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A CENTURY OF  
HUMOUR



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*A Century of*  
HUMOUR

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Edited by  
P. G. WODEHOUSE

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## PREFACE

AS I sit down to write the Introduction to this book, I may be looking modest, but I am not modest really. I am distended with a gaseous pride. My mental attitude is that of those ambidextrous Hollywood actors who can pat themselves on the back with both hands, and I have such a pronounced attack of swelled head that if at this moment I wished to walk through the Marble Arch I should have to pin my ears back.

And not without reason, for nobody, I think, can deny that the swiftness with which I have become a force in English letters is rather remarkable. It is a bare thirty-four years since I started earning my living as a writer, yet already I am the author of an Omnibus Book, and now the world is ringing with the news that Messrs. Hutchinson have asked me to edit their *Century of Humour*—a job which entitles me to wear pince-nez and talk about Trends and Cycles and the Spirit of Comedy and What Is The Difference Between Humour and Wit.

My only trouble is that I have so little to say on these matters. Trends, now. Well, I suppose Trends are all right, if you are able to take them or leave them alone. It is more a question of will-power than anything. And very much the same thing applies to Cycles. (Remind me to tell you some time how I once rode from Portsmouth to London.)

With regard to the Spirit of Comedy, I will simply say this, that in my opinion—and I am told that George Meredith used to feel much as I do—Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized men and women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes, to make the correctness of the representation convincing. Credulity is not wooed through the impressionable senses; nor have we recourse to the small circular

glow of the watchmaker's eye to raise in bright relief minutest grains of evidence for the routing of incredulity. The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech. For, being a spirit, he hunts the spirit in men; vision and ardour constitute his merit: he has not a thought of persuading you to believe in him.

I think that is all I have to say about the Spirit of Comedy.

We now come to the difference between Wit and Humour, a thing which has always perplexed my simple mind. Here I will draw upon Mr. J. B. Morton ("Beachcomber"), who not long ago wrote in the *Spectator* as follows:

"The English are very fond of humour, but they are afraid of wit. For wit is like a sword, and humour is like a jester's bladder. . . . Nobody knows what Mr. Wodehouse's philosophy of life is; or even whether he has one. But with Mr. Wyndham Lewis it is different. Everything he writes fits into a fixed philosophy."

Well, that sounds all right. "Fixed philosophy", eh? That's the nub of the thing, is it? Fine. Let's have a look at something of Mr. Lewis's. Take this, from his weekly column in the *Daily Mail*.

One was young oneself once, as Methusalem remarked when he saw a centenarian climbing a tree, but at the same time one cannot but deplore some of the scenes in the House of Commons during the Speaker's enforced absence on Thursday at Oxford where an honorary degree was conferred upon him.

In the absence of a firm hand one expects uproar in such an assembly as the Commons, but one does not expect to find things scrawled all over the walls in chalk. Hopscotch and marbles again are harmless enough, but for M.P.'s to bully and maltreat those of their number who are weak in the head (especially if of Cabinet rank) is outrageous.

A woman M.P. declared yesterday: "We are very glad to see the Speaker back again. Many of us brought him little tributes of wild flowers on his return. I do not see why for doing this we should be called 'sneaks' and 'narks' and pinched on the arm, or why some of the big back-benchers should savagely pull our hair." An inquiry will probably be held.

No, it beats me. When I read that, I thought it was the funniest thing even Mr. Lewis, whose work I revere this side of idolatry, had ever written, but I was not scared a bit.

Later in this book you will find a stark piece of writing by Mr. Lewis on the subject of Harebells. I think Mr. Morton over-estimates the terrifying quality of that, too. Personally, I read *Scene with Harebells* without a tremor, and my laughter was not just that nervous giggling you do when you see swords all over the place. The fact of the matter is, we English are tougher stuff than Mr. Morton supposes.

But if there really is this difference between Wit and Humour, I can think of no better way of studying the subject than by reading this book. They are all here, all the swordsmen and bladder-wielders of the last hundred years—I think. There is always the haunting fear that in a short while from now I shall be starting out of my sleep and screaming, "Gosh! Why did I forget So-and-So?" But I really feel that there will be very few of these So-and-So's. Humour (or it may have been Wit) has been my favourite reading for nearly fifty years. I do not think I have missed much during that time, and I have a retentive memory. There are things in this book which I have not read since I was at school, but they have lingered with me down the years and when the call came to select up they bobbed. One never quite forgets a story that has made one laugh.

Barry Pain's *The Refugees*, for instance. I have not looked at that since it first appeared in *Punch*. *Circ.* 1900, it was. I read it on a winter evening in my tent, the day we overcame the Nervii (Haileybury, 3-nil), but I remembered it without an effort.

Yes, I think this collection may be considered quite fairly representative. And I think it may reasonably be called a pretty good three-and-sixpence worth. It is not, of course, for women and weaklings, who will be unable to lift it, but if here and there throughout this realm, this England, there is an occasional retired circus strong man who has not let his muscles get flabby and who has the price in his pocket and the will to buy, I feel convinced that he will not regret having planked down his three and a bender.

P. G. WODEHOUSE



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## BEN TRAVERS

### *The Nutcracker*

Ben Travers is the author of many novels and short stories, but the field in which he has won an international reputation is in drama of the lighter kind. He wrote those famous Aldwych plays *A Cuckoo in the Nest*, *Rookery Nook*, and many others which have had long runs.



## THE NUTCRACKER

WITH a kiss we open. A clandestine affair in a summer-house on a night in June. His eyes closed; her eyes dreamy with delight but not heedless of the gleam of danger from the open french-window across the lawn. We open to your liking, I believe, ladies, who have had such kisses of your own before now and will have more in some cases.

But alas! I must dash your naturally pleasant anticipations of a liaison. This was a prosaic, unmarried romance. The kisser merely a young games master at a public school; a housemaster's daughter the kissee. The menace within the study across the lawn was only Father, who was sitting correcting Latin exercises. A lame Victorian theme.

Mr. Panting (Father—and what a name, by Aristophanes! for a public school housemaster to be cursed with; it asked for lampoonery and got it) sat slashing with a blue pencil at the Latin exercises and snorting his disagreement with many of the views expressed. Mrs. Panting—a woman of walnut—was on a neighbouring sofa, with knitting needles in both hands and her mouth. Miss Panting was officially exercising the dog. From the boys' wing of the massive house the Babel of day had given place to a distant studious hum of eventide.

"Martin Dicksee," said Miss Panting, releasing herself from the embrace and astutely informing the reader of the games master's name, "I love you. Till you came, no one in this mouldy place has had the sense to see a perfectly good flirtation sitting up and pining to be got on with. That'll have to be all for to-night, but come again to-morrow."

She had received the name Flimsy not from the font, but from the Lower Common Room. In like manner her mother was known, and had for two generations been known, even among masters, as "Flannel". In course of time nicknames at public schools cease to be a matter of levity and become one of tradition. You might hear two completely

sedate and humourless old masters at Chappelby in conversation as follows. "Call in and have a chat after dinner to-night. I should like to exchange some further opinion with you on the circumstances in which the side PQ will generate the curved surface of a conical frustrum." "Many thanks, but I have a previous engagement to dine with Flannel Panting."

Young Mr. Martin Dicksee, a great-limbed, blue-eyed, rough-haired games expert, reassured Flimsy that in his case this was no mere passing flirtation, which statement he illustrated by crushing such portions of the young lady as may legitimately be crushed at this stage of the proceedings.

At which she, a sparkling little vixen with mischievous dark eyes and a boyish shingle, said, "I simply must go in," and resumed a semi-recumbent attitude in the summer-house.

Unfortunately the fool of a dog strolled back alone through the french-window into the study. Mr. Panting was busy slashing the exercises with his blue pencil. "Hn'gh! *Inquit* —'quoth he.' Did he, indeed? This little beast uses a crib." Slash!

Mrs. Panting protruded her maternal proboscis. "Where's Diana?" she inquired of the dog, who made no reply.

"This Master Noble," said Panting, waving a beslashed page of mistaken inkwork, "is the most beastly little ignoramus in the whole of my experience. If I remember rightly, he's the boy you dislike most heartily in the house, isn't he?"

"I suspect him of being the boy who made me look a fool at the sports," replied Flannel Panting. "You remember on sports day last year?"

"No."

"Yes, you do. I was standing talking to the Headmaster and his wife and a shower of rain came on, and I opened my umbrella and a banana fell out. I believe Noble was the boy."

"H'm. The little brute will spend next Saturday in extra school, anyhow," said Panting, scoring a huge blue, triumphant "Extra School" over Noble's paper. "What was that you said about Diana?"

"She hasn't come in, that's all. I don't know why not." Panting cocked his head like a bird in sight of food. He

peered out at the lawn for a moment; then rose to his feet. "I wonder," he said and exit.

In the summer-house there was some guiltily hasty unlocking of limbs, but they were utterly too late with it to deceive Panting. He stood at the entrance to the summer-house and behaved exactly as in the Middle Fourth. That is to say, he instinctively hitched with his hands at a gown that wasn't there and made the sound of tea-tasters.

Flimsy remained blandly seated, and remarked rather flippantly, "Hallo, Pop." The summer-house had presumably been made to fit Panting, whose bald head came just about up to the level of Martin Dicksee's chest bone. So Martin stood tending a severe bump on his cranium and looking as foolish as only a big man can.

Panting addressed his daughter.

"Go in and sit with your mother."

"Is that intended to be a punishment?"

"Do what you're told."

"No. You're going to send me in and stay here and tick off Mr. Dicksee. I won't have that. I asked him in here. It's my fault. If it *is* a fault."

"I'm not going to waste words over him," said Panting. He drew himself up at Martin with fresh and elaborate tea-noises. "If ever I catch you within the precincts of my house or grounds again, I shall go straight to the Head and get you removed."

The rubbing, helpless, great nice boy began to burble his formalities.

"Mr. Panting, it's all quite all right—you know what I mean—honourable and all that sort of thing. I'm honestly frightfully gone on Flim—your daughter, and I—and I wish to—wish to be allowed to—to—you know—sort of——"

"Silence, confound you, young man, and get out of my summer-house. You! You're not a master at all—a games creature. A hulking, great useless hack-about know-nothing! Get out of my sight. And don't come into it again."

"Cheerio, Martin. I'm on any time," said Flimsy.

She was borne into the study, was impertinent to Flannel, and went rudely and door-slammingly to bed. Panting returned, positively sweating with wrath, to his table, and fairly sabred exercises with his blue pencil.

For years untold Panting had ruled the Middle Fourth. A thankless task. Occasionally a promising new boy arrived and sprinted through into the Upper Fourth in a single term. In the Upper Fourth even the worst cases began to assume some measure of ordered responsibility. But the Middle Fourth remained an Inferno, in which dawdled, stagnated and cribbed all the utterly incorrigible, all the worst blackguards and crooks; touring their dull *Æneid* through and through; capable, even after about six terms, of "*Tum pius Æneas—* Sir, then the pious *Æneas*," but of no more. The scum of the school. Louts. Some of them even had small moustaches.

"Noble!" explained Panting, on the morning after the summer-house affair. "Come here. No, keep your hand out of your pocket."

"Oh, indeed!" he proceeded a moment later. "Silence, there! Another snigger and you'll all go to extra school for a month. As for you, Noble, you'll write out the first five hundred lines of the Third *Æneid* in Latin and English——"

"Oh, ssss——"

"And you will take that filthy squirrel and release it on the cricket field and come straight back."

"Sir," said Noble, a red-haired ruffian with a tie askew and hands which would have disgraced a plumber's mate, "may I just say I've had this squirrel for some time, and if it got away it would absolutely peg out, sir? It's used to captivity and couldn't fend for itself."

"Ah! So you've been keeping the beast in my house, have you? Brownlow, two hours' extra school."

"Sir," said Noble, "I brought it in here not for my own sake, but its. It's been living in a boot box, and I felt it wanted a sort of outing. I didn't want it in form. As a matter of fact, sir, it's been gnawing my vitals."

"I'll have you flogged in a minute," said Panting. This concluded the argument.

At the boundary of the cricket field Noble encountered the new games master. At the moment Noble was in difficulties. He was holding the squirrel aloft, while an excited mongrel performed acrobatics at his heels.

"Hallo," said Martin. "What's all this about?"

"It's a squirrel, sir. I happened to have it in Mr. Panting's form, and he told me to release it. Only this dog's here, sir."

"Whose dog is it?"

"Fugg's, sir."

"Whose?"

"The old man who goes round the place, clearing up rubbish, sir. I don't know his real name. Anyhow, he isn't here to look after the dog."

"What an ass you were to take the poor beast into Mr. Panting's form."

"I had to, sir, because—" Noble hesitated. This great, young, hefty sporting master rather appealed to him. He took a chance. "Sir! It's awful bad luck losing the squirrel. I had to take it with me because the boot-cad at Mr. Panting's house vowed he would have its blood. Sir! Would you care to have it, sir?"

"And give it back to you, I suppose, against Mr. Panting's orders? No, you don't, you tyke. But I can't let the dog get it. Give it to me."

Noble handed it over and departed. The squirrel ungraciously bit its rescuer's hand heartily, but Martin refrained from responding to the still pressing negotiations of the dog. He made for his rooms in a little house beyond the main school buildings. The dog accompanied him down Chapleby Hill, circuiting hopefully.

From an upper window of the private wing of Panting's Flimsy greeted him with a hail and a glad waving of some unidentified undergarment. "What on earth are you doing with that sq——?" Then lace curtains intervened, shrouding her like the blackness of a film close-up. Mrs. Panting was at home too.

But there was another observer of Martin's progress. From the branches of a tree in Panting's garden Notcutt Minor, nominally on sick leave, gazed open-mouthed at the spectacle of the games master striding towards his digs in the company of Noble's squirrel and Fugg's dog.

Martin was in the act of placing the squirrel in his fishing basket when Emily, daughter of his landlady, made bold to protest. "Reely, Mr. Dicksee. It can't be kept in the 'ouse. It's un'althy. Whew!"

A squirrel is not, at the best of times, among the most ambrosial of God's creatures. Nor does it gain in fragrance from a stiff blending of boot polish. There was justice in Emily's stern judgment.

"It's only for a little while," said Martin. "I'm not going to keep it permanently. You needn't sit with it. If I let it go now that dog may get it."

"I wonder that even the dog fancies it," said Emily.

"Well, look here. I'm going up the hill again. I'll get the dog away and you can release the squirrel. I only want to get rid of it."

"Not me, sir. I should 'ate to touch it," said Emily. She then retreated to the kitchen and deliberated over a tin of disinfectant. Martin went his way. Fugg's dog definitely refused to accompany him. But no sooner had Martin repassed Panting's than down from his bough slid the sniper, Notcutt Minor. A minute afterwards he was on Martin's doorstep.

With foresight rarely applied to his scholastic duties Notcutt Minor grasped Fugg's dog with both hands when Emily came to the door. Notcutt Minor was small, pink and cherubic. Devils, those small, cherubic boys—the worst devils of the lot.

"Good morning," said Notcutt minor. "I say. Didn't Mr. Dicksee bring a certain squirrel here just now?"

"Why?"

"Does he frightfully want it?"

"No, he don't," said Emily. "And no more don't I."

"Good egg!" said Notcutt Minor. "I say. I'll take it if you like."

Admirable solution. After all, Mr. Dicksee had told her to get rid of it. Emily agreed. "Good egg," said Notcutt Minor. "Only, would you keep Fugg's dog here for the present while I make good my escape?"

Presently, Noble, rounding the angle of Panting's on his return from morning school, was accosted by Notcutt Minor, whose snub nose appeared at the open window of the sick-room. The following dialogue ensued.

"Noble! I say, I've got your squirrel."

"What? You don't mean to say it had the sense to home?"

"Home?"

"Yes, you fool. To home—like a homing pigeon."

"No. I went and got it off Dicksee's skivvy."

"Well, hand it over, then."

"All very well. I had the devil of a job to get it off the

skivvy. She said Dicksee prized it above a pearl of great price."

"Where is it? Come on."

"How much will you give me for it?"

"Nothing. I haven't any oof, anyhow. I might give you a pot of plum jam for it."

"Nothing in jam. I might take a jar of potted meat. Or a large tin of sardines. But not in tomato."

"Well, come down here and I'll show you what I've got. Come complete with squirrel."

Notcutt Minor descended. "This is what I've got," cried Noble and barely attacked him. "Come on, where's the squirrel?"

"In my bags' pocket. Let go, you swine," replied Notcutt Minor.

Noble found the squirrel. It bit him beautifully. He withdrew his hand. The squirrel shot into the ivy on the house wall and set forth on a lightning tour in the direction of the private wing.

Having arrived at a commodious niche in the ivy of the private wing, the squirrel remained for several hours, quivering in bewildered retrospect. To be released from the black odours of the boot box only to be leapt and gnashed at by Fugg's dog; to be rescued from Fugg's dog only to endure the stuffy damnation of the bags' pocket—so this was what it meant to be a squirrel. Probably it mistook the ivy niche for some Paradise of animal bliss following a brief and sticky Gehenna of existence.

At four o'clock in the hot June afternoon Mrs. Panting repaired to her bedroom to change her frock before taking tea with the Headmaster's wife. Flimsy was already neatly arrayed for the occasion, and was waiting below. Panting, his class-room labours o'er, was in his dressing-room, removing a collar limp with the exuberance of the afternoon's hate. Collarless, he rushed into his wife's presence, summoned by screams of that shrill nature which, for some reason, always seem particularly piercing when uttered by a female in *déshabillé*.

"My goodness! Robert! Robert! Arc'hch! Kill it or something."

"What is it? My love! Tell me, for heaven's sake, what?"

"I don't know. Quick. Don't talk. Kill it. Something horrible, like a monkey. Urg'chh! It sprrang from behind the bed. It's on top of the wardrobe. It's one of the boys."

"One of the boys?"

"One of the boys is responsible. Don't argue. Do something. Quick! Get up on the wardrobe and kill it."

"Control yourself, will you? Keep calm. How can I possibly get on top of the wardrobe and kill a monkey?"

But he mounted a chair and made a distant, unadventurous survey. "Aha!" he exclaimed. "So that's it, is it? Oho. Yes. I think I see."

"Don't keep on like that," said Flannel Panting, jaundiced with fright and clutching still her disarranged garments around her as though fearful that her matronly torso might be observed by the monkey. "*What* do you see? What is it? Do something."

"It's a squirrel. It belongs to your favourite, Noble. I told him to get rid of it, and this is his idea of a joke, I suppose—to put it in your bedroom. I'll have him flogged, if not expelled. I'll write to his father myself."

