he rather enjoyed this tribute to his professional skill.

“Certainly, I will. Now, let’s see. These rebels are at the gate, aren’t they? A few shots are fired—answered by rifle-fire from the defenders. That ’ud want organising to a certain extent. There’d be time in it—they’re trained troops—see? Probably a machine-gun would open up somewhere.”

Eliphalet had begun to take notes on the back of an envelope.

“A machine-gun—very good,” he said. “Now, how would that sound?”

Raeburn tapped his forefinger in a metrical beat upon the table.

“I see, I see. Please continue.”

“Isn’t there some talk about the rebels bringing up artillery?”

“Yes; they open fire on the consulate.”

“Ah, that was where you were all over the place. First, you want a low, distant report, then a whistle—SShhreeee—e—u—u—cr—umpp. Something like that they go.”

“Very effective! This is most valuable.”

Under the subtle influence of appreciation the warrior developed his theme and gave many graphic illustrations of the din of battle, each of which the stage mind of Eliphalet Cardomay rapidly translated to the possible resources of the property-room.

“Finally, when the rebels blow up the gate you want a noise—a real noise. That twopenny maroon you explode wouldn’t lift a wicket off a nursery door.”

“And I thought that effect was fairly good,” said Eliphalet plaintively.

“I can only tell you it made me laugh.”

“We must change it, then—it must be changed at once. I pride myself on presenting nothing but the best to my audience. Many thanks, Captain Raeburn; you have rendered me a great service. I shall rehearse the battle-scene very thoroughly and utilise all your valuable suggestions. If you and

your friend would honour me by accepting a box for Friday night's performance, I think I can promise you a reflection of the real thing."

Probably Mr. Bryan realised that Raeburn would drop a brick, so without giving him time to refuse he gracefully accepted the invitation on behalf of both. And when Eliphalet had wished them "Good night" and departed, he said:

"We'd insulted him quite enough, my dear fellow; we should have been inexcusably rude to have said 'No.' "

"A silly old gas-bag," smiled Raeburn. "We'll go, then. Anything for a laugh."

Next day, and the one following, Eliphalet Cardomay and his stage-manager, Freddie Manning, worked at the battle-scene like grim death. The artillery practice achieved with drums of different notes and a develine whistle was a triumph of realism. A stern suggestion of machine gunnery was contrived by the use of an archaic police rattle, opportunely unearthed from a neighbouring junk shop. For the mining of the gate a large cistern was salvaged from a rubbish-heap and two maroons were placed inside and fired simultaneously.

"Manning," exclaimed Eliphalet gleefully, "it is tremendous! Now, just once more, and we'll leave it at that."

On his way back to the hotel he chanced to meet Captain Raeburn, who was swinging a cane in Broaden Street.

"We shall surprise you to-night," he said, by way of greeting, and passed on, chuckling.

The Grand Theatre, Wadley, was situated at the top end of a short blind road, standing back from Broaden Street. The stage-door and emergency exits, which, it will be remembered, were blocked with scenery, opened on a narrow thoroughfare at the back.

Approaching the box-office, one passed Messrs. Felder & Syme's Small Arms and Cartridge factory. Behind them, and separated only by a ten-foot wall, one of the many urban gasometers rose and fell in response to the city's consumption.

Friday night in Wadley was always the best for business. It was then the "good people" patronised the drama, and Mr. Gimball, the manager, was wont to make special efforts for their better comfort. On Friday there were extra members in the orchestra. On Friday there was red cloth on the front steps. On Friday all the electric light points burnt gaily in the big lustre

chandelier above the auditorium, and woe betide the programme-girl that failed to appear in her whitest and newest apron upon that night of nights.

When the returns were brought to Eliphalet Cardomay at the close of the second act, he was agreeably pleased.

"We've a fine audience for our new battle," he observed, "and the play is going well."

Captain Raeburn sat back in his box, the picture of misery.

"Look here," he remonstrated, "that fellow Cardomay is awful. How about slipping quietly away?"

But Mr. Bryan would not hear of it.

In the Small Arms factory next door the night-watchman was making himself comfortable against his vigil. By means of a pile of straw-filled cases he constructed an easy-chair. The light of the small caged gas-jet being insufficient to illuminate his Late Football Extra, he produced from his pocket a stump of candle and waxed it to the top of one of the cases. This done, he ensconced himself luxuriously, spread out the paper, and settled down for a "nice read."

Meanwhile the third act of "The Flag" proceeded. Eddies of rebellion were already lapping against the walls of the consulate. The Colonel's daughter, disguised as a gipsy, had dropped from the walls and was away in search of aid—and the audience had begun to realise that in the next act there would be trouble, with a capital "T." They were right.

The print of the halfpenny Football Edition, held in the hands of the night-watchman, began to blur. Delicious little thrills of fatigue pulsed through his limbs. He reflected how foolish he had been never before to have disposed himself so comfortably. Also he reflected how good that pint of dinner ale had been, partaken before coming on duty. Odd thing he had never drunk of dinner ale before! In the future he would remedy that omission—a rounder, mellower and more palatable beverage would be hard to conceive. He closed his eyes and allowed his imagination to picture the big glass tankard and the burnt Sienna distillation it had contained. He tried to open them again but they revolted against the impulse.

"Aft' all," he muttered, "aft' all—wha's it marrer?"

The paper slipped from his fingers and dropped to the top of the case beside the candle. His hand made a lumbering, futile gesture to regain it, then fell to his knee and skidded off inertly. His head rolled a trifle, lurched forward and his body went limp. Then came the heavy regular purr of a man breathing.

A capricious draught slanted the flame of the candle until it gently touched the corner of the newspaper. Being damp, the paper burnt slowly and only in one direction. Finally it went out, but not before setting light to an enthusiastic wisp of straw. The straw realised at once what was required, and passed the dancing yellow flame along the ridge of the line of overflowing cases. The lids of the cases were screwed down and the heat generated from the burning wisps of protruding straw was insufficient to ignite them. This was very disappointing, for very soon the straw had burnt out and, but for one insignificant circumstance, a very enjoyable fire would have been lost to the neighbourhood. The circumstance in question was provided by a stump of pencil which hung on a string from a notice-board. A final spurt of flame from the last tuft of straw ignited the little piece of cedar-wood, which—nothing if not communicative—promptly conveyed its sorrow to the string supporting it. The string burnt through and the flaming pencil dropped to the floor upon a little heap of paper and rubbish. In these sympathetic surroundings it received every encouragement, and in very little time the whole pile was blazing merrily. A chance puff of wind from an open doorway scattered fragments in three directions, in each of which a cheerful fire resulted.

The packing-room, a few feet down the passage, where stacks of empty cartridge-boxes were stored, was, perhaps, the most successful; although, considering the non-inflammable nature of much of its contents, the small recess beneath the wooden staircase competed very creditably. The third fire was insignificant, confining itself to the cremation of a row of overalls hanging on a line of hooks.

When the night-watchman woke, he found himself confronted with a task beyond the reaches of his capacity. His rush to the fire rack resulted in oversetting two buckets of water, and the flames, laughing at his failure, tore down the ceiling of the packing-room and mounted gleefully to the storey above.

The curtain had just risen on the last act when Mr. Gimball burst through the iron door and almost fell upon Eliphalet Cardomay, waiting in the wings.

“The cartridge factory next door is ablaze,” he gasped, “and the sparks are pouring down by the box-office. Drop the iron curtain and we’ll get the audience out.”

“At once!” assented Cardomay. “But wait a moment—if the stuff is falling outside, will they be able to pass?”

“God! I don’t know—I doubt it.”

“There are five minutes before my entrance. Take me somewhere where I can see—quickly.”

Mr. Gimball hurried him through the iron door and up some private stairs. At the end of a corridor they found a window, and looked down at the street below. Flames were pouring from the factory and the walls bulged dangerously.

“Useless,” said Eliphalet. “We must empty the house through the emergency exits.”

Then he remembered, and looked at Mr. Gimball with condemning eyes.

“I shall lose my licence for this,” muttered the manager hoarsely. “There’s only one way for it—we must pass them through the iron door and out across the stage.”

“You fool!” (It was most unusual for Eliphalet to say a thing like that.) “You fool! Pass three hundred people through a two-foot doorway? There’d be a panic—a horrible panic. We must clear those blocked exits, that’s all.”

“It’ll take an hour.”

“We’ll do it in a quarter.”

“But in the meantime?”

“In the meantime we will play the play.”

“But, my God, don’t you realise that place is full of explosives? Even if we’re not blown up, the row——”

“And don’t you realise it is a battle scene we shall be playing?”

Then, as fast as his years would carry him, he hurried back to the stage.

“What orders, Guv’nor?” said Manning, who, through the open door of the scene entrance, could see the progress of the fire.

“Get all your men, Manning, everyone who is not actually playing, and clear the stuff from the emergency exits. The front of the house is impassable. Make a job of it, Manning, while I hold the audience.”

“Right!” said Manning. “Now, boys, every one of you.” He was stripping off his coat as Eliphalet heard his cue and walked on to the stage.

Even through the make-up, fear was written large on the face of old Kitterson, who played the orderly.

“We’re in for a rough time,” said Eliphalet, speaking from the text.

There came a sharp, insistent crackle—almost merged into a single report. A shelf of twelve-bore cartridges had gone up next door.

Eliphalet took a cigarette from his case and lit it steadily.

"Why, man," he said lightly, between the puffs, "you are not afraid—are you?" He stretched out his hand and gripped old Kitterson's arm with a warning pressure.

"We've been through too much together to show the white feather now."

Half his words were lost in the roar and crackle from outside.

Captain Raeburn touched his friend's arm.

"Altering the lines, aren't they?" he queried.

"Damn good effect of something burning. You can almost smell the smoke."

Eliphalet had smelt the smoke too. It made him cough, so he impromptued quickly.

"The devils have fired the outbuildings. Phew! how the infernal fumes choke one."

He strode over to the window, through which, and beyond the edge of the back cloth, the open scene door gave a view of the factory fire.

Great geysers of flame were spouting from the back windows and reaching loving hands toward the gasometer, not sixty feet distant.

Old Kitterson had followed and he, too, saw and realised the waiting danger.

"God!" he exclaimed. "If that catches!" And there was a note of terror in his voice.

"Yes," said Eliphalet thoughtfully, "if they fire the magazine it would not be pleasant."

Kitterson was plucking his sleeve and beckoning him to come away, but Eliphalet threw the old fellow from him with a fine flash of anger in his voice and eyes.

"If we are to die," he cried, "we will die like soldiers and gentlemen—at our posts."

There was a hoarse, solid detonation, followed by a splutter of little reports and the sharp stink of gunpowder filled the auditorium.

Some ladies in the stalls moved restively, and complained it was too realistic. In the gallery a girl shrieked, and some boys mocked her with their laughter.

Eliphalet Cardomay was sitting on the window-sill, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Well done, lads," he cried to his imaginary forces below. "A few more like that, and we——"

Crash!

A great piece of the factory wall fell noisily into the yard, and the released flames poured out toward the gasometer. Eliphalet could feel the sweat breaking out upon his forehead. He almost prayed for that devastating flash which would end the charade. But a gentle wind took the matter in hand and fanned the tongues of flame away.

De—dinga—longa—longalong. De—dong—along—along.

The engines were coming. He had forgotten the possibility of that sound and the message of terror it might convey to the audience. If the truth leaked out there would be a panic. They would find the front of the theatre impassable, and battle with each other in the blocked exits.

So he burst into a great shout of laughter.

"Some idiot is ringing the fire bell!" he shouted. "Ha! the fool. Come, Weldon; don't you see the joke? Laugh, man; laugh!"

"I can't make this out," Raeburn was saying. "Wait here a minute. I am going to see."

He slipped from the box and ran down a deserted corridor. On his left he heard the sound of men's voices and the moving of heavy objects. He pushed open a door labelled "Extra Exit" and found Manning with a crowd of furiously working actors and stage hands humping large scene flats into the street at the back. They worked as though their very lives depended upon it.

"What's up?" demanded Raeburn.

Freddie Manning scarcely looked in his direction, but he jerked out:

"Get away and keep your mouth shut."

Raeburn took the hint, and made his way to the box-office. The road outside was blocked with fallen débris and mantled in a smother of smoke. It cleared for a second, long enough to show him half a dozen engines farther down, with brass-helmeted firemen busy paying out the hose.

Clinging to one of the theatre pillars was the night-watchman—a shivering wreck of what so short a time before had been a fine connoisseur of dinner ale.

"There's thousands o' rounds up there," he dithered, pointing at the still-to-catch top storey. "And if they don't set off the gas-works, may I never touch another pint."

Then Captain Raeburn understood many things, and he returned to his box to watch the man he had belittled deal with emergency.

Eliphalet Cardomay had got his second wind and was holding the audience with a light but firm rein. He was jesting with death at his elbow—tickling the feet of Fate, and strewing the stage with half-smoked cigarettes. Old Kitterson, fired by example, had braced his shoulders for the ordeal and was doing his best to help the Guv'nor in his hour of need.

They had reverted to the original text when Raeburn re-entered the box, and Kitterson was saying:

"They are piling explosives beneath the main gate, sir."

"We shall go to our Maker with a better speed, then."

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"Nothing, if the relief is not in time. We have still our prayers and a generous supply of these excellent cigarettes."

Kitterson (at the window): "Ah! they are lighting the fuse. They move away from it. It burns slowly—Guv'nor—sir!"

Almost with a single impulse the entire audience clapped hands over his ears, and, by a caprice of fortune, some thousands of rounds of best smokeless cartridges detonated with a hollow, paralysing roar.

The whole building shook. The long line of the back-cloth snapped, and it swung down from a single tether. Several women went into hysterics, and a quantity of plaster mouldings fell from the roof and splattered among the audience.

Then there was silence—no sound but the soothing hiss of water on red-hot beams.

Eliphalet Cardomay, with arms folded, stood in the middle of the stage, a queer smile playing about his lips; Kitterson had dropped his head in his hands and was crouching beside a table; and then the door burst open, and little Violet O'Neal, "the Colonel's daughter," followed by two men in officers' uniforms, burst upon the stage.

"It's all right," she gasped. "The danger—the worst is over."

Suddenly her part came back to her.

"The rebels are flying," she cried. "You're safe—safe!"

Eliphalet, Colonel and father, caught her to his breast, smothering something she was saying about the gasometer.

"God has rescued us, my child—God is very good."

And Manning, who had dashed up from the street a second before, was just in time to ring down.

"Exits all clear, Guv'nor," he cried.

"Take up the curtain, then," said Eliphalet; and when it rose he stepped forward to the footlights and, holding up his hand for silence, said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, will you kindly leave the theatre by the right and left emergency exits. There has been a fire in the street by the box-office, so this way will be more convenient."

He bowed—turned with a pardonable instinct towards the box in which Raeburn and his friend were standing, and favoured them with a very slight smile.

The curtain fell and the audience, in some perplexity, but without panic, filed out of the theatre to the narrow alley at the back.

"Mr. Cardomay," said Gimball, "I reckon you've saved my licence."

"It had not occurred to me I had so important a task to fulfil," returned Eliphalet.

"I can tell you I'm grateful."

"Well, you will at least admit I kept them in the theatre and got them out."

In the *foyer* of the hotel Captain Raeburn was waiting, a broad hand outstretched to greet him.

"You flirted with death better than anyone I've struck yet," he said. "I estimate you have saved a hundred lives to-night, Mr. Cardomay. Are you big enough to accept an apology?"

A flush of pride spread over Eliphalet's rugose features.

"I am small enough to be deeply flattered by it," he replied, as he took the proffered hand. "Yet, after all, it was a simple enough matter. I had but to follow my training—to give them a few whiffs from the gas-works."

"I deserve it, Colonel," Raeburn acknowledged, "and a good kicking besides. But look here, after all this, surely you'll have a drink to-night."

Eliphalet smiled whimsically.

"Why, yes," he said, "I should enjoy a cup of cocoa very much."

"Have it your own way," laughed Raeburn, and gave the order.

Eliphalet divided the tails of his coat and sat himself comfortably on a cane chair.

"Despite our earnest preparations, you never heard the new battle effects, after all."

"What I heard was pretty convincing, though!"

“Ye—es! But still, it’s disappointing. Now, if you and your friend would accept a box for to-morrow night——”

And Raeburn had the good grace to answer:

“There is nothing I should enjoy more.”

PART II. AND A ROUGH COMPOUND

CHAPTER VIII
MORNICE JUNE

Eliphalet Cardomay stretched himself luxuriously on a green-painted arm-chair by the Achilles Statue in Hyde Park.

He was wearing a new broad-brimmed grey felt hat, and the seasonableness of his attire spread to a pair of dark felt spats, below which the bright spring sunshine reflected itself on the surface of his well-blacked boots.

It was pleasing to lounge under the new-foliaged plane trees and watch fashionable London sedately disporting itself on the gravel paths—to see the riders cantering in the Row, and to hear the "clot-clot" and pleasant jingle of harness as the smart people drove by. Something in the pageantry of it all appealed to his dramatic sense. Piccadilly—the Strand—Oxford Street—awoke no sympathetic chords in his being—he was more at ease and happier in any of the great thoroughfares of Manchester, Leeds or Glasgow, but this great meeting-place of England's noblest-born stirred him strangely.

The tide of well-dressed men and beautifully-gowned women set his mind upon a sad train of thought. They were not for him, these select; his poster on a hoarding they would pass by without a second glance. They belonged to the great ones of the London stage—that mighty little clique whose doors were barred to such as he. That very morning he had seen a few of the upper theatrical ten walking in the Park, and, even as the thought crossed his mind, Sir Charles Cleeve, an actor knight, and his fashionable wife, drove past in a high phaeton drawn by a pair of piebalds. A real live duchess turned in her carriage to smile a greeting to them. (Eliphalet knew she was a duchess, for he had often seen her portrait in the illustrated weeklies, hanging on Smith's book-stalls in the Midland stations.) A clever woman Sir Charles's wife. All the world knew that the high ground he now held unchallenged had in part been won for him by her tireless energy, tact and charm.

It was a great thing for an actor to possess such a wife. He fell to wondering whether, had his choice been as happy, he, too, might not have been a member of the Garrick Club, a driver of phaetons, a recipient of smiles from duchesses. He could hardly refrain from smiling at the thought

of the figure his wife would have cut in polite society. Yet she had been an able enough actress in her day. Poor Blanche—poor, empty-headed, self-centred, easy-virtued Blanche. It required an effort to reconstruct her picture in his mind. Twenty-seven years is a long time, and even pleasant pictures had faded in less. Once he had loved her, like a very Romeo, and set her on a pinnacle higher than any balcony. He shivered, as with horrible clarity he saw the night when, returning late from the theatre (there had been a rehearsal after the show), he had found her in their wretched little parlour, drinking a wretched brand of champagne with Harrington May, the leading-man. The same Harrington May who had fled from the field of honour—to return later, as a fly returns to a pot of jam.

Everyone has supper with everyone else on the provincial stage. It is one of the best and friendliest traditions of the Road, and Eliphalet, born and bred of the Boards, would have thought no ill to find her entertaining one or a dozen men at any hour of the night. But this was different. It was not the friendly little repast with its scrambled eggs and rattle of theatrical shop; it was frankly a carouse. There were empty tinselled bottles on the table, and those down whose throats the liquid had passed were drunk—Harrington May dully, and his wife stupidly. She had her head on the man's shoulder, and was laughing in a loose, trumpery way.

It was useless to talk to them, for May was not in a state to distinguish between flattery and abuse, while she was in a mood to say things no man would desire a third person to hear. Accordingly, he postponed his observations until next morning, and when that came it appeared she had the more to say. With bitter emphasis she stated that, as a husband, Eliphalet fell far short of her ideals. Apart from the miserable salary he earned, which, in itself, was an insult to a woman who was earning a larger one (for Blanche was playing the villainess and he the juvenile, and in those days virtue was cheaper than crime), she abhorred his studious nature, his ridiculous name, and his attitude towards life in general. She was of a lively temperament—a temperament calling for plenty of sparkle and sunshine (he had thought of those empty bottles downstairs), and accordingly had decided to leave him for good.

Eliphalet offered little or no opposition. He had known for a long while that sooner or later their ill-assorted union would come to an end.

"Very well," he had said; "I won't stand in the way of your happiness. You shall have a divorce as soon as it can be arranged."

Instead of regarding this as a token of goodwill, Blanche had reviled him. It was obvious, she cried, he had no love for her, and merely made her

his wife for the sake of the better salary she earned; and—now he seized the chance of a divorce in the hope of wringing heavy damages from Harrington.

"I want no damages," he replied. "Maybe I shall find my reward without."

Eliphalet did not have a speaking part in the scene that followed. His first line was "Thank God," and that was after the door had slammed.

So Harrington May assumed responsibilities for Eliphalet Cardomay's matrimonial obligations, and when the decree *nisi* was made absolute, he took "Miss Blanche Cannon" to be his lawful wedded wife.

How the union had turned out Eliphalet never knew, since from the hour she left his house he had met neither the one nor the other. Indirectly he heard that as fruit of their love a daughter had been born—and that was the only thing for which he envied Harrington May. He might have saved himself the trouble, for poor Harrington, possibly from ecstasy at the sight of this miniature edition of her faultless mother, shortly afterwards gave up the ghost. Blanche, whose appreciation for a change of diet had not waned with his decease, took unto herself a lover, and fades from view in a mist of misguided emotions.