"Well, take the beast away from here first. You needn't think I'm going to share my bedroom indefinitely with squirrels."

Flimsy, who had been attracted, it is to be feared, by the sounds of her mother in distress, here appeared to the rescue; and by means of persuasive noises, such as are always associated with the blandishments applied to beasts and infants, aided further by an open parasol belonging to Flannel, which suffered severely in the good cause, managed to secure the squirrel. "Funny thing!" she said. "This seems to be a very good year for squirrels. This is the second I've seen to-day."

"If you mean there are a lot of them about, it's a *bad* year for them," said her mother, proceeding heatedly with her toilet.

"Give it to me," said Panting. Flimsy handed over the squirrel, which tasted Panting and declined any further sustenance from that source.

Half an hour later the housemaster received Mr. Noble in his study. Panting had worked himself into a condition

of scarlet fury which gave even that red-head to blench. So may Judge Jeffreys have intimidated a cowering victim in ruthless, seething rage, without waiting to worry about the details of the accusation.

But Noble did not cower. When Panting managed to convey some idea of what this was all about, the accused met the charge with an expression of bland sympathy.

"But, sir, dash it all—I'm sorry, sir, but really, sir—I didn't put a squirrel in Fla—in Mrs. Panting's bedroom, sir. I don't even know which is her bedroom, sir. How should I?"

"Silence. Come on, speak up. You dare to deny that you brought the squirrel back to the house when I told you to let it loose?"

"I gave it to Mr. Dicksee, sir."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. I met him and he took it."

Even in the midst of his wrath Panting checked himself. His eyes and mouth visibly widened. He visualized the games master, smarting beneath last night's castigation and planning this ribald vengeance. Diana had no doubt cooperated. Panting swung round at Noble, terrifically tea-tasting.

"Did you tell Mr. Dicksee that it was *I* who had taken a dislike to this squirrel and ordered you to throw it away?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah!"

"I beg pardon, sir?"

"Go away. You needn't think that because I'm sending you away unpunished at present that I don't think you are a blot on the house. Get out of my study, will you!" Noble, for once, obeyed without hesitation.

Flannel and Flimsy had already gone ahead to their tea-party. Panting now followed them. On his way across the cricket field he observed Martin at the nets. He was bathed in enthusiastic perspiration and putting down some pretty testing stuff to Jobson, one of the opening First Eleven pair. This he followed up with instructions couched in language which Panting considered grossly out of keeping to a boy. "Jobbers, don't flourish at your cuts. Come down slap on the ball or leave it alone. Don't gesticulate at the bally thing."

Panting waylaid some lounging nondescript and ordered

him to take a message. Mr. Dicksee was to be told that the Headmaster required his presence in twenty minutes' time. The still throbbing housemaster then proceeded to interrupt the tea-party.

Flimsy quite liked the Head. He was one of those young, recently-appointed heads of public schools who are, at least, still human. In fact, had it not been for a languid and rather precious wife, the Head might have preceded Martin in the flirtation field.

In her airy and arty drawing-room, thrown open to the afternoon zephyrs, the precious wife served tea to Flannel and the Head hovered with a cake-stand about Flimsy. Suddenly a domestic, infectiously flushed, announced that Mr. Panting desired immediate audience in the study.

"Oh, but how too sweet of him to call," said the Head's wife. "He must not worry about schooly things on such a rapturous afternoon. Bring him in to tea, Blue Boy, dear."

"He's rattled to the quick about some boy putting a squirrel in mother's bedroom," said Flimsy. "I wouldn't have him in here. He'd only slop his tea."

"Diana!" said Flannel.

"I'd better see him," said Blue Boy, and departed to the study.

"Father gets so volcanic," said Flimsy. "Surely he could call and get a boy swished at some reasonable hour."

"It's a very good thing that *someone* upholds the discipline of the school," said her mother.

"Oh, the boys don't mind being swished," said Flimsy. "They pick the bits of birch out of themselves and sell them as souvenirs. One boy, who got it very hot for cheating in exams. last term, made one and eightpence-halfpenny."

A few minutes later the flushed maid was summoned by the study bell. In the study Mr. Panting occupied the hearth-rug, his face being now of a ripe beetroot shade. The Head looked serious, thanks to a severe effort.

"When Mr. Dicksee calls," he told the maid, "show him straight in here."

Scarcely had the maid closed the study door when the front-door bell rang. Outside stood a grey, dapper gentleman with a bowler hat perched at an angle and a broad check suiting.

"Headmaster in?" he inquired. "Tell him Sir Perks Dicksee."

The maid was no stickler for titles. She shot the visitor into the study and reckoned her duty done.

"You the Head?" cried Sir Perks Dicksee heartily, addressing Panting. "How are yer? I'm Sir Perks Dicksee. Popped along to see my nephew. How de do?"

"Sir Perks Dicksee?" exclaimed Panting. "What, the mill—the—ah—financier? Good heavens, I'd no idea young Mr. Dicksee was your nephew."

"My only one. Heir. Insisted on coming here. Teaching games. Well, why not? Dashed good idea."

"We were just discussing your nephew," said the Head. "I fancy he'll be along here in a minute if you'll wait. Let me take you to the drawing-room. I should like you to meet my wife. She'll give you some tea."

"Yer wife, certainly, pleasure. Tea? No, thank yer. Muck," said Sir Perks.

"Just one moment, Mr. Panting, and I'll have another word with you," said the Head, and removed Sir Perks.

"I think," he continued, slipping back into the study later, "that we'd better dismiss the idea that young Dicksee put the squirrel in your wife's room."

Panting blew his nose, but made no further comment.

"Moreover," said the Head, "I must say, Mr. Panting, that you appear to have been a trifle hasty in objecting to his attentions to your daughter. The heir to a baronetcy and a fortune——"

"I never knew that," said Panting indignantly. "Why wasn't I told?"

Flimsy, in her outspoken way, put the same question to Martin as she accompanied uncle and nephew down Chappleby Hill half an hour later. "Fancy you being the nephew of the man who won the Derby last year. And never telling me. Why didn't you, you comic?"

"Whenever I've been with you," said Martin, "there's always been something much more important to think of even than Uncle."

"I leave you here," said Flimsy, outside Panting's. "But come and see me after dinner—in the summer-house."

"Well?" said Martin, as Flimsy went her nimble, hand-kissing way. "Am I a good judge?"

Sir Perks adjusted an eyeglass.

"Full marks," he replied. "Fine filly."

"Coming back to my rooms, Uncle?"

"No. I'm off."

"I've got some whisky there."

"Well, don't moon about. Where are yer rooms?"

The squirrel, on being released by Panting, had passed the remainder of the afternoon in a neighbouring tree. It was still there when, between the evening meal and prep., a boy seated himself at the foot of the tree and examined the contents of a dishevelled paper bag. The squirrel, prying cautiously, discerned peanuts. Then the boy suddenly turned his head and peered aloft. The head was a red head. The squirrel took but one fleeting glance at it and scuttled like a streak of light into the topmost branches.

ARTHUR MORRISON

*Byestones*

Arthur Morrison is well-known as a novelist, dramatist and writer on Oriental art. His extensive collection of Chinese and Japanese paintings is now in the British Museum. His stories of life in the slums of the East End of London are particularly notable.



## BYLESTONES

**M**ORE than once already I have said that Snorkey Timms was not a person of any constitutional honesty, except in an oblique and cranky way toward such of his intimates as trusted the honour he never claimed to possess. Perhaps his chief personal characteristic was a dislike of the particular form of violence called work; and no argument could change his views.

"It ain't that I've never tried work," he said, sucking with much enjoyment at his pipe, just filled from my pouch—his taste in tobacco was almost his only creditable characteristic—"you mustn't suppose that. I've tried it right enough, though not often, bein' only 'uman, as you might say. It may pay some, but I don't seem to be that sort. Born different, I s'pose. Why, the hardest work I ever did—my word, it *was* a drive, too!—I lost money over—*lost* it. An' after workin' like a 'orse—two orses—all night, too! Fair makes me shudder when I remember it.

"Somebody had been a-preachin' about honesty to me, I s'pose, like what you do sometimes. So I took on a job as a bookmaker's minder—you know what that is, o' course. You just 'ang about your bloke's pitch on the course, an' if anybody gets makin' a dispute with him, or claimin' what your bloke don't mean to pay, or what not, why you just give 'im a push in the jore. O' course, you get it back sometimes, but that's what you're paid for. Choppy Byles was my bloke—he was a nut, and no mistake. There wasn't nothing that Choppy Byles wasn't up to. He was up to such a lot o' things that he kep' *two* minders reg'lar—and he wanted 'em, too, I can tell ye. We could 'a' done with a few more to 'elp us most times, could me and Jerry Stag, the other minder. Both of us had either one eye or the other black, permanent, while the flat racin' season was on; an' once we went 'ome from Alexander's Park with about three-quarters

of a weskit between us an' nothing else on us but bruises. But Choppy Byles, he was all right, and a mile away 'fore the row got into its swing; 'e 'ad quite a payin' afternoon.

"Chipstead Spring Meeting and Felby races is within a few days of each other, and not more'n twenty mile apart—as o' course you know, like anybody well brought up. About 'alf-way between them two towns is a little place called Nuthatch, and the year I'm a-speakin' of Mr. Choppy Byles and us two, Jerry Stagg and me, we stayed at Nuthatch over the day or two between the two meetin's; I dunno why, unless there was somebody in London as Choppy Byles didn't want to see afore he'd made a bit at Felby.

"Me and Jerry Stagg, we thought we was in for a nice little day or two's holiday in the country. But Mr. Choppy Byles didn't take no holidays—he was out for business all the time. He'd race two earwigs over a cabbage-leaf and bet pennies on it with the greengrocer's boy, rather than miss a chance. And as luck would have it, we found the people at Nuthatch quite a sportin' lot; in fact, we didn't give 'em full credit till we come away; and then we was ready to swear they 'atched 'arder nuts at Nuthatch than any place forty times its size.

"It was a rest-an'-be-thankful sort o' place to look at, though, and as comfortable and cosy a pub to stay at as ever I see. It 'ud convert any teetotaller to look at it, would the Fox and 'Ounds. We got there in the evenin' after Chipstead, an' sat in the parlour a-talkin' to the Nuthatchers an' doin' our best to astonish the natives. And all through the conversation, whatever was said, there was our bloke, Mr. Choppy Byles, feelin' round and hintin' to find if he couldn't get a bet on with somebody about any ol' t'ing. At last he got on to runnin', an' it turns out the Nuthatchers had got a chap they fancied could run a good mile.

"That was enough for Choppy Byles. He was on it. The runnin' chap's name was Dobbin—Jarge Dobbin they called 'im—an' it didn't seem to stand to reason that a chap with a name like that could run a fast mile. What was more, Choppy Byles's memory was wonderful, and, follerin' the Sheffield 'andicaps reg'lar, he knew the name o' pretty well everything on two legs that could raise a toddle, and the name o' Jarge Dobbin wasn't one of 'em. But he always wanted

the best bargain he could make, did Choppy; so he began comin' the innocent kid.

“‘E must be a wonderful runner,’ he said, ‘this here Dobbin. I s’pose ’e could run a mile in three or four minutes quite easy?’

“‘Why, no,’ says the Nuthatcher as was talkin’ most—chap called Gosling—‘nobody could do that. The best as was ever done in the world was a pretty good bit over four minutes.’

“‘Was it?’ says Choppy, lettin’ on to be surprised. ‘Well, o’ course, I dunno nothin’ about them things. I only seemed to ’ave a sort of idea that three or four minutes would be pretty quick. I s’pose he’d do it all right in four minutes and a ’alf?’

“‘No,’ says Gosling; ‘that’s championship time, too. Jarge Dobbin ain’t a champion, not yet. But he’d run a mile on the road in five minutes.’

“‘That seems rather slow for sich a very fine runner,’ says Choppy.

“‘Well, I think he could beat that,’ says Gosling; and the whole lot o’ the others there said they was sure he could.’

“‘Ah!’ says Choppy. ‘Sich a man as him ought. You don’t seem to be stickin’ up for your pal half enough. I expect you’d be glad to bet big odds he’d do it in four minutes an’ three-quarters.’

“‘Why, yes,’ says one chap in the crowd, ‘I would.’ An’ some o’ the others says ‘‘Ear, ’ear!’ But Gosling, he sat considerin’. He was a fat, jolly-lookin’ feller, but very thoughtful, with sharp little eyes.

“‘I wouldn’t bet very big odds,’ he says, presently. ‘But I’d give a bit of odds he’d do it—say between the forty-fourth and forty-fifth milestone along the main London road here.’

“‘What odds?’ asks Choppy, snappin’ him up quick. ‘Two to one?’

“‘Why, no,’ says Gosling, in his slow way; ‘not sich odds as them. Five to four.’

“Choppy ’aggled a bit, but he couldn’t get the odds no longer. So it was settled and put down in writin’ that Jarge Dobbin was to run from the forty-fourth to the forty-fifth milestone, next day, in four minutes forty-five seconds, if he could, the stakes bein’ five quid to four on his doin’ it.

An' as soon as that was fixed Choppy Byles began offerin' side bets all round.

"'Not in my 'ouse,' says the landlord. 'I can't 'ave no bettin' 'ere. I've got my licence to think of. You'll 'ave to go outside if that's your game.'

"So everybody got up an' went out. Jist as we came tumblin' out into the lane Choppy gives me a drive in the ribs and whispers, "'Ere's your chance to make a bit for yourself. Take the odds, same as me, an' tell Jerry Stagg.'

"What his game was o' course I didn't know, but it was pretty clear there was something up his sleeve—it was the sort o' sleeve there's allus something up, was Choppy's. Well, I told you the Nuthatchers were a sportin' lot, but it would ha' surprised you to see the little crowd out there under the stars in that peaceful village a-backin' and a-layin' that evenin'. Choppy Byles, he took every bet he could get, givin' evens when there was no more odds to be got, an' then offerin' odds against—anything to pile it up. Jerry Stagg an' me, we got our little bit on soon and stopped; and sooner or later all the others stopped too, and went 'ome. It was the sort o' place where they go to bed in the middle o' the evenin'.

"The back door o' the Fox and 'Ounds was left on the latch all night for the potman to come in in the mornin'. Choppy found that out by tellin' the landlord he'd take a evenin' stroll, and might be in late. So Choppy gave us the tip and went out for his stroll; and when everybody else was in bed *we* went out very quiet by the back way, and found Choppy waitin' for us.

"'Come along,' says he. 'Don't make no row, and don't waste time; there's a job o' work for you two.'

"'Work?' says we; an' I could 'ear Jerry Stagg shud-derin' in the dark.

"'Yes,' says Choppy, 'and you'll 'ave to do it smart if you want to win them bets you've made.'

"'Ow's that?' says I.

"'Why,' says he, 'we're goin' to shove one o' them milestones a bit farther along the road. *We might* win with 'em where they are, but it's always best to make sure.'

"Quite a genius, you see, was Choppy Byles—a genius out an' out. How many 'ud 'a' thought o' sich a move as that? Not one in a million.

“ ‘But won’t they spot it ?’ says Jerry, a bit doubtful.

“ ‘Not if we do it careful,’ says Choppy. ‘And, besides, what odds if they do ? We ain’t takin’ no witnesses, and it’s down plain enough, in black an’ white. Between the forty-fourth and forty-fifth milestones, it says, an’ nothing about ’ow far apart they’re to be. Nobody can’t get over that. What’s more, that chap Gosling, I believe he knows something about them milestones. What for should he pick on them two and no others ? And it was him as put it down on the paper, remember—not a mile, but between them stones. It struck me mighty odd at the time. It’s a short mile, that’s what that is, an’ he knows it. There’s lots of ’em like that about the country, where they put the motor traps. So we shall only be putting the mistake right, or thereabouts, and doin’ the nation a favour, as well as takin’ it out o’ that dishonest sharp, Gosling. Come along. That won’t be a short mile to-morrow mornin’, whatever else it is.’

“The village was mostly scattered about a lane leadin’ out o’ the main road, you understand, so up the lane we goes. It was a windy night and very dark—just as suited us.

“When we come out on the main road we looks up an’ down in the dark for two or three minutes ’fore we spotted there was a milestone right opposyte the end o’ the lane. So across the road we went, and began strikin’ matches to read what was on it.

“I began, but arter about fifteen matches had blown out before I could see anything more than it *was* a milestone Choppy Byles lost his temper and had a go himself. We stood round, Jerry and me, and spread our coats while Choppy knelt down and struck more matches, talkin’ about ’em that pretty all the while I wonder the milestone didn’t catch fire itself. It was a worn old thing and not easy to make out, but presently Choppy persuaded a match to keep alight a bit, and then he jumped up.

“ ‘*That’s* one of ’em,’ he says ; ‘number forty-five. But it’s right opposite the end o’ the lane and everybody’ll remember that. We must leave this where it is—p’r’aps forty-four’s in a easier place. Come on—it’ll be this way.’ So we starts off to the right.

“We hadn’t gone much more’n half-way when we come to the church, with the graveyard round it.

“‘Just the place we want,’ says Choppy. ‘There’s sure to be a shed with spades and things in it. I was rather lookin’ for a farm shed.’

“So we went gropin’ about round the church, and, sure enough, we found a shed all right, with no lock on the door and a whole lot o’ shovels and picks and what-not in it, and a wheelbarrer—one o’ them wide, flat sort as navvies use. It looked as though Choppy Byles’s usual luck was in.

“We shoved a crowbar and a couple o’ shovels and picks on the barrer, and Jerry Stagg had just started wheelin’ it down the path to the gate when we got one o’ the biggest frights I ever had in my life. We very near ran into a man standing in the gateway.

“‘Ullo!’ says the man. ‘What’s all this?’

“‘Sh!’ Choppy whispers to us. ‘Not a word!’ and he shoved in front.

“‘Good evenin’!’ says he to the chap. ‘We thought you’d ha’ been in bed, or we’d ha’ come round. We just wanted to borrow—*hire*, that is—the barrer and shovels for a hour or two, to bury a dawg.’

“‘Well,’ says the chap, ‘you’ve come out a rum time to bury a dawg.’

“‘Why, yes,’ says Choppy, ‘we ’ave left it a bit late; but we wanted to keep it very private—not ’avin’ a licence for the dawg, you see. Now, what should you think might be a fair charge for us borrowin’ these things for a couple of hours, strictly private, to bury a dawg?’