"Dear me! Surely I am not mistaken—it is Mr. Cardomay?"

At the sound of his own name Eliphalet's mind came back to the present with a jolt.

Standing before him, leaning on an ebony cane, stood a middle-aged gentleman, faultlessly dressed and of aristocratic bearing.

Eliphalet rose. "I am," he said, "but for the moment——"

"No—no—no," hastily interposed the other, "you could hardly be expected to remember me. Both you and I, Mr. Cardomay, in our separate spheres, are engaged in catering for these." He made a slight gesture toward the passers-by. "We met but once, and that on the occasion of your very admirable performance of Cellini."

Eliphalet blushed at the words, although no undercurrent of satire was conveyed. That same "very admirable performance of Cellini" stood for him as a door that barred him from London theatres for all time.

"Yes, yes," he said, to hide his confusion, "I do remember you. Mr. Bridge Deansgate, who owns the Mall Theatre, is it not?"

Mr. Deansgate smiled affably.

"But please don't stand," he begged. "And, if I may, I will sit beside you. That's better. Yes, yes, yes; I often wonder why we see so little of you in

town, Mr. Cardomay—but perhaps your presence here betokens——"

"No," came the hasty assurance. "I am spending a few weeks' holiday before my next tour."

"Indeed. I understand your recent production was a great success—great. You are stopping in Mayfair—near the Park—yes?"

"I have some rooms in Camden Town."

"Ah. I have often heard it spoken of as a most healthy district. For the moment I forget the nature of the soil—gravel, I believe. And so you are taking a few weeks' immunity from work? Umhum! Yes—yes. Now I wonder—but still, if you are resting, perhaps not."

"You were about to suggest?"

"Nothing, nothing. A fleeting idea, that is all, prompted by this happy encounter. As doubtless you have heard, we are producing 'Hamlet' for four weeks, and it occurred to me—but perhaps I should offend you. We have an admirable cast, and in many ways it would be a pleasant engagement. You see, nowadays it is so hard to find actors who still understand the grand old method."

He inclined his head gracefully to Eliphalet, who bowed in response.

"I am disposed to be interested," he said.

"For the Ghost, now, where is a manager to turn? That very thought was possessing my brain when I chanced to look up and see you. If you are not otherwise engaged, how would it be to stroll to the Corner and pick up a hansom? They have a *chef* at the Garrick with a true appreciation of how a Châteaubriand should be cooked."

The upshot of this conversation and an excellent lunch was to find Eliphalet Cardomay, at three o'clock the same afternoon, discussing terms with the business manager of the Mall.

"I never talk about money," Mr. Deansgate had said. "Tell Dawson to give you what you want."

Winslow Dawson was an agreeable little man, who had the habit of paying less than you intended to accept, at the same time conveying the impression that you had bested him all along the line. He carried his hands permanently in his trousers pockets, from whence they never appeared to emerge, even when a door had to be opened or shut or a contract signed. He performed these functions, so it seemed, by some balancing feat of prestidigitation. He had a habit of balancing on his heels and contemplating his patent-leather toes. He would remain thus during a long discussion, then look up with the sunniest of smiles and say, "Then that's settled, isn't it?"

When Eliphalet left the theatre it was in a very happy mood. After all, he would appear in London again, and—what was better still—in a part regarding the rendering of which he could scarcely be at fault.

Mr. Deansgate had said, "Do just as you like with it, my dear Cardomay; we have every confidence in you."

In honour of the occasion he stood himself tea at Fuller's and ate quite a large piece of walnut cake.

"A delightful management," he reflected. "This is better than a holiday, old boy."

Perhaps he felt a shade awkward at the rehearsal next morning to find the stage thronged with so many unfamiliar faces, but for the most part they were a friendly company, and very soon he was quite at ease with the men.

The ladies he found difficult, being so totally dissimilar to the homely, good-natured souls who played with him on his hundred tours.

There was a Miss Helen Winter, who played the Queen and whose personality caused him alarm. She seemed far more like a duchess than the real example he had seen in the Park. Her clothes were severe to a fault, and she used lorgnettes with awful precision. Somehow the sense of these instruments pervaded her even in the Castle of Elsinore.

When they were introduced she said:

"How do you do, *dear* Mr. Cardomay. I have heard so much about you." Then departed quickly, as though fearing he might be tempted to tell her more.

For Ophelia one of London's younger emotional actresses had been secured. Her emotions were more acutely demonstrated off the stage than on, for it appeared, despite a healthy exterior, she was racked with torments arising from an ailment described as "my neuralgia." She spoke of her neuralgia as others might say "My Mother." It was indeed her most cherished possession, and only through the good offices of smelling-salts and aspirin was she able to encompass the calls made upon her artistry.

Eliphalet, having made the acquaintance of the young lady and her neuralgia, and being attracted by neither, sought for someone to talk with during his long waits. In so doing he espied Miss Mornice June.

Mornice was absurdly pretty. She had big black-lashed eyes and a mass of whitey-gold fluffy hair. She played the part of the Player Queen, and held sway over the hearts of the small-part young gentlemen and those engaged as "extras."

They gathered about her in the wings and sought the favour of her smile. Neither did they seek in vain, for Mornice had a quality of responsiveness that caused all who came in contact with her to believe themselves vital to her well-being. Did they come with jests, her laughter was light-hearted and unstinted; did they come in sorrow, she was quick to sympathise, and real tears would moisten her lashes. An extremely sensitive person was Mornice, who answered every vibration about her—be it grave or gay. Not in mood alone but in outline, her entire being seemed to impregnate itself with the spirit of the moment. She would break off suddenly in the merriest laugh to respond to a bar of music wailing pathetically from a hidden violin.

"Just listen! Isn't it wonderful!" she would say, transformed into a picture of rapt adoration. Then in a second she was back again to her faun-like merriment, exchanging jokes that a properly brought up young lady would have failed to understand.

"Who is the little lady yonder?" Eliphalet asked.

Miss Helen Winter threw a flickering glance in the direction of his gaze.

"I *really* couldn't tell you, *dear* Mr. Cardomay, for I don't know. A nice little thing, no doubt, but hardly a lady. She gives me the impression of being on the stage for the purpose of earning a living."

This was too subtle for Eliphalet, and he asked for an explanation.

"I mean she has no people—no money. She acts for a livelihood. Of course that is purely a surmise, but I am sure I am right. The stage is full of young girls who are trying to earn their living. It is very sad, when one comes to think of it."

Being herself a dweller in Park Street, with no real occasion to act, Miss Winter was one of the rapidly increasing class who make it impossible for the really needy to find employment.

Eliphalet was blissfully ignorant of the methods London managers had begun to use. He did not know that it had become quite *de rigueur* to engage society ladies to play leading parts, irrespective of talent and merely for the sake of the smart friends they attracted. It is the Box Office that counts, first, last and always. Remember that, some of you clever young ladies, before you abandon the typewriter or the comfortable certainty of the Insurance Office.

"To me," he said, "that stands to her credit. She strikes me as a most charming little girl."

"Oh, quite—quite, *dear* Mr. Cardomay, but provincial—very, very provincial." And having delivered this two-edged thrust, she sailed away to

pastures new.

So Eliphalet asked the same question of Polonius.

"Mornice June, her name is. Something in her, I fancy. Forget who told me she's been earning her living since she was fourteen. Her people were a bad lot—deserted her—so they say."

Eliphalet did not need to introduce himself, for the very next day Mornice marched up and gave him a cheery smile.

"Do you mind if I talk?" she said. "You look so homish to me. I can't get on with these London people a bit."

He made room for her on the roll of carpet, and she sat beside him.

"Yet, my dear," he answered, "you seem to be very popular."

"With those silly boys, yes! But even they are different. I say, I'm sure you know all about playing in Shakespeare. I do wish you'd be an absolute dear, and hear me my lines. I'm certain I shall get a fearful 'bird' from his Nibs." (His Nibs was her name for the eminent producer.) "It's the blank verse that does me. I've never tackled verse before, except 'I am Lily, called the Flowers' Queen, the goodest, sweetest fairy ever seen.' You know—you flip up through a star trap and get it off your chest, where the white limes meet."

She delivered the cheap couplet with perfect mimicry of pantomime style, then clapped her hands and laughed gaily. Eliphalet caught the infection of her spirit, and laughed too.

"But you will be a dear, and help me, won't you?" she appealed, picking a speck of fluff from the knee of his trousers. "I say, you didn't brush yourself very carefully this morning, did you?"

"I stand corrected," said Eliphalet; "but my dresser is away on his holiday."

"Aren't you married, then?"

"No—not now."

Mornice's face became serious at once.

"You poor dear, I am so sorry. Is she——?"

But Eliphalet took the book from her hand.

"Come," he said, "let us hear those lines. We will go down this corridor, where we shall be undisturbed."

As a rule, when you hold the book for someone who is almost a stranger they are anxious and awkward, but it was not so with Mornice.

“It’s just here where she enters with the Player King. There! Got it? Right-o.”

In a second she flung herself into the spirit of the scene. Gesture, voice and feature were alike unchained to the emergency of the situation. At the right moment she dropped to her knees and with outstretched arms poured forth the protestations of undying fidelity with ringing vibrations of emotion. When she had finished, she sprang to her feet and exclaimed:

“There! that’s the best I can do!”

Eliphalet was amazed. Never before had he seen anyone more liberally endowed with natural ability. And yet he knew this ability was misguided—that Mornice June suffered from a fatal facility.

Spontaneous ease of obtaining effects is perhaps the most dangerous asset an artist may possess. You will find it in legions of draughtsmen, who will dash off what is seemingly the cleverest sketch and actually a mere tangle of inaccuracy—wrong in every line and detail. They are born with a box of tricks—any one of which may be drawn from its docket at a second’s notice.

Reach-me-down art—and as unlike the real thing as a city tailor’s ready-for-wear garments to the creations of a Savile Row expert.

It was beyond Eliphalet Cardomay’s skill to point out the fundamental fault in the girl’s acting, and it was beyond his skill to indicate the fortune to which her facile skill directed her. Had one of those wise and energetic gentlemen been present, those gentlemen who project their three-reel productions upon a white screen and who speak of “Close-ups,” “Eyes that register well,” “Panoraming the Camera,” and so forth, he would have recognised at once the great future awaiting Miss Mornice June in the broad estates of Filmland.

“I have nothing but admiration,” said Eliphalet. “You must have studied hard to do so well.”

“Studied! I just swotted up the lines, that’s all. How does one study?”

“By considering the relative values of what one is saying and inflecting the lines accordingly.”

“Oh, I should never be able to do that. I just get a thing, or I don’t get it. But d’you really think it’ll do?”

“I imagine it will do more than well.”

“Oh, you are a dear! I was sure you’d give me the ‘bird.’ ”

“Tell me: you have been on the stage for some long while?”

"Um. Donkeys' years; but I'm thinking of chucking it."

"Giving it up?"

"Yes; for the 'movies.' "

Eliphalet was aghast. To him the Cinema was a very degrading profession.

"I think, my dear," he said, "you would find that a very poor alternative to our beautiful art."

"But I love the 'movies,' and I'm sure I should be able to blink myself to fame. I can cry like old Billy-oh when I want to—and the wet-lash stunt is half the battle, y'know."

Just then one of her many admirers came down the corridor. He was a smooth-haired, self-satisfied looking fellow, who played the Second Player.

"I've been looking everywhere for you," he said. "We shall have to go on in a minute."

Eliphalet moved away and left them together.

"You are a rotter, Morny, to talk to that old blighter and leave me in the lurch."

"He's a duck," said Mornice, "and I love him."

"I think you love everyone except me."

"Darling," she exclaimed with outstretched arms, "I love you to distraction. Without you the world would be a desert track, or tract, whichever it is."

"Then for God's sake give me a kiss!"

Mornice considered the proposition in pouting perplexity. Then she laughed and said:

"Don't be such a stupid little fool, Ken."

"You always say that when I come to the point."

"Avoid the point then, darling, and you won't get your pretty little puds pricked."

"Look here, will you come out to lunch with me?"

"Will I—will I? No. I won't, but I'll come to tea instead, and pay my own share."

"Won't you let me kiss you? I'm in deadly earnest, Morny."

"If you're in deadly earnest you shall kiss me. Oh, but not now. You shall kiss me on the back of the ear when it comes to the cue for the kiss in

our scene." And so saying, she ducked her head and bolted down the corridor as fast as she could run.

During the fortnight of rehearsals Eliphalet saw a great deal of Mornice, and they became inseparable friends. She told him her name was really Alice May, but she couldn't endure Alice, so had achieved Mornice from the deeps of her imagination. She had elected the riper month of June instead of May because it sounded jollier after Mornice. Of her people she scarcely ever spoke. Once, in the course of conversation, she chanced to remark:

"Oh yes, he did a vamoose—like mother."

"What is a 'vamoose'?" he asked.

"When you skip off and leave everything to look after itself."

"And that is what happened with you?"

"Umps! I've been on my own since I wore pigtails."

Eliphalet was silent, thinking of the risks to which this child must have been exposed in her struggle for a living. Intuitively she read his thoughts, and said:

"I can look after myself, though. Don't you worry!"

"I am quite confident of that," he replied. Then, after a slight hesitancy, "But aren't you a shade unwise to encourage the admiration of all these young men? That Mr. Kenneth Luke, for instance?"

"Oh, Ken's all right. He went to Oxford College, so he ought to know how to behave."

Eliphalet smiled and shook his head dubiously. It seemed to him that her reasoning was not quite conclusive.

To tell the truth, Master Kenneth had been a little too importunate of late, and Mornice had been considering the advisability of "choking him off." However, since her one scene had to be played with him, she had thought it better to keep on friendly terms.

Eliphalet Cardomay was more than pleased with the notices the press gave him after the first night. "A rendering full of the best traditions of Shakespeare," said one. "Mr. Cardomay's beautiful voice was heard to advantage," said another.

It was gratifying to hear his "beautiful voice" spoken of as though the whole world knew of its existence. He began to regain some of the confidence lost after his last London appearance. He fell to wondering what they would have said had he appeared as Hamlet instead of the Ghost, and concluded, erroneously, the papers would have been equally flattering.

He had never played Hamlet, and the idea of doing so on some future tour possessed him. Little Mornice June should be given the part of Ophelia, and would certainly outshine the neuralgic young lady in her rendering. All she needed was guidance.

Eliphalet had quite made up his mind to engage Mornice on a long contract, not only for her talent, but because he could not endure the thought of losing sight of her. Somehow she filled an empty space in his heart that long had craved for a tenant. It is good for a man to have some interests in life outside his work, and he had none.

There was something in Mornice that awoke a queer familiarity with another episode of his life, but when he tried to place the impression it would not develop. Was it perhaps with scatter-brained little Eunice Terry, whom he had disillusioned about the stage? No! For beyond the "Nice" at the ends of their Christian names there was little enough semblance. Mornice had her head screwed on the right way, whereas Eunice had nearly had hers screwed off.

One morning a rehearsal had been called for some minor alterations, and Eliphalet was sitting with his back against a scene-flat, when he heard Mornice's voice on the other side.

"Poor Ken," she was saying. "Oh, dear, what a sad and gloomy face!"

"You know how to cure it," came the answer.

"I? I only seem to make it worse."

"That's true. You're playing with me, Morny, and I've had enough of it."

"Well, if you're too old to play, go and sit in the corner with a book."

"For God's sake chuck fooling. After all, you can't afford to turn me down like this, and I'm not the chap to put up with it for ever."

It was a graceless speech, and Eliphalet was astonished at the girl's answer.

"You old silly, I don't want to turn you down. I'd like you to be happy as the rest are."

"Well, make me happy, then."

" 'Course I will—if I can."

"If you can! Look here, Morny; come and have supper with me after the show to-night." She did not reply, and he went on: "Why, hang it, you must have been out to supper scores of times."

"Yes, I have—scores and scores."

"Will you come, then?" There was more than eagerness in his tone.

"I may as well, I suppose. Very well, then—yes."

"At last! And that's a bargain, isn't it? There's no going back now? Where would you like to go? Cecil?—Savoy? Just say, and I'll ring up for a room at once."

"A room! What for?"

"We shan't want to be disturbed."

"Shan't we? Now look here, Ken; if I come to supper with you we sup in the main restaurant, or not at all."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that. You can safely leave the arrangements to me."

"Right; I will. And I'll leave you the supper, too."

"What do you mean?"

"I've taken a very intense dislike to you. I think you are an absolute low little rotter."

Eliphalet, on the other side of the piece of scenery, murmured a prayer of thanksgiving.

"You do?" said Kenneth. "Well, if that's so, you won't be disappointed. I may not be great shakes in the company, but I can promise to make it none too pleasant a place for you—unless you say you are sorry."

It was all very ill-conditioned and childish.

"The only thing I'm sorry about," said Mornice, "is that I didn't smack your face days ago." She marched off, the picture of outraged dignity.

And Eliphalet, as a student of nature, reflected that the young man had received a more valuable lesson than all his 'Varsity training had provided, and, when the rancour had abated, would profit very greatly therefrom.

It is always disappointing when one's opinions prove to be at fault. Possibly this in some measure added to Eliphalet's cold fury at what took place that evening.

He had gone down earlier than usual and was standing in the wings, watching the Play Scene. Mornice and Kenneth Luke as the Player King and Queen, with arms interlaced, came on to the stage within the stage and began to speak their lines, and there followed the most paltry piece of meanness Eliphalet had ever beheld. A deliberate effort to "queer" a fellow-player.

Seemingly Kenneth Luke had profited nothing by his lesson of the morning and was determined to take it out of his mentor by the unkindest method.

He ended his first speech with so inconclusive an inflection that it was well-nigh impossible for her to speak her lines. Not satisfied with this, he introduced long pauses in the wrong places and when she, believing he had forgotten his part, began to speak, he spoke also, with the result that the words jumbled together unintelligibly.

Mornice did her best, but had lost the thread of the scene and broke down. So Kenneth prompted her audibly, and no sooner had she started than he essayed to "queer" her afresh. But that was not all, for when, in the course of the scene, he lay down for his afternoon repose, or "secure hour," he contrived to lie upon the train of her gown. Certainly he did it very discreetly, and none but Eliphalet saw. It appeared from the front to be mere carelessness when Mornice, in backing from the stage, stumbled, tried to recover herself and fell noisily down the rostrum steps.

The effect of a roar of laughter in that part of the play can be imagined. The act, in the vulgar parlance, was "dished."

Even through his make-up of ghostly green Eliphalet Cardomay went quite purple.

To trifle with one's art was to him an unforgivable offence—but when that trifling was done in a Shakespearian production, a London theatre, and as a piece of sheer malice against a young girl——!

The muscles of his hands knotted convulsively. This was a matter that could be dealt with in only one way. He made a movement toward the back of the stage, then checked himself. He would be wanted for his last scene in a moment. He must wait until after that, and then——!

It is to be feared that Eliphalet Cardomay's countenance did not wear that expression of seraphic benignity it should when he appeared behind the gauzy curtain and Hamlet spoke the lines, "Look here upon this picture and on this." He contrived to impart the full measure of appeal into the final words, "Speak to her, Hamlet," then hurried from the stage, stripping off his draperies and breathing through the nose.

On the first dressing-room landing Mornice was standing, and before her, looking very different from his usual placid self, was Mr. Winslow Dawson.

"That sort of thing may do for the provinces," he was saying, "but it won't do in the Mall Theatre. I have never seen such an exhibition."

"I didn't forget my cue," said Mornice pathetically. "Really and truly, I didn't—and it wasn't my fault I fell down."

Mr. Dawson made an impatient gesture with his head.

"Mr. Luke," he said. Kenneth Luke stepped out of the shadows, "you play the scene together—what have you to say?"

"Well. I certainly noticed Miss June seemed rather all over the place, and ——"

"One minute," said Eliphalet, steering into the middle of the group.

Mr. Dawson turned.

"We are rather busy," he began.

"And so am I," said Eliphalet, "and my business won't wait." Then, addressing Kenneth Luke, "Now, you—put up your hands."

"What do you mean?"

"Put them up. I'm going to give you a thrashing. Do you understand that?"

"No, I don't," replied Kenneth insolently. "And what the devil are you interfering for?"

"For the pleasure of doing that," said Eliphalet, and hit him with surprising vigour on the end of the nose.

"Damn!" roared the youngster, and drew back his arm with intention of countering. But somehow it entangled in his cloak and before he had freed it, Eliphalet had pranced in and rained upon him a veritable tornado of blows. More by luck than judgment one of them took Kenneth on the point of the jaw, and put him to sleep behind a curtain of falling stars.

"I say! whatever is all this about?" exclaimed Mr. Dawson.

"A—piece of—just retribution and N-nemesis. Tell him, my dear—I—I'm——"

Then very gracefully, as he was graceful in all things, Eliphalet Cardomay tottered and collapsed across the body of his prostrate foe.

It is not a wise proceeding for a man on the wrong side of sixty to engage in a rough-and-tumble. The results are apt to produce cardiac disturbances. The doctor, who was called in, said afterwards there was a time when he doubted whether Mr. Cardomay's heart was equal to the task of adjusting itself. Certainly the old actor was in a sorry way when he was placed in Mr. Deansgate's private brougham and driven off to Camden Town under the guardianship of a very anxious Mornice. She had explained how the circumstances came about, and Mr. Deansgate sent a polite request to Kenneth Luke to call at his office before leaving.

The result of this interview was significantly betrayed by the presence of Kenneth Luke's "card" in the following Thursday's issue of the *Daily*

Telegraph, with the words “At Liberty” following his name.