“‘Well,’ says the chap, ‘it’ll come a bit dear. That there Christian wheelbarrer an’ things out of a churchyard oughtn’t properly to be used to bury a dawg at all—specially a dawg with no licence. There’s the strain on my conscience to consider,’ he says. ‘Say a quid.’

“‘Bit ’igh, ain’t it?’ Choppy says, with his hand in his pocket. He was always a dreadful ’ard ’un to part, was Choppy.

“‘I told you it ’ud come a bit ’igh,’ says the chap; ‘specially if it’s got to be kep’ private. A quid.’

“So, seein’ there was no help for it, Choppy lugged out the money and ’anded over. ‘Mind,’ he says, ‘this is strict Q. T.—between ourselves. We’ll be careful to put the things back again.’

“‘I don’t care whether you do or not,’ says the chap,

turnin' out o' the gate and chucklin' all over. "They ain't my things. I only took a look in as I went along!"

"I'd almost 'a' give another quid to see Choppy's face just then, but I could guess it. We shoved out into the road, and I could hear Choppy's rage almost bustin' out through his ears and nose. 'If it wasn't for givin' away the show,' he said, presently as we went along the road, 'we'd have it back out of him. Never mind—I'll get it all back to-morrow. Keep your eyes a-goin' for that milestone.'

"It wanted watchin' for in the dark, for there was a lot o' big trees along the hedge just thereabout which made it darker than ever. Pretty soon we spotted it, however, right in against the bank, with long grass and thistles and what-not all round it. The trees sheltered us a bit more here, so we didn't have to waste so many matches, and there was the '44 miles' all right and plain enough. So we set to work.

"Me and Jerry did the diggin' and Choppy Byles did the lookin' out—just the department he would choose. It was a sight easier than our job, anyhow, for that ground was very near as hard as the milestone itself. We dug pretty hard for a bit, and then Jerry took hold o' the top o' the stone and gave it a shove. It stood like a rock. 'My wig!' says Jerry. 'I wonder 'ow far it goes down?'

"We went at it again, and the more we dug the 'arder the ground got. I never had sich work; and I was just slackin' off a bit for a rest when we had another startler.

"A strange voice says, all of a sudden: 'Look 'ere—I'm sharin' in that!'

"Jerry Stagg fell over his spade and I sat down whop. Choppy Byles spun round with a jump, and there in the road was a chap standin' watchin' us.

"'I've bin sittin' over 'Ome Chips 'arf the night workin' out that clue,' says the chap, 'and now I come along and find you diggin' on the very spot. I reckon I share in that treasure.'

"This was the time when the buried-treasure rage was on, as you'll remember. All sorts o' papers buried money all over the shop, and parties was a-diggin' and pokin' about everywhere after it. We was relieved the chap wasn't up to our game, but it *was* a bit awkward.

"'What rot!' says Choppy. 'We're buryin' a dawg!'

“‘Dawg be blowed!’ says the chap. ‘Show me, your dawg!’

“‘Certainly not,’ Choppy says, very decided. ‘It’s a private dawg. You’ve done the clue wrong, that’s what it is. Go back and do it again, careful.’

“‘I have done it careful,’ says the chap; ‘and now I’ll stop here and see if I’m wrong or not.’

“‘No,’ says Choppy Byles, gettin’ nasty, ‘you *won’t* stop here, not when you come to think of it you won’t. When we go out buryin’ dawgs, private dawgs, we want to be let alone, see? We want to be let alone with our grief. And there’s three of us, *with* shovels. No, when you come to think of it, this is what you’ll think,’ says Choppy, speakin’ more friendly, and gettin’ nearer to the chap, with his hand in his pocket again; ‘this is what you’ll think. You’ll think to yourself, “’Ere’s three genelmen buryin’ a dawg, a private dawg, what they’re very grieved over. *If* I was right about that there treasure,” you’ll think, “why, they’re there first anyhow, an’ there’s three of ’em *with* shovels and other things just as ’ard, and I’d better not make ’em angry,” you’ll think. “I’d better take a friendly quid what they offer me and go away, and write to the editor of *’Ome Chips* for a consolation prize.” That’s what you’ll think if you’re a reasonable chap, as knows what’s best and safest.’

“‘Well,’ says the chap, steppin’ back a bit and speakin’ milder, ‘I *am* a-thinkin’ something o’ the sort, since you put it that way. Only I’m a-thinkin’ the friendly quid ought to be two.’

“Choppy was a hard partner in general, but prompt when it paid. ‘Here y’are,’ he snapped out; ‘two quid—take ’em and hook it,’fore I change my mind.’

“So the chap took the two quid and went off along the road. We listened to hear his footsteps dyin’ away, and then Choppy grabs a pick himself.

“‘We’ll get this over quick,’ he says, ‘before any more ’Ome Chippers comes along. Them papers is a public noo-ance, upsettin’ people’s minds like this. But keep a look-out in that there hole, in case that feller’s right.’

“I don’t like thinkin’ about the job we had. Nobody ain’t got any right to ask me to work again for the rest o’ my life after what I did that night. That milestone was like

them icebergs you read about—about ten times as much down below as up above. And the ground—well, you'd ha' sworn we'd found a' iron mine, all solid metal. Choppy dropped his pick soon and put in all his energy stimulat'in' Jerry and me, and gropin' about in the dirt for any odd thing 'Ome Chips might ha' put there.

"Well, we did it at last. That is, we got the milestone a-lollin' over sideways in a big hole, and we began sich a fight to get it on the wheelbarrer as we'd never gone through before—not even at Alexander's Park. Jerry and me was down the hole heavin' most desprit at the bottom of the stone, and Choppy Byles was haulin' at the top to pull the thing into the barrer, and the chorus was enough to roast the little birds a-sleepin' on the trees overhead. Our tempers was none the better for all this, and before we got the stone fair on the barrer we nearly had a fight among ourselves. I'd ha' sworn I 'eard Choppy laughin' at us, but he said it was Jerry, an' Jerry said it was us two, and we never properly settled it. But we did get the stone on the barrer at last, filled in the hole, and started off along the road.

"It was a pretty straight bit o' road, with trees along the side all very much the same, so it looked as though we could stretch out that mile a good bit without makin' the change look very noticeable. So we went along lookin' for a place as looked as much as possible like the one we took it from, when something else 'appened.

"I never see sich a country road as that one was that night; it was like the Strand, pretty near, barrin' the lights an' the evenin' papers. We was just steadyin' up to look at what seemed a good place when we heard footsteps.

"What shall we do?' I says.

"Stand still,' whispers Choppy. 'P'r'aps he won't notice. Get in front o' the barrer.'

"Then we heard the footsteps again, and they was all over the road at once; and the next minute the clap comes in among us like a Catherine wheel, and bang over the wheelbarrow we was tryin' to hide.

"Whash this?' says the new chap, turnin' over very unsteady on the milestone. 'What they leave wheelbarrers about in public road for people tumble over for, eh? Wheelbarrers an'—an' tombstones! I say, there's a tombstone on thishyer barrer! D'y'ear? Tombstone. What you want

tombstone on barrer middle o' night for?' An' with that he lifts bisself up and sits in the barrer talkin' to us by and large.

"'I know what you think,' says he; 'you think I'm drunk. That's my legs; they're shockin', but I'm allri'—sober as judge. Now, what about tombstone?'

"'It's all right, old chap,' says Choppy, tryin' to haul him up. 'It's for a dawg we're buryin'.'

"The chap sat and wagged his head and chuckled. 'Dawg?' he said. 'Dawg? You don't seem believe I'm sober. I know what you've done. You've bin an' boned thishyer tombstone out o' the churchyard 'long there, to make—make—here, I say, what you goin' to make out o' that tombstone?'

"'You get up, old feller, and come along o' me,' says Choppy, 'and I'll tell you all about it. I got a drink for you a little farther up the road—in a flask. It's a beautiful night for a walk; come along—the drink ain't very far off.'

"We never knew Choppy had got his flask with him, or it 'ud 'a' been empty long before this, with what we'd gone through. But we got the chap up somehow between us, and him and Choppy went staggerin' off along the road the way we'd come.

"Choppy was gone a most rabunculous long time, and me and Jerry pretty well fell asleep on the milestone waitin' for him. When he came at last he was spittin' and snarlin' with rage like an old tom-cat.

"'That there drunken tyke's been and lost my flask,' he said. 'Swigged it empty and then dropped it in the ditch or somewhere—he didn't know. I've bin gropin' all over the road and ditch and burnt all my matches, and had to give it up. But he's fast asleep an' safe enough, up against a stile. These here Nuthatch people owe me a bit more over this; but I'll have it all out of 'em to-morrow. We'll shove this milestone on a bit farther still. But spread your coats over it, in case we meet somebody else in this here busy thoroughfare.'

"So Jerry and me put our coats over it and started off once more. We didn't go far this time—about fifty or sixty yards. We'd made it a pretty long mile by now, and there was a sort o' place here that seemed a good deal like the one the milestone came from, so we stopped. And here

we found the first bit o' reasonable luck since we left the church-yard shed ; the ground seemed pretty soft.

"So we whanged in with the picks and shovels, and soon had a pretty tidy hole. The boss took a hand quite serious this time, for he was gettin' nervous. Not that he was much good. If you get three men as ain't used to it all a-diggin' one hole together on a dark night, you'll find they get a bit tangled up, one way and another. Jerry and me both resigned our appointments several times in that hole, and it was only business considerations as prevented a fight.

"Now we was diggin' this hole just at the foot of the bank by the roadside, and there was a hedge atop of the bank. We'd got the hole, as we thought, pretty near deep enough, and was just a-stoppin' to say so, when there came a most terrifyin' voice from over the top o' the hedge.

"'Oo—oo—oo !' says the voice. 'It's murder ! Nothing but murder !'

"We looked up, and there was a monstrous sort of ragged head lookin' down at us.

"'You've woke me up,' says the head, 'with your horrid language. I may be obliged by circumstances to sleep agin a hedge, but I've got my feelin's. You've got a corpse in that there barrer, covered over with coats, and you're a-buryin' of it. I ain't goin' to stand and see that done, not free of charge, I ain't. I may be a tramp, but I've got my feelin's !'

"Here was another fine go. To think we should ha' picked on the very spot where this tramp was dossin' ! But Choppy spoke up again.

"'S-sh !' he said. 'We're very sorry we disturbed you—didn't know you was there. Do you read '*Ome Chips* ?'

"'Read *what* ?' says the head.

"' '*Ome Chips*. The best and most 'olesome family paper in the world. Full of excitin' but moral stories, interestin' puzzles, and instructive articles by Aunt Eliza. One penny weekly. We're advertisin' it.'

"'Are you ?' says the tramp. 'Well, I'm a nervous chap and always carry a police whistle. I'll blow it 'ard, and advertise '*Ome Chips* a little more.'

"'No,' says Choppy, very hasty, 'don't do that. We don't advertise that way—anybody can blow a whistle.'

"'I can,' says the tramp. 'You hear me !' And he shoved the whistle in his mouth.

“‘Stow it!’ says Choppy, scrambli’n up the bank. ‘Don’t do a silly thing like that. You see, we’re out buryin’ treasure.’

“‘All right, I don’t mind that,’ says the chap in the hedge. ‘Bury it quick, so’s I can come an’ dig it up. Or give it me now, and save trouble.’

“‘That ain’t likely,’ says Choppy. ‘You don’t seem to understand liter’y work. We shan’t bury no treasure here now, when you’ve spotted the place; not likely, is it? But we’ll give you five bob to go and sleep somewhere else.’

“‘Why?’ asks the tramp. ‘I ain’t doin’ no ’arm, and it’s a very nice hedge. No, I don’t believe this treasure yarn. My theory’s murder. It’s a habit I don’t ’old with, is murder. I never allow a murder—under two quid; and this whistle’s a *very* loud ’un. Don’t you get no nearer—I’m nervous.’

“Choppy Byles looked up at the tramp and down at us, helpless. Then he pulled out the money and handed it over. The tramp was off in a jiffy; and presently we could hear him whistlin’ a little tune a long way off. I believe he did that to give us another scare.

“‘Two more this peaceful village owes me,’ says Choppy. ‘Just till to-morrow.’

“So we tumbled that milestone into the hole, holus-bolus, and shovelled in the earth quick and stamped it down. There was a rare lot there was no room for, but we kicked it about among the long grass and made it pretty tidy. And then we went home. We put the things back all right in the churchyard shed, and we crawled very quiet into the Fox and Hounds not very long afore the potman.

“In the mornin’, after breakfast, Choppy Byles says to the landlord, in a casual sort o’ way: ‘I s’pose you’re goin’ to see the runnin’ match this afternoon?’

“‘Why, yes,’ says the landlord. ‘I did think o’ goin’ over after dinner.’

“‘Where is it?’ asks Choppy, innocent as putty. ‘I don’t know my way about here.’

“‘Well,’ the landlord says, takin’ him to the window, ‘you see the church right away there to the right?’

“‘Yes,’ says Choppy.

“‘Well, the forty-fourth milestone’s a little way beyond that, along the road, and the forty-fifth’s farther on still.’

“‘Farther on still?’ says Choppy, with a sort o’ fall in his voice. ‘Farther on still?’

“ ‘Why, yes, o’ course,’ says the landlord. ‘A mile farther on. It would be, wouldn’t it?’ ”

“Choppy Byles looked round at me and Jerry Stagg with a face like a paper kite.

“ ‘What’s this mean?’ he gasped, as soon as the landlord was out o’ the room.

“ ‘I’ll go along the lane and see,’ says Jerry. And we both went with him.

“We came out at the end o’ the lane, and there was the first milestone we’d seen, straight in front of us. We took a look round and went across. It was the forty-third! The forty-third!

“The figures was worn, and not particular clear, and the three was one o’ them with the flat top and a sharp corner instead of a curl; very much like a five on a pitch-dark night with a match in a wind; but a three all the same.

“The three of us stood a-blinkin’ at each other over that milestone, as it come to us that we’d gone and made the mile a lump shorter instead of longer! And such a lump!

“ ‘Look out!’ says Jerry, very sudden. ‘There’s Gosling comin’ up the lane with another chap. Get behind the hedge!’ ”

“There was a gate close by, and we nipped in like winkin’ and stooped behind the hedge. It was Gosling, sure enough, with a pal, talkin’ and laughin’ like anything. He seemed to have a lot to say, but we only heard one bit, and that was enough.

“ ‘Five quid and a silver flask,’ says Gosling, ‘not to mention a night’s fun. But that’ll be nothing to the afternoon’s!’ ”

“We three just sat down behind that hedge and looked at each other like waxworks. We saw a whole new picture-show of that awful night in two seconds, us workin’ and them peepin’.

“Then says Choppy Byles: ‘My bag’s in the bedroom at the Fox and ’Ounds. Cheaper to leave it there. Foller the railway line.’ ”

“So we did.”



ANTHONY HOPE

*A Slight Mistake*

*An Uncounted Hour*

Anthony Hope (Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins) abandoned the law for novel writing, and very soon made his name by dashing romances of an imaginary Balkan country, of which *Rupert of Hentzau* and *The Prisoner of Zenda* are the favourites. In a different vein *The Dolly Dialogues* also achieved great popularity.



## A SLIGHT MISTAKE

"I DON'T ask you for more than a guinea," said Mrs. Hilary, with a parade of forbearance.

"It would be the same," I replied politely, "if you asked me for a thousand"; with which I handed her half a crown. She held it in her open hand, regarding it scornfully.

"Yes," I continued, taking a seat, "I feel that pecuniary gifts——"

"Half a crown!"

"Are a poor substitute for personal service. May not I accompany you to the ceremony?"

"I dare say you spent as much as this on wine with your lunch!"

"I was in a mad mood to-day," I answered apologetically. "What are they taught at the school?"

"Above all, to be good girls," said Mrs. Hilary, earnestly. "What are you sneering at, Mr. Carter?"

"Nothing," said I, hastily; and I added with a sigh, "I suppose it's all right."

"I should like," said Mrs. Hilary, meditatively, "if I had not other duties, to dedicate my life to the service of girls."

"I should think twice about that, if I were you," said I, shaking my head.

"By the way, Mr. Carter, I don't know if I've ever spoken unkindly of Lady Mickleham. I hope not."

"Hope," said I, "is not yet taxed."

"If I have, I'm very sorry. She's been most kind in undertaking to give away the prizes to-day. There must be some good in her."

"Oh, don't be hasty!" I implored.

"I always *wanted* to think well of her."

"Ah! Now I never did."

"And Lord Mickleham is coming, too. He'll be most useful."

"That settles it," I exclaimed. "I may not be an earl, but I have a perfect right to be useful. I'll go too."

"I wonder if you'll behave properly," said Mrs. Hilary, doubtfully.

I held out a half-sovereign, three half-crowns, and a shilling.

"Oh, well, you may come, since Hilary can't," said Mrs. Hilary.

"You mean he won't," I observed.

"He has always been prevented hitherto," said she, with dignity.

So I went, and it proved a most agreeable expedition. There were two hundred girls in blue frocks and white aprons (the girl three from the end of the fifth row was decidedly pretty)—a nice lot of prize books—the Micklehams (Dolly in demure black), ourselves, and the matron. All went well. Dolly gave away the prizes; Mrs. Hilary and Archie made little speeches. Then the matron came to me. I was sitting modestly at the back of the platform, a little distance behind the others.

"Mr. Musgrave," said the matron to me, "we're so glad to see you here at last. Won't you say a few words?"

"It would be a privilege," I responded cordially, "but unhappily I have a sore throat."

The matron (who was a most respectable woman) said, "Dear, dear!" but did not press the point. Evidently, however, she liked me, for when we went to have a cup of tea, she got me in a corner and began to tell me all about the work. It was extremely interesting. Then the matron observed:

"And what an angel Mrs. Musgrave is!"

"Well, I should hardly call her that," said I, with a smile.

"Oh, you mustn't depreciate her—you, of all men!" cried the matron, with a somewhat ponderous archness. "Really I envy you her constant society."

"I assure you," said I, "I see very little of her."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I only go to the house about once a fortnight— Oh, it's not my fault. She won't have me there oftener."

"What do you mean? I beg your pardon. Perhaps I've touched on a painful——?"

"Not at all, not at all," said I, suavely. "It is very natural.

I am neither young nor handsome, Mrs. Wiggins. I am not complaining."

The matron gazed at me.

"Only seeing her here," I pursued, "you have no idea of what she is at home. She has chosen to forbid me to come to her house——"

"Her house?"

"It happens to be more hers than mine," I explained. "To forbid me, I say, more than once to come to her house. No doubt she has her reasons."

"Nothing could justify it," said the matron, directing a wondering glance at Mrs. Hilary.

"Do not let us blame her," said I. "It is just an unfortunate accident. She is not as fond of me as I could wish, Mrs. Wiggins; and she is a great deal fonder than I could wish of——"

I broke off. Mrs. Hilary was walking toward us. I think she was pleased to see me getting on so well with the matron, for she was smiling pleasantly. The matron wore a bewildered expression.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Hilary, "that you'll drive back with the Micklehams?"

"Unless you want me," said I, keeping a watchful eye on the matron.

"Oh, I don't want you," said Mrs. Hilary, lightly.

"You won't be alone this evening?" I asked anxiously.

Mrs. Hilary stared a little.

"Oh, no!" she said. "We shall have our usual party."

"May I come one day next week?" I asked humbly.

Mrs. Hilary thought for a moment.

"I'm so busy next week; come the week after," said she, giving me her hand.

"That's very unkind," said I.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Hilary; and she added: "Mind you let me know when you're coming."

"I won't surprise you," I assured her, with a covert glance at the matron.

The excellent woman was quite red in the face, and could gasp out nothing but "Good-bye", as Mrs. Hilary affectionately pressed her hand.

At this moment Dolly came up. She was alone.

"Where's Archie?" I asked.

"He's run away; he's got to meet somebody. I knew you'd see me home. Mrs. Hilary didn't want you, of course?"

"Of course not," said I, plaintively.

"Besides, you'd rather come with me, wouldn't you?" pursued Dolly; and she added pleasantly to the matron, "Mrs. Hilary's so down on him, you know."

"I'd much rather come with you," said I.

"We'll have a cosy drive all to ourselves," said Dolly, "without husbands or wives or anything horrid. Isn't it nice to be rid of one's husband sometimes, Mrs. Wiggins?"

"I have the misfortune to be a widow, Lady Mickleham," said Mrs. Wiggins.

Dolly's eye rested upon her with an interested expression. I knew that she was about to ask Mrs. Wiggins whether she liked the condition of life, and I interposed hastily, with a sigh:

"But *you* can look back on a happy marriage, Mrs. Wiggins?"

"I did my best to make it so," said she, stiffly.

"You're right," said I. "Even in the face of unkindness we should strive——"

"My husband's not unkind," said Dolly.

"I didn't mean your husband," said I.

"What your poor wife would do if she cared a button for you, I don't know," observed Dolly.

"If I had a wife who cared for me, I should be a better man," said I, solemnly.

"But you'd probably be very dull," said Dolly. "And you wouldn't be allowed to drive with me."

"Perhaps it's all for the best," said I, brightening up. "Good-bye, Mrs. Wiggins."

Dolly walked on. Mrs. Wiggins held my hand for a moment.

"Young man," said she, sternly, "are you sure it's not your own fault?"

"I'm not at all sure, Mrs. Wiggins," said I. "But don't be distressed about it. It's of no consequence. I don't let it make me unhappy. Good-bye; so many thanks. Charming girls you have here—especially that one in the fifth—I mean, charming, all of them. Good-bye."

I hastened to the carriage. Mrs. Wiggins stood and watched. I got in and sat down by Dolly.

"Oh, Mrs. Wiggins," said Dolly, dimpling, "don't tell Mrs. Hilary that Archie wasn't with us, or we shall get into trouble." And she added to me, "Are you all right?"

"Rather!" said I, appreciatively; and we drove off, leaving Mrs. Wiggins on the doorstep.

A fortnight later I went to call on Mrs. Hilary. After some conversation she remarked:

"I'm going to the school again to-morrow."

"Really!" said I.

"And I'm so delighted—I've persuaded Hilary to come."

She paused, and then added:

"You really seemed interested last time."

"Oh, I was."

"Would you like to come again to-morrow?"

"No, I think not, thanks," said I, carelessly.

"That's just like you!" she said severely. "You never do any real good, because you never stick to anything."

"There are some things one can't stick to," said I.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mrs. Hilary.

But there are—and I didn't go.



## AN UNCOUNTED HOUR

WE were standing, Lady Mickleham and I, at a door which led from the morning-room to the terrace at The Towers. I was on a visit to that historic pile (by Banbrugh—out of the money accumulated by the third Earl—Paymaster to the Forces—*temp.* Queen Anne). The morning-room is a large room. Archie was somewhere in it. Lady Mickleham held a jar containing *pâté de foie gras*; from time to time she dug a piece out with a fork and flung the morsel to a big retriever which was sitting on the terrace. The morning was fine but cloudy. Lady Mickleham wore blue. The dog swallowed the *pâté* with greediness.

"It's so bad for him," sighed she; "but the dear likes it so much."

"How human the creatures are!" said I.

"Do you know," pursued Lady Mickleham, "that the Dowager says I'm extravagant. She thinks dogs ought not to be fed on *pâté de foie gras*."

"Your extravagance," I observed, "is probably due to your having been brought up on a moderate income. I have felt the effect myself."

"Of course," said Dolly, "we are hit by the agricultural depression."

"The Carters also," I murmured, "are landed gentry."

"After all, I don't see much point in economy, do you, Mr. Carter?"

"Economy," I remarked, putting my hands in my pockets, "is going without something you do want in case you should, some day, want something which you probably won't want."

"Isn't that clever?" asked Dolly, in an apprehensive tone.

"Oh, dear, no," I answered reassuringly. "Anybody can do that—if they care to try, you know."

Dolly tossed a piece of *pâté* to the retriever.

"I have made a discovery lately," I observed.

"What are you two talking about?" called Archie.

"You're not meant to hear," said Dolly, without turning round.

"Yet, if it's a discovery, he ought to hear it."

"He's made a good many lately," said Dolly.

She dug out the last bit of *pâté*, flung it to the dog, and handed the empty pot to me.

"Don't be so allegorical," I implored. "Besides, it's really not just to Archie. No doubt the dog is a nice one, but——"

"How foolish you are this morning! What's the discovery?"

"An entirely surprising one."

"Oh, but let me hear! It's nothing about Archie, is it?"

"No. I've told you all Archie's sins."

"Nor Mrs. Hilary? I wish it was Mrs. Hilary!"

"Shall we walk on the terrace?" I suggested.

"Oh, yes, let's," said Dolly, stepping out, and putting on a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat, which she caught up from a chair hard by. "It isn't Mrs. Hilary?" she added, sitting down on a garden seat.

"No," said I, leaning on a sun-dial which stood by the seat.

"Well, what is it?"

"It is simple," said I, "and serious. It is not, therefore, like you, Lady Mickleham."

"It's like Mrs. Hilary," said Dolly.

"No; because it isn't pleasant. By the way, are you jealous of Mrs. Hilary?"

Dolly said nothing at all. She took off her hat, roughened her hair a little, and assumed an effective pose. Still, it is a fact (for what it is worth) that she doesn't care much about Mrs. Hilary.

"The discovery," I continued, "is that I'm growing middle-aged."

"You are middle-aged," said Dolly, spearing her hat with its long pin.

I was, very naturally, nettled at this.

"So will you be soon," I retorted.

"Not soon," said Dolly.

"Some day," I insisted.

After a pause of about half a minute, Dolly said: "I suppose so."

"You will become," I pursued, idly drawing patterns with my finger on the sun-dial, "wrinkled, rough, fat—and, perhaps, good."

"You're very disagreeable to-day," said Dolly.

She rose and stood by me.

"What do the mottoes mean?" she asked.

There were two: I will not say they contradicted one another, but they looked at life from different points of view.

"*Pereunt et imputantur*," I read.

"Well, what's that, Mr. Carter?"

"A trite, but offensive, assertion," said I, lighting a cigarette.

"But what does it mean?" she asked, a pucker on her forehead.

"What does it matter?" said I. "Let's try the other."

"The other is longer."

"And better. *Horas non numero nisi serenas*."

"And what's that?"

I translated literally. Dolly slapped her hands, and her face gleamed with smiles.

"I like that one!" she cried.

"Stop!" said I, imperatively. "You'll set it moving!"

"It's very sensible," said she.

"More freely rendered it means: 'I live only when you——'"

"By Jove!" remarked Archie, coming up behind us, pipe in mouth, "there was a lot of rain last night. I've just measured it in the gauge."

"Some people measure everything," said I, with a displeased air. "It is a detestable habit."

"Archie, what does *Pereunt et imputantur* mean?"

"Eh? Oh, I see. Well, I say, Carter!—Oh, we, you know, I suppose it means you've got to pay for your fun, doesn't it?"

"Oh, is that all? I was afraid it was something horrid. Why did you frighten me, Mr. Carter?"

"I think it is rather horrid," said I.

"Why, it isn't even true," said Dolly, scornfully.

Now when I heard this ancient and respectable legend

thus cavalierly challenged I fell to studying it again, and presently I exclaimed :

“Yes, you’re right ! If it said that, it wouldn’t be true ; but Archie translated wrong.”

“Well, you have a shot,” suggested Archie.

“The oysters are eaten and put down in the bill,” said I. “And you will observe, Archie, that it does not say in whose bill.”

“Ah !” said Dolly.

“Well, somebody’s got to pay,” persisted Archie.

“Oh, yes, somebody,” laughed Dolly.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Archie. “I suppose the chap that has the fun——”

“It’s not always a chap,” observed Dolly.

“Well, then, the individual,” amended Archie. “I suppose he’d have to pay.”

“It doesn’t say so,” I remarked mildly. “And according to my small experience——”

“I’m quite sure your meaning is right, Mr. Carter,” said Dolly, in an authoritative tone.

“As for the other motto, Archie,” said I, “it merely means that a woman considers all hours wasted which she does not spend in the society of her husband.”

“Oh, come, you don’t gammon me,” said Archie. “It means that the sun don’t shine unless it’s fine, you know.”

Archie delivered this remarkable discovery in a tone of great self-satisfaction.

“Oh, you dear old thing !” said Dolly.

“Well, it does, you know,” said he.

There was a pause. Archie kissed his wife (I am not complaining ; he has, of course, a perfect right to kiss his wife) and strolled away toward the hot-houses.

I lit another cigarette. Then Dolly, pointing to the stem of the dial, cried :

“Why, here’s another inscription—oh, and in English !”

She was right. There was another—carelessly scratched on the old battered column—nearly effaced, for the characters had been but lightly marked—and yet not, as I conceived from the tenor of the words, very old.

“What is it ?” asked Dolly, peering over my shoulder, as I bent down to read the letters, and shading her eyes with

her hand. (Why didn't she put on her hat? We touch the Incomprehensible.)

"It is," said I, "a singularly poor, shallow, feeble, and undesirable little verse."

"Read it out," said Dolly.

So I read it. The silly fellow had written :

"Life is Love, the poets tell us,  
In the little books they sell us;  
But pray, ma'am—what's of Life the use,  
If Life be Love? For Love's the Deuce."

Dolly began to laugh gently, digging the pin again into her hat.

"I wonder," said she, "whether they used to come and sit by this old dial just as we did this morning!"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," said I. "And another point occurs to me, Lady Mickleham."

"Oh, does it? What's that, Mr. Carter?"

"Do you think that anybody measured the rain-gauge?"

Dolly looked at me very gravely.

"I'm so sorry when you do that," said she, pathetically.

I smiled.

"I really am," said Dolly. "But you don't mean it, do you?"

"Certainly not," said I.

Dolly smiled.

"No more than he did!" said I, pointing to the sun-dial.

And then we both smiled.

"Will this hour count, Mr. Carter?" asked Dolly, as she turned away.

"That would be rather strict," said I.



E. CE. SOMERVILLE and MARTIN ROSS

*The Shooting of Shinroe*

Enone Somerville and Martin Ross (the latter being in reality her cousin Violet Martin) were born and lived in Ireland, which is the scene of their lively and entertaining stories, many of which deal with the hunting field. Miss Somerville was herself an M.F.H. for several years and is also an accomplished artist.



## THE SHOOTING OF SHINROE

MR. JOSEPH FRANCIS McCABE rose stiffly from his basket chair, picked up the cushion on which he had been seated, looked at it with animosity, hit it hard with his fist, and, flinging it into the chair, replaced himself upon it, with the single word :

“Flog !”

I was aware that he referred to the flock with which the cushions in the lounge of Reardon’s Hotel were stuffed.

“They have this hotel destroyed altogether with their improvements,” went on Mr. McCabe between puffs, as he lit his pipe. “God be with the time this was the old smoking-room, before they knocked it and the hall into one and spoilt the two of them ! There were fine solid chairs in it that time, that you’d sleep in as good as your bed, but as for these wicker affairs, I declare the wind’d whistle through them the same as a crow’s nest.” He paused, and brought his heel down heavily on the top of the fire. “And look at that for a grate ! A wellgrate they call it—I’d say, ‘Leave Well alone !’ Thirty years I’m coming to Sessions here, and putting up in this house, and, in place of old Tim telling me me own room was ready for me, there’s a whipper-snapper of a snapdragon in a glass box in the hall, asking me me name in broken English” (it may be mentioned that this happened before the war), “and ‘Had Ta Cook’s ticket ?’ and down-facing me that I must leave my key in what he calls the ‘Bew-ro’.”

I said I knew of a lady who always took a Cook’s ticket when she went abroad, because when she got to Paris there would be an Englishman on the platform to meet her, or at all events a broken Englishman.

Mr. McCabe softened to a temporary smile, but held on to his grievance with the tenacity of his profession. (I don’t think I have mentioned that he is a Solicitor, of a type

now, unfortunately, becoming obsolete.) He had a long grey face, and a short grey moustache; he dyed his hair, and his age was known to no man.

"There was one of Cook's tourists sat next me at breakfast," he resumed, "and he asked me was I ever in Ireland before and how long was I in it. 'Wan day,' says I."

"Did he believe you?" I asked.

"He did," replied Mr. McCabe, with something that approached compassion.

I have always found old McCabe a mitigating circumstance of Sessions at Owenford, both in Court and out of it. He was a sportsman of the ingrained variety that grows wild in Ireland, and, in any of the horse-coping cases that occasionally refresh the innermost soul of Munster, it would be safe to assume that Mr. McCabe's special gifts had ensured his being retained, generally on the shady side. He fished when occasion served; he shot whether it did or not. He did not exactly keep horses, but he always knew someone who was prepared to "pass on" a thoroughly useful animal, with some infirmity so insignificant that until you tried to dispose of him you did not realise that he was yours, until the final passing-on to the next world. He had certain shooting privileges in the mountains behind the town of Owenford (bestowed, as he said, by a grateful client), and it had often been suggested by him that he and I should anticipate some November Sessions by a day, and spend it "on the hill". We were now in the act of carrying out the project.

"Ah, these English," McCabe began again, mixing himself a glass of whisky and water, "they'd believe anything so long as it wasn't the truth. Talking politics these lads were, and by the time they had their ham and eggs swallowed they had the whole country arranged. 'And look,' says they—they were anglers, God help us!—'look at all the money that's going to waste for want of preserving the rivers!' 'I beg your pardon,' says I, 'there's water-bailiffs on the most of the rivers. I was defending a man not long since that was cot by the water-bailiffs poaching salmon on the Owen. "And what proot have you?"' says I to the water-bailiff. "How do you know it was a salmon at all?" "Is it how would I know?" says the bailiff. "Didn't I gaff the fish for him meself!"' "

"What did your anglers say to that?" I inquired.

“Well, they didn’t quite go so far as to tell me I was a liar,” said Mr. McCabe tranquilly. “Ah, telling such as them the truth is wasting what isn’t plenty! Then they’ll meet some fellow that lies like a tooth-drawer, and they’ll write to the *English Times* on the head of him!” He stretched forth a long and bony hand for the tumbler of whisky and water. “And, talking of tooth-drawers,” he went on, “there’s a dentist comes here once a fortnight, Jeffers his name is, and a great sportsman too. I was with him to-day” —he passed his hand consciously over his mouth, and the difference that I had dimly felt in his appearance suddenly and in all senses of the word flashed upon me—“and he was telling me how one time, in the summer that’s past, he’d been out all night fishing in the Owen. He was going home before the dawn, and he jumped down off a bank on to what he took to be a white stone—and he aimed for the stone, mind you, because he thought the ground was wet—and what was it but a man’s face!” McCabe paused to receive my comment. “What did he do, is it? Ran off for his life, roaring out, ‘There’s a first-rate dentist in Owenford!’ The fellow was lying asleep there, and he having bundles of spurge with him to poison the river. He had drink taken, I suppose.”

“Was he a water-bailiff too?” said I. “I hope the conservators of the river stood him a false set of teeth.”

“If they did,” said McCabe, with an unexpected burst of feeling, “I pity him!” He rose to his feet, and put his tumbler down on the chimney-piece. “Well, we should get away early in the morning, and it’s no harm for me to go to bed.”

He yawned—a large yawn that ended abruptly with a metallic click. His eyes met mine, full of unspoken things; we parted in a silence that seemed to have been artificially imposed upon Mr. McCabe.

The wind boomed intermittently in my chimney during the night, and a far and heavy growling told of the dissatisfaction of the sea. Yet the morning was not unfavourable. There was a broken mist, with shimmers of sun in it, and the carman said it would be a thing of nothing, and would go out with the tide. The boots, a relic of the old *régime*, was pessimistic, and mentioned that there were two stars squeez up agin the moon last night, and he would have no depend-

ence on the day. McCabe offered no opinion, being occupied in bestowing in a species of dog-box beneath the well of the car a young Irish setter, kindly lent by his friend the dentist. The setter, who had formed at sight an unfavourable opinion of the dog-box, had resolved itself into an invertebrate mass of jelly and lead, and was with difficulty straightened out and rammed home into it.

"Have we all now?" said McCabe, slamming the door in the dog's face. "Take care we're not like me uncle, old Tom Duffy, that was going shooting, and was the whole morning slapping his pockets and saying, 'Me powder! me shot! me caps! me wads!' and when he got to the bog, 'O tare an' 'ouns!' says he, 'I forgot the gun!'"

There are still moments when I can find some special and not-otherwise-to-be-attained flavour in driving on an outside car; a sense of personal achievement in sitting, by some method of instinctive suction, the lurches and swoops peculiar to these vehicles. Reardon's had given us its roomiest car and its best horse, a yellow mare, with a long back and a slinging trot, and a mouth of iron.

"Where did Mr. Reardon get the mare, Jerry?" asked McCabe, as we zigzagged in successive hair-breadths through the streets of Owenford.

"D-Dublin, sir," replied the driver, who, with both fists extended in front of him and both heels planted against his narrow footboard, seemed to find utterance difficult.

"She's a goer!" said McCabe.

"She is—she killed two men," said Jerry, in two jerks.

"That's a great credit to her. What way did she do it?"