Mornice and the landlady put Eliphalet to bed and tucked him in as though he were a child. He complained of being thirsty and very tired, and hardly seemed aware of his surroundings.

“I shan’t leave him to-night,” whispered Mornice. “Perhaps you’d give me a comfy chair, Ma dear, then I can watch restfully.”

And as the good Mrs. Albion liked being addressed as “Ma dear,” she produced her best armchair (a forbidding affair of varnished walnut, American cloth and brass-headed nails), and set it beside the bed. She also put a match to the fire and, on the principle of “If you’re not going to sleep, you must eat,” cooked up “a bit o’ supper.” She did not leave the room until satisfied that Mornice had done justice to the grilled herring and jug of hot coffee. Then she gave her a “nice” kiss and a whispered good night.

Mornice lowered the gas, and, taking Eliphalet’s hand, sat beside him.

The Old Card was very restless, and rambled in his mind and speech. Fragments of disjointed sentences and long out-of-use quotations came from his lips. Once he snatched away his hand and cried “Put them up!”

Very gently Mornice soothed him and regained his hand.

“I’m sure I was right—a blackguard,” muttered Eliphalet. “And she little more than a child—clever—dear child! With a little training, a little care—‘Have you a daughter? Let her not walk in the sun.’ I’ve no daughter—no child—nothing. That’s so, old boy; that’s so.”

“Ssh!” whispered Mornice. “You must go to sleep. Ssh!”

“Who’s that?” He spoke in a startled tone.

“It’s me—Mornice.”

“ ‘Me, Mornice’—No—‘I,’ Mornice, ‘I’—a little training—a little guidance.” His voice trailed away into silence. When next he spoke it was to ask:

“What’s the time?”

“Three o’clock.”

“Three at night—and that was a woman’s voice, I don’t understand. Who are you?”

She told him again.

“Three o’clock at night—No, not Mornice—you’re Blanche—poor old Blanche! And yet so much seems to have happened since—and Blanche—I don’t know!”

Mornice started violently.

“Why do you call me Blanche?”

The quick sound of her voice roused the old man from his wanderings, for he turned, rose on his elbow, and looked at her.

“What’s the matter, my dear?” he said. “Why are you here?”

“You’ve been ill,” she replied. “Don’t you remember?”

“Ah, yes, yes, I remember now.”

“Tell me,” she begged. “A moment ago you called me Blanche.”

“I did!—good God, yes! That’s where the resemblance lies.”

“Who were you speaking of?”

“Blanche Cannon. Before you were born she was my wife.”

“But she is my mother. Then am I——?”

Eliphalet had taken her hands and was looking at her with wide-opened eyes.

“How I wish you were!” he said. “But you came after, my dear.”

“Then,” said Mornice very positively but very tenderly, “whether I am, or whether I’m not, whether you like it or whether you don’t, I’m going to be your daughter—See!” And she kissed him as a daughter should.

At the theatre a week later the Lady of the Lorgnettes addressed She of the Neuralgia.

“My *dear*,” she said. “Have you heard the news? *That* Mr. Cardomay has taken *that* Miss Something-or-other June to live with him. *Really*, it is extraordinary what these *stage* people will do.”

And She of the Neuralgia was constrained to take two aspirins in rapid succession to recover from the tidings, while the Lady of the Lorgnettes turned aside to congratulate *that* Mr. Cardomay on his speedy recovery.

CHAPTER IX
A REVERSIBLE FAVOUR

A certain old actor, whose spirit had passed above the flies, once remarked, referring to "Hamlet," "This delightful profession of ours is ruined by perennial productions of that most gloomy play."

Such an observation is, of course, indefensible, nevertheless the magnetic charms of "Hamlet" are, to a certain extent, margined. Without exception it delights the actor who plays the title-rôle, and almost without exception it fails to delight those members of the cast who play the minor parts. Another section of the dramatic world who eye this drama askance are those indispensable gentlemen whose money is reposed in theatrical enterprise.

A syndicate, as a rule, is composed of unemotional persons, whose love of art is subordinated to a love of profit, and with this aim in view they are apt to rebel against the devotion of their capital to presentations of Shakespearian masterpieces.

This, in fact, was what occurred when Eliphalet Cardomay gravely announced this intention at the Round Table of his Supporters. His appearance in town in the character of The Ghost inspired the idea, and he had thought it over very carefully and decided it was good. Little Mornice June was to appear as Ophelia—a revival of "The Night Cry" would be postponed, and it only remained to impart his intentions to the four commercial gentlemen who composed his syndicate and receive their sanction and blessing.

"You will agree," he said, "to an actor of my calibre a career cannot be regarded as complete if he has failed to appear as the Moody Dane. We have been in the best accord in our past dealings, and I am confident of your approval in this matter."

For a while no one spoke. Mr. Albert Shingle, owner of a large Drapery Emporium, with branches in several Midland towns, looked furtively at Mr. Thomas Combermare, dealer in dry-goods. But Mr. Combermare only picked his teeth with a tram-ticket and shook his head.

"Well, I don't know so much," said Mr. Shingle, at last, expanding his globular waistcoat. "What do you say, Mr. Wardluke?" The gentleman

appealed to was a retired doctor, who had done extremely well by opening small surgeries in the poorer parts of Bradford.

"I'd like to agree with Mr. Cardomay," he said, "for, on the whole, he has done extremely well by us—but—well—'Hamlet.' You see what I mean? One must consider the public." He put a pencil in his ear, stethoscope fashion, as though seeking to learn how the heart-beats of the multitude responded to so extreme a test.

"I am all against it—all against it."

It was an angular little man who spoke. His name was Wilfred Wilfur, and he had inherited more money than his talents would have earned. His own opinions he valued highly, and was alone in this respect.

"We are here to make money—make it, Mr. Cardomay, make money—not to lose. Now I, personally—and I suppose I count—I'm one of the public, you know—I don't like 'Hamlet.' I've never read it—never seen it—and I don't like it."

"I am suggesting," said Eliphalet, patiently, "that in this case you consult my views rather than your own. On examining past records I find you have never made less than eight per cent. each year on the capital I have controlled; in many cases far more. This justifies me, I think, in demanding a certain latitude of action."

"That's not business, Cardomay," said Mr. Shingle. "That's sentiment, that is, and sentiment's no good. I put you a plain straightforward question. Which'd make most money—'Hamlet' or 'The Night Cry?' "

"Money is not the only consideration."

"It is with us—it is with us," chirped Mr. Wilfur excitedly.

Eliphalet fidgeted with his cane.

"Financially, in all probability, 'The Night Cry' would show better receipts, but——"

"Exactly. Then that settles it—we will put up 'The Night Cry.' "

Eliphalet compressed his lips and rose.

"It is not settled so easily," he remarked.

And for the first time in their mutual association there was a scene.

It was decided if Eliphalet desired to retain their services he must adjust his views to theirs. He, as a counter, produced precisely the same terms, and the result was a lock-out. Art *versus* Commerce. The meeting broke up with generally distributed feelings of grievance and dissatisfaction.

Eliphalet Cardomay took some rooms in Trafford Park and sat down to wait until such a time as they should realise their folly and withdraw the opposition to his demands.

He was never really happy when not working, and even the pleasant companionship of Mornice failed to dispel the gloom of the days that followed. They were both bitterly disappointed. He at the lack of faith shown by his syndicate, and she at losing her first chance of a big part.

It had hurt Eliphalet more than he believed possible to break the news to her after the meeting.

"Oh, never mind," she had said. "I should have been very dud as Ophelia. Anyway, I shall be in 'The Night Cry,' shan't I?"

When he told her "The Night Cry" was indefinitely postponed, her distress was evident.

Mornice was wholly centred in getting on, and sitting idle in the Trafford Park lodgings was almost more than she could endure. Very discreetly she hinted at being allowed to try for a Cinema engagement to fill in, but on that subject Eliphalet was severe in his disapproval.

"Cinematograph acting is not art," he would say. "Trust me, and sooner or later you shall have your chance. My syndicate will come to their senses before long."

And the weeks dragged by, but no word was received from Messrs. Shingle, Wardluke, Wilfur and Combermare.

He made an effort to find a new syndicate, but oddly enough no one rose to the fly. Then Mornice approached the subject again on different lines.

"It's all nonsense," she said. "I'm costing you a fearful lot." (This was not strictly true, for their weekly bills rarely exceeded two pounds.) "And there's not the slightest reason why I should. Do let me try and get a teeny part in a film. There are two companies in Manchester, now, and if you give me an introduction I'm sure they'd have me."

Eliphalet refused, but worried over the matter exceedingly. After all, he had promised to help her, and instead he had done nothing beyond the entertainment of his own society and the provision of a very bread-and-butter existence. He reflected that she must be considering herself worse off now than before they had met, and was probably reproaching the impetuosity that led her to play the part of daughter to an old man. It was not fair she should be pilloried on his account. So he lay awake at night and sought for a solution and when he found a way to make good his promise he set about it with characteristic zeal. From the bottom of a theatrical basket

he produced a bundle of old plays—Veterans of the Road, with expired copyrights. These he sorted over, collected half-a-dozen, and dropped them into Mornice's lap.

"Read them carefully," he said, "and tell me which one you would like to play the most."

In great excitement Mornice read them all, and decided on a play of the "Sweet Nancy" order.

"Good! You shall play it."

The next move was to secure a few bookings from small Number 2 towns. This proved rather difficult, since he offered old material and an unknown cast, but by accepting very low terms the dates were secured. A company was engaged, some stock scenery hired, and three weeks later Miss Mornice June, flushed and triumphant, was starring in the "Smalls," in a comedy "Presented by Mr. Eliphalet Cardomay."

Presented was an appropriate word, since the receipts were so infinitesimal that it cost Eliphalet about fifteen pounds a week to keep the tour running.

As he was earning no salary at the time, he moved to a humbler lodging off the Palatine Road, and there continued the silent and unsuccessful freezing out of his syndicate.

There was no real occasion for Eliphalet to economise to the extent he was doing, for his banking account showed a comfortable credit (fruit of many years' saving). To do so, however, was no great privation, for the provincial actor knows better than any other man how to live, and live well, on nothing a week. Better circumstances had brought little change in Eliphalet Cardomay's mode of life. Joints appeared on the table with great frequency, perhaps, and he did not deny himself a dish of crumpets when the bell of the muffin-man sounded in the street. But these little extras he now excised, and gave further outward evidence of poverty by walking the streets with melancholy mien.

He missed his Art and missed Mornice, and altogether he was ill-content. The delights of prominence so obsessed Miss Mornice that letter-writing, after the first week, showed a pathetic decline. He had to satisfy himself with postcards of which "Having a lovely time—You are a dear" was a fair sample.

One day when meandering down Oxford Road, Eliphalet was heartily accosted by another old actor of the name Sefton Bulmore. Bulmore had once been a popular comedian, but had lost much of his hold upon the public. After eking out a precarious existence with special performances and

short tours, he had the good fortune to obtain some fairly regular work with Eastlake's Exclusive Cinema Company, and had given them satisfaction.

He was a breezy, go-as-you-please old fellow, who would borrow a shilling or lend you a pound with equal good-nature.

"Hullo, Cardomay! Dear old boy, old man—how's things?" he hailed. "You don't look too grand. Haven't seen your poster about lately. Where are you showing now?"

"I am not, at the moment," replied Eliphalet. "But won't you step along and take a cup of tea?"

As they walked toward the lodging Sefton Bulmore did most of the talking, but this did not prevent him from casting sidelong glances at his companion.

"Must have come a cropper somehow," he reflected.

The sight of Eliphalet's very humble apartment and the modest fare offered strengthened this impression. Discreetly as possible he tried to discover how matters stood, but his masked inquiries failed to produce the required information.

"Well, I must be getting along," he said at last, with a hearty hand-shake. As he touched the handle of the door an idea flashed into his brain, and he turned:

"Just occurred to me—I've come out without any ready. You might lend me a couple of ten shillings."

Eliphalet hesitated. "I haven't so much on me," he answered, "but I daresay——"

"Lord love you, I don't want it—only a joke—pulling your leg, that's all. Ha! Well! Must be going, old man. Bye-bye."

Sefton Bulmore had learnt what he wanted to know—or thought he had. As he walked down the street he muttered to himself:

"Tch, tch! Bad business! Poor old Card! Tch-tch. Getting old—losing ground—hipped—stony!"

On the stage, more perhaps than in any other calling, there exists a wonderful unity and fellowship. You will never appeal in vain for help for one player to another. The hat that goes round empty is always filled before returning.

Sefton Bulmore worried over Eliphalet Cardomay all night, and the liberal supply of whisky he absorbed failed to dispel his anxieties. It would be no good offering money, even if he had it to offer, for the Old Card was

far too proud to accept charity. He would have to devise some means of helping him, and, by hook or by crook, he meant to do so. The opportunity arose sooner than he expected, for the very next morning brought an offer by post from Eastlake's Exclusives of a long part in a Three-Reel Drama, and the terms proposed were thirty guineas.

Then Sefton Bulmore knew that his prayer had been answered, and rejoiced. He donned his brightest clothes, swallowed a hasty Guinness, and sallied forth to interview Mr. Eastlake of the Movies.

"Ha, Bulmore!" that gentleman greeted him. "So you got our letter, eh? Going to accept?"

"Sorry," replied Bulmore, "very sorry, old boy, but I can't."

"What's the trouble? Terms?"

"Busy, old man; busy."

"That's all rot. You're just the man I want, and I don't know where to find another if you turn us down."

"Turn you down! Wouldn't do it. Matter of fact, I am making you a present by refusing. 'Cause I can put you on to a fine proposition straight away."

"You can?"

"Yes, and fix details *ac dum*."

"Well, let's have it," said Eastlake a shade warily.

Sefton Bulmore cast a suspicious eye round the office, as though about to expose a secret of awful moment.

"What would you say to Eliphalet Cardomay?"—he had dropped his voice to a penetrating whisper.

"Who?"

"Eliphalet Cardomay."

"Never heard of him."

"Never—what? Come, come, old man, old boy, that's too rich. But you can't be born yet if you haven't heard of *him*."

"I may have heard the name, but not in our line of business. What about him, anyway?"

"Only this—I can—get—him—to—play—the—part. Now then!"

Mr. Eastlake did not appear half so impressed as he should have been.

"Hum!" he remarked. "Would he be any use?"

Bulmore cast his eyes ceiling-ward in mute despair.

"Use! Now look here, old boy, I tell you frankly, if you are going to play round with the notion I shall call it off."

"Well, what's he doing now?"

"Resting."

"At liberty—eh?"

"No, resting; and there's a big difference between the two. Resting means you are not acting because you don't want to act. At liberty means you want to act, and would at any price, but can't. Got it?"

"I see. Well, send him along, and I'll look him over."

"You don't understand—you don't know what you're saying, old man. Why, he wouldn't walk to the end of the street to look for jobs, for the simple reason that half the town is coming his way to offer 'em."

"Like that, eh? Well, I suppose I must take your word, Bulmore, and risk it. For your sake I hope he doesn't let us down, that's all. What's he like, now—is he funny?"

Bulmore stretched his imagination to the fullest.

"You should just hear them shriek at him."

"And about terms? Would he take a bit less?"

"That's the one difficulty, old man. I mentioned what you'd said, but he held out that thirty-five guineas was the lowest he'd accept."

"Well, it's the highest we'd pay. Tell him that."

"Well, we'll let it go at thirty-five, and if you've a sheet of paper handy I'll sign an acceptance form on his behalf."

Sefton Bulmore's cherrywood cane, which he spun in his hand as he went whistling down the street, was a peril to the neighbourhood. He did not allow himself to be oppressed in the smallest degree that he had turned over to his friend a sum of money of which he was in great personal need. He felt himself amply repaid by having brought the interview to so successful a conclusion. Great is the balm descending upon him that giveth.

Without losing any time he hastened to inform his old colleague of the news, and with truly dramatic sense did not dull the point by approaching it too directly.

He found Eliphalet Cardomay taking a modest luncheon, and sat down to join him without waiting for an invitation.

"Doesn't seem right to see you out of harness," he began, his mouth well filled with cheese and pickles. "What's more, I can't believe it agrees with you."

“One feels the difference, of course,” Eliphalet confessed. “However, it is my own choice.”

Bulmore took this statement as a piece of pardonable pride.

“Still, I wonder you don’t do something as a fill-in. Now, there’s quite a decent income waiting to be picked up with the Cinema, y’know.”

“The Cinema!” Eliphalet’s eyebrows arched disapprovingly.

“That’s it. Growing concern, old man, getting a bigger hold on the public every day.”

“The mushroom season is a short one,” commented Eliphalet drily.

“Well, they both do best in the dark,” said Bulmore, with a laugh. “But the Cinema has come to stay, laddie, mark my words; and it’s up to you and me to have a dip in the pie.”

Eliphalet Cardomay rose and assumed a position of importance by the fireplace.

“It is up to you and me, and all those who treasure the traditions of our noble calling, to manifest our disapproval of this mechanical device for—what shall I say?—for potting our artistry, by leaving it severely alone.”

Bulmore, who was expecting his old friend to embrace the opportunity he had come to offer, was wholly unprepared for so hostile an attitude. He kicked himself, metaphorically, for introducing the subject in this roundabout way instead of walking straight up and saying, “You’re broke, old man; here’s a job for you.” But having chosen his means he had no other course but to continue on the lines of his beginning.

“Agreed,” he said. “Still, there are times when we must tone down our ideals a bit and take what pickings lie around. Matter of fact, I was talking to Eastlake this morning—Eastlake’s Exclusives, y’know—and he gave me to understand he’d be very glad of your services.”

“I am sorry to disappoint the gentleman, Bulmore, but my views on this subject are too pronounced to allow me to relax them on his account.”

This was pride with a vengeance, thought Bulmore, and he stumbled badly.

“Money’s good,” he said. “Thirty-five pounds for two weeks’ work can’t be sneezed at, y’know.”

“If I allowed money to influence me,” responded Eliphalet, “I would never be able to hold up my head again.”

“But—Well! I mean—I hardly know what to say next, old man.”

“Say nothing. We have so many topics in common, it is a pity to pursue one in which we are at variance.”

Bulmore ran his fingers through his thin hair.

“It’s this way, old man,” he said. “You—you’d be doing me a real favour by accepting this shop—a real favour to me.”

“Forgive me asking, but how can that be?”

This was clearly a moment for invention, and Bulmore wrestled with his ingenuity before answering, and finally produced:

“Because I want to make a favourable impression with the firm. If they saw I was a friend of yours, it’ud do me a piece of good.”

“But why not ask for the part yourself?” suggested Eliphalet, by no means displeased with the compliment.

“I did, but they won’t have me. They are dead-set on you, and no one else will do. Now, as a pal——”

“No,” replied Eliphalet firmly; “it is asking too much of friendship. Please let us drop the subject.”

Then Bulmore played his last card.

“If you refuse, you’ll do for me absolutely, because—well, I—I made ’em a solemn promise in your name that you’d take it.”

“Surely not!”

“I did, old man—and signed a contract for you into the bargain.”

For a moment Eliphalet’s indignation was too great for expression. He took several turns up and down the little room, tossing his head and ejaculating “tchas” of displeasure.

“Too bad! Too bad altogether. After all these years, Bulmore! You should have known me better! To prostitute my art in this way! Too—too bad!”

“I’ve done it now,” muttered Bulmore, with hanging head. “And I suppose you’ll do me?”

There was pathos in every line of the little man’s figure, for he could act very realistically when he chose. Eliphalet saw, and could not ignore, the silent appeal. With an effort he walked over and laid a hand on the bent shoulders.

“And you should know me better than to think that,” he said. “I never go back on my friends, whatever the cost. You may tell Mr. Eastlake I am pleased to accept his offer. And now let us say no more about it.”

As Bulmore walked down the street there was no swinging cane to mark the gaiety of his mood. He felt bruised and disappointed. The affair had turned out so differently from expectations.

Sefton Bulmore, in fact, was suffering, as so many others have suffered, from doing a good turn without positively labelling it as a good turn beforehand.

"I would have liked him to have been pleased," he murmured. "But he'll earn the money, and that's what matters."

The open doors of the Lion lured him to enter. In the saloon he met an acquaintance, and touched him for ten bob and a cigar.

* * * * *

There are peculiar qualities required in film-acting to obtain good results. Being denied speech as a means of expression, you are forced to seek other alternatives. Facial expression and gesture will not suffice. There remains but one solution—you must think right. Do this, or, in other words, let your thoughts be in accord with the scene you are required to play, and you will find automatically all the emotions will have portrayed themselves. Also you must have a good nerve, for to many the rotation of the operator's hand and the precise tick-tick-tick of the camera produce an even more disconcerting effect than does a first-night audience.

If you are fearless, clear-brained and receptive, put on your best bib and tucker, and sally forth to Wardour Street, the G.H.Q. of Filmland, for there a fortune is awaiting you.

To a certain extent Eliphalet Cardomay thought right, and his actions were always graceful; but he could not conquer embarrassment of the camera. His performance was marred by nervousness, and nervousness shows with alarming fidelity on the screen. From this cause many promising scenes had to be re-taken again and again, and the producer, an American who savoured of pistols and the Wild West, danced in indignation.

"I ask you, Mr. Cardomay," he implored, "not to look at the camera as if it were loaded. We're trying to get stuff into the machine, and not out of it. Now, once again, please. Ready, Cable? Go, then!"

The operator would start to turn, Eliphalet to enter, and the producer to talk, all at the same time.

"Down stage a little, please. That'll do. Take out your penknife—cut the string so. Raise your chin—a little more, more—don't look at me!"

Then Eliphalet would throw down the penknife and exclaim:

“I really cannot act if you will talk.”

“Stop turning, Cable. There goes another eighty feet. Now why in hell did you leave off? Pardon my language, but oblige me with an answer.”

“I cannot act if you talk.”

“I’m here to talk—wouldn’t be a film if I didn’t. How can you hope to keep the audience from beating it unless I put a bit of variety in your positions?”

“But your talking interferes with my acting.”

“Don’t want you to act. Want you to cut the string of a parcel and put the knife back in your pocket. You wouldn’t have straw down on the sidewalk before your villa, if you were doing that at home.”

Eliphalet was mortally offended, and only loyalty to his old friend prevented him from throwing up the engagement.

Considering the ceaseless irritations he was subjected to, his behaviour throughout was exemplary.

It was in the comic scenes he appeared at his worst. Seeing no humour in them himself, he registered nothing beyond the suggestion of outraged dignity upon the film.

When Mr. Eastlake saw Eliphalet’s comedy—for he was in the habit of having the day’s work projected for his approval each evening on a miniature screen—he was exceeding wroth. Consequently he visited the studio next morning and engaged the old actor in conversation.

“Seems to me,” he said, “your comedy is not a strong point. Now, Bulmore told me you could be screamingly funny when you like.”

“Funny!” echoed Eliphalet. “I have never been funny in my life.”

“Well, that’s what he told me, and on the strength of it I made the engagement. Sorry to bother you, but if this film is to be released, you really must whack a bit of fun into your part.”

“I will do my best,” said Eliphalet loftily. “But ‘every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes.’ ” And having delivered this dictum, he bowed and walked away.

It is doubtful whether Eliphalet’s efforts to be funny would have given amusement to a village idiot. He was frankly at sea with the ridiculous—at sea in an unexplored ocean, and his flounderings were pitiful to behold.

So Mr. Eastlake and the producer held a conference and decided it was useless to proceed.

“We’ll burn the lot,” said Eastlake. “Pay him off and start afresh. That fellow Bulmore fairly sold us a dog.”

Next morning Eliphalet was politely informed that his services were no longer required. No reasons were given, nor any reproaches made. Film companies conduct their business on business lines. There is no “incompetent” clause in their contracts. When a performer has failed to give satisfaction, he is paid in full, and another is engaged. Eliphalet received a cheque for thirty-five guineas, and a polite “Good-day” from the cashier.

While he was buttoning his coat in the hall he heard Mr. Eastlake’s voice sounding through his office door:

“No, Bulmore—and we are not likely to have any more work for you either.”

“But why, old man? Why?”

“I might ask you why—why you told us those wonderful tales about your clever friend. He’s let us in for a couple of thousand feet that aren’t worth the price of fixing salts.”

“Whew! That’s bad! I thought he’d be all right—straight I did.”

“But why turn him on to us if you wanted the job yourself?”

There was a pause; then Bulmore’s voice:

“He was dead broke, and I wanted to do him a good turn.”

“At our expense.”

“And my own, old man, by the looks of it.”

Eliphalet waited for no more, but flushing for shame, slipped out into the street and hurried away.

“I made a favour of doing it,” he muttered. Bulmore’s money in his pocket burnt like a hot coal.

Awaiting him at home was a statement of the week’s account from the manager of Mornice’s tour. The expenses were twenty-two pounds in excess of the takings. He also received a postcard from Mornice saying she was dreadfully miserable that the tour was finishing the following week, but it would be lovely to see him again.

“She’ll never be happy unless she’s acting,” he thought.

He wrote some figures on the back of an envelope, figures which showed that her tour had realised a loss of eighty pounds. Eighty pounds. He had earned nothing for the last ten weeks save—and he looked at the cheque for thirty-five guineas—money defrauded from a friend, and ill-earned at that.

“This is no good,” he argued, his thoughts resting on the cherished wish to play ‘Hamlet.’ “No good—and after all, blessed is he that humbleth his pride.”

So he sat down to write, addressing the letter to Mr. Shingles, Chairman of the Syndicate. A reply was received two days later, and he duly entrained for Bradford to attend the meeting.

His reception was chilly.

“I have re-considered my views, gentlemen,” he said, “and withdraw my proviso with regard to the ‘Hamlet’ production.”

“I knew we’d starve you out,” squeaked Mr. Wilfur, rubbing his bony hands. “Oh, yes, money always counts—money wins, money does.”

“Not always,” said Eliphalet, thinking of Bulmore. “With some men friendship stands on a higher plane.”

“Well, I may say, Cardomay, that you have strained friendship almost to a breaking-point,” commented the obese Mr. Shingles. “Here’s half the autumn gone, and nothing done. Still, if you have come back admitting yourself to be in fault—well—— But what do you say, Doctor?”

“No good harbouring ill-feeling. We may as well carry on, but since we’ve lost so much time and all the best dates, the question of reduced percentage asserts itself,” said Mr. Wardluke.

And thus the thin edge of the wedge implanted itself daintily into the future fortunes of Eliphalet Cardomay. When he left the meeting he had lost ground, and what was left before him was perilously insecure.

On arriving home he sent a letter to Bulmore asking him to supper, and spent the time of waiting purchasing and laying out a really sumptuous spread. In his breast-pocket there was a bulge of banknotes, representing the cashing of Mr. Eastlake’s cheque.

“Ha, ha!” he cried when old Bulmore, looking rather down and out, came into the room. “Here’s the man who brought me luck. Congratulate me, my dear old fellow, for I open again in my own management in a month’s time.”

His tone rang with enthusiasm, and all through the meal he held forth upon the advantageous terms he had arranged with his syndicate and the big success forecasted for the play.

Poor Sefton Bulmore could hardly fail to feel rather out in the cold, but he did his best to reflect the cheerful mood of his host. The effort was pathetically transparent, however, as Eliphalet noted with satisfaction.

“Yes, yes, and to tell you the truth, Bulmore, I was a bit low. That thirty-five guineas you put me in the way of earning was a godsend. But now! they can’t do enough—insisted on my accepting a big advance.” And he flourished a wad of notes before Bulmore’s hungry eyes.

With all the will in the world, the old fellow could not help wishing his friend would be a trifle less arrogant about his finances. It is a severe test on a man who has nothing in his pockets to resist envying one who has so much, especially when he knows that but for a flash of generosity some of that money would have been his own.

Eliphalet Cardomay might not always have shown genius in his portrayal of emotions, but he understood them very thoroughly, notwithstanding.

Eventually Bulmore could endure the ordeal no longer, and rose to take his departure. At the hall door he halted indecisively, shuffled his feet and cleared his throat a good deal, but he said nothing. So Eliphalet took the bull by the horns.

“Yes, I am very grateful indeed,” he repeated for the twentieth time, “and if there is the slightest thing I can do for you by way of return, I shall take it as unfriendly if you fail to name it.”

“Thank ye,” said Bulmore huskily. “I won’t forget.” He descended one step, then turned. “Matter of fact,” he admitted with rather a dry tongue, “I am just a wee bit short of ready at the moment, and a sovereign or two——”

“Why, my dear old friend, I wouldn’t insult you with such a loan. Here, take”—and he produced the roll of notes—“take these. No, no; I insist—please. There! that’s right. Not a word—I beg you. After all, we are friends, and between friends—— But what a moon! Wonderful night—wonderful night.”

“Old man!” said Bulmore, wringing his hand in silent gratitude and sniffling suggestively. “Dear old man!”

For some reason Eliphalet sniffed too.

“We’re a couple of fools, Bulmore,” he said, at last; “a couple of old fools.”

“No, actors, laddie; actors.”

“That’s it—actors. Sometimes I think it is a very great thing to be an actor. Good night.”

“God bless you, old man.”

And, tucking the money in his pocket, he shuffled down the street.

CHAPTER X
THE DEAR DEPARTED

If Eliphalet Cardomay never pretended Mornice June was his own daughter he certainly never checked her from calling him Father, or any other such title her fancy devised. A man on the very wrong side of sixty, who has never been so called, finds the sound of that name comes very sweetly to his ears.

When he met her at the station on her return from the tour, she halloed "Father" from the carriage window, and leapt into his arms before the train had stopped.

Usually Eliphalet was a ceremonious man under the eye of the public, but on this occasion he returned her embraces with a warmth equal to her own.

"Dear me!" he said, as arm-in-arm, the gust of welcome having subsided, they walked from the station. "Dear me! I wouldn't have believed I could be so happy and excited. I haven't been kissed on a railway platform since——"

"When?"

He hesitated. "Oh, a very long while ago."

His thoughts strayed back over a chasm of years, to the time when this girl's mother, in the first flights of their courtship, embarrassed him grievously by the publicity of her affections.

"I was thinking of your mother," he said at last.

"Oh!" replied Mornice, who was hoping for a more spirited confidence.

"You know," he went on, "when I see you, I sometimes wish I had been a little more tolerant. It is a wonderful possession—a child of one's own."

"You might not have liked me so well," said Mornice gaily. Her face took more serious lines. "I was only fourteen when she cleared out and left me on my own—but it wouldn't have been any good—I can see that. She wasn't a bit nice, I'm afraid."

There was a quality of frankness about Mornice. She invariably spoke her mind. A bad mother was none the better for being her own. Mrs. Harrington May, late Mrs. Eliphalet Cardomay, *née* Blanche Cannon, was

not a lady to inspire affection in other than masculine hearts, and even there not a quality to endure.

"Then you do not miss your mother?"

"Not a bit."

"No," said Eliphalet thoughtfully; "and no more do I. Well, well; I have arranged with the syndicate—yes, I had to climb down about playing 'Hamlet,' and now we are going to put up 'The Night Cry,' after all. The cast is engaged and we start rehearsing here this week."

"Oh, that's fine," said Mornice. Then with a shade of nervousness, "And who have you got to do my part?"

"Yourself, of course."

"Me?—Oh, but, Pummy, I can't. Didn't I write and tell you? Thought I had—at least, I didn't think I had, exactly, but I meant to."

"Tell me what?" Eliphalet looked genuinely startled.

"Oh, Daddy fatherums, don't—don't look so serious, please. It's—I—— Well, I met a young man—a boy—a gentleman—oh, yes, always the perfect gentleman. No, but he's a dear, really; I mean, he's awfully nice and *very* clever, and—— Well, I didn't want to be a drag on you, and you never actually told me you were going to open, so I didn't see how I could very well refuse—could I?"

Eliphalet stopped dead, with:

"Good God, what are you talking about?"

"Yes. I knew you'd disapprove, and I knew if I waited to ask you, you wouldn't let me; so I took my courage in both hands, shut my eyes, and said, 'Yes.' But it's only for six weeks."

From his tail-pocket Eliphalet drew a large silk handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"What is only for six weeks?" he managed to ask.

"I told you—this Cinema engagement, of course."

"Thank you," he said faintly. "If you don't mind, we will go into this dairy and take a glass of milk."

Not until they had seated themselves at the small marble-topped table, with two china beakers of milk and some sponge-cakes on white saucers before them, did he speak again.

"One should never mystify one's audience: that is a first principle in our profession. Remember it, my dear, and you will save people from many unnecessary shocks. Now, about this engagement?"

So Mornice told him how one Ronald Knight, who was "really awfully nice," had seen her playing at Colwyn Bay, and had come round "after the show" with a most alluring offer.

"They are a new firm, and, just think! they are going to pay me a pound a day—and I'm to play lead in the film. Oh, Daddy fatherums, I'm to play the Village Maid!" And, kissing the tips of her fingers, she dabbed them on the end of the old man's nose.

Taking into consideration Eliphalet's strong distaste for the Cinema—a distaste rendered more poignant by his own recent unsuccessful exploits before the camera—it is surprising that he did not at once quash the whole idea. The fact remains, however, that he did not. He knew in honesty to his ideals he should have taken up a very severe standpoint, but instead he caressed the end of his nose lovingly, where the sense of the kiss she had dabbed upon it still endured.

"Well, well, well!" he said. "There is no better way of learning a mistake than by experience—and that I am not justified in denying you. But after the six weeks, Mornice, you will return to me."

"Oh, you darling, to let me!" she exclaimed, delightedly. "And of course I'll do whatever you say I must."

He seemed to ponder for a while, and presently said:

"What was it you called me a moment ago? Some quite odd name."

"Daddy fatherums?"

"That was it—yes."

"Do you like being called that?"

"Yes, I do," he confessed, after the manner of an expert tasting a rare wine. "I do. It is very foolish of me, no doubt—idiotic—but I like it notwithstanding."

An old man will do a great deal for a girl—that is sufficiently obvious; and so, for that matter, will a young one.

To avoid losing any of her society Eliphalet shifted the scene of his rehearsals and all the cast to Chester, in which town, on account of its historic surroundings, the film was being taken.

His theatrical lodging-book showed no addresses of the landladies of Chester, but Mornice promised to drop a card to Ronald Knight to arrange rooms and meet them at the station.

Ronald Knight, it subsequently appeared, was not the manager of the film company, but the manager's son. He was a young man of dramatic

enthusiasm and ambition.

In Mornice's conversations he recurred with great frequency, under such titles as Ron, Ronny, Spud, The Boy—or Pyjams. (The latter being arrived at by a kind of inverted reasoning, *sic*. Knight—Knightie—Nightie; and since the masculine of nightie equals pyjamas, hence Pyjams.)

Eliphalet was somewhat hard put to it to recognise a single personality under so many alternative names. He gathered that Mr. Knight was well placed in the esteem of his protégée, and on that account suffered mildly jealous pangs. These he was not too subtle to betray—when Mornice would tactfully remark:

"The boy is frightfully anxious to meet you. He just thrilled when I told him I was your sort-of-daughter."

"Yes, yes, that is very likely," said Eliphalet, ironically; but he was none the less pleased by these nosegays of speech.

So the whole cast of "The Night Cry" were entrained for Chester, where in due course they arrived. Mr. Knight was waiting on the platform, and sprang to open the door of Eliphalet's compartment.

"Here's The Boy," cried Mornice. "Now, Spud, be polite, and shake hands with Mr. Cardomay."

Ronald Knight was naturally polite, and did as he was bid, with "It's a very great pleasure to meet you, sir." While Mornice, in the background, gratuitously supplied, "I call him Daddy fatherums, and sometimes Pummy."

Eliphalet frowned a little. An old man does not care to have his pet name hung on the line for all to behold.

"Oh, she's boasting," said Ronald, with some neatness, who, reversely, as a young man, was charmed to have been called "Spud" in public.

"Mornice tells me she has asked you to find us some accommodations," said Eliphalet.

"Oh! I forgot to," gasped Mornice, in instant contrition. Then: "Hold out your hand, Morny!"

Ronald laughed as she inflicted punishment upon herself.

"I know a few addresses, Mr. Cardomay. Or perhaps you will stay at the hotel?"

"I prefer rooms—they are more homely."

A couple of addresses were written on the back of an envelope ("No, not that one." Eliphalet recognised Mornice's writing, and smiled), and armed

with these, he and she and their more portable assets climbed into a cab.

Ronald was a shade disappointed at being left behind, but he had told Mornice they would want to see her at the office by five o'clock. To which she replied:

"I'll be there at four, then, and you can do me a tea beforehand. By-oh, Ron," as they rattled over the cobbles of the station yard.

"Now," said Eliphalet, "we have a choice between Mrs. Devon and Mrs. Montmorency. Which shall it be?"

Mornice voted in favour of "The West Countrie" as being less high-sounding than Montmorency. Accordingly they addressed themselves to Mrs. Devon's knocker.

Alas! but the good lady's rooms were already engaged. Yes, she had heard of Mrs. Montmorency, but could claim no actual acquaintance.

"I think," she hazarded, "she's been abroad a good deal. But there! it doesn't do to say anything, and there isn't any reason to suppose she won't make you comfortable—but still! That's the house at the corner—Number Six. The one with the funny blinds."

So they crossed the road and attacked the bell of Number Six, and after a decent pause the door was opened by a middle-aged woman with an apron but no cap.

Eliphalet addressed her as "Madam" and enquired if she were Mrs. Montmorency.

"No," came the reply, with a touch of pride, so Mornice thought. "No, but I do for her. I'm Emma. What might you want?"

"We are requiring two bedrooms and a sitting-room."

"Y-es. We could do that. Are you theatricals? But there! I needn't ask, for it's stamped on your faces as plain as the words on a wall."

Eliphalet remarked that the doorstep was inhospitable, and suggested they might be invited to inspect the rooms.

"You shall see them," said Emma, adding, "Such as they are." She led them within. "There—this'd be the sitting-room, if you was to take it."

"But it is, in any case," said Mornice with a twinkle.

Emma shook her head discouragingly.

"Well, come!" said Eliphalet. "This is quite comfortable."

It was the twin of every other theatrical parlour, with its ponderous wallpaper, plush upholsterings and curtains, palm pedestal in the window and draper's paintings on the walls.

Emma nodded gloomily.

"I suppose it's all right," she allowed. "If you want to see the bedrooms, you'll 'ave to climb the stairs, for there's no other way."

She led the procession to the floor above, and revealed two reasonably well-kept bedrooms, with blue linoleum on the floors and scarlet Paisley eiderdowns on the beds.

"I think this should suit us very well. Er—what about terms, now?"

Emma straightened a little doormat with the dilapidated toe of her shoe.

" 'Ardly know what to say about terms. You see, she's funny about 'em. Tries to get all she can—but she always takes less."

"Perhaps I could speak to her?"

"No, no, you couldn't, not very well. Y'see, she's out—Saturday!—You know what I mean. You must arrange with me or not at all."

"Certainly, as you please."

"What about twenty-five shillings, then?"

Eliphalet hesitated, on principle.

"We should probably be here for three weeks," he observed.

"Then you're not playing in the town?"

"No; rehearsing."

"That's a pity, 'cause I'd 'ave asked for a seat Friday. 'Sides, if you're r'hearsing, it's unlikely you'd be able to afford twenty-five."

"We could afford a great deal more," said Eliphalet, with a touch of silly pride. "But one does not pay more than a penny for a penny bun."

"But even then you may get a stale one," replied Emma philosophically. "Well, I should think twenty-five shillings 'ud be enough, then. 'Tis enough, as a matter of fac'—plenty."

"Very well; we will leave it at that."

"All right. I 'spec' she'll raise a rare to-do about it, but one can't help that. Pity she wasn't 'ome 'erself—but there, it's Saturday, and you know what that means! 'Ave you 'ad your dinners?"

"No," said Mornice; "and we're dreadfully hungry."

"Well, I suppose a chop each 'ud do, for liver's very dear, and I don't suppose you want to spend much."

"A chop will be excellent."

"Then I'll leave you to wash your 'ands. There are some bits of yellow in the soap-dishes, but if you've brought your own, I'd use it."

At the top of the stairs she turned and addressed Mornice.

"You may as well be warned. The 'andle of the water-jug in your room is only stuck on with fish-glue, so you'd better lift by the sides when you're pouring out. Three people 'ave paid for that 'andle already."

"Thanks awfully," said Mornie, trying not to laugh.

"Thought I'd tell you. Not but what you're sure to forget; then you'll make the fourth." And with this melancholy foreboding Emma descended toward the kitchen.

Emma's cooking of the chops was of more attractive quality than her conversational manner of introducing them. She further supplemented the meal with a sweet omelette, expressing a doubt, while serving it, that the price of the eggs used would probably "put them in a state" when they had to settle the bill.

Mornice was enchanted with Emma, and gave a graphic performance of her voice and manner for Eliphalet's after-dinner delectation.

"She's lovely," declared Mornice; "and I only hope Mrs. 'Montblancmangy' will be half as funny."

The lady in question did not arrive home until after Mornice had set out to meet Ronald Knight. It was about five-thirty when Eliphalet heard the click of a key in the front door and the sound of footsteps in the passage. Apparently, the owner of the house was a clumsy person, for a great rattling betokened a collision with the umbrella-stand. There followed the noise of objects falling, and Eliphalet undertook to surmise that the three plush-backed clothes-brushes had been flung from their brass hooks to the floor. A certain amount of scuffling ensued, and then a female voice, speaking in detached tones, said:

"Dash the things! Let 'em lie!"

Acting on this resolution, the footsteps continued their way down the passage, and a door at the far end banged.

"H'm!" said Eliphalet Cardomay.

Emma came from the kitchen and entered her mistress's parlour.

Mrs. Montmorency was seated in a wicker chair, and her head moved from side to side in a rhythmic measure. On the floor beside her lay various belongings—a bag, an umbrella and a pair of gloves. Upon her lap was a large brown-paper parcel, suggestive of the wine merchant, and this she grasped securely by a small leather handle.

She was a largely-built woman on the wrong side of fifty, and the clothes she wore would have befitted better a less advanced age. Large plaques of

jewellery shone from her expansive bosom and implicated themselves in the lace and trimmings of her blouse. Across her shoulders was a fur cape, which, in conversational periods, she styled as “My mink.” An elaborate hat, at the moment somewhat awry, reposed upon her butter-coloured hair—hair dressed *à la pompadour*. Her face was a fine shade of purple, the intensity of which had been somewhat toned down by a liberal application of powder.

“I’ve let the rooms,” remarked Emma. “Theatricals—an old chap and ’is daughter.”