"P-pulled the lungs out o' them!" ejaculated Jerry, turning the last corner and giving the mare a shade more of her head, as a tribute, perhaps, to her prowess.

She swung us for some six miles along the ruts of the coast road at the same unflinching pace, after which, turning inland and uphill, we began the climb of four miles into the mountains. It was about eleven o'clock when we pulled up beside a long and reedy pool, high up in the heather; the road went on, illimitably it seemed, and was lost, with its attendant telegraph posts, in cloud.

"Away with ye now, Jerry," said McCabe; "we'll shoot our way home."

He opened the back of the dog-box, and summoned its occupant. The summons was disregarded. Far back in the box two sparks of light and a dead silence indicated the presence of the dog.

"How snug you are in there!" said McCabe. "Here, Jerry, pull him out for us. What the deuce is this his name is? Jeffers told me yesterday and it's gone from me."

"I d'no would he bite me," said Jerry, taking a cautious observation, and giving voice to the feelings of the party. "Here, poor fellow! Here, good lad!"

The good lad remained immovable. The lure of a sandwich produced no better result.

"We can't be losing our day with the brute this way," said McCabe. "Tip up the car. He'll come out then, and no thanks to him."

As the shafts rose heavenwards, the law of gravitation proved too many for the setter, and he slowly slid to earth.

"If I only knew your damn' name we'd be all right now," said McCabe.

The carman dropped the shafts on to the mare, and drove up the pass, with one side of the car turned up and himself on the other. The yellow mare had, it seemed, only begun her day's work. A prophetic instinct, of the reliable kind that is strictly founded on fact, warned me that we might live to regret her departure.

The dentist's setter had, at sight of the guns, realized that things were better than he had expected, and now preceded us along the edge of the lake with every appearance of enthusiasm. He quartered the ground with professional zeal, he splashed through the sedge, and rattled through thickets of dry reeds, and set successively a heron, a water-hen, and something unseen, that I believe to have been a water-rat. After each of these efforts he rushed in upon his quarry, and we called him by all the gun-dog names we had ever heard of, from Don to Grouse, from Carlo to Shot, coupled with objurgations on a rising scale. With none of them did we so much as vibrate a chord in his bosom. He was a large dog, with a blunt, stupid face, and a faculty for excitement about nothing that impelled him to bound back to us as often as possible, to gaze in our eyes in brilliant inquiry, and to pant and prance before us with all the fatuity of youth. Had he been able to speak, he would have asked idiotic

questions, of that special breed that exact from their victim a reply of equal imbecility.

The lake and its environs, for the first time in McCabe's experience, yielded nothing ; we struck up on to the mountain-side, following the course of an angry stream that came racing down from the heights. We worked up through ling and furze, and skirted flocks of pale stones that lay in the heather like petrified sheep, and the dog, ranging deliriously, set water-wagtails and anything else that could fly ; I believe he would have set a blue-bottle, and I said so to McCabe.

"Oh, give him time ; he'll settle down," said McCabe, who had a thankfulness for small mercies born of a vast experience of makeshifts ; "he might fill the bag for us yet."

We laboured along the flank of the mountain, climbing in and out of small ravines, jumping or wading streams, sloshing through yellow sedgery bog ; always with the brown heather running up to the misty sky-line, and always with the same atrocious luck. Once a small pack of grouse got up, very wild, and leagues out of range, thanks to the far-reaching activities of the dog ; and once a hermit woodcock exploded out of a clump of furze, and sailed away down the slope, followed by four charges of shot and the red setter, in equally innocuous pursuit. And this, up to luncheon time, was the sum of the morning's sport.

We ate our sandwiches on a high ridge, under the lee of a tumbled pile of boulders, that looked as if they had been about to hurl themselves into the valley, and had thought better of it at the last moment. Between the looming, elephant-grey mountains the mist yielded glimpses of the far greenness of the sea, the only green thing in sight in this world of grey and brown. The dog sat opposite to me, and willed me to share my food with him. His steady eyes were charged with the implication that I was a glutton ; personally I abhorred him, yet I found it impossible to give him less than twenty-five per cent of my sandwiches.

"I wonder did Jeffers take him for a bad debt," said McCabe reflectively, as he lit his pipe.

I said I would rather take my chance with the bad debt.

"He might have treated me better," McCabe grumbled on, "seeing that I paid him seven pound ten the day before yesterday, let alone that it was me that was the first to put

him up to this—this bit of Shinroe Mountain that never was what you might call strictly preserved. When he came here first he didn't as much know what cartridges he'd want for it. 'Six and eight,' says I, 'that's a lawyer's fee, so if you think of me you'll not forget it!' And now, if ye please," went on Mr. Jeffers's preceptor in sport, "he's shooting the whole country and selling all he gets! And he wouldn't so much as ask me to go with him; and the excuse he gives, he wouldn't like to have an old hand like me connyshooting his shots. How modest he is!"

I taunted McCabe with having been weak enough thus to cede his rights, and McCabe, who was not at all amused, said that after all it wasn't so much Jeffers that did the harm, but an infernal English Syndicate that had taken the Shinroe shooting this season, and paid old Purcell that owned it ten times what it was worth.

"It might be as good for us to get off their ground now," continued McCabe, rising slowly to his feet, "and try the Lackagreina Valley. The stream below is their bounds."

This I hasten to say, was the first I had heard of the Syndicate, and I thought it tactless of McCabe to have mentioned it, even though the wrong that we had done them was purely technical. I said to him that I thought the sooner we got off their ground the better, and we descended the hill and crossed the stream, and McCabe said that he could always shoot this next stretch of country when he liked. With this assurance, we turned our backs on the sea and struck inland, tramping for an hour or more through country whose entire barrenness could only be explained on the hypothesis that it had been turned inside out to dry. So far it had failed to achieve even this result.

The weather got thicker, and the sport, if possible, thinner. I had long since lost what bearings I possessed, but McCabe said he knew of a nice patch of scrub in the next valley that always held a cock. The next valley came at last, not without considerable effort, but no patch of scrub was apparent. Some small black and grey cattle stood and looked at us, and a young bull showed an inclination to stalk the dog; it seemed the only sport the valley was likely to afford. McCabe looked round him, and looked at his watch, and looked at the sky, which did not seem to be more than a yard above our heads, and said with emotion:

“Did ye think of telling the lad in the glass box in the hall that we might want some dinner kept hot for us? I d’no from Adam where we’ve got to?”

There was a cattle-track along the side of the valley which might, though not necessarily, lead somewhere. We pursued it, and found that it led, in the first instance, to some black-faced mountain sheep. A cheerful interlude followed, in which the red setter hunted the sheep and we hunted the setter, and what McCabe said about the dentist in the intervals of the chase was more appropriate to the occasion than to these pages.

When justice had been satiated, and the last echo of the last yell of the dog had trembled into silence among the hills, we resumed the cattle-track, which had become a shade more reliable, and, as we proceeded, began to give an impression that it might lead somewhere. The day was dying in threatening stillness. Lethargic layers of mist bulged low, like the roof of a marquee, and cloaked every outline that could yield us information. The dog, unchastened by recent events, and full of an idiot optimism, continued to range the hillside.

“I suppose I’ll never get the chance to tell Jeffers my opinion of that tomfool,” said McCabe, following with an eye of steel the perambulations of the dog; “the best barrister that ever wore a wig couldn’t argue with a dentist! He has his fist half-way down your throat before you can open your mouth; and in any case he’ll tell me we couldn’t expect any dog would work when we forgot his name. What’s the brute at now?”

The brute was high above us on the hillside, setting a solitary furze bush with convincing determination, and casting backward looks to see if he were being supported.

“It might be a hare,” said McCabe, cocking his gun, with a revival of hope that was almost pathetic, and ascending towards the furze bush.

I neither quickened my pace nor deviated from the cattle track, but I must admit that I did so far yield to the theory of the hare as to slip a cartridge into my gun.

McCabe put his gun to his shoulder, lowered it abruptly, and walked up to the furze bush. He stooped and picked up something.

“He’s not such a fool after all!” he called out. “Ye said he’d set a blue-bottle, and, b’Jove, ye weren’t far out!”

He held up a black object that was neither bird nor beast.

I took the cartridge out of my gun as unobtrusively as possible, and McCabe and the dog rejoined me with the product of the day's sport. It was a flat-sided bottle, high shouldered, with a short neck; McCabe extracted the cork and took a sniff.

"Mountain dew, no less!" (McCabe adhered faithfully to the stock phrases of his youth). "This never paid the King's shilling! Give me the cup off your flask, Major, till we see what sort it is."

It was pretty rank, and even that seasoned vessel, old McCabe, admitted that it might be drinkable in another couple of years, but hardly in less; yet as it ran, a rivulet of fire, through my system, it seemed to me that even the water in my boots became less chill.

"In the public interest we're bound to remove it," said McCabe, putting the bottle into his game-bag; "any man that drank enough of that'd rob a church. Well, anyway, we're not the only people travelling this path," he continued; "whoever put his afternoon tea to hide there will choose a less fashionable promenade next time. But, indeed, the poor man could not be blamed for not knowing such a universal genius of a dog was coming this way! Didn't I tell you he'd fill the bag for us!"

He extracted from his pockets a pair of knitted gloves, and put them on; it was equivalent to putting up the shutters.

It was shortly after this that we regained touch with civilization. Above the profile of a hill a telegraph post suddenly showed itself against the grey of the misty twilight. We made as bee-like a line for it as the nature of the ground permitted, and found ourselves on a narrow road, at a point where it was in the act of making a hairpin turn before plunging into a valley.

"The Beacon Bay road, begad!" said McCabe. "I didn't think we were so far out of our way. Let me see now, which way is this we'd best go."

He stood still and looked round him, taking his bearings; in the solitude the telegraph posts hummed to each other, full of information and entirely reticent.

The position was worse than I thought. By descending into the valley we should, a couple or three miles farther on,

strike the coast road about six miles from home ; by ascending the hill and walking four miles, we should arrive at the station of Coppeen Road, and, with luck, there intercept the evening train for Owenford.

“And that’s the best of our play, but we’ll have to step out,” concluded McCabe, shortening the strap of his game-bag, and settling it on his back.

“If I were you,” I said, “I’d chuck that stuff away. Apart from everything else, it’s about half a ton extra to carry.”

“There’s many a thing, Major, that you might do that I might not do,” returned McCabe with solemnity, “and in the contrary sense the statement is equally valid.”

He faced the hill with humped shoulders, and fell with no more words into his poacher’s stride, and I followed him with the best imitation of it that I could put up after at least six hours of heavy going. McCabe is fifteen years older than I am, and I hope that when I am his age I shall have more consideration than he for those who are younger than myself.

It was now nearly half-past five o’clock, and by the time we had covered a mile of puddles and broken stones it was too dark to see which was which. I felt considerable dubiety about catching the train at Coppeen Road, all the more that it was a flag station, demanding an extra five minutes in hand. Probably the engine-driver had long since abandoned any expectation of passengers at Coppeen Road, and, if he even noticed the signal, would treat it as a practical joke. It was after another quarter of an hour’s trudge that a distant sound entered into the silence that had fallen upon McCabe and me—an intermittent grating of wheels upon patches of broken stone, a steady hammer of hoofs.

McCabe halted.

“That car’s bound to be going to Owenford,” he said ; “I wonder could they give us a lift.”

A single light (the economical habit of the South of Ireland) began to split the foggy darkness.

“Begad, that’s like the go of Reardon’s mare !” said McCabe, as the light swung down upon us.

We held the road like highwaymen, we called upon the unseen driver to stop, and he answered to the name of Jerry. This is not a proof of identity in a province where every third man is dignified by the name of Jeremiah, but as the car pulled

up it was Reardon's yellow mare on which the lamplight fell, and we knew that the fates had relented.

We should certainly not catch the train at Coppeen Road, Jerry assured us; "she had," he said, "a fashion of running early on Monday nights, and, in any case, if you'd want to catch that train, you should make like an amber-bush for her."

We agreed that it was too late for the preparation of an ambush.

"If the Sergeant had no objections," continued Jerry, progressing smoothly towards the tip that would finally be his, "it would be no trouble at all to oblige the gentlemen. Sure it's the big car I have, and it's often I took six, yes, and seven on it, going to the races."

I was now aware of two helmeted presences on the car, and a decorous voice said that the gentlemen were welcome to a side of the car if they liked.

"Is that Sergeant Leonard?" asked McCabe, who knew every policeman in the country. "Well, Sergeant, you've the knack of being on the spot when you're wanted!"

"And sometimes when he's not!" said I.

There was a third and unhelmeted presence on the car, and something of stillness and aloofness in it had led me to diagnose a prisoner.

The suggested dispositions were accomplished. The two policemen and the prisoner wedged themselves on one side of the car, McCabe and I mounted the other, and put the dog on the cushion of the well behind us (his late quarters in the dog-box being occupied by half a mountain sheep, destined for the hotel larder). The yellow mare went gallantly up to her collar, regardless of her augmented load; McCabe and the Sergeant leaned to each other across the back of the car, and fell into profound and low-toned converse; I smoked, and the dog, propping his wet back against mine, made friends with the prisoner. It may be the Irish blood in me that is responsible for the illicit sympathy with a prisoner which sometimes incommodes me; I certainly bestowed some of it upon the captive, sandwiched between two stalwarts of the R.I.C., and learning that the strong arm of the Law was a trifle compared with the rest of its person.

"What sport had you, Major?" inquired Jerry, as we slackened speed at a hill.

I was sitting at the top of the car, under his elbow, and he probably thought I was feeling neglected during the heart-to-heart confidences of McCabe and the Sergeant.

"Not a feather," said I.

"Sure the birds couldn't be in it this weather," said Jerry considerably; he had in his time condoled with many sportsmen. "I am after talking to a man in Coppeen Road station that was carrying the game-bag for them gentlemen that has Mr. Purcell's shooting on Shinroe Mountain and what had the four of them after the day—only one jack-snipe!"

"They went one better than we did," I said, but, as was intended, I felt cheered. "What day were they there?"

"To-day, sure!" answered Jerry, with faint surprise, "and they hadn't their luncheon hardly ate when they met one on the mountain that told them he seen two fellas walking it, with guns and a dog, no more than an hour before them. 'That'll do!' says they, and they turned about and back with them to tell the police."

"Did they see the fellows?" I asked lightly, after a panic-stricken pause.

"They did not. Sure they said if they seen them, they'd shoot them like rooks," replied Jerry, "and they would too. It's what the man was saying if they cot them lads to-day they'd have left them in the way they'd be given up by both doctor and priest. Oh, they're fierce altogether!"

I received this information in a silence that was filled with bursting with the desire to strangle McCabe.

Jerry leaned over my shoulder, and lowered his voice.

"They was saying in Coppeen Road that there was a gentleman that came on a mothor-bike this morning early, and he had Shinroe shot out by ten o'clock, and on with with him then up the country; and it isn't the first time he was in it. It's a pity those gentlemen couldn't ketch *him*. *They'd* mothor-bike him!"

It was apparent that the poaching of the motor-bicycle upon the legitimate preserves of carmen was responsible for this remarkable sympathy with the law; I, at all events, had it to my credit that I had not gone poaching on a motor-bicycle.

Just here McCabe emerged from the heart-to-heart, and nudged me in the ribs with a confederate elbow. I did not respond, being in no mood for confederacy, certainly not with McCabe.

"The Sergeant is after telling me this prisoner he has here is prosecuted at the instance of that Syndicate I was telling you about," he whispered hoarsely in my ear, "for hunting Shinroe with greyhounds. He was cited to appear last week, and he didn't turn up; he'll be before you to-morrow. I hope the Bench will have fellow-feeling for a fellow-creature!"

The whisper ended in a wheezy cough that was Mr. McCabe's equivalent for a laugh. It was very close to my ear, and it had somewhere in it the metallic click I had noticed before.

I grunted forbiddingly, and turned my back upon McCabe, as far as it was possible to do so on an outside car, and we hammered on through the darkness. Once the solitary lamp illumined the prolonged countenance of a donkey, and once or twice we came on a party of sheep lying on the road; they melted into the night at the minatory whistle that is dedicated to sheep, and on each of these occasions the dentist's dog was shaken by strong shudders, and made a convulsive attempt to spring from the car in pursuit. We were making good travelling on a long down-grade, a smell of seaweed was in the mist, and a salt taste was on my lips. It was very cold; I had no overcoat, my boots had plumbed the depths of many bog-holes, and I found myself shivering like the dog.

It was at this point that I felt McCabe fumbling at his game-bag, that lay between us on the seat. By dint of a sympathy that I would have died rather than betray I divined he was going to tap that fount of contraband fire that he owed to the dentist's dog. It was, apparently, a matter of some difficulty; I felt him groping and tugging at the straps.

I said to myself, waveringly: "Old blackguard! I won't touch it if he offers it to me."

McCabe went on fumbling: "Damn these woolly gloves. I can't do a hand's turn with them."

In the dark I could not see what followed, but I felt him raise his arm. There was a jerk, followed by a howl.

"Hold on!" roared McCabe, with a new and strange utterance. "Thtop the horth! I've dropped me teeth!"

The driver did his best, but with the push of the hill behind her the mare took some stopping.

"Oh, murder! Oh, murder!" wailed McCabe, lisping thickly. "I pulled them out o' me head with the glove,

trying to get it off!" He scrambled off the car. "Give me the lamp! Me lovely new teeth——"

I detached the lamp from its socket with all speed, and handed it to McCabe, who hurried back on our tracks. From motives of delicacy I remained on the car, as did also the rest of the party. A minute or two passed in awed silence, while the patch of light went to and fro on the dark road. It seemed an intrusion to offer assistance, and an uncertainty as to whether to allude to the loss as "them" or "it" made inquiries a difficulty.

"For goodneth'ake have none o' ye any matcheth, that ye couldn't come and help me?" demanded the voice of McCabe, in indignation, blurred pathetically by his gosling-like lisp.

I went to his assistance, and refrained, with an effort, from suggesting the employment of that all-accomplished setter, the dentist's dog, in the search; it was not the moment for pleasantry. Not yet.

We crept along, bent double, like gorillas; the long strips of broken stones yielded nothing, the long puddles between them were examined in vain.

"I'll give you half a crown this minute, McCabe," said I brutally, "if you'll say 'Sessions'!"

Here the Sergeant joined us, striking matches as he came. He worked his way into the sphere of the car-lamp, he was most painstaking and sympathetic, and his oblique allusions to the object of the search were a miracle of tact.

"I see something white beyond you, Mr. McCabe," he said respectfully. "Might that be them!"