“Decidedly!” replied Mrs. Montmorency, her head still moving and increasing the raffish angle of her hat. “Decidedly! I should think so, indeed! Why, good gracious me, yes!”

“If you know all about it, there’s no call for me to tell you.”

“None whatever—decidedly not! What did you say?”

“Oh, you’re—you’re Saturday!” said Emma.

Mrs. Montmorency stiffened.

“Any sauciness, and out you go—bag and baggage, lock, stock and barrel!”

“You wouldn’t part with the barrel—not if you thought there was anything in it,” returned Emma, with asperity.

“I think, Emma, you forget who you’re speaking to. Now, what did you say about the rooms?”

“Let ’em, that’s all. Twenty-one shillings a week for the two upstair fronts and the sitting, and they’ll stay three weeks like as not.”

“This comes of my going out!” declared Mrs. Montmorency. “It means that I can’t go out, and that’s what it *does* mean! Who, may I ask, please, have you let my rooms to at such a price?”

“Old fellow and his daughter.”

“Daughter, indeed! Decidedly, I should say so. A nice thing altogether. Well! it’s what I expected—no more, no less.”

“You can tell ’em to go if you’re not satisfied—I ’aven’t sheeted the beds yet.”

“That’s at my pleasure, and one more piece of sauciness and you’ll be the one to go. But I’ll charge them for the cruet—ninepence a week, and any breakages will be double—double. And now, please, what are the names of the precious pair?”

“Didn’t ask.”

“No, you wouldn’t—decidedly not. You’d turn my house into a warren for all the rag-bag and nameless vagabonds in the town. I’ll see them myself, and you can be sure I’ll have my say, too.”

“Then I should take off my ’at and straighten up a bit first—for you look for all the world like a needle in a hay-stack.”

Emma walked from the room and slammed the door.

Mrs. Montmorency rose from her chair and, approaching the mirror on the mantelshelf, Narcissus-fashion surveyed her own loveliness therein. Seemingly she found Emma’s counsel good, for she removed her hat and cast it upon a chair, where it was crushed in the emotional crisis that followed. Her hair she pawed and patted into some pretensions to order—her face she enriched with a fresh crust of powder. From a scent-spray, convenient to hand, she directed a jet of some heliotrope-coloured fluid upon her bosom. This done, she straightened her figure and passed out into the passage, with primmed lips.

To avoid the impression that by letting a room she sacrificed the privilege of entering it at will, she turned the handle of Eliphalet’s door, without knocking, and walked inside.

It happened that the old actor had closed his eyes for a few moments and was sleeping—his back toward her. Mrs. Montmorency sniffed, but, failing to awaken him, circumnavigated the table until his features, lit up by the cast-down glare of the incandescent gas, confronted her own.

For a moment she looked and then, with a curious throttled cry, turned about and fled.

Eliphalet sprang to his feet and arrived in the passage in time to see the door at the far end swing to with a bang that shook the house.

“How very curious!” he said, and returned to his chair.

“God! It’s Cardy,” gasped Mrs. Montmorency, panting breathlessly against the mantelpiece.

She rang the bell furiously, but when Emma arrived waved her away with, “No—no—I want nothing. I’ve had a shock, that’s all; but I can manage.”

She managed uncommonly well, and it must be considered as providential that her purchases that afternoon had included two bottles of brandy whereby the ill effects of the shock were capable of being warded off. By the time the first bottle was at half-tide, she was able to review the situation less fearfully.

Here was her first husband—the man who divorced her—living under the same roof as a guest, and with him was a grown-up daughter.

What would be the result of this intolerable coincidence? As a late member of the Boards herself, her imagination supplied many startling solutions. The conventional idea was that Eliphalet, realising what he had thrown away, would implore her to take pity and return to the shelter of his arms; the dramatic, that after years of anger and dull hatred, the sight of her would cast him into such a frenzy that murder would be done. In support of this theory came the memory of how once he had called out his man to fight with pistols for the sake of her honour. It was all very irritating and tiresome, coming as it did at the time when she had settled down to peaceable ways of living. As fruits of many affectionate years, she was left with money enough to buy the small lodging-house, and a matter of fifty pounds per annum over and above to guarantee a convivial Saturday at the end of each week. This was not affluence by any means, but it sufficed to make life endurable. It was impossible that Eliphalet would be in so good a position, and was it not more than likely that if he discovered her, his first thoughts would be to negotiate a loan?

This latter theory caused Mrs. Montmorency more uneasiness than any other. Generosity was not a strong point, beyond the latitude she allowed herself for personal indulgences. Clearly, then, Eliphalet Cardomay's propinquity was not to be encouraged.

Once more she rang the bell for Emma.

"What terms did you ask these people for my rooms?" she demanded.

"I asked 'em twenty-five."

"And they beat you down?"

"Oh, yes," said Emma, who was sick of the whole affair.

"I thought as much. And where are they playing?"

"Nowhere. They're r'hearsing."

"Indeed! And who ever heard of letting rooms to an actor who was rehearsing?"

"They've got to sleep somewhere while they're doing it—haven't they?"

"They are not going to sleep here—not after to-night, or to-morrow at the latest. That I *have* made up my mind to. This house is not a charitable institution; whatever else it may be, it isn't that."

"A truer word never passed your lips," said Emma, and escaped before the inevitable warning about sauciness found expression.

Mrs. Montmorency drank soberly for an hour to lubricate her reflections. She heard Mornice come in about eight o'clock, and was fired with a desire to go into the passage and denounce her. This project, however, she abandoned for want of material for the accusation. She decided that a dignified letter would be the best means of being rid of the pair of them, and this she set about to write. But, chiefly due to the error of dipping the wrong end of the pen into the ink, the dignity failed to appear on the page. Even in her semi-bemused condition she realised that Eliphalet could hardly be expected to fathom the meaning of her shadow-graphs, and so decided to leave the matter unsettled until the morning. That being so, it was obviously a slight on her maker of cognac to leave the bottle unemptied—and, after all, it was Saturday.

She was singing some little trifle of song when, about ten o'clock, she perilously mounted the stairs toward the oblivion of her bed-chamber.

With the arrival of the day Mrs. Montmorency was able to approach the problem with a clearer headache. She recollected, with a start, that only a few inches of brick and plaster separated her from her one-time husband.

Emma did not offer her breakfast on Sunday mornings, for to do so was to incur a rebuke for sauciness—and so, when dressed, nothing prevented Mrs. Montmorency from getting to work at once upon the eviction of her tenants.

For a long while she sat with the pen in her mouth and her brows contracted in thought. To tell the truth, she was not gifted with a high standard of literary attainment. As a girl, she could dash off as many as you please of the "My own darling boy" sort of letters which ended with "tons of love and kisses," but this severer kind of exchange presented abundant difficulties. With the exception of Eliphalet, none of her husbands, or those who had passed as such, was of a scholarly turn. Harrington May, Mornice's father, on whose account Eliphalet had divorced her, though by no means a fool, had not troubled to obtrude his erudition upon her. Similarly, none of the other hands through which she had passed had used their skill to mould her intellect.

At last, however, she contrived a letter which gave her every sort of satisfaction. It ran:

SIR,—*My Emma in my absence let you rooms at terms unsatisfactory to myself. Mrs. Montmorency is a lady who does not take in lodgers without good credenshalls. This is not to in any way say that your credenshalls may not be all right, but as I have no knowledge of you she feels the let is not satisfactorily. It would be necessary under such a state as yours for payment to be made for the whole time of three weeks in advance. As it is not likely under your present state you could do this or be able she feels obliged to ask you to go elsewhere without trying to be impolite.*

I beg to remain,
Yours faithfully,
MRS. B. MONTMORENCY.

Mornice had brought Ronald in to lunch, and this letter was handed to Eliphalet simultaneously with the apple-tart. He frowned a little as he read it, and remarking "Extraordinary woman!" handed it to Mornice.

"Oh, it's sweet!" cried Mornice. "Read it, Pyjams." Then to Emma, "Do ask her to come in."

Emma had been schooled in what to say should this request be made. Her manner of putting it was:

"She's in bed. Bit funny to-day! You know what I mean."

"I will reply later," said Eliphalet. When Emma had left the room, he picked up the thread of the former conversation—his familiar views upon the degradation of acting for the Cinema.

"Yet, sir," said Ronald, who had listened very politely, "I am sure Miss Mornice June would have a great future in the film. My father agrees with me."

"There is no future for the film, my boy," corrected Eliphalet. "Now, for the stage——"

Ronald Knight agreed heartily that the art of the stage ranked on a far higher plane, and expressed his own very proper ambitions in this direction.

On the whole, Eliphalet was pleased with the young man, and lost his sense of jealousy when Mornice "Ronnied" and "Spuddied" him.

After he had gone and Eliphalet had replied for about the nineteenth time, "Certainly he is a very agreeable young fellow," he turned to the matter of the letter again.

"It is very curious," he said, after reading it a second time, "but there is something familiar about the composition and handwriting of this note."

"Now you say so, it strikes me too," said Mornice.

He laughed. "Then I am sure it is merely imagination on my part. But that is unimportant. This is very offensive, and I am seriously disposed to ask for the bill and go."

Mornice dissuaded him. Emma made her laugh, she said, and her bed was a dream without lumps. Probably the poor thing was hard up, and it was just a try on to get money in advance.

"Well, if that is so, and you are satisfied, there is no reason why she should not have it."

Accordingly he sat down and wrote:

> MADAME,—*I am in receipt of your letter and hasten to applaud the spirit of caution that inspired it.*
>
> *It has not been my habit to give credentials when taking rooms, since I believed my name to be a sufficient guarantee of probity. However, since this appears to be a condition you require, I enclose five pounds, three guineas being for rent and the remainder towards current expenses.*
>
> *Awaiting your acknowledgment and receipt*,
>
> *Yours faithfully*,
> ELIPHALET CARDOMAY
> (with a flourish beneath).

"Well, is he going? Was he wild?" demanded Mrs. Montmorency when Emma brought the note.

"Neither, by the looks of it."

"Oh, dear! Give me the letter, then, and don't stand there looking as if—if——" She could think of nothing, so opened the envelope instead.

The sight of the five-pound note gave her astonishment and perplexity.

"Isn't it like him!" she exclaimed, when she had read what he had to say. "Prosy old fool!"

"Eh?" inquired Emma.

"I was not addressing you."

She bit one of her short, podgy fingers, and thought hard. "Wish I could see him for a moment."

"Why don't you?"

“Because you’ve let all the front room windows, like the fool you are. That’s the worst of a house without a basement.”

“Go and see ’im in his room—’e’s there.”

“I won’t, and I don’t want any saucy suggestions from you, either.” She tapped her foot and fingered the five-pound note indecisively. “You’ve been in the provinces all the while I’ve been abroad. Have you ever heard of Eliphalet Cardomay?”

“ ’Course. Who ’asn’t? Runs his own companies, doesn’t ’e? I suppose anyone who’s heard of Queen Anne ’as ’eard of ’im.”

“His own companies? What sort of theatres?”

“Big drama houses.”

“Oh! Oh! That’s the worst of being out of the swim so long. H’m! Wonder if it ’ud be a mistake——” She took a pen and wrote a receipt for five pounds. “With Mrs. Montmorency’s compliments, please, and tell him she is satisfied.”

Emma placed it on the arm of Eliphalet’s chair, saying:

“All right! You don’t ’ave to go, after all.”

Eliphalet Cardomay’s five-pound note had created a profound impression on Mrs. Montmorency. That he, at his age, could produce so large a sum without protest or difficulty argued that he must be in a singularly sound financial position. A man who could do so much could probably do more—and if that were the case——

She had worked out her life on strictly practical lines—the margin for enjoyment being limited by her tangible assets. It was purely motives of economy that only allowed the indulgence of a single “Saturday” in the week. With a little more capital a “Saturday” might also occur on Tuesday. Her “mink” might cease to be a substitute and become mink. Scented soaps, patchouli, and many other nose-offending delicacies might spring into being about her. A cellar, even, might be started, and a silver mirror added to her gradually-dwindling toilet appointments. Clearly, it was not advisable to cast Eliphalet forth without first plumbing his resources. That grown-up daughter was rather a stumbling-block. Daughters are unsympathetic creatures, and it might very well be that she would stand in the way of her father’s generous impulses. The main thing to do was to find out exactly what their position was, and meanwhile to lie low.

For three days Mrs. Montmorency digested her plans and took great pains to avoid meeting her guests. This necessity resulted in some very near shaves; in one case driving her to take refuge in the cistern-cupboard.

Emma was valueless, since she declined to interrogate either Eliphalet or Mornice on the matter of their private affairs, and it was only by accident that Mrs. Montmorency learnt that Mr. Ronald Knight, who visited the house nearly every day, was the gentleman who had recommended them to her tender graces.

This was a happy windfall, for it provided an excuse for offering him her thanks and at the same time drawing from him a little private conversation.

The following afternoon, which was too wet and dark to be of use to the film folk, Mr. Knight returned with Mornice and entered the house.

No sooner did Mrs. Montmorency hear his voice in the sitting-room than she opened the front door and passed out.

There was a broad-minded pastry-cook's at the corner of the street, where cherry-brandy and sweet wines were dispensed to nervous ladies, and, using this as an observation-post, Mrs. Montmorency sat down to a pleasant hour of waiting.

"Mr. Cardomay out?" said Ronald, warming his hands before the fire.

"Yup. They're doing the second act—he won't be in till five."

Ronald bore the tidings with fortitude.

"You're going to be awfully good in that film, Morny," he said.

"Think so?"

"Sure so! If it gets released and well booked they'll be after you like flies—all the big firms."

"Bon!" said Mornice, who could throw a spice of French into her conversation.

"Morny!"

"That's me!"

"I suppose dozens of men have adored you?"

"Oh, yes. We'll take a tram to-morrow, if you please, and look at their little graves."

"Have you ever loved any of them?"

"All of them."

"Any *one* more than the rest?"

"Yes; but not so's you'd notice."

"It wouldn't be very original of me, then, to say I loved you?"

"It would be if you didn't."

He scarcely knew how to take that, but he tried:

“D’you want me to be original?”

“If you can’t be natural,” she said.

“If I were natural,” said Ronald, with a deep breath, “I should ask you to marry me—when I’ve got on and have a good position. Will you?”

“Well, come, Ronnie,” said Mornice, who was used to protestations of love but a stranger to proposals of marriage; “it’s a sporting offer, isn’t it?”

“Do you take it, then?”

She bit her pretty little mouth into all manner of tantalising and absurd shapes.

“Well, I’d like to have it by me to think about and enjoy all by my lonesome.”

“You want me to go away? I will!”

“Norrabit! You stop. I’ll let you know some day. The matter shall have our serious consideration,” she added, and laughed provokingly.

He got up and stood beside her.

“Morny, it’s awfully difficult to stop without wanting to—to——”

“Yes?”

“To kiss you.”

“Well,” said Mornice, “and what’s to prevent you, please?”

“You might not like it.”

“But I’m certain I should.”

She pouted up into his face, and he kissed her, and she kissed him—and very proper, too.

There is a deal too much nonsense talked about kissing; it should be encouraged, for all that bacteriologists say to the contrary. Reliable young people, with properly ordered minds, ought to kiss each other far more frequently than they do. It is a delightful, frank and wholesome pastime—and does any amount of good all round. Of course, if you are a prude and attach an absurd significance to a kiss, there is no more to be said, and it is your own look-out and your own loss. But if you take it as a seal of good fellowship, and expression of the youthfulness that sings in every decent heart, however old, it is right and good and proper. Besides, no one will mind, that way. They will slap you on the back and say you are a jolly good fellow, and she’s a dear, sweet, natural girl, and your wife will kiss your own particular pal’s husband, and she will snuggle none the less close to you on that account, nor will you press his hand with any the less warmth. If we abandoned kissing the people we don’t want to kiss, and only gave our

caresses to the ones we do, the world would be an ever so much jollier little globe to live upon.

Ronald was in a very glorified frame of mind when he came down the road, and, seeing him, Mrs. Montmorency rose from her fourth cherry-brandy and debouched from the confectioner's.

"I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Knight," she said.

He raised his hat.

"Yes," he said; "but forgive me if I——"

"I am Mrs. Montmorency. You were kind enough to recommend me to my present guests."

"Ah, yes! So I did."

"It was so kind of you, and I wish to say how grateful I am."

"Oh, not at all—delighted! Good afternoon!" For Ronald was very happy with his thoughts.

"I am stepping your way, Mr. Knight, and if you don't mind, we'll walk together."

What could he do but acquiesce?

"It is rather a delicate thing to say," she went on, "but—well, I'm rather particular, and I've been abroad for a good many years." (She branched aside to give a few impressions of the Antipodes.) "So, you see, I've rather lost touch. What I do want to know is, are the Cardomays quite nice people?"

Ronald supported them hotly and enthusiastically. He represented Eliphalet as a delightful personality who, professionally, was second only to Sir Henry Irving in the hearts of the public.

This was encouraging, but Mrs. Montmorency had not gained all the information she required.

"And the dear young lady—such a sweet girl, I think—she's entirely dependent on the old gentleman, I suppose?"

"No, indeed," returned Ronald. "She's playing lead in an important film production at a very substantial salary."

"How nice! Nothing I like better than to hear of young people getting on. I'm an old pro. myself, Mr. Knight; used to be quite a star in my day. But, dear me! I've passed my turning. Thank you so much, and good afternoon."

"Good afternoon," repeated Ronald, delighted to be rid of the lady of haunting odours.

“That settles it,” said Mrs. Montmorency to herself. “It wouldn’t be fair to me if I didn’t take the chance.”

At breakfast next day Eliphalet found a note on his plate stating that Mrs. Montmorency would be highly honoured if he would favour her with a call in her private boudoir at six that evening. He sent a reply to the effect that he would be pleased to come at the time stated.

Meanwhile Mrs. Montmorency was rehearsing the reconciliation scene from every possible mental angle. She decided to adopt the attitude of a tired woman, sick of the world and its frivolities—a woman who yearned for tenderness and the warmth of a home fire. Contrition there should be in plenty—a hint of many privations, bravely borne, and a show of still amply-filled wells of affection wherefrom a man might fill his bucket with joy.

She ransacked her wardrobe and produced a peignoir constituting a cross between a kimono and a Nottingham lace curtain. This garment, she felt sure, would lay siege to any heart. With her own hands she ironed and prepared it, then laid it aside upon the bed until the hour for dressing should arrive. Naturally, these exertions called for stimulant, and a bottle of brandy was broached with beneficial results. From a hidden recess she unearthed an early portrait of Eliphalet, and this she placed in a frame, occupied by some more recent tenant of her affections, and hung it on the wall in her boudoir. Emma was despatched, not without protest, to procure half-a-dozen arum lilies and half an ounce of cachous. The lilies were bestowed in vases on the mantelshelf, and the cachous fought a losing fight with the brandy-fumes.

All being in readiness, she mounted the stairs, abandoned her corsets, donned the peignoir, and made what little improvements to her face were expedient with creams and powder.

“I can’t imagine what she wants with me,” said Eliphalet, “but” he glanced at his watch—“I soon shall.”

Throwing Mornice a smile, he went down the passage toward the private boudoir. There was no answer to his knock, so he turned the handle and walked inside. Mrs. Montmorency hung over the bannisters above, and watched him enter.

Finding himself alone, his first thought was to retire, but an innate curiosity caused him to look about him first. The lilies attracted his attention, or rather diverted it from the garish vulgarity of the other decorations. His eye was caught by the photographs on the walls, for he recognised several old faces among them. All theatrical lodgings are plastered with portraits of the various actors who have distinguished them with their presence, but there was something in the sequence of the portraits

that seemed oddly familiar. Somewhere, on some past wall, he had seen the same picture gallery assembled. Where? He turned and found himself face to face with his own portrait—his portrait as a very young man; written across it in ink, autumnal-brown with time, were the words:

"To my dear Blanche—Eliphalet."

"Good God!" he whispered.

Then said a voice behind him, speaking in trembling accents:

"I've been so miserable, Cardy. All these years I have never known a moment's peace and quietude."

He revolved slowly and confronted the woman who had been his wife. Her hands outstretched toward him. He did not move, but looked her over gravely. Dolled up, painted, and smelling of half-a-dozen cheap perfumes that strove in vain to subordinate the reek of still stronger waters—she was all that his fancy pictured she would be.

"So it's you, Blanche," he said.

"Yes, me—what's left." (He nodded at that.) "If you knew, Cardy, what I have gone through—what my conscience has suffered for the way I served you, you would take pity. That's why——" She made a gesture as though to say, "Behold the wreckage"—"And you—you so young-looking, so handsome, and with a beautiful grown-up daughter! Oh, Cardy, it's too much to bear. You must forgive me and take me back."

Sobbing piteously, she fell into his arms.

Eliphalet let her sob for as long as he could hold his breath; then he placed her in a chair and seated himself as far away as possible.

"Need you envy me so acutely?" he said. "You married again, and bore a daughter after you ceased to be my wife."

"That's true," she nodded, dabbing her nose, which sprang to a bright purple at the touch; "but it's cruel to remind me."

"Why?" His voice was courteous, but unsympathetic.

"She—Oh, and she was such a pretty, dainty little thing. I can't speak of her, Cardy. I can't."

"Why not?"

With a choking voice she replied:

"She was taken—taken——"

"You mean she died?"

"Died; yes. Only fourteen—getting on so nicely, too; beginning to earn her own keep, like the one you've got. But there, you've always been the

lucky one."

"By God," he said, "I think I have."

It was an awkward remark to counter, so Blanche kept up her pathetic wail.

"It would be like the touch of my own child, just to see your daughter."

"You shall," said he, and walked to the door.

This movement was ahead of its cue, so she hastened to exclaim:

"Yes, but not now—wait till I'm myself again. Cardy, can you—will you let me come into your life again?"

"We can discuss that later, I wish to show you my daughter first."

He went straight to his sitting-room.

"Mornice," he said. "Our landlady—she—she's your mother. I want you to come with me."

Mornice gasped, but made no articulate reply. Hand in hand, they entered Mrs. Montmorency's boudoir.

It occupied a full five seconds before Mrs. Montmorency grasped the situation; when she did, she sat bolt upright and exclaimed, "O God!" in the most colloquial way imaginable.

Mornice said nothing, which in the circumstances was the best thing to do.

"Well," said Eliphalet, "is there anything to be gained by continuing the scene?"

Mrs. Montmorency rose and gave herself away.

"Well, you were earning a good living, weren't you?" she demanded of Mornice. "My—er—friend didn't like children, and I had my own way to make. Then when I met Mr. Montmorency abroad, and told him about you, he couldn't be bothered."

"Yes, I quite understand," said Mornice.

"Girls should be made to look after themselves."

Eliphalet cut in with "I think all that is necessary has been said."

Blanche breathed desperately through her nose. She had lost ground, and saw no hope of regaining it. As a last cast—a final appeal to the emotions, she volunteered to faint.

"I'm going off!" she cried. "Quick—brandy!" Her faltering gestures indicated the cellarette very concisely.

Eliphalet poured a measure into a convenient glass, and she gulped at it greedily.

Then the faint—an unconvincing affair of eyelid work and hand-twitching—took place. From a kind of innate chivalry they waited until such a time as she thought fit to recover.

"We will say good-bye, Blanche," said Eliphalet. "Your daughter and I have our packing to do. Is there anything else you wish to say to her?"

"No, there isn't," came the uncompromising reply.

"Good-bye, then."

"But I'll say this to you, though," said Blanche. "You are a pig—that's what you are—an old pig!"

They went out, closing the door as her similes climbed the ladder of abuse in a ringing crescendo.

Later, as they drove through the cool night air, toward the hotel, Eliphalet thoughtfully said:

"You were right, my dear; it wouldn't have been any good. But it's a pity for you."

"Why?" she answered, laying her warm little hand in his. "I've got a Daddy fatherums, haven't I?"

CHAPTER XI
CLOUDS

"The Night Cry" was a failure—and a melancholy failure at that. Why this should have been is hard to understand, since, as a play, it compared favourably with many successful productions in Eliphalet Cardomay's repertoire. Perhaps the truth was that Eliphalet was getting old. The most skilful tricks of lighting and make-up failed to conceal this obvious fact.

"He ought to retire," said the wise playgoers, as they passed sorrowfully from the theatre. "A fine old chap, but he's stopping too long."

There is nothing in the world destroys confidence more quickly than this kind of talk, and nothing is more easily destroyed than an actor's reputation. People repeat such phrases for want of something better to say, and slowly but surely it comes back to ears that are ever attentive for a hint of the kind—attentive because their owner's pockets are affected.

For the last five seasons Eliphalet's receipts had shown a gradual, almost imperceptible decline, but it was not until the production of "The Night Cry" that the fall was considerable. And it was considerable! The vibrations set in motion thereby automatically were felt afar and closed the purses of the four commercial gentlemen who formed his syndicate.

Eliphalet was distressed at the want of success, but philosophical. He reflected with gratification that it had not been his wish to do the play. He had asked for support for a production of "Hamlet," and had been denied; thus, not unreasonably, he conjectured this might prove a lesson to his syndicate for the future to respect his judgments. Besides which, a certain percentage of failures was inevitable, and in all his career that percentage had been very low.

Every Christmas he and the syndicate met to discuss the past year's work and make future plans, and this was always the occasion for a little ceremony. Eliphalet brought with him four boxes of Half Coronas, and one of these he solemnly presented to each member of the board. They, although offering no tangible return, would express a surprised gratification and a vote of cordial appreciation for his artistic energies exerted on their behalf. A luncheon-party would follow, which broke up with handshakes and good and seasonable wishes.

But on this particular year Eliphalet felt, no sooner he had entered the room, that there was a strange atmosphere. Each of the four gentlemen showed embarrassment and disinclination to meet his eye. The cigars were presented and accepted, which appeared to heighten the general unease. Then the chairman rose and called upon Dr. Wardluke to address the meeting, as his own powers of speech were affected by a recent cold.

So the doctor, after some rustling of papers and a deal of pulling at his waistcoat, came to his feet and spoke.

It was, he said, a great pleasure to them all to observe that Mr. Cardomay had been spared to attend another of these pleasant annual meetings, and he was sure that none of them contemplated the fact that this was to be the last without sensations of regret. Their association had been more than pleasant —it had been cordial; but sooner or later the best of things came to an end.

"Mr. Cardomay has been a loyal colleague to us, Gentlemen, and I venture to say we have been as loyal to him. But what was it that Æsop said about the bow?" No one appeared to know. "Well, I can't recall the exact words, but they go to prove that you must not strain anything beyond its limit. It makes us very happy to reflect that, mainly through our support, Mr. Cardomay must now be in a comfortable financial position, and it will be pleasant to think of him spending his autumn years in some quiet little nook, standing back from the road." He resumed his seat to an encouraging salvo of "Hear, hear!"

Then Eliphalet Cardomay rose, and he looked a little white and drawn.

"I take it," he said, "by all this preamble, you wish me well, and for that I express my thanks. I was not aware you intended to break up our partnership, and perhaps it would have been more business-like and kinder to have informed me beforehand. However, that may pass. Doubtless, from your point of view, Gentlemen, I am an old pair of shoes to be thrown aside as outworn, but I would remind you that this"—and he pointed with his stick to a play-bill of "The Night Cry" hanging on a wall—"this is the first time they have let in the water. I accept my dismissal, Gentlemen, without demur, but reserve to myself the right to choose the hour of my retirement to that ivy-clad nook Dr. Wardluke painted with such eloquent impertinence in his speech. I would further recommend you to keep an eye on the theatrical columns of your newspapers, where you may see that these old shoes are still capable of covering a good many miles of the road. Good day, Gentlemen, and good-bye." He swung his hat to his head like a cavalier, and walked proudly from the room.

He booked a ticket to New Brighton, where, at the conclusion of her first film engagement, Mornice had joined him. It had always lived in Eliphalet's brain that when he retired it would be to dwell within sight of the sea in that most delightful of resorts. The circumstances of staying there at the hour of his dismissal struck him as coldly prophetic.

"But we haven't finished yet," he said, as the train bore him westward. "We'll show 'em there's stuff in the Old Card still!" No actor properly realises he has outstayed his welcome until his backers forsake him, and even Eliphalet was not convinced.

There was enthusiasm in his voice and fire in his eye. But the train had not travelled many miles before the enthusiasm died and a queer gnawing doubt assailed him. Was it possible, after all, these gentlemen were right? Would it not, perhaps, be better to slip away from the haste and turmoil of active life and seek out that little villa of his own? After all, he had fought nobly and successfully, and surely the right to repose had been well earned?

There was standing to his credit at the bank enough, and more than enough, to assure a comfortable competence to the end of his days. Perhaps, too, he was a little tired. He had run without stopping for so many, many years. Then he thought of his boasts to the syndicate.

"We'll challenge 'em, old boy, and we must make good!"

There was Mornice, too, to be considered. He had promised her a big chance, and it was up to him to meet the bill.

Ronald Knight had come over to spend the day with Mornice (a not infrequent occurrence), and they rose, apparently from the same chair, as he entered the room. Maybe they were a shade embarrassed, for neither one nor the other asked how the meeting had gone, but, instead, gave themselves over to expressions of almost unnatural delight at his return. Consequently, tea passed without the subject being mentioned.

Glancing from one to the other, Eliphalet was conscious of an air of supreme excitement shared between them.

"Well," he asked, "has the Mornice film been—what is the word?—released yet?"

Ronald Knight shook his head.

"N-no, not yet. Matter of fact, we've had rather bad luck—very bad. No one seems to care for the story." Eliphalet smiled rather cynically, and the young man hastened to add: "But Morny has made an enormous success. Terrific! We had a private projection."

"A what?"

“A private show.”

“Ah, yes! Well?”

“With big-wigs from the best firms, and they are absolutely unanimous that she’s *it*.”

Mornice tried not to look too proud, but the artifice was transparent. Eliphalet frowned a little.

“I am glad,” he said. “She is certainly very capable—of better things.”

“Yes; I know you hate movies,” said Mornice.

He nodded.

Ronald started afresh.

“A success like that, even at a private proj-show, means a great deal, and ____”

“And,” Eliphalet cut in, “you are now going to tell me she has had some flattering offers and ask me to let her accept them, knowing very well that the last time I allowed her to do so was on the undertaking that she returned to the legitimate at the end of the engagement.”

Ronald’s reply was unexpected.

“That’s just what I—what she—what I’m sure we all feel she ought to do.”

“I want to, awfully,” exclaimed Mornice; “in something—— Oh, you go on, Ronny.”

“It is only that people—people in the show believe there is such big stuff in her that makes me suggest it.” He hesitated.

Eliphalet leaned back in his chair and smiled indulgently to help him along.

“We all know she is a young Modjeska—a little Bernhardt—eh, Mornice?”

“You needn’t be saucy, Dads. After all, he’s only repeating what they think. I don’t know whether I am great.”

(Very few actors and actresses are absolutely certain on this point, but most of them have a comfortable conviction, even though they may not express it.)

Eliphalet had seen little heads swell large too often to be surprised. He nodded to Ronald Knight to proceed.

“Everybody who saw her in that film believed she’d make a fortune on the legitimate stage.”

The potential gold-mine, and certainly her mass of hair was in itself a large enough nugget, was licking jam from a sticky finger like a child at a school-treat.

"All right, Ron," she said. "Go on now about the play."

Thus adjured, Ronald drew breath for fresh adventures.

"D'you remember, sir, a few years ago buying a play?-'A Man's Way' it was called. You never put it on."

"I remember—yes. A fine, vigorous piece of work. I made some alterations to the text. But somehow it wasn't satisfactory. But why?"

"It was written by a cousin of mine. I happened to mention your name, and he showed it to me. By Jove, it's magnificent! Now, as it was in the original form, that play, with Morny as the wife——"

"Oh, come! A very, very difficult part, my dear boy."

"You haven't seen her on the film."

"H'm! Well, I must look it up."

"It's here," said Mornice. "I rummaged it out of your basket." She produced the MS. from beneath a sofa cushion.

Eliphalet turned over a few pages, stopping here and there. A startling modernity still seemed to spring from every line.

"There is no doubt of its worth," he mused; "but so very modern!"

"Yes, but, Dads, isn't that just what it should be? And it is such a wonderful part."

"I doubt if it would suit me."

"The wife's, I mean."

"I believe," said Ronald, "people are getting tired of old-fashioned plays."

"I wonder," said Eliphalet. "I wonder if that is why——" He stopped, frowned, and struck the table a blow.

"What is it, Dads?"

"Everyone wants to alter the tide of my life to-day." He rose and started to pace excitedly up and down the room. "Why is it? You want me to break new ground, plough fresh pastures; and they, they say I am done with—finished!"

"Who said that?"

"My syndicate. They spoke of a rustic cottage, standing back from the road, in which to spend the autumn of my life."

"How dared they! What did you answer?"

"I told them to read the theatrical news—that was all."

"Bravo!" applauded Ronald, with great sincerity, adding: "Then, by Jove! if you did this play, starring yourself and Morny, wouldn't it be a terrific smack in the eye for them!"

"I am nearly seventy," replied Eliphalet, "and I suppose it is wrong and foolish at such an age, but I would like to show 'em something, I would!"

"Why don't you?" said Ronald and Mornice, in one voice.

When, some three days later, Eliphalet sought Freddie Manning, wisest and most energetic of stage-managers, and told him what had happened and what he intended to do, Freddie spoke up boldly.

"Don't you, Guv'nor!"

"I shall, Manning. It's a final cast, and I mean to go out with a flourish. We shall advertise it as a farewell tour. New scenery—posters—everything."

"And who's backing you?"

"I am."

Freddie cast his eyes above, but held his peace.

"I shall star Mornice in equivalent type to my own."

"Don't you," repeated Manning. "If she's a wash-out, the come-back will be twice as strong."

"I take the risk. I am going to produce 'A Man's Way' in the original form, and in every respect to rival a West-End production. I shall have wooden doors, and the scenery will be three-ply instead of canvas."

"And I suppose you'll have a West-End cast as well?"

Eliphalet shook his head.

"I had thought of it," he confessed, "but I cannot go back on the Old Crowd. There will be only one newcomer besides Mornice, and that will be Mr. Ronald Knight. For the rest, the Old Cardomay Company will see Old Cardomay out. As regards booking, I shall accept the best No. 1 towns only, and shall book a three months' tour; not at the drama houses, but at the principal theatres in every case."

Freddie Manning tilted his bowler hat to the extreme limit of possible angles.

"Guv'nor," he said, "God alone remembers how long we've been together. I was a super-boy in the crowd when you were playing juveniles; and boy, man and veteran, we've fought side by side in nearly every shack with footlights from Land's End to John o'—what's-'is-name. You've stuck

by me fine, and I'll stick by you to the end and past it. I've never openly countered a scheme of yours, though I may have pulled a few strings on the quiet; but this time I do, and as man to man, I put it down that you cut it out—right out. If the advice ain't wanted, say so and I'll buckle on to the new job for all I'm worth; but those are my feelings, Guv'nor, and I had to speak 'em."

"I know, Manning, I quite understand. Likely enough you are right, and this is a great folly. But I want to do it—I want to make one final splash."

"Good enough," said Freddie. "I'll get busy straight away."

When Freddie Manning got busy, busy he undoubtedly was. Eliphalet told him to go ahead with the scene folk, the costumers, the advertising experts, and two thousand pounds.

As a general rule, ladies and gentlemen provide their own modern clothes for provincial tours, but in this case, in the matter of ladies, Eliphalet departed from precedent and undertook the responsibility of providing them. To the gentlemen he addressed the following words:

"I want this production to be memorable, and to that end everyone who appears in it must appear under circumstances most agreeable to the eye. In our profession it is not always possible to maintain one's wardrobe at a state of perfection, and we are over-liable, perhaps, to run our suitings beyond the limits of appearance and durability. To encourage you all, then, to do justice to me and the play, I propose to pay an additional twenty-five per cent on your ordinary salaries. One more word, Gentlemen, and I have done. We are all tradesmen, with the trade at our finger-tips. Let us show that we, of the provincial theatres, can give, in appearance, intelligence and art, as good (if not better) measure as our brothers in the capital."

Then the rehearsal began.

At the first reading Eliphalet was delighted. The play seemed to act itself. He experienced an odd sensation that there was little or nothing for the producer to do—that it rested with the company to commit to memory their lines and repeat them from appropriate positions upon the stage. He had not realised that the true human modern play is almost automatic, and that its crises arise from the general team-work of the company, and not by individual effects.

"If it goes so well while they are holding their books, what will it be when I have shaped it up?" he thought.

In the midst of these agreeable reflections he failed to observe a very obvious change had taken place in Mornice. Since persuading him to do this play and place her among the stars, she underwent a complete

metamorphosis of manner. She adopted the worst characteristics of a leading lady. She gave the company good-morning each day with an air of great condescension. She trespassed into that forbidden Tom Tiddler's Ground near the centre of the footlights reserved for producers and the managerial branch. She devoted less attention to her part than to criticisms of other people's renderings. She would follow members of the company to dark parts of the stage and give advices that were neither desired nor of the smallest value.

You who read these pages, do not be too severe in your judgments upon her. In a scarcely-formed mind certain mental conditions inevitably result from success or prominence upon the stage too soon. A name seen by its owner for the first time on the hoardings in three-inch block type acts as an intoxicant. Mercifully, the condition is transitory, and you will find that your really successful actor or actress is, as a rule, the jolliest and least sidey of individuals.

It was her idea, supported by Ronald Knight, that the women's costumes should come from Redfern's—it was she who had seen the magic three-ply scenery at Wyndham's, that does not vibrate when Mr. du Maurier goes forth and closes the door crisply behind him.

To do the young people justice, they never for an instant thought they were doing otherwise than serving Eliphalet an excellent turn by their exuberant suggestions.

"He's a darling, Ronnie," Mornice would say, most days; "but he is old-fashioned, and if we are to make the play go, we must modernise him."

But window-boxes on the pyramids will not make them resemble art villas at Letchworth, and this fact they learnt too late to be of use.

Naturally, these many preoccupations kept Mornice so busy that the study of her part was almost entirely side-tracked, but it never occurred to her to entertain misgivings on that account.

About this time a slight staleness was discernible in the progress of the play. Eliphalet could not tell whence it arose or how to combat it, but vaguely he wished for the services of some virile brain other than his own to preside at rehearsals. Mr. Raymond Wakefield, for instance, who had tied him up in such painful knots on the occasion of his appearance in London. He would have known in an instant what was required.

There were legions of tiny but vital subtleties that cried out for definition, and in all Eliphalet's bag of tricks there was no machinery for bringing them into focus. In every scene they bubbled up through the lines, like vortices in quicksand. A thousand fine points of psychology that needed

assembling, refining and giving prominence. Eliphalet was bewildered by their numbers; he did not know where or how to start work upon them, and he sat by the footlights, brows contracted, finger-tips together, in silent dissatisfaction with himself and the play. On the seventh day of rehearsals he rose distractedly, and exclaimed:

"We are not getting on, ladies and gentlemen. I am sure we are all doing our best, but we are not getting any forrader."

Then old Kitterson spoke.

"I know it, Guv'nor; but it's devilish hard. How are we going to get big effects out of these lines? I'm not saying anything against 'em, mind."

"It's so natural, Guv'nor," complained Mellish, another old-timer.

Miss Fullar shook her head wisely. "That's it; too natural."

"It is not for big effects we must try," said Eliphalet, "but for the little ones. The big effects in this play arise from the little. Therefore we must try to create a standard excellence."

It was, perhaps, the nearest approach toward expressing the essentials of a modern production he ever made.

"Yes, but how are we to do it?" old Kitterson questioned.

"Oh, we shall see," said Eliphalet, rather feebly, and subsided into his chair again.

At supper that night he was rather dejected.

"Cheer up, Dads," said Mornice. "After all, you and I have most of the work to do, and we shall make things go."

He answered her rather seriously.

"I can see what to do with you," he said, "for you are far astray from the part. It is the others who perplex me."

Mornice was taken back.

"I know I am not up to the mark yet," she replied, "but I'll let myself go to-morrow." Then, quite satisfied that her own case was established, she turned to vital matters. "Pummy! you'll have to get your hair cut, you know. You can't possibly play a smart doctor, and keep it long."

"I have realised it, my child." He looked at her with a queer smile, and said, "Are you Delilah, I wonder?"

It is to be regretted that Mornice had little knowledge of the Old Testament. She asked for particulars.

"A lady who cut off Samson's hair. Shorn of his locks, his power departed." Then his mind came from east to west with a vengeance. "I am

glad I took you from the Cinema before it was too late."

"Too late?"

"H'm. You are cinema-acting very alarmingly in 'A Man's Way.' Coding, my dear, coding; I will show you to-morrow."

On the morrow he was ready for her in earnest, and realising this, Mornice flung herself into the part with startling energy. He did not allow her to go far before holding up his hand.

"My dear," he said, "try to remember you are playing the part of a married woman who is at variance with her elderly husband. Do not therefore swing an imaginary sun-bonnet, or smile and blink your eyes at the audience, as though each one was a potential lover. You have three acts in which to gain their affections—not thirty feet of film."

"Oh, you are horrid," said she.

"Not at all. Believe me, this—this bright stuff is entirely misplaced."

So she came on again, and this time resembled a woman torn by conscience after rifling a church of its plate.

"And now you go to the opposite extreme—you will have no emotions left for the big moment in the last act, if the opening of a door causes you so much distress."

When the ordeal was over, Mornice was a trifle piqued.

"I don't think he ought to have gone for me like that before the company, Ron—do you?"

But Ronald Knight was an honest lad, and answered:

"After all, there was sound stuff in what he said."

A reply which put him in prompt disfavour for a period of twenty-six hours, at the end of which time they met, by a kind of mutual magnetism, and kissed each other with enthusiasm in the dressing-room corridor.

"You are sorry for what you said?"

"I am sorry it offended you, but I think it is up to us to do what the old chap wants. After all, he's taking a big risk."

Ronald Knight was beginning to feel some uneasiness about the wheels he had set in motion. Having some knowledge of what a well-put-on production costs, he wondered if Eliphalet's resources were up to the strain.

To do them justice, the company worked like Trojans. It is true, some of their energies were misplaced, but they were all well-intentioned. Miss Fullar, for instance, as the duchess, gave the impression that the duke had married far beneath his social station. This impression was partially

obliterated when the duke himself appeared in the second act, and gave place to doubts as to how the lady could ever have accepted his addresses. Mellish played a man-about-town, but had the misfortune to choose the wrong town, and never once came within the four-mile radius.