McCabe swung the lamp as indicated.

"No, it might not. It's a pebble," he replied, with pardonable irascibility.

Silence followed, and we worked our way up the hill.

"What's that, sir?" ventured the Sergeant, with some excitement, stopping again and pointing. "I think I see the gleam of the gold."

"Ah, nonthenth, man! They're vulcanite!" snapped McCabe, more irascibly than ever.

The word nonsense was a disastrous effort, and I withdrew into the darkness to enjoy it.

"What colour might vulcanite be, sir?" murmured a voice beside me.

Jerry had joined the search-party ; he lighted, as he spoke, an inch of candle. On hearing my explanation, he remarked that it was a bad chance, and at the same instant the inch of candle slipped from his fingers and fell into a puddle.

"Divil mend ye for a candle ! Have ye a ma'th, sir ? I haven't a one left !"

As it happened, I had no matches, my on'ly means of making a light being a patent tinder-box.

"Have you a match there ?" I called out to the invisible occupants of the car, which was about fifteen or twenty yards away, advancing towards it as I spoke. The constable politely jumped off and came to meet me.

As he was in the act of handing me his matchbox, the car drove away down the hill.

I state the fact with the bald simplicity that is appropriate to great disaster. To be exact, the yellow mare sprang from inaction into a gallop, as if she had been stung by a wasp, and had a start of at least fifty yards before either the carman or the constable could get under weigh. The carman, uttering shrill and menacing whistles, led the chase, the constable, though badly hampered by his greatcoat, was a good second, and the Sergeant, making the best of a bad start, followed them into the night.

The yellow mare's head was for home, and her load was on its own legs on the road behind her ; hysterical yelps from the dentist's dog indicated that he also was on his own legs, and was, in all human probability, jumping at the mare's nose. As the rapturous beat of her hoofs died away on the down-grade, I recalled the assertion that she had pulled the lungs out of two men, and it seemed to me that the prisoner had caught the psychological moment on the hop.

"They'll not ketch him," said McCabe, with the flat calm of a broken man ; "not to-night, anyway. Nor for a week maybe. He'll take to the mountains."

The silence of the hills closed in upon us, and we were left in our original position, plus the lamp of the car, and minus our guns, the dentist's dog, and McCabe's teeth.

Far, far away, from the direction of Coppeen Road, that sinister outpost, where evil rumours were launched, and the night trains were waylaid by the amber-bushes, a steady tapping sound advanced towards us.

“A motor-bike!” ejaculated McCabe. “Take the light and thtop him—he wouldn’t know what I wath thaying—if he run over them they’re done for! For the love of merthy tell him to keep the left thide of the road!”

I took the lamp, and ran towards the bicyclist, waving it as I ran. The star, now a moon of acetylene ferocity, slackened speed, and a voice behind it said :

“What’s up?”

I stated the case with telegraphic brevity, and the motor-bicycle slid slowly by me. Its rider had a gun slung across his back; my lamp revealed a crammed game-bag on the carrier behind him.

“Sorry I can’t assist you,” he called back to me, keeping carefully on the left-hand side of the road, “but I have an appointment.” Then, as an afterthought, “There’s a first-rate dentist in Owenford!”

The red eye of its tail-light glowed a farewell and passed on, like the rest, into the night.

I rejoined McCabe. He clutched my arm and shook it.

“That wath Jefferth! *Jefferth*, I tell ye! The dirty poacher! And hith bag full of our birdth!”

It was not till the lamp went out, which it did some ten minutes afterwards, that I drew McCabe from the scene of his loss, gently, as one deals with the bereaved, and faced with him the six-mile walk to Owenford.

*(From “In Mr. Knox’s Country”, by kind permission of Messrs. Longman, Green & Co.)*

W. M. THACKERAY

*The Persecution of British Footmen*

William Makepeace Thackeray was one of the giants of Victorian literature, famous for his gift of characterisation and knowledge of life. He began by contributing both articles and drawings to *Punch*, and the publication of *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* established him in the front rank of novelists.



## THE PERSECUTION OF BRITISH FOOTMEN

LEVIN remoke from the whirld: hockupied with the umble dooties of my perfeshun, which moacely consists of droring hale & beer for the gence who freguent my otel, when LOY polittlicle efairs hinterest but suldum, and I confess that PHILIP habdigaded (the other day, as I read in my noble & favorite *Dispatch* newspaper, where PUBLICOALER is the boy for me), I cared no longer no mor than I did when the chap hover the way went hoff without paying his rent. No maw does my little MARY HANN. I prommis you she has enough to do in minding the bar and the babbies, to eed the conwulsions of hempires of the hagonies of prostrick kings.

I ham what one of those littery chaps who uses our back parlor calls a *poker curranty* on plitticly subjix. I don't permit 'em to whex, worrit, or distubb me. My objick is to leaf a good beer bisnis to little JEAMES, to sckewer somethink comftable for my two gals, MARY HANN and HANGELINA (wherehof the latter, who has jest my blew his and yaller air, is a perfick little Sherrybing to behold), and in case Grimb DETH, which may appen to the best on us, should come & scru me down, to leaf behind a somethink for the best wife any gentleman hever ad—tied down of coarse if hever she should marry agin.

I shoodn't have wrote at all, then, at this present juncter, but for sugmstances which affect a noble and galliant body of menn, of which I once was a hornmint; I mean of the noble perfeshn of Henglish footmen & livry suvvants, which has been crooly pussicuted by the firoashus Paris mob. I love my hold companions in harms, and none is more welcome, when they ave money, than they at the Wheel of Fortune Otel. I have a clubb of twenty for gentlemen outalivery, which has a *riunion* in my front parlor; and MR. BUCK, my lord Duke's hown man, is to stand Godfather to the next little PLUSH as ever was.

I call the attenshn of Europ, in the most solomon and unpressive manner, to the hinjaries infligted upon my brutherin. Many of them have been obleeged to boalt without receiving their wagis; many of them is egsiles on our shaws: an infewriate Parishn mob has tawn off their shoaldernots, laft at their venerable liveries and buttons, as they laff at every-think sacred; and I look upon those pore men as nayther mor nor less than marters, and pittty and admire them with hallmy art.

I hoffer to those sacred rephugs (to such in coarse as can pay their shott) an esylum under the awspitable roof of JEAMES PLUSH of the Wheel of Fortune. Some has already come here; two of em occupize our front garrits; in the back Hattix there is room for 6 mor. Come, brave and dontless Hemmigrants! Come, childring of Kilammaty for eight-and-six a week; an old member of the Cor hoffers you bed and bord!

The narratif of the ixcapes and dangers which they have gon through, has kep me and MRS. P. hup in the bar to many a midnike our, a-listening to them stories. My pore wife cries her hi's out at their nerations.

One of our borders, and a near relatif by the Grandmother's side, of my wife's famly (though I despise both, and don't bragg like some foax of my ginteel kinexions), is a man wenerated in the whole profeshn, and lookt up as one of the fust Vips in Europe. In this country (and from his likeness when in his Vig to our rewered prelicks of the bentch of bishops) he was called CANTYBERRY—his reel name being THOMAS. You never sor a finer sight than CANTYBERRY on a levy day, a-seated on his goold fringed Ammer-cloth; a nozegy in his busm; his little crisp vig curling quite noble over his jolly red phase; his At laced hallover like a Hadmiral; the white ribbings in his ands, the pransing bay osses befor him; and behind, his state carridge; with MARQIZ and MARCHYNESS OF JONQUIL inside, and the galliant footmen in yalla livery clinging on at the back! "Hooray!" the boys used to cry hout, only to see CANTYBERRY arrive. Every person of the extablishment called him "Sir", his Master & Missis inklewdid. He never went into the stayble, ixep to smoke a segar; and when the state-carridge was hordered (me and the JONQUILS live close together, the W of F being sitiuated in a ginteel Court leading hout of the street), he sat

In my front parlor, in full phig, reading the newspaper like a Lord, until such time as his body-suvn't called him, and said LORD and LADY JONQUIL was ready to sit behind him. Then he went. Not a minnit sooner: not a minnit latter; and being elped hup to the box by 3 men, he took the ribbings, and drove his employers, to the ressadencies of the nibillaty, or the pallis of the Sovring.

Times is now, R how much changed with CANTYBERRY! Last yer, being bribed by SIR THOMAS and LADY KICKLEBURY, but chiefly, I fear, because this old gent, being intimat with Butlers, had equired a tayste for Bergamy, and Clarick, and other French winds, he quitted LORD and LADY JONQUIL's box for that of the KICKLEBURY famly, residing *Rue Rivuly*, at Paris. He was respected there—that CANTYBERRY is wherehever he goes; the King, the Hex-Kings coachmen, were near moughs compared to him; and when he eard the Kings osses were sold the other day at 50 frongs apease, he says they was deer at the money.

Well, on the 24th of Febbywerry, being so ableegin as to drive SIR T. and LADY KICKLEBURY to dinner with the MARKEE D'EPINARD, in the *Fobug Sang Jermang*, CANTYBERRY, who had been sittn all day reading *Gallynanny*, and playing at cribbidge at a *Marshong de Vang*, and kawbsquinly was quite hignorant of the ewents in progrice, found hissself all of a sudding serowndid by a set of rewd fellers with pikes and guns, hollerun and bellerin "*Veevly liberty*", "*Amore LEWY-PHILIP*", &c.—"Git out of the way there", says CANTYBERRY, from his box, a-vipping his osses.

The puple, as the French people call theirselves, came round the carridge, rawring out "*Ab Bab l' Aristograt*"!

LADY KICKLEBURY looked hout. Her Par was in the Cheese Mongering (olesale) way: and she never was called an aristograt afor. "Your mistaken, my good people," says she; "*Je swee Onglase. Wee, boco*, LADY KICKLEBURY, *je vay diner avec MUNSEER D'EPYNAR*"; and so she went a-jabbring on; but I'm blest if the Puple would let her pass that way. They said there was a barrygade in the street, and turning round the eds of CANTYBERRY's osses, told him to drive down the next street. He didn't understand, but was redy to drop hoff his perch at the Hindignaty hofferred the British Vip.

Now they had scarce drove down the next street at a tarin gallop, (for when aggrywated, CANTYBERRY drives like madd,

to be sure), when lowinbyold, they come on some more puple, more pikes, more guns, the pavement hup, and a Buss spilt on the ground, so that it was impawsable to pass.

"Git out of the carridge," rors the puple, and a feller in a cock at, (of the Pollypicnic School, CANTYBERRY says, though what that is he doant No), comes up to the door, while hothers old the osses, and says, "*Miladi, il faut descendres*"; which means, you must git out.

"*Mway ne vu pas, Moi* LADY KICKLEBURY," cries out my LADY, waggling her phethers and diminds, and screaming like a Macaw.

"*Il le fo pourtong,*" says the Pollypicnic scholar: very polite, though he was ready to bust with laffin hissself. "We must make a barrygade of the carridge. The cavilry is at one end of the street, the hartillary at the other; there'll be a fight presently, and out you must git."

LADY KICKLEBURY set up a screaming louder than hever, and I warrant she hopped out pretty quick this time, and the hoffiser, giving her his harm, led her into a kimmis shop, and give her a glas of sallyvalattaly.

Meanwild CANTYBERRY sat puffin like a grampus on his box, his face as red as Ceilingwhacks. His osses had been led out before his hi's, his footmen—French minials, unwuthy of a livry—had fratynized with the Mobb, and THOMAS CANTYBERRY sat aloan.

"*Descends mong gros!*" cries the mobb; (which Intuprited is "Come down, old fat un"); "come off your box, we're goin to upset the carridge."

"Never," says THOMAS, for which he knew the French; and dubbling his phist, he igsclaimed, "*Jammy Dammy!*" He cut the fust man who sprang hon the box, hover the fase and f's; he delivered on the nex feller's nob. But what was THOMAS CANTYBERRY against a people in harms? They pulled that brave old man off his perch. They upset his carridge—*his* carridge beside a buss. When he comes to this pint of his narratif, THOMAS always busts into tears and calls for a fresh glas.

He is to be herd of at my bar: and being disingaged hoffers hissself to the Nobillaty for the enshuing seasn. His turns is ninety lbs. per hannum, the purchasing of the hannimals and the corn, an elper for each two osses: ony to drive the lord and lady of the famly, no drivin at night excep to

Ofishl parties, and two vigs drest a day during the seasn. He objex to the country, and won't go abrod no more. In a country (sezee) where I was ableeged to whonder abowt disguised out of livery, amongst a puple who pulled my vlg off before my face, THOMAS will never mount box agin. ..

And I eplaud him. And as long as he has enough to pay his skaw, my house is a home for this galliant Hogsile.



F. E. BAILY

*Spare A Penny*

F. E. Baily was for many years the editor of *The Royal Magazine*, and a versatile writer of novels, short stories and verse, with a big public both in England and the United States. Among his best-known books are *Golden Vanity* and *Supper Time*



## SPARE A PENNY

### I

THE Lady Lisa Heaven, one of the most beautiful girls in Society, emerged bonelessly from her stately motor car and stood for a second on the pavement to let everything settle back into place again. Really it was her father's car, but Lord Tombs, a learned recluse with the longest beard in the House of Lords, seldom emerged from his library in Berkeley Square, where he engaged himself in writing his psychic masterpiece: *From En-Dor Onwards*.

Lisa then rang the bell of a smart house in Cumberland Place and a footman led her to the gold drawing-room where Meriel Houp was entertaining a choice selection of her girl friends.

Happy cries greeted Lisa as though she had returned from a five-year stay in darkest Africa: "My *dyeh!*" "Lisa, how divine you look!" "Darling, you're simply wonderful!" and Meriel Houp became at once the soul of hospitality.

"Precious, what cocktail would you like—Mad Dog, Sleeping Tiger, Naughty Girl, Hopeless Dawn, Soul's Ruin? Or of course there are ether and amyl nitrate for such as like them."

"I doubt if the average engine runs well on doped fuel," demurred a hard-bitten damsel who raced at Brooklands. "Give me the good old fifty-fifty Benzole mixture—half gin and half Italian."

"I'll have to have a Mad Dog, Meriel," the youngest of the party said plaintively. "I promised Mummy I wouldn't touch ether until I was eighteen."

They curved their lithe limbs into settees and arm-chairs and lifted their glasses to scarlet lips. Then Meriel held up a manicured paw for silence.

"Listen," she said. "I have an idea for a perfectly price-less rag."

"Oh, Meriel, you too-quaint thing."

"Well, Sulks Hethermoor really thought of it at the Come-On Club last night—you know, the place where that priceless Cicassian girl dances with no clothes on. We each choose from the telephone directory four men whose names begin with the first four letters of our first Christian names, and write to them for subscriptions for some charity. Everyone puts two pounds in the kitty, and the one who collects the most money from her four men scoops the kitty and gives a party for the rest."

"Meriel, how stabbing!"

"How wounding!"

"How too desperately homicidal!"

"I felt comparatively gouged myself when Sulks threw up the idea. There are about twenty-five of us, and Agnello, the manager of the Come-On, said he'd do us proud if we gave the party there. It doesn't matter what charity you pick. Anything that sounds likely to wring the hard hearts of telephone subscribers will do."

Waking next morning when her maid brought her early tea, Lisa pursued an idea through the fumes of last night's cocktails and cigarettes, and the memories of certain routs or hugging-matches in which she had taken part. She sat up in bed, an adorable sight, and blinked pathetically at Minchin. The hair of Lisa was like fine-spun gold, the line of her arched plucked eyebrows as narrow as the border-line between sin and virtue, her grey eyes were like Atlantic seas, and no man could look at her face without wanting to kiss her, unless, of course, he was married. And then there swam into her bemused brain details of the thing Meriel had told her to do, and she wondered who could supply her with a list of charities. The butler, she supposed. It wasn't cook's work or housemaid's work and one never expected such things of outdoor servants. She raised a milk-white arm, pointed a resolute finger at Minchin and said:

"Tell Faversham to get me a list of charities out of some newspaper or something. And I want all the telephone directory, every volume from one to a hundred, and a writing-block, and one of those pencil things to write with. And do hurry, Minchin, and don't creep about like a snail with a bad conscience. You give me the heebie-jeebies."

Presently Minchin returned with a newspaper cutting,

the volumes of the telephone directory, each in a case of scarlet morocco leather, with the crest of the Tombs and their motto ("I get what I can") in gold, a writing-block, and six beautifully sharpened pencils. Lisa put down her teacup, lit a cigarette and studied the list of charities.

"Happy Homes for Decayed Fishmongers' sounds good to me," she murmured. "I adore caviare and lobster and every fishmonger ought to have a happy home to decay in when decay sets in. Now I've got to pick four blighters from the directory whose names begin with L, and I, and S, and A."

Glancing down the L's, she found herself attracted by the name of Lavender, Jack. "A spot of lavender ought to do stout work among all these decaying fishmongers," she reflected, and wrote him down: Lavender, Jack, 19 Nairobi Mansions, Maida Vale.

Among the I's, Iggins, George, riveted her attention. She relinquished the telephone book and stared across the room. "Nothing the matter with my eyesight," she decided, "and yet how can such things be? They must have left out the H. No one was ever called Iggins." However, she wrote him down also: Iggins, George, Ltd., Mfr., 985 Gardenia Street, Whitechapel. From the S's she selected, after long thought, Snatchley, Derek Vane, 1000 Curzon Street, W. One seemed to need a little tone after Maida Vale and Whitechapel. The A's left her in not the slightest doubt. No girl of taste could pass by Abalab, William, 1049 Rebecca Terrace, Balham. "Too marvellous, whether you spell him frontwards or backwards," Lisa exclaimed with a happy sigh, throwing the telephone books on the floor. "And now to write them their letters. How stabbingly pep-giving for the humble toilers of Whitechapel and Maida Vale when they find the coronetted envelopes on their breakfast tables!"