Old Kitterson's butler was sound—he had specialised in this line for many years—but the part caused him great disappointment, since there was nothing to do or say that was not strictly in the way of domestic service. Not once in any act did he have the opportunity to exclaim, "God! it's Master Harry!" followed by a stumble forward, a hand-grip and a sobbing "Sir—sir!" He asked Eliphalet whether this popular effect could not have been introduced into the text, but Eliphalet turned a kindly but deaf ear to the appeal.

Ronald Knight was one of the bright features, and took his place becomingly in the general scheme of things.

One regrets to record that Mornice June was neither "great" nor "it." She divided her rôle into small crumbs of individual effect. It was as though she had installed a mental switchboard, labelled with such tickets as Anger—Remorse—Sarcasm—Gaiety—Malice—(but never aforethought).

Eliphalet Cardomay, although the part was wholly unsuited to his personality, gave the best and most illuminating performance of his whole career. It was totally unlike his usual traditional method, and precisely like it should have been. Quite naturally he seemed to know what to do and how to do it with the least possible effort. It was a queer caprice of fate that this simple method that he had viewed with a kind of disrespectful sour-grapes awe should suddenly have been made clear to him.

He played the part, so to speak, with his hands in his pockets, and marvellous discoveries came his way. For instance, he discovered that when a man is saying to his wife, "You can go—you can get out," he does not of necessity take a position in the centre of the stage and throw a fine gesture toward the door, but is more likely to scratch his own ear or perform some other minor diversion. That this mantle of naturalness should have descended upon him made him all the more sensitive to the shortcomings of the cast. It was cruel he should have learnt the value of simplicity too late to be able to teach it to others; for that was the bitter truth.

He would lie awake at night, thinking, and his thoughts were far from peaceful. Supposing, after this supreme effort, the play failed? It would mean the loss of everything to him. His capital, his nerve, and his hopes for Mornice would perish at a single blow. "Let it succeed," he implored, and the words were a prayer. "I want the little girl to have her chance."

They were not healthy thoughts, and they snatched at him all hours of the day and night. In the night especially they would prod him into wakefulness. He would see pictures of the grey, back-street under-world, where the unwanted actors go. They danced before his eyes like green spots with scarlet centres.

The strain told, after a while, and he came to rehearsals haggard-eyed and irritable.

There is nothing like irritability for getting the worst out of a company—not so much because they resent it as because it makes them nervy and distracts their thoughts.

On the day he had his hair cut he felt that his strength had departed indeed.

He had arranged that there would be dress-rehearsals for a week, that the company might become accustomed to their clothes. The first of these depressed him as nothing had ever done before. The women's gowns had cost nearly two hundred and fifty pounds, and, beautiful as they were, they looked woefully out of place on the backs of the Old Cardomay Company. Mellish, who had done his best to achieve the outward appearance of a man-about-town, cut a pathetic figure, despite the variety of his checks. He gave the effect of being arrayed in his Sunday suit, and wore a buttonhole of daffodils in the second act. Eliphalet was conscious of something amiss with most of them, but could not lay his finger on the point of offence. On the whole, the extravagances of wardrobe seemed to cause their wearers added uneasiness, and a more ungainly performance he had never beheld.

"What do you think, Manning?" he asked, tentatively, when the curtain fell on the last act.

"Fine," was the stony rejoinder.

"That's a lie," said Eliphalet very softly.

"You're right, Guv'nor; it is."

"And the truth?"

"They're all adrift—'cept you. They'll drown you between 'em."

Eliphalet seized him savagely by the arm, and cried:

"We have four days more, Manning. We can't afford to leave it like this. I shall get a producer from London—at any price."

He rushed to the nearest Post Office and wired to Raymond Wakefield, begging him to name his terms to attend a rehearsal of 'A Man's Way.' "If not for terms, then come in pity," he ended.

Wakefield wired to say he would arrive next morning by eleven-thirty.

Eliphalet called a full-dress rehearsal, with lights, for two o'clock, and met Wakefield at the station.

Even though several years had passed since their last meeting, Eliphalet was struck with the same extraordinary appearance of youthfulness borne by the eminent producer.

"I've come for love, Mr. Cardomay, and because your wire breathed tragedy. What's the sorrow?"

"Second childhood," said Eliphalet pathetically.

"Producing 'A Man's Way,' aren't you? Must say it surprised me a bit. Plucky of you. Good play. Came to us once."

"You know it, then?"

"Yes; thought of putting it up."

"That's splendid news," said Eliphalet, with a sudden revival of confidence.

"How's it shaped?"

"You'll see," said Eliphalet; then, with a wail in his voice, "It has gone beyond my powers, Mr. Wakefield, and I feel so old."

"We all do before a new production," came the cheerful reply.

"I don't want anyone to know who is in front," Eliphalet told Manning, "but tell the company I look to them to do their utmost."

And so the curtain rose and fell on the three acts of "A Man's Way," and when all was over Raymond Wakefield made his way round to Eliphalet's dressing-room and walked in, whistling cheerfully.

"Well?" queried Eliphalet nervously.

"You old marvel," said Raymond. "How d'you come to do it?"

"Do what?"

"Act like that?"

Eliphalet flushed like a schoolboy praised for his bowling.

"It is all right, then?"

"*You're* all right. You've forgotten all you learnt in a theatre, and are playing what you've learnt in life. If you were twenty, or even ten, years younger——"

"Yes, I'm too old."

" 'Course you are—and too old for this part. But it's a work. You'll get no gratitude, though, on that account. I'll tell you what the public and the

papers'll say. They'll say you are not serving them with the goods they're accustomed to receive, and you'll get slanged for default as sure as there's an agent in Charing Cross Road."

"What about the others?"

Raymond Wakefield's mouth went down at the corners like a child about to cry.

"Won't do! You've committed the unforgivable sin of standing by your pals—oh, I know you have—and art and philanthropy don't mix and never will. My motto is to sack everyone at the end of a run, and then look round afresh. In consequence, I suppose I'm pretty well hated by every actor on the London stage, and the best-beloved of the public."

"And Miss Mornice June—the wife?" Eliphalet put the question tentatively.

"Naughty, very naughty indeed. D'you know what I'd do with her?"

"She's my adopted daughter," said Eliphalet, to be on the safe side.

"I'd put her in the Cinema business, and live luxuriously on a ten per cent. commission of the salary she earned."

"Strange you should say that. I gave her this part to keep her away from the Cinema."

"Then it wasn't fair to the theatre public—or the Cinema public either."

"Do you consider our chances of success are remote?"

Raymond dropped his cigarette to the floor, and twisted it out with the heel of his boot.

"God, He knows! It's all a lottery. You're of the provinces—you should be able to say."

"But I ask you."

"Well, if I had to stake my last farthing in a theatrical venture, it would not be in this one."

"Thanks," said Eliphalet. "Mine is."

"Take no notice," Raymond hastened to explain. "It was only for something to say. Well, I must be going."

"You—you won't stop a day or two and rehearse us a little?"

He shook his head.

"I value the compliment, but I'm too conceited to reveal my weakness."

"Weakness?"

“Yes, for I shouldn’t be able to help ’em. I’ll let you into a secret. People imagine I can teach anyone to act. I can’t. All I can do is to know who would be right in certain parts. Then I engage ’em, and their combined elements give forth a chemical compound known as a Brilliant Production. That’s the whole secret. Tell that fellow—Mellish, isn’t it?—not to wear daffodils in his buttonhole, and to cut his moustache off if he can’t let it alone—and tell the duchess to let her train take care of itself when she’s in a drawing-room. God bless you, Mr. Cardomay, and good luck.”

He shook hands warmly, and hurried away.

“Poor old devil!” he muttered, as the stage-door swung to behind him. One might have imagined that there was an added moisture in his eyes if the idea were not so absurd. A specialist has no feelings.

About a week later, Doctor Wardluke met Mr. Wilfred Wilfur in the street, and the latter gentleman was in a state of unparalleled excitement. In his hand he flourished a copy of the *Bradford Mercury*, and he cried:

“Seen the news? Old Cardomay has come an almighty cropper with that production of his—knew he would—knew he would!”

And the two late members of the Cardomay Syndicate congratulated themselves most cordially on the happy insight that led them to “get out of it in time.”

The papers were not kind—they were not even discerning. As Raymond Wakefield foretold, they were mortally offended with Eliphalet for departing from his usual routine and cutting off his hair. Because they were accustomed to see this actor in a “robuster class of work,” they totally ignored the excellent quality of his acting. “There are plenty of companies who can provide us with the modern problem play, without Mr. Cardomay doing so. We look to him to uphold the good old traditions of the drama, and instead——” etc.

The rest of the cast were very properly chewed up, and questions were put as to what reasons existed for advertising a certain unknown and very amateurish young lady as a star.

The receipts for the first week were negligible, and the second showed a substantial margin on the wrong side.

“We have ten more bookings, and I must play them out,” said Eliphalet desperately.

“What are the fines in default of appearance?” suggested Manning.

But Eliphalet shook his head. “It wouldn’t be fair,” he said. “There’s the company to consider. I promised them three months.”

“And d’you think there’s a single damned one of ’em who’d hold you to that?” came the fierce rejoinder.

“Let us lose like gentlemen,” said Eliphalet.

And his savings dripped from him like the sweats of fear.

He was very silent at home those days, and week by week went by without improvement. He would sit with his hands listlessly down-hanging, and his eyes fixed in a vacant, dreamy stare.

Mornice did her best to brighten things up, but she did not understand very well the workings of his mind. Her belief in her own greatness, too, was slow to abate, and it was not until a notice appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* (most delightfully outspoken of organs) that illumination came, and she realised her own contribution to the tragedy. They gave the play one of its few good notices, but of her they spoke with a frankness that allowed of no misunderstanding.

Being by nature a good-hearted and dear little girl, she put her arms about one of the red fire-pails on a dark landing and wept with such pitiful vibrations that the water spilled over and mingled with her tears. Here Ronald Knight found her, and transposed her head to his shoulder.

“Everyone gets bad notices sooner or later,” he told her. “But listen, Morny, here’s something to cheer you up. My father has had an offer to produce for Raphaeli’s Film Company in America, and he wants you to come out and play *ingénues*, with a year’s guarantee.”

“D-does he?”

“Yes, and I should be going too. It’s in ten days’ time he’s sailing, just after we close here. There! You’re happy now, aren’t you?”

“N-no,” she sobbed, kissing him to cheer herself up a bit. “I’m miserable —about him.”

“So am I,” said Ronald. “Horribly.”

“He wouldn’t have done it except for me.”

“Don’t forget that I asked him.”

“But I made you, Ronny. What’s going to happen, supposing he’s lost everything. D’you know, I’m beastly frightened.”

“Let us go and talk to him, Morny.”

They went. He was sitting in his dressing-room, idly twisting a fragment of paper that had shown the night’s returns. He looked very old.

“Well?” he said, lifelessly, as they came in.

Then Mornice broke out with:

“Oh, we’re so frightfully sorry—we want to tell how frightfully sorry we are.”

He stretched out a hand, and gathered hers into it.

“Why, my dear,” he said, “you mustn’t take a bad notice to heart.”

“It isn’t that—I know now I ought never to have played the part—but it was my beastly conceit that made you do the play.”

“And I ought to be kicked for pushing it forward,” said Ronald.

“I’ve watched you when you thought you were alone, and seen how dreadfully sad and broken you looked, and I know it’s because I’ve made you lose all your money—isn’t it?”

A something eloquently full of tragedy and sorrow in her voice stung Eliphalet to a sudden need to lie.

“God bless my soul!” he exclaimed. “Whatever put such a fancy into your silly little head?”

“Because it’s true.”

“My dear, dear, dear little girl, you are talking nonsense. I have been sad, I confess it; but my sorrow was for you—I feared you had suffered a great disappointment.”

“D’you mean that?”

“Surely.”

“And you’ll be all right after this?”

He laughed lightly.

“I shouldn’t worry about that.”

“But I do—horribly.”

He disposed himself in a position of some importance.

“Mornice,” he said, “I have figured now in nearly forty productions, most of them successful. Think what that means. Am I to be crippled by a single false move? The idea is absurd. Where is your arithmetic, my dear? Ask young Ronald here, and he’ll show you the sum on paper. Maybe I shall have to cut things a trifle finer in consequence of this, but what of that? No, no, no—my sorrow was all for you, and since yours has ceased to be, why, then, our sorrow is bankrupt, and we are all glad again.”

“You’ve shifted a weight from my mind,” said Ronald, with an outward breath.

And Mornice hugged him ecstatically.

“ ’T’any rate, I’m not going to be a drag on you any more,” she said, and told the tale of the American offer.

“Yes,” said Eliphalet, “I think you ought to accept. It’s a selfish confession, my dear, and I want you to believe I would have done my best for you, but I haven’t the energy for much more work. Years tell, and I doubt if I could stand the strain of another big venture. I mean to do myself well—luxuriously—in that little cottage with the ivy-clad porch that stands back from the road. You’d have found it dull there, living with an old man.”

“I’d have loved it—with you.”

“Not a bit of it. No, you’d be kicking the glass to flinders in a week. I should try a young man instead of an old ’un. I should try him.” He tilted his head toward Ronald Knight.

“I wish to God she would, sir,” said Ronald devoutly.

“I don’t mind,” said Mornice.

“Then do,” said Eliphalet; “and I shall be left without a care in the world, to enjoy an affluent old age.”

“You mean that, Dads?”

“ ’Course I do. But don’t go talking about it in the company, or everyone will be trying to borrow.”

So they went out, laughing, who had entered in tears.

“Manning,” said Eliphalet, when the stage-manager, according to his custom, looked in for final instructions, “what d’you think we could realise on the scenery and costumes?”

“ ’Bout four hundred. Laon’s should be good for that.”

“H’m! not bad. Tell ’em we’ll sell. Good night, Manning.”

“G’night, Guv’nor.”

He turned over the pages of his bank-book, and examined the balance. “Ought just to see me through,” he muttered; “and then—four hundred pounds!”

God sends happy thoughts when most they are needed, and a vision arose of two young people laughing happily as they passed from the room.

“We pulled off that scene, old boy,” he said. “Fairly brought the house down.”

CHAPTER XII
THE FINAL CURTAIN

A keen eye would have failed to detect Eliphalet Cardomay's real feelings during the last week of his last tour. Outwardly he presented the appearance of a man at ease with his conscience and at peace with the world.

A lucky public holiday added a couple of really good houses to the week's receipts, and the thirty sovereigns that arose therefrom he presented to Mornice as a wedding gift.

With many thoughtful considerations he helped her purchase a trousseau and fixed up details with Ronald's father. These two elderly gentlemen discussed marriage and contracts with the cordial gravity such important matters demand.

The entire company was at the wedding, and very smart indeed was the appearance they presented. Eliphalet had given the ladies the Redfern gowns and added permission for them to be worn at the church. He himself was most spruce, a white gardenia in his buttonhole and his silk hat (it had been treated with stout the night before to flatten the nap) reflected the sunshine like a mirror.

He gave away the bride with a nobility that kings might have envied, and at the reception which followed, the little speech he made was full of the happiest moments. He actually allowed a waiter to pour him out a glass of champagne, but although the glass was certainly emptied, there was a strong rumour running that an aspidistra close at hand received the wine.

The wedding took place the day before the final performance, and the happy pair departed in a shower of confetti and a great draught from waved handkerchiefs, to reappear on the two succeeding nights at the theatre.

"I want to say good-bye to you and Ronald to-morrow over a little dinner," Eliphalet whispered to the bride. "It will be easier than in the theatre. It is going to be rather hard to lose you altogether."

She and Ronald were sailing for America, and were going straight to Liverpool after the curtain had fallen.

Eliphalet made great and tender preparations for that parting feast, and laid the table lovingly with his own hands. Then at six o'clock he lit the

fairy candles that twinkled among the fruit and smilax, and waited. And Mornice arrived, dressed in her prettiest trousseau frock—all by herself.

"Where is Ronald?" he asked.

"I told him to stop at home, Pummy. I sort of guessed you want me by my lone."

How many of these exquisitely-prepared little feasts are left untasted? We are in love—or have to say farewell—and we centre all our beforehand time setting out rare flowers, fair dishes and delicate appointments, to show how very greatly we care. And perhaps someone says, "How lovely of you to do all this to me," or maybe breaks a white rose from its stem to keep in memory.

Then a hand stretches across the table, and another's takes it, and the little dishes are all neglected and the fairy candles burn low. After the long, long silence and unspoken words of love or parting, it all breaks up into a commonplace putting on of coats, whistling of cabs, or catching of trains.

Arm-in-arm and hugging very close together, they walked to the theatre, and as the illuminated face of the Town Hall clock proved beyond question they were late, there was nothing for it but to run the last hundred yards.

Ronald Knight was at the stage-door and was cheered to see them arrive breathless and laughing.

Then Eliphalet stooped and planted a hurried kiss on Mornice's cheek.

"God bless you, my boy," he said almost fiercely to Ronald, and passed through the swing-door toward his dressing-room.

He had meant to make a speech on the day he went out of management, and the company, knowing this, grouped themselves on the stage when the curtain fell on the last act. Then, quite naturally, he knew it could not be done. The things about which one really feels have so small a part in speeches. So, when he found himself confronted by the most sympathetic audience before which an actor ever appeared, he learnt that all his art, technique and experience availed nothing. Those dear, honest, familiar faces dimmed as he looked toward them into a grey wet mist. Somewhere in his throat a new pulse started to throb—and throbbed burningly.

Eliphalet Cardomay shook his head like a child who is lost.

"I—I can't," he said. Then, with a feeble, impotent gesture of farewell, he turned away.

"Three cheers for him," gasped Freddie Manning, his face scarlet with emotion.

And Eliphalet Cardomay bolted from the theatre.

During the performance he had managed to say a few words, individually, to those old corner-stones of his dramatic edifice who, for years and years, had worked the provincial theatres under his managership. That had been hard enough, God knows. Old Kitterson made no bones about it, and frankly howled when Eliphalet gripped him by the hand.

Scarcely less reserved was Freddie Manning—the least emotional of creatures.

"I'm hating it, Guv'nor," he said.

He kissed all the ladies of the company and had a kind word for each, but Mornice he steadfastly avoided, for there was a limit to his powers of endurance, and he wished to escape without any show of weakness.

The last person he spoke to was his dresser.

"I won't sleep at night, sir, for worrying about you and your things. You won't never be able to look after yourself proper."

"Nonsense," said Eliphalet. "I shall miss you, of course, but it will come easier after a while. You—you've been more than attentive, Potter, and just a little parting gift——" He pressed a five-pound note into the dresser's hand—a note that Potter secretly replaced in his master's pocket while helping him, for the last time, into the big fur overcoat.

Eliphalet Cardomay's great farewell tour, with seventy-five pounds a week spent on advertisement, was over and done with, and out of the wreckage he salved four hundred pounds.

He did not raise a wail over the loss—he was too game; but in his inner self was a tiny cry of disappointment.

He had always cherished the belief that when he retired it would be to go to the first real home he had ever known.

The home, as he pictured it, was a little detached villa at New Brighton. It would face the sea and there would be tamarisk bushes, forming a guard of honour, from the garden gate to the front door. He had worked out how each room would look—just what furniture and pictures there would be—as though it were a scene in a play. Every detail was cut and dried and ordered in his mind. This was to be his compensation for the sacrifice of his profession. And now——!

Four hundred pounds and his lonely self were all that remained.

For about six weeks Eliphalet Cardomay drifted aimlessly. He had nowhere to go and nothing to do. Late hours having been the habit of his lifetime, it was impossible to go early to bed, and the empty evenings hung like lead upon his hands.

A letter or two came from America, forwarded from his old lodging, and these were the only bright spots on a desolate landscape.

Sunday was a day that bothered him dreadfully. Every Sunday for forty years he had been accustomed to the rush of packing—of cabs—porters and long train-journeys. To sit idle in his rooms and read the *Referee*, which in the past had often seemed a very desirable thing to do, proved in practice a very trying ordeal. He fretted all the morning with a sense of important duties neglected, and usually finished up by walking to the nearest railway station to watch the theatrical trains pull out. Then he would return and settle down, with a sigh, to an afternoon of irksome inactivity.

He had never been a man with a wide circle of friends, and the few acquaintances he met mostly took their pleasures by leaning across the bar or hiving round the cheese at a Bodega—a practice which he showed no disposition to emulate. In consequence he was thrown entirely on his own resources, and, as a result, there set in a kind of incipient melancholy. He began to speculate how long four hundred pounds would last, at an expenditure of thirty shillings a week.

"And three years of this sort of thing is about as much as we could stand, old boy," he said, when he looked at the result of the calculation.

So he continued to drift in a melancholy isolation, until one day, upon a bench in Roundhay Park, he espied a familiar figure.

It was a man—or, more truthfully, what was left of a man—poor, shivering, down-and-out. But Eliphalet needed no second glance to assure him that here was Sefton Bulmore—old Sefton, who had done him a good turn—old Sefton, squeezed from the boards to make room for younger blood and fresher funniosities.

"Sefton!" said Eliphalet, stretching out his hand.

A pair of watery eyes were raised jerkily and scanned his features. Then the old fellow came to his feet with astonishing vigour. Lifting his right hand high in the air, he brought it down whack into the extended palm, covering it instantly with an embracing grasp from his left. It was an old stage formula, executed with technical perfection. (Try it yourself; you will find it is none too easy to do.)

"The Old Card. By God, it's the Old Card!"

There was a world of enthusiasm in the tone—then suddenly his manner changed to an extremity of confidence.

"This is uncommonly fortunate. To tell you the truth, old son, I've been a bit unlucky lately. But the Profession sticks together, eh? For old sake's

sake—and if—if you can't lend me ten bob, five 'ud do!"

"Sit down—let's talk," said Eliphalet.

So they sat together on the park bench and talked, and a hundred old stage memories and old stage personalities were dug out from the unforgotten past.

"Aha! ha! fine fellows—fine fellows, all of 'em. 'Tisn't what it was in our young days. The Profession's going to the dogs, Cardomay, old son, going to the dogs fast."

"Fate's been unkind to you?" queried Eliphalet.

"Unkind! Ha! I can remember turning up my nose at forty pounds a week—and look at me now!" He pulled out two empty trouser pockets and turned the palms of his hands up.

Eliphalet considered for a moment.

"Bulmore," he said, "I have a bit—not much, but a bit, and, old man, I'm sick for someone to talk to. I worked out that, taking things easy, I've enough to last about three years—alone. Well, one-and-a-half in company would please me better. Will you share?"

"Mean it?"

"Here's my hand."

"By God, the Old Card's a trump!" cried Bulmore, taking it.

It seemed that years had fallen away from him in a moment.

"D'you know," he went on, "I haven't tasted solids for a couple of days."

"Tea is waiting at home now," said Eliphalet.

Sefton Bulmore rose at once.

"And I hope that home isn't far away, either," he flashed, with a touch of his old humour.

During the tram-ride Bulmore's spirits rose by leaps and bounds.

"Tell you what," he exclaimed. "You and I together—tragedy and comedy—we've the elements of a fortune between us—a fortune, my boy. We'll write a play—Cinema—pooh!—No good to anyone! We'll write such a play as was never written before. And if we don't knock 'em——! By God!"

A light danced in Eliphalet's eyes—the light of reviving enthusiasm.

"It's an idea, Sefton," he said. "An idea. Perhaps, after all, we shall be wanted."

They bought watercress for tea, and cucumber, sardines and potted meat, so it is no small wonder that the meal was a success. Sefton Bulmore fairly expanded under its influence.

Eliphalet arranged with his landlady for an extra bed to be made up in his room.

"And now," he said, "shall we fetch your things?—and you can settle in comfortably."

For answer Bulmore produced a pile of pawn-tickets and laid them on the table.

"That's the lot," he answered, "save what I stand up in."

Eliphalet went through the tickets to see what most essentially should be redeemed.

"You'd like your ulster, eh?"

"It's been a good friend to me—still, two pound ten, y'know."

"Not another word," said Eliphalet.

When they emerged from the pawn-shop Sefton Bulmore was clad in a fur-collared coat which, despite a shade of wear about the cuffs and elbows, was a garment any actor might be proud to wear.

"And now," said Eliphalet, "we'll make for home and have our first talk about the play."

There was a note of disappointment in Bulmore's acquiescence, that called for a querying eyebrow from Eliphalet.

"I was only thinking—just to-night—old friends re-meeting—and—as a little celebration——" He tilted his head suggestively toward the brilliantly-lighted windows of the Goat Hotel.

"I never do," said Eliphalet.

"No, no, I understand—but—to the success of the play—a couple of glasses!"

Eliphalet shook his head.

"You go," he said. "Here, take——" And he pressed some silver into Bulmore's palm, "I'd—I'd rather not."

"It's sad work drinking alone."

"I shall have the pleasure of your company at home all the sooner, then."

It was after eleven before Bulmore returned, and bed was the obvious prescription. So Eliphalet helped him undress, and listened to a good deal of maudlin matter, without which the evening would have been a happier one.

Next morning they set to work mapping out a scheme for their future. Being accustomed to work at night, they made their plans accordingly.

They would breakfast late, partake of their one serious meal at three o'clock, enjoy a cup of tea about half-past five, and devote the evening hours to work upon the play. At midnight the traditional Welsh rarebit, washed down with a jug of good milky cocoa, would be served—then a pipe and bed. To relieve any embarrassment in giving or receiving, Eliphalet arranged that each should draw the same weekly sum, and share alike in all things.

Thus the terms of partnership were laid down, and together they set about to write such a play as would stagger the world.

The plot was everything, they decided, and so to the making of the plot were dedicated countless hours and an incredible quantity of paper.

As the work proceeded Bulmore's spirits grew apace.

"We've got 'em!" he would shout. "There's a fortune here, old man." And so great would be his enthusiasm that it was an all-too frequent occurrence for him to abandon work in the early part of the evening and drink copious draughts to their inevitable success.

These little excesses were the cause of no small concern to Eliphalet Cardomay. Bulmore would often spend his entire weekly allowance in a night at the bar; thus, when the day for settling their accounts arrived, it would be necessary for Eliphalet to draw on his dwindling principal to make good the deficit.

Once the plot was finally determined, the actual writing of the play began. In this Eliphalet did most of the work. Bulmore's temperament was such that he could not sit still, and must needs pace up and down, gesticulating and pouring forth a ceaseless stream of red-hot ideas.

In itself this method proved a somewhat disturbing factor, and tended to retard the progression of the work; but Eliphalet strove manfully, and some eleven months from the day of their first meeting had the exquisite pleasure of subscribing the word "Curtain" on the final page.

Then he and his partner gripped hands with a pride too full for words.

"Read it aloud, Eliphalet, old man," said Bulmore. "Let's have it! Let it go! Here, old man—wait a minute!" He rushed from the room, returning a moment later with the breathless landlady, Mrs. Wattle, and her anæmic niece, Annie. These he literally flung (no other word is possible) one at each end of the plush settee. "Don't make a sound," he warned them, with a threatening gesture. "You are going to hear the finest play that ever was

written—a masterpiece! On you go, Eliphalet, with all your voice, and all you've got. Give 'em a bit of the old."

So Eliphalet filled his lungs, and read. Both he and his audience were in tears when he intoned the final heart-rending passages.

Then he closed the book and laid his hand upon it—his eyes filled with the light of triumph.

"What did you think of it, Annie?" demanded Mrs. Wattle, when she and her niece were restored to the kitchen.

"Be-utiful, be-utiful," replied Annie. "It was just like any drama you might see on the stage."

There was no intended satire in this truest of criticisms.

The reading had proved altogether too much for Sefton Bulmore, and being so elevated by the marvels of their achievement, he went forth and indulged in a debauch, beside which his previous excesses were as child's play.

Eliphalet sat alone with the glory he had created. He turned his eyes to the level of the gods, and prayed aloud.

"Be pleased to bless our work, O Lord!"

Then a cold tremor crept down his spine—brought to existence by the sight of an unopened letter leaning against the clock. He knew what it was—a statement of credit from the bank—and had delayed breaking the seal, until the play should be finished, lest, perhaps, the tidings should divert his attention from the final scene. But now that reason no longer existed. So he rose and tore open the envelope.

Fifty-seven pounds was all that was left between two old men and starvation. Almost miraculously the rest had melted away. Fifty-seven pounds—and the Play.

"*AND* the play, old boy," said Eliphalet. He tore the sheet in two and dropped it in the fire; then, picking up the manuscript, made his way to bed.

That night he slept with a fortune beneath his pillow. Of course the play had to be typed. They were too old at the game to risk spoiling chances by sending it in MS. form. The bill for the typing was four pounds—a big lump from a capital of fifty-seven.

Eliphalet had a long talk with Bulmore, and pointed out the need for economy during the next few weeks, while managers were considering their work. Bulmore was quite huffy about it.

“Seems a sin not to have a good time, with a fortune like this waiting to be picked up,” he grumbled.

But Eliphalet was firm, and for the first time a slight estrangement arose between them. To mark his disapproval, Bulmore went out and got drunk.

The three copies of the play were duly registered and posted to the three likeliest managers.

“I’m sending the original manuscript to Mornice,” said Eliphalet, “I would like her to see the part she might have played, had she not given up the legitimate stage to play in pictures.”

So he packed it up, with a fatherly little note, and despatched it to Mornice, c/o Raphaeli Film Company, at some unpronounceable city in the United States.

Then, in a fever of excitement, they sat down and waited for the herald of their fortunes to sound the trumpet of success.

And quite suddenly Sefton Bulmore was taken ill. The first-class doctor whom Eliphalet sent for at once, shook his head over the case.

“The machinery is worn out,” he said. “You can do nothing, Mr. Cardomay, beyond care and attention. A nurse may be necessary later on. Give him plenty of light food—chickens, fish, and so forth, and above all keep him cheerful.”

“What’s he say?” demanded Bulmore, when Eliphalet returned after seeing the doctor out.

“That you must take things easily for a while.”

“Ha! that’s all very well, but rehearsals will be starting soon, and I’ve got to be there, y’know—I must be there. Any news?”

“Not at present. There’s hardly time yet.”

“A fortnight. Ought to be hearing something soon.”

“And depend upon it, we shall,” soothed Eliphalet.

And he was right, for the first copy was returned that evening, with a curt note of refusal.

Eliphalet took it into the sitting-room and read it again and again. It was unbelievable. Power, the likeliest of all managers, had refused his play.

“Can’t have read it,” thought Eliphalet. “Can’t possibly have read it! I mustn’t let Sefton know this.”

So he put the play in a fresh envelope and despatched it elsewhere, and to salve his conscience for the deceit he meant to perpetrate, he bought Bulmore some hothouse grapes and a bottle of calf’s-foot jelly.

Poor old Bulmore was an indifferent patient—subject to fits of depression and excitement. The sound of the postman's knock in the street brought him to his elbow at once.

"Down you go, down you go!" he would cry; then when Eliphalet returned empty-handed, he would work himself into a passion and curse the dilatoriness of managers or accuse Eliphalet of having addressed the envelopes wrongly.

Then, one day, about three weeks after his illness began, two more copies of the play were returned. In one there was no comment at all, and in the other a letter stating that a market for such stereotyped work no longer existed.

"Oh, oh!" cried Eliphalet, with the tone of a wounded child. "They don't understand."

"There was something that time," exclaimed Bulmore, as he slowly entered the room. "Quick—what was it?"

"Lambert has written," he said. "Wants to see me in Bradford—to-morrow."

The old comedian's body relaxed, and he gave a sigh of wonderful relief. "Good God! To-morrow, eh? That will be to discuss terms—yes. You'll have to be firm—he's slippery—'ll want watching. Pity I'm like this. Pity—pity!"

Then followed a mass of details that Eliphalet must be sure to observe, and in the midst of them the doctor arrived.

"You'll want that nurse," he said, as Eliphalet conducted him downstairs. "He's very rocky—practically living on nervous energy. A bit intemperate in the past, I should say. Well, well! I'll send her in to-night. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Eliphalet, and turned into the sitting-room to review the situation. At the present rate of expenditure his finances could scarcely be relied upon to last much longer. Yet what could he do? Bulmore must have everything he wanted, of course, and the lie about the play must be maintained.

He re-addressed the two returned copies and posted them, with a silent, fervent prayer. There were but six managers in all to whom the play would be of possible use, and half of these had already refused.

"Even chances, old boy; we mustn't throw up the sponge yet."

Then he returned to minister to his partner.

"I'll have some champagne to-day—champagne, a sole, and a dish of quails. We can afford 'em now," croaked old Bulmore. "No longer any need for economy."

And to maintain the lie Eliphalet bought all he asked for, and more besides.

When the nurse came he told her of his deception, and between them they kept the story going. Eliphalet invented a wonderful interview with Lambert, in which he had asked for and been accorded exceptional terms. Rehearsals would be beginning in a very short while——

"And, by Jove, Sefton, we shall have such a cast!"

And so the poor fraud went on, and twice more the play was returned.

It was almost more than Eliphalet could endure, but he kept a firm lower lip, and saw it through.

About three o'clock one night the nurse awoke him.

"I think he's going," she said.

Old Sefton Bulmore was propped up in bed, and looked a very sick man.

"Laddie!" he gasped. "It's up! Fate's cheating me—you—you've been a real friend—but I'm paying it all back. Here—under my pillow!"

Eliphalet drew from beneath the pillow a scrap of paper, scrawled over with the words, "I bequeath all the interests that will accrue to me from the play, 'Right Triumphant,' to my friend, colleague and benefactor, Eliphalet Cardomay."

"It's a fortune, o' man—a fortune."

Eliphalet took the drooping hand from the coverlet and grasped it.

"It is beautiful of you," he said.

There was a long silence; then Bulmore stirred slightly.

"Make it a good funeral," he whispered.

"I will, old man."

As a final touch of irony, the last remaining copy of "Right Triumphant" was returned a few moments before Bulmore's coffin was carried down the steps. And Eliphalet Cardomay dropped it into the grave beside his dead comrade.

It would be profitless and painful to follow Eliphalet through the job-seeking, grey underworld in which, during the following months, he drifted. And while he drifted, he lost heart and his pride began to forsake him. Eliphalet Cardomay disappeared, and left no address. He lacked the courage to confess his real state to Mornice. One deception makes another easy, and about the time he had lied to Bulmore about the play, he had written in answer to Mornice's constantly-expressed reproaches regarding his dilatoriness in taking the little house, to say he had at last secured the villa of

his dreams. To make the story good, he described the decorations of every room from attic to basement, and even threw in a picture of the tamarisks in the front garden. There had been a chance then that the play would bring his words to truth, but that chance had gone, and he could carry on the deception no longer. Thus with his disappearance the sweet ties that had existed between himself and his little adopted daughter were severed.

Somehow or another he managed to eke out an existence—but it was existence, and nothing more. Only once did he try to obtain work upon the stage, and the experience was so humiliating he did not repeat it. Somehow he had managed to preserve his old friends, the fur coat, the broad-brimmed hat and the cane which had supported him for so many years. He obtained an interview at a Bedford Street Agency with a flaccid, swag-bellied Semite, who wore a white waistcoat and check uppers to his glossy boots.

"Never heard of it," said this gentleman, when Eliphalet roundly pronounced his full titles. "And there's nothing for your sort here. I'm looking over a bunch of supers at five o'clock, and if you care to line up with them you can take a chance."

"Thank you," said Eliphalet gravely, "but I think not."

"Then, for the Lord's sake, get out. We're busy here."

And Eliphalet retired with dignity—as befitted one who had held provincial audiences for nearly half a century, and was part author of the finest play ever written.

Fate was a little kindlier after that, for he found employment in a tiny Brixton paper shop, owned by a widow. She, poor soul, was so occupied by her husband's legacy, a girl of three and two twin boys, that to attend to the shop was an impossibility. So Eliphalet sat on a kitchen chair behind the counter and dispensed halfpenny journals, bottles of gum, penny note-books, and pencils with little tin covers to them.

In these surroundings he was moderately happy. There were plenty of theatrical papers to read, for the neighbourhood was patronised by the lesser geniuses of the dramatic and music-hall world. In a way he became something of a local character, and many an old "pro" would step in of a morning to exchange reminiscences. Once or twice he was recognised, but on these occasions he always begged his discoverers not to disclose his identity.

"It is not that I am ashamed," he said, "but there are many I knew who, if they heard, would pity me—and pity is a quality more blessed to bestow than to receive."

So his wishes were respected, and for six tranquil months the Old Card sold his papers and followed in the dramatic columns the movements of members of his old companies. Thus he learned that Freddie Manning had abandoned the Road for the business managership of the Royal Theatre, New Brighton.

"Good boy, Manning," he said. "That's capital. New Brighton, too!" Rather a twisted smile came to the corners of his mouth, for he could not help thinking of that Dream Villa, facing the sea. It would have been very pleasant with Manning so close at hand, dropping in of an evening, maybe, for a bit of late supper and a chat about old times. Through the same medium he learnt how Mornice had sprung to Fame as a Film Artiste and was commanding a truly Chaplinesque salary.

This was a matter that gave him less pleasure, for, although rejoicing in her success, he could not conquer the underlying conviction that the Cinema was the bastard child of the stage, and an ignoble art.

"I wonder what she thought of my play," he ruminated. "I would like to have known."

One day there burst into the shop a little music-hall comedian named Dwyer. He was one of the very few who had recognised Eliphalet, and something of friendship had sprung up between them.

"Seen this week's *Foot-Lights*?" he demanded. Then, without waiting for an answer, "They're advertising for you."

He produced a crumpled periodical, flung it on the counter and pointed to a certain passage with a nicotine-stained forefinger.

"If Eliphalet Cardomay will call upon or communicate with Messrs, Newman & Stranger, 108A, Henrietta Street, W. C., he will hear something greatly to his advantage."

"Good gracious!" said Eliphalet. "I wonder what that means. I must step round there this evening."

"You'll step round now, old cock."

"I can hardly leave the shop——"

"That for a tale!" yelled the little comedian; then, making a megaphone of his hands, he shouted, "Mother!" at the very top of his voice.

In response to the call the owner of the shop appeared, a baby in her arms and the little girl towed along by her skirts.

"He's come into a fortune—see this! Mustn't wait a minute—You can spare him. Tell him to get his hat! Shop'll look after itself!"

Infected by the excitement of the moment, Mrs. Nelson said he must go at once. Furthermore, she gave Eliphalet the baby to hold, while she brushed his hat and coat and polished the knob of his stick.

"I'll stand a cab," said Dwyer, "for I won't let you out of my sight till I've heard the best." With which, he half swallowed two fingers of his right hand and produced a whistle so piercing that a taxi seemed to spring from nowhere.

Bread cast upon the waters returns after many days. There was a certain quality in "Right Triumphant" which, even though the stage desired it no longer, was still of an order to find favour in the hearts of cinema audiences.

The manuscript copy of the play, sent to Mornice, was read, at her request, by Mr. Raphaeli, who at once realised, with her in the leading part, a film version might be played with every hope of success.

Mr. Raphaeli was seldom wrong, and on this occasion he was "righter" than usual. Eliphalet Cardomay had disappeared, and enquiry failed to locate him, but to his credit, on a ten per cent. royalty, a sum of three thousand pounds had accumulated.

"She looked after your interests pretty closely," remarked Mr. Stranger of Henrietta Street. "I think you may rely on that sum doubling itself before the interest on the film expires. By the way, here's a bundle of letters from her addressed to you."

Eliphalet Cardomay was wonderfully calm during the interview, and did not betray by word or gesture the slightest excitement, but his fingers trembled a trifle as he took the letters. He received the address of a firm of solicitors, who were looking after the money on his behalf, shook hands, and walked from the office.

On the pavement outside he conveyed the news to the little comedian who, in his enthusiasm, performed a war-dance which drew toward them a massive policeman, complete with warnings.

"But you don't look half pleased enough," he gasped, when Eliphalet took his arm and drew him away.

"I am—I am—very pleased and very grateful. It's just a shade of disappointment that the play should not have made its success on the legitimate stage." But the cloud faded almost before it came in the bright blue horizon of the future.

A twinkle showed in his eyes.

"Dwyer," he said, "in all my life I have never yet borrowed from a fellow-artist, but I am wondering now if you would lend me a sovereign."

“Whatever you want, old man; whatever you want.”

“Simpson’s is just over there, and I was thinking—an undercut from a saddle of mutton—you and I together-a little celebration, what?”

“Fine!” echoed Dwyer. “Take what you want out of this——” producing a fiver from a Friday night envelope.

As they turned into Bedford Street there were a few old down-and-outers of the profession, leaning disconsolately against the wall of an agent’s office.

Eliphalet jerked his head toward them.

“Would you mind if I did?” he questioned.

“Better still!” shouted Dwyer enthusiastically. So Eliphalet crossed the street.

“Boys,” he said, addressing the group, “will you take a bit of lunch with me? Just to talk over old times.”

Eliphalet Cardomay has the pleasantest villa in New Brighton, with tamarisks forming a guard of honour to the front door. The rooms inside are just what you would expect—cosy, warm, hospitable. Sir Henry Irving’s signed portrait, as Thomas à Becket, hangs over the fireplace in the parlour, and there are many others of great-hearted, if less celebrated, performers dotted about the walls in comforting disorder.

Prominent in the centre of the mantelpiece is the portrait of a baby, and scrawled across one corner in Mornice’s go-as-you-please hand is written “Eliphalet to his grand-dads.” Probably this photograph is his most cherished possession, and he is justly proud that so bold a name should rise afresh in a new generation. Mornice even on the occasion when she and Ronald and the baby came over from the States and spent a glorious three weeks at New Brighton, never divulged the secret that this wonderful child was ordinarily termed “-Potkins.”

To minister to his wants are Potter, his one-time dresser, and Potter’s wife—she was wardrobe-mistress in the company for many a year. Between them they look to it that the Old Card is kept out of draughts—has his socks scrupulously darned—his sheets aired, and is served only with the dishes he likes best.

You may see him any day you care to look, walking up and down the parade with a firm step and his hat at a fearless angle. Under his arm is the

ivory-knobbed gold-mounted cane of quaint design, and he shows a marked favour for fur coats, of which he possesses more than one.

It is rare indeed for a Saturday to pass without Freddie Manning looking in for an hour after the show. And whether it be a supper of tripe, cooked in milk, a Welsh rarebit, or a dish of sizzling liver-and-bacon, it all goes down with equal appreciation, to an accompaniment of happy reminiscences that mostly begin with:

"Remember that time in '93—we put up 'The Silver King' the following season——" And somewhere each evening as regular as clockwork——

"Say what you will, the stage isn't what it was, Manning; it isn't what it was."

Transcriber's Notes:

A few obvious punctuation and typesetting errors have been corrected without note.

[The end of *The Old Card* by Roland Pertwee]