Later in the day she sent each of them the same appeal:

*Dear Mr. Lavender,  
Iggins,  
Snatchley,  
Abalab,*

*I am writing to ask you if you would be so kind as to contribute to the fund I am collecting in aid of Happy Homes for Decayed Fishmongers. If you could see, as I have seen, our fish-*

*mongers in their decay, I am sure you would realize, as I do, the urgency of their case. I need hardly remind you that without our fishmongers our brave fishermen would toil in vain, and our brave fishermen, as we all know, constitute our last line of defence if the Navy lets us down.*

*No sum is too large or too small to be received gratefully at this address by*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Lisa Heaven.*

Although Lisa pursued with good heart the murky round of a Society beauty and spent an entire afternoon being drilled as a bridesmaid, for the Guards have nothing on the authorities of St. Æthelfrith's, Grosvenor Square, in the way of discipline, and woe-betide the bridesmaid who fails to keep her dressing, she began subconsciously to look forward to the arrival of the postman. On the following day the blood mantled her cheeks, though fortunately her make-up concealed the fact, when she beheld an envelope addressed in strange handwriting and postmarked Maida Vale. Tearing it open, she read :

*19 Nairobi Mansions, Maida Vale.*

*Your Grace,*

*When I got Your Grace's kind letter about the fishmongers I said to myself although times are hard, Jack, you have got to do your bit so I enclose 2s. apologizing for the smallness of the sum but times are bad just now we are showing at the Knightsbridge Empire this week and if Your Grace could find time to take a box it would give the show a push-off our own turn is a knock out.*

*Always yours sincerely,*

*Jack Lavender (Miss)*

*Speciality Dancer.*

Lisa threw down the letter and nearly wept with despair.

"Disqualified in the first round. I might just as well have tried to enter a colt for the Oaks. But how on earth could I know Jack Lavender was a girl? What positively death-dealing luck!"

She pushed the postal order into a drawer, scribbled a letter of thanks, and flung herself once more into the empty round of gaiety.

## II

The butler, entering Lisa's sitting-room where, at six-thirty p.m. she was managing to snatch a brief rest, announced :

"There is a person by the name of Higgins asking for you, m'lady."

Lisa turned a languid head, and then her subtle woman's instinct sent a message to her brain. Struggling for calm, she replied :

"You mean Iggins, not Higgins, Faversham."

"The person did indeed give his name as Iggins, m'lady, but I attributed it to a neglected education."

"What does Mr. Iggins look like, Faversham?"

"He is well-spoken and respectably dressed, m'lady. If I might venture to say so, m'lady, I should put him down as either insurance or vacuum sweepers."

"I will see him, Faversham. Show him in here and if anyone calls or rings up, I'm not at home."

"Very good, m'lady."

Meanwhile, far below in the echoing marble hall, George Iggins, as we must call him, sat wiping his damp hands on his handkerchief, the prey of beautiful yet acute emotion.

For more than twelve long months he had worshipped Lisa from afar. A growing collection of cuttings from the gossip columns of the newspapers and the shinier weeklies occupied his scanty leisure. He knew all about her summer holiday at Juan les Pins, her prowess at winter sports, her bedroom decorated by Löts, the celebrated neo-primitive artist, and Chiswick, her Afghan wolf-hound. Once, greatly daring, he had bought a programme from her at a charity *matinée* and watched in admiring silence while with adorable absence of mind, she gave his change to somebody else. His legs almost refused to function when eventually a manservant appeared before him and said : "Her Ladyship will see you, sir. Will you please come this way?"

They rose in the lift to the first floor, and George followed the manservant along a stately corridor, his feet sinking ankle-deep into the rich carpet. The manservant threw open a door and intoned : "Mr. Iggins, m'lady," and George tottered in. The manservant closed the door, and George was alone with his divinity.

He saw her sitting, so slim and beautiful, on a brocaded

settee. One rounded limb was crossed over the other and a wisp of summer frock accentuated her lovely fragility. No one, least of all, George, would have suspected she could dance all night and consume beer and sausages in quantity at four a.m. She smiled automatically and he heard a clear high voice say: "Good afternoon, Mr. Iggins. This is very kind of you. Won't you sit down?" A slender hand indicated, with a vague gesture, the other corner of the settee. Somehow George found himself sitting beside Lisa at no more than arm's length.

Had he but known her emotion was scarcely less acute than his. She had expected to see a stout man in middle life with a soup-strainer moustache capable of arresting even unfilterable microbes, a fancy waistcoat across which straggled a vast gold watch-chain, and heavy breathing. Instead she perceived a good-looking young man of perhaps twenty-eight in a neat blue suit, wearing a wrist-watch.

"It was awf'ly kind of you to write me that letter, Lady Lisa," George began, gathering his poor wits together. "Of course I should love to subscribe. I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind my asking how much people are giving. One likes to—er—do the right thing as it were."

Those were his words, but his heart sang madly: "I am sitting on a settee next to the most beautiful girl in the world. I wouldn't swap this settee for a front seat in paradise. George, old lad, you'll go out into the night after this all shot to pieces, but live for the moment and hang the consequences."

"It was awf'ly kind of you to call," Lisa told him. Her mind failed completely to concentrate as it should have done on the needs of decayed fishmongers. She could only admire the crisp directness of this attractive young man, so different from the languid Guardsmen, diplomats and other male nit-wits who thronged about her like moths round a candle. No one had given her such a thrill for months. She wished she knew the kind of sum people in Whitechapel were in the habit of subscribing to charities. "I should give just whatever you like," she suggested. "In these hard times one has to think of oneself little as one may wish to." •

"What made you write to me, of all people?" George asked finally, little realizing that he could scarcely have asked a more embarrassing question. Lisa reflected for a moment.

"I had a sort of list, you see. I thought your name sounded rather nice. And then Gardenia Street—a man who lived in a street with a name like that couldn't help having a generous nature.

"Evidently you've never seen Gardenia Street."

"No, Mr. Iggins," Lisa answered on a sudden impulse, "but I should love to. Couldn't you take me there one day and show me your factory. What sort of factory is it, by the way?"

"As a matter of fact we manufacture carnival novelties—balloons and paper hats and squeakers and that sort of thing."

"How perfectly divine! I simply love balloons. And perhaps before now I've worn one of the paper hats you manufacture. Mr. Iggins, will you promise to let me see your factory one day?"

"I doubt if you'd really care for it, Lady Lisa. Perhaps if you were to go down on a Sunday when things are quiet and inspect the neighbourhood we might decide about the factory later on. I'm always free on Sundays."

"Then will you call for me next Sunday at eleven? We can go in the car. I'm so tired of the emptiness of my ordinary existence. I want to see life in the raw. You will have a cocktail before you go, won't you, Mr. Iggins?" She paused, and added tactfully: "Or of course there's beer if you prefer it. Some people do. A great deal of beer's being drunk just now."

"Thanks ever so much; I'd love a cocktail."

"Then would you mind pressing the bell?"

The footman brought the cocktails and Lisa and George dallied with them in heavenly converse. It was obvious to each of them that he or she was in love. A tender and simultaneous passion had bridged the ghastly gulf which yawns between Whitechapel and Berkeley Square. When at last he had gone, Lisa, her palm still tingling from contact with George's in a farewell clasp, threw herself recklessly on the settee and faced the situation.

"I adore him," she confessed aloud. "He has the pep and kick of a two-fisted he-man and what are social barriers to me in a case like that? I shall marry him and share his home in Gardenia Street, and go out and buy the fish and chips for our supper. I shall live where the tide of life runs fiercely

and when I don't behave myself George will probably give me a thick ear."

She felt one small, rose pink, shell-like ear tenderly, and smiled. In imagination she could hear George roaring for his fish and chips and cursing her with vermilion oaths because they weren't ready.

Meanwhile George had gone forth into Berkeley Square hurried round the corner and stepped furtively into a waiting Rolls-Royce. The chauffeur drove him respectfully to a tall house in a fashionable quarter of Kensington. A pretty parlourmaid opened the door and took his hat and stick. George went into the library and mixed himself a whisky-and-soda from ingredients on a side table. His nerves were strung up to a high pitch of excitement by his meeting with Lisa and he considered the future anxiously.

"She thinks I'm poor and live in Gardenia Street," he reflected. "When she finds out her mistake will she despise me for a humbug or will love triumph in spite of my deception? Well I must bath and change for dinner and hope for the best."

They served him dinner in a stately room overlooking the garden. Hardly had coffee and brandy been taken into the library when the telephone rang and the voice of George's Continental agent came over the wire.

"Please fill these urgent orders," said the voice. "Two thousand false noses and five thousand paper hats for the League of Nations Carnival on the 29th, to be delivered at Geneva in a fortnight's time. A quarter of a million ditto for the Jugo-Czechian National Fête next month, delivered at Gstätz. Ditto for the Pan-Russian Congress at Pinsk in July, including three thousand hats symbolical of the Volga boatmen. I shall confirm this in writing as a firm order."

"O.K.," George answered, scribbling furiously on a pad. "It means taking on another hundred hands, but I'll arrange that in the morning. I assume the price quoted shows the usual fifty per cent profit less ten per cent commission?"

"That is so. I'm hoping to land also the contract for the All-Poland Glee-Singing Contest. They always wind up with a fancy dress dance. Good-bye."

On Sunday morning after breakfast, George took a bus as far as the Ritz Hotel and walked the remaining distance to Berkeley Square. Outside No. 3000 the stately motor car

of Lord Tombs stood waiting. The same footman admitted George and he waited feverishly in the hall for the arrival of Lisa. She came at last, barely a quarter of an hour late, in a little frock of tender green. Her roseleaf hand stole into his for a brief second and then they were in the car, gliding towards Gardenia Street with George conning the chauffeur, who had never been east of Temple Bar, through the telephone. Finally they drew up before a modest building with "George Iggins, Ltd." lettered over the entrance. Little did Lisa know it was only the clerks' office, and that George's great factory, covering several acres, stood but a hundred yards farther on. Lisa gazed at the clerks' office with bright eyes and parted lips.

"All the result of your own industry," she murmured in a rapt voice, "and I've never even earned the price of a pair of stockings. And now won't you show me where you live. Is it that house with the lace curtains next door?"

Fortunately George was not a captain of industry for nothing and his brain worked swiftly.

"I'm afraid it would be a little awkward to-day, Lady Lisa. I had to dismiss my charwoman and at the moment I've put up at—er—a local inn. As soon as I find a new charwoman——"

But Lisa's attention was distracted by the passage of a clanging monster at the end of the street."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "that's a tram." She knew that after she married George, trams must replace a car as her means of transport. "Couldn't we go home in a tram? I've never ridden on a tram in all my life, and they look simply fascinating."

Cruelly marooning the outraged chauffeur in an uncharted wilderness, Lisa and George boarded a tram. Lisa climbed to the top deck of the vast conveyance and sat with shining eyes while it thundered along. It seemed symbolic of her future life, vibrant and riotous and inexpensive. They descended for luncheon—"I shall be calling it dinner, one day," Lisa reminded herself with a beating heart—at one of Messrs. Tiger's depots and consumed fish cake and stewed steak and tomatoes and nut sundaes made ambrosial by the divine sauce of love. Afterwards they rode on more trams to Balham, Clapham, Brixton, Lewisham, Peckham, Putney, Tooting, Wimbledon and Woolwich south of the Thames; and

Camden Town, Finsbury Park, Hackney, Holloway, Islington, Kentish Town, Stoke Newington, and Hammersmith north of it. Finally George took Lisa home on a bus and deposited her tired, but happy, on her doorstep.

"You must come and see me soon," she insisted. "Come to tea one day and let us have a long talk." Then, realizing with a blush that he was accustomed to a kipper or some other relish with his tea, she added hastily: "I expect that's too early for you, though. Come and have a cocktail instead. I'll ring you up at Gardenia Street and fix a date."

### III

Next day when, at six-thirty p.m. she was endeavouring to snatch a brief rest from the tedious round of pleasure and lay supine on the brocaded settee dreaming joyously of George, the butler entered Lisa's sitting-room wearing a grave expression.

"I beg your pardon, m'lady, but there is a Mr. Abalab in the hall desiring to see your ladyship."

"Abalab? Abalab? Oh, yes, I remember. What's he like, Faversham?"

"He is a venerable figure, m'lady. His beard is even longer than that of his lordship."

"Faversham, do think what you're saying. No beard could possibly be longer than Daddy's."

"It is not my place to contradict your ladyship, but his lordship's beard reaches to his waist. Mr. Abalab's beard extends to within a few inches of his knees. He is in the nature of what is known in vulgar circles as a King Beaver."

"You may send him up, Faversham, but I do hope he won't moult all over the carpet."

Lisa then lowered her feet to the ground and prepared to welcome this patriarchal subscriber to Happy Homes for Decayed Fishmongers. A moment later Mr. Abalab was ushered in.

She realized at once that Faversham had not exaggerated. Mr. Abalab's beard indeed reached almost to his knees, sweeping majestically over a black frock coat. The vast dome of Mr. Abalab's head was bald, and piercing eyes gazed from beneath his scraggy brows. He stood about five feet seven in his elastic-sided boots.

Requesting the human wind-vane before her to be seated, Lisa went on courteously: "It is indeed good of you to come and see me about the subject of my letter, Mr. Abalab."

Mr. Abalab sat down and from the thick natural entanglement which concealed his mouth a voice proclaimed solemnly:

"Hail, Princess! The sign which I have long awaited has been vouchsafed. I and the faithful await your pleasure."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Abalab?"

"I am a prophet," explained Mr. Abalab, his words slightly muffled by the waving prairie of beard, "the prophet of the Osophites. It was foretold long ago that a princess should appear to us who would bring in the millennium. As soon as I received your letter I realized, being psychic, that you were that princess. It is laid upon me to bring you the royal crown which has been handed down to me from prophet to prophet!"

"Where is the crown?" asked Lisa, who, like most girls, was fond of jewellery, but Mr. Abalab shook his head in a gesture recalling a breeze stirring the tree-tops of the forest.

"I haven't it with me," he exclaimed. "Psychic as I am I required visual confirmation of my belief. Now that I see you I am perfectly convinced. I will bring you the crown at this time to-morrow if that would suit Your Highness. We can discuss the future, for you have a great part to play in rescuing the world from its present troubles. I see you leading civilization out of the morass, riding on a white horse."

Lisa knew quite well she was going to live in Gardenia Street with George, riding upon a tram, but the idea of the crown intrigued her and she hastened to fall in with Mr. Abalab's suggestion. Before he could reply, Faversham appeared once more.

"Pardon me, m'lady, but there is a Mr. Snatchley in the hall who desires to see you."

"What is he like, Faversham?"

"Mr. Snatchley is a gentleman, m'lady."

"Very well. Let him come up. I'm sure you won't mind, Mr. Abalab. He's just someone else interested in Decayed Fishmongers."

Directly Mr. Snatchley appeared, Lisa could see that he belonged indeed to the effete aristocracy. His beautiful double-breasted lounge suit obviously came straight from

Savile Row, and more, he wore the Old Hartonian tie. He greeted her with the quiet confidence of one accustomed to mixing in good society, and then shot a piercing glance at Mr. Abalab.

"Perhaps I could see you privately later on, Lady Lisa?" he suggested with well-bred tact. "I have a certain communication to make if I may."

At this moment Lord Tombs drifted vaguely into the room, apparently having mistaken it for his library. He gazed at its occupants with the absent-mindedness of a recluse, but on perceiving Mr. Abalab his eyes flashed.

"You have a longer beard than I have," he exclaimed.

"I am an older man than you are," replied Mr. Abalab not without dignity.

"I consider it damned bad form, and in my own house, too," Lord Tombs said coldly, and went out again. Thereupon Mr. Abalab rose and made his farewell."

"To-morrow at this hour," he reminded Lisa, and made a majestic exit. Instantly a change came over Mr. Snatchley.

"You are the Lady Lisa Heaven?" he inquired crisply.

"Yes, Mr. Snatchley."

"I am Detective-Inspector Snatchley, a police officer, and I am prepared to hear any explanation you may have as to why you should not be charged with gathering alms inasmuch as you sent me a letter dated the third instant from this address soliciting aid on behalf of Happy Homes for Decayed Fishmongers."

"But why not, Mr. Snatchley? I was doing what I could to help a good cause."

"I communicated at once with the organization and I have a letter signed Angela Ramsbotham, Secretary, denying that you had any authority from them to collect money."

Lisa had figured in too many night-club raids not to know the etiquette of the situation. "If you are a police officer, Mr. Snatchley, of course you have your warrant card?" she suggested, and with a grave inclination of the head he produced it. Thereupon Lisa realized that the only thing to do was to come clean. Inspector Snatchley listened patiently.

"As you were under a misapprehension," he explained, "we need not proceed in the matter, but you laid yourself open to a charge of gathering alms. If you did it in the

street while playing, let us say, the bagpipes, that would be lawful, for then you would be offering value, or for a consideration to do or refrain from doing a thing, that is to go on playing for those who could bear it and refrain for the benefit of those who couldn't. By the way what was that man with a beard doing here?"

"That was my father. He lives here."

"No, no; the one with the longer beard, who wore a frock coat."

Half-guiltily Lisa explained, and Inspector Snatchley frowned.

"I ought to warn you, Lady Lisa, that he is well known to the police as a fence or receiver of stolen goods. I think I'd much better be concealed in the room when he returns to-morrow. I could easily hide behind those curtains."

"But how thrilling. Do stay and have a cocktail and tell me how you became a policeman. I mean you don't *seem* like a policeman. I mean that tie you're wearing, and your address in Curzon Street——"

Inspector Snatchley produced a gold cigarette-case and offered it. "You see, Lady Lisa, things have changed in the Force. The Council schools nowadays turn out mere bookish idealists. They do quite well in the finger-print and lost property departments, but for the rough stuff of police work one needs the public schools. My division, for instance, is known as Harton's Own. We specialize in the West End. We belong to all the best clubs and can keep an eye on the drinking habits of bishops and the high stakes for which Guards officers play *Vingt-et-un* and crown and anchor. I assure you that to-day in nine cases out of ten a policeman's uniform is no bluer than his blood."

#### IV

Putting aside her early tea tray, Lisa, a lovely figure in diaphanous *crêpe de Chine* pyjamas, stretched out a hand for her bedside telephone and with a finger trembling from excitement, dialled Whitechapel 92756. She trembled because it was George's number. She wished he could see her as she was now. Did one wear *crêpe de Chine* pyjamas in Gardenia street or a nightie with long sleeves made of unbleached

calico? A girl's cool, business-like voice answered: "George Iggins, Ltd." and Lisa pulled herself together.

"Lady Lisa Heaven speaking. I want Mr. George Iggins, please."

The girl with the cool, business-like voice had received detailed instructions. She put the call through to George in a large room furnished with all the *dernier cri* of office furniture.

"Good morning, Lady Lisa. This is indeed a pleasure."

"Good morning, Mr. Iggins. How are you? Splendid! I wanted to ask if you could come along for a cocktail at six-thirty to-night. I have a little meeting of my subscribers and I'd love you to be there. You can? That's delightful of you. Sorry to interrupt you. I'm sure you're dreadfully busy. Good-bye."

Lisa leaned back against her pillows with shining eyes.

"He's in his shirt-sleeves," she whispered, "hammering down the lids of packing-cases full of balloons and rattles, giving a lead to his men, hammering harder and faster than any of them. The persp—no, the honest sweat drips from his brow. How magnificent! What an inspiration!"

At six-fifteen p.m. to the second, Detective-Inspector Snatchley arrived. Lisa regretted to notice he was not in uniform. "Are you armed?" she asked eagerly, after the first greetings. "He may pack a gat. One never knows in these days."

The inspector shook a head whose hair had been cut by the best hairdresser in London. "It'll be quite all right, Lady Lisa. I have a couple of men outside. I'm sure he'll go quietly. May I disappear behind the curtains? Thank you most frightfully. You're being simply wonderful."

At six-twenty-five a servant ushered in Mr. Abalab. He carried a newspaper parcel which, together with his beard, gave him altogether the appearance of Santa Claus. He raised a hand in salutation and his voice came solemnly through the hirsute avalanche obscuring his features.

"Princess, you are about to behold the crown of the hereditary ruler of the Osophites."

Struggling with the knots in the string, Mr. Abalab then removed the newspaper from a singularly attractive gold crown or diadem. As it flashed into view Inspector Snatchley stepped from behind the curtains.

"I am a police officer," he began, "and I arrest you for being in possession of what I believe to be the Babylonian tiara, stolen recently from Mr. Sunbury-Skivington, the celebrated archæologist, of The Copse, Watling Parva, Herefordshire. I warn you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be used as evidence against you."

"All I can say," Mr. Abalab answered dismally, "is I gave half a dollar for it to a man who told me he got it from a friend who worked for the pictures."

"No doubt," explained Inspector Snatchley to Lisa, "he wished to plant the tiara on you, finding it impossible to dispose of. Then, having made a plan of the house he would have had it burgled, and bought the produce of the burglary for a song. There are, of course, no such people as the Osophites. We have had our eyes on him for a long time."

At this moment a diversion occurred in the shape of George, whom the manservant ushered into the room. George stared at the quaint scene which met his eyes and then, perceiving Inspector Snatchley, he held out a glad hand.

"My dear Trousers!" he cried joyfully, and Inspector Snatchley answered: "Why, Stodger old boy, how are you? I haven't seen you since we left the old school."

He turned, beaming, to Lisa and continued:

"Fancy your knowing dear old George Catterick. The greatest moment in my life was when he and I carried out our bats together in the Harton-Etchester match at Lord's after he sneaked the winning run within fifteen seconds of stumps being drawn. He was in the same house with me at Harton."

And then, glancing at Lisa, George realized the hopelessness of his situation, and a scarlet blush overspread his face. The voice of Mr. Abalab broke the silence. Blowing wisps of beard to left and right he observed:

"If it's all the same to you, Inspector, I should prefer the solitude of a dungeon to my present surroundings. They resemble a Rotarian convention more and more every moment. I am quite prepared to pay for a taxicab to avoid being hauled through the streets."

Inspector Snatchley recalled himself to the business in hand.

"Come round to the canteen presently and have a chat,

Stodger," he suggested. "The beer's good and you'll see a lot of well-known faces there. Mine's the ZX Division. Good-bye, Lady Lisa. You've been too splendid for words."

When George and Lisa were alone silence fell on the room. She stood twisting a scrap of handkerchief nervously. At last she said:

"So you're really George Catterick and were at Harton, and you let me think you were George Iggins, a struggling manufacturer in Gardenia Street. Do you think it was quite kind of you?"

George shrugged his shoulders helplessly, continental though the gesture was for a son of Harton.

"The name of the firm is Iggins. I bought it when it was going down and built it up. Naturally, when we went off the gold standard I swept the Continent. To-day hardly a foreigner wears anything but a British false nose. When you wrote to me I hadn't the courage to undeceive you, because I'd been in love with you for ages. I collected all your photographs and Press notices. I subscribed to every Press cutting agency in the country."

"Did you, George?"

"Of course I did. Who wouldn't? And Lisa, when you said I could come up here and see you and asked me to sit on the very settee, I felt—honestly I felt just as bucked as when I got my House colours."

"You darling," Lisa said, for no one could appreciate better than she the splendour of this tribute.

"Lisa, I'm afraid I'm awf'ly rich, but could you love me a little bit?"

With a sigh Lisa capitulated, horse, foot, guns, and army troops.

"I adore you, George. And if you've been deceitful I'm not much better. The reason why I wrote to you——"

She sketched briefly the competition designed by Merial Houp. George listened with sparkling eyes.

"I'll subscribe a hundred pounds, darling," he said joyfully. "If that doesn't win you the kitty, I'll eat six of my own paper hats."

Even as he spoke, the door opened and Lord Tombs entered the room. He glanced round furtively, appeared to be reassured, and closed the door.

"That man with the beard longer than mine has gone,"

he said contentedly. "Frankly, there is a medium in all things and I thought him rather an outsider. After all, a sahib's a sahib, say what you like. What I wanted to tell you last night, Lisa, when his disgusting presence prevented me, was that I'm ruined. The Tombs diamonds have gone and are replaced by paste imitations, the pictures are mortgaged, and I'm in the hands of the money-lenders. You'd better prepare for the great crash. I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't notice you. Forgive these purely domestic reflections."

"Sir," George replied, "Lisa and I are in love and I request her hand in marriage. These temporary difficulties of yours can be overcome quite easily, seeing I am very rich. Unworthy as I feel——"

"Not at all, not at all," Lord Tombs answered graciously. "Nothing would induce me to stand in the way of my daughter's happiness. Pray remain to dinner, if you will be so good. On this auspicious occasion I am prepared to waive the question of evening dress."

He went out and left them together. Slowly, gently and adorably Lisa yielded herself into George's arms. He could scarcely believe that all her loveliness now belonged to him.

"We'll give the party at Agnello's and announce our engagement at the same time," she murmured, her cheek against his. "And, George, I'm not altogether sure I'm not rather glad I shan't have to live in Gardenia Street."



A. P. HERBERT

*Family Faces*

A. P. Herbert is probably the best-known living English humorist, and like all real humorists often has a vein of seriousness underlying his satire. The follies and inconsistencies of the law are one of his favourite targets, as in *Honeybubble & Co.*, from which this story is taken, and his latest novel *Holy Deadlock*.



## FAMILY FACES

THE only card-games which it is worth while for a man of sense to waste his time on are those which are not played with cards at all, such as the game which I invented in the smoking-room of the *S.S. Coronado*. It is played with the signed wine-cards which the steward returns to you on the last day of the voyage with the bill. The bills having been paid, two players take their respective packs and deal the cards out one by one, as in "Beggar My Neighbour". Whenever the word "Whisky" turns up each player cries "Snap!" and the one crying "Snap!" first wins. But a rum punch is joker and takes the pool always.

I played George, and George of course won. I had perhaps more voice, but he had more whisky-cards. And an old gentleman, in bed, sent up from C Deck to ask if the community singing would be continued long, because if so he would like to join us.

"Family Faces" is just such a game. George and I often go down for the week-end to old Fothergill's. On our last visit we found Mr. Honeybubble there as well. Now, Fothergill comes of a very old family and likes to talk about it after dinner. Normally George and I have not the smallest-objection to Fothergill's ancestors. We sit snoozing comfortably over Fothergill's excellent cigars and brandy, while Fothergill climbs happily higher and higher up the family tree. He generally stops at about De Courcy Fothergill, who was a Lord Chief Justice in the reign of Queen Anne. But on this occasion his ascent was frequently and foully interrupted by Honeybubble, who would keep butting in with his own detestable forebears in Lancashire.

"Fothergill is not used to this sort of thing, and the atmosphere became uncomfortable and even subsultry. So much so that George and I, roused before our time, began to have fond memories of our own ancestors, and George mentioned his great-uncle, who was first Bishop of Umbobo, until eaten, very properly, by a cannibal. I then spoke of my grandfather the Admiral, and the end of it was that George suggested that when we next met we should all bring photographs or

miniatures of our respective families and see which had the best. This meant that Fothergill had to ask Honeybubble for another week-end, which I don't know that he was so terribly keen on; but he did it, and the evening concluded in a lethal hush, like Europe just before the Great War.

\* Well, we all met again last week-end, and after dinner on Saturday George sent us off to fetch our families. He himself had a packet of photographs the thickness of *Who's Who*.

The game of "Family Faces" you have probably played. But you have never played it with George. Don't. George, I think, would cheat at a Charity Spelling Bee. We sat down at the card-table, and George explained the rules of the game, which are that each player plays an ancestor or relation, and the plainest relation pays five shillings, which the handsomest receives. (Well, that is how George explained the rules.) Honeybubble protested that the whole thing was frivolous and not at all what he had expected; but Fothergill, who has always made a great point of the fine looks of his ancestors, overruled him, and the game began.

Fothergill played first; and he led his ace, the Lord Chief Justice in the reign of Queen Anne. A fine-looking old fellow, though perhaps the tiniest bit dated by his whiskers. I played modestly my Admiral. Honeybubble with a tremendous air put down Joshua Honeybubble, J.P., and we all gazed at Joshua.

"That is my great-great-uncle," he said, "first Mayor of Bootle, founded the Bootle Fire Brigade, fought in the Crimean War, was a friend of Richard Cobden, Justice of the Peace——"

"But that's no good, old boy," said George; "he has a face like an onion."

Now, I could not defend this utterance of George's in a Court of Law, much less a Court of Chivalry. As a matter of fact the face of Joshua Honeybubble bore no resemblance whatever to an onion. It was quite a good face, and I thought myself that it was a toss-up between Joshua and the Lord Chief Justice for the best-looker. But the awful thing is that I do not really care *what* outrage a man does to Honeybubble. So I was silent.

"An onion?" said Honeybubble indignantly, as if it would have been pardonable to liken Joshua to a potato or a mangel-wurzel.

"An onion," said George—"quite definitely, an onion."

Honeybubble made an angry sound like the end of a soda-water syphon.

"It's your turn, George," I said, to ease the tension, as it were.

George then played an unmistakable photograph of Miss Gladys Cooper.

"That is my mother," he said simply.

I opened my mouth, astounded (even I, who know George). I realized instantly that both Fothergill and Honeybubble were of that rare kind of bat who would not know Miss Gladys Cooper if they saw her, and indeed they were both goggling reverently at George's mother. I was just going to speak when George kicked me very viciously on the ankle. It then crossed my mind that, if George was disqualified for a foul, I should very likely have to pay Honeybubble five shillings, and this I thought, was more than Joshua was worth. So, basely, I confess, I was silent again.

We then voted. George's remark about the onion must have prejudiced us against Joshua, for Joshua had to pay up and George's mother won.

"Youtoplay, Honeybubble," said George good-humouredly.

Honeybubble then played an ancestor so appalling that I instantly played my good uncle James.

"My aunt Elizabeth," said Honeybubble. "A great woman; she gave all her life to the poor. Married three times, was presented to the Queen, Vice-President of the Primrose League—er——"

"But, man," shrieked George, "she's in *bloomers*!"

It was true. She was wearing bloomers and standing beside a bicycle. It was awful.

"I did not understand," said Honeybubble stiffly, "that this was to be a Beauty Competition."

"Well, it is," said George, and coolly played a rather inferior chorus-girl as she appears in *The Crinoline Girl*.

"My grandmother," he said, "on her wedding day."

The others loved her, and I bided my time.

The truth is that George had *finessed* too much, for the rest of us voted for Fothergill's father, a grand-looking fellow. Honeybubble paid, of course.

At this point, by a stupid piece of clumsiness, I knocked George's cards on to the floor. I helped him to pick them

up, naturally, and was fortunate enough to secure the top dozen photographs in his pack. I put my ankles well over towards Fothergill and the game proceeded.

Proceeded? It became a procession. In the next round I played George's *fiancée* (for the time being), a lovely girl.

"My stepmother," I said, "as a bridesmaid."

George spluttered but said nothing. I won; Honeybubble lost with an ancestral alderman.

I then played in quick succession Miss Tallulah Bankhead, June, Mr. Owen Nares, Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson, Lopokova, Mr. Nicholas Hannen, Miss Angela Baddeley, Captain Eden, M.P., and the Duchess of York. George had brought a wonderful family, but his second eleven were no match for his first. I played one of my own relations now and then to let Fothergill win a trick with his lawyers and big-game hunters and make him happy. Honeybubble continued to play aldermen and bishops and noted philanthropists and aunts and uncles of unimpeachable virtue but unspeakable appearance. He always paid; it was monstrous. After a few tricks even George began to put in a good word for Honeybubble's ancestors, but nothing could save them. I think in the end even Honeybubble voted against them.

And then—I suppose I was tired by the constant strain of invention—I turned up Miss Edna Best, and I simply could not think what relation she was. I had played seven aunts, I knew, and almost as many sisters, but I could *not* remember what other relatives I had exhibited.

"That is my mother," I said feebly at last. "Taken at the Boat-race."

"I beg your pardon?" said Fothergill suspiciously, and George kicked me again.

"You've had one mother already, sir," said Honeybubble rather rudely.

"Well, then," I said, all harassed, "that is my little daughter."

And then of course there were questions, and then there were explanations, and then there were harsh words, and, what with one thing and another, that week-end was quite difficult. But I do *not* think that Honeybubble will say quite so much about his ancestors in future.

## “SASSENACH”

*My Gardener's Grandmother*

“Sassenach” is the name under which Major J. B. Arbuthnot, a regular soldier who has seen much service, writes his amusing tales of Irish life. The story which is reprinted here is taken from his volume *Arms and the Irishman*. Major Arbuthnot was the original “Beachcomber” of the *Daily Express*.



## MY GARDENER'S GRANDMOTHER

**M**Y gardener is justly proud of his grandmother, who thinks she is eighty-three, and threatens to marry again.

For the moment, however, she is content to feed bantams, scour the garden for eggs, and "do" for her grandson—also she is conversationally inclined!

Now it has long been my practice to give short notice (if any) when crossing from England, to reach Ballynaslob about dawn, feeling far from well.

This gives me the opportunity of raising Cain over a superfluity of weeds in flower beds—over rakes, spades and mowing machines left to rust upon the lawn, and so forth—the only way, I find, to preserve even a semblance of law and order in the land of the Free and Easy.

It was on just such an occasion that I descended one morning upon the garden, and went on the warpath according to plan.

My gardener—we call him "Bertie" and his official designation is Albert Edward O'Shaughnessy—was, as had been anticipated, conspicuous by his absence. He had gone to ground in the potting shed, and was absorbed in the creation of a rabbit hutch wherein to imprison ferrets. Moreover, he was using my new set of carpentering tools, the case of which I had left securely locked a fortnight before. Those under his authority reclined on a bench before him, smoking cigarettes.

Having said "good morning" to O'Shaughnessy, I congratulated him on his ingenuity, admired the rabbit hutch, and added that in my humble opinion the general condition of the garden fell short of perfection. And when he had finished making idle excuses, I inquired after his grandmother. "Where is she now?" I asked. "Who lies beneath her spell?"

Bertie knocked ashes from his pipe, kicked long limbs about, and grinned like a gargoyle under the church roof.

"Is ut me grandmother? Gosh! but it's a horrible woman she is! She would be up to mischief somewhere round about as loike as may be." She was! I discovered Mrs. O'Shaugh-

nessy perched upon a twenty-foot ladder, from which altitude she gave me the "glad eye".

"Come down out of that at once," I cried. "You know you are far too young to be climbing ladders!"

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy cackled, felt for the next last rung but two, missed it, and let a yell.

"Steady, now!"

She steadied, and upraised her voice.

"May the good God spare ye," she exclaimed, with aggressive loudness.

"Thank you very much," said I, "but do, for Heaven's sake, be careful, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, because you are not insured." She descended somewhat, and addressed me further.

"An' 'tis plazed an' proud we are to have ye back on us again, as them lads has Bert's heart broke the way they would be idlin' around an' him working himself to the bone for yer honour the day long an' howlin' in his sleep o' noights along with the cats being in dread that ye'd be springin' it on 'im unprepared loike, an' them sparrograss beds all anyhow . . ."

"It's a fine day, is it not?" said I.

"Foine day is ut? 'Tis hailstones as big as ginger-ale bottles that were after killing me dead not a Sunday ago."

"Yes, that's the worst of your Irish climate!—but tell me, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy—how are all your cocks and hens?"

"Hins and cocks is ut? My God! me sowl is blistered wid chasing after them damned bantams!"

I expressed regret.

"An'—an' oh, my Lord! whutt the divil's the matter wid yer appearance?"

Then I remembered she had not seen me since the removal of a small and colourless moustache.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy arrived on *terra firma* and pierced me with an eagle eye.

"Well?" I asked.

"In the name of God, what compelled ye to tear out yer whiskers?"

"Why . . . don't you consider it an improvement?"

It was evident that she did not; also that for once in a way she was at a loss for a suitable reply. Then her nationality came to the rescue.

"In the name of God, captain," she exclaimed, "ye look—a thousand toimes the gintleman ye were!"

JEROME K. JEROME

*Three Men in a Boat*

J. K. Jerome tried his hand at teaching and acting before he took to journalism and established his reputation as a humorist with *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*. Of his plays the best known is *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*.



## THREE MEN IN A BOAT

### CHAPTER VI

*Kingston.—Instructive remarks on early English history.—Instructive observations on carved oak and life in general.—Sad case of Stivings, junior.—Musings on antiquity.—I forget that I am steering.—Interesting result.—Hampton Court Maze.—Harris as a guide.*

IT was a glorious morning, late spring or early summer, as you care to take it, when the dainty sheen of grass and leaf is blushing to a deeper green; and the year seems like a fair young maid, trembling with strange pulses on the brink of womanhood.

The quaint back streets of Kingston, where they came down to the water's edge, looked quite picturesque in the flashing sunlight, the glinting river with its drifting barges, the wooded towpath, the trim-kept villas on the other side, Harris, in a red and orange blazer, grunting away at the sculls, the distant glimpses of the grey old palace of the Tudors, all made a sunny picture, so bright but calm, so full of life, and yet so peaceful, that, early in the day though it was, I felt myself being dreamily lulled off into a musing fit.

I mused on Kingston, or "Kynningestun", as it was once called in the days when Saxon "kings" were crowned there. Great Cæsar crossed the river there, and the Roman legions camped upon its sloping uplands. Cæsar, like, in later years, Elizabeth, seems to have stopped everywhere: only he was more respectable than good Queen Bess; he didn't put up at the public-houses.

She was nuts on public-houses, was England's Virgin Queen. There's scarcely a pub. of any attractions within ten miles of London that she does not seem to have looked in at, or stopped at, or slept at, some time or other. I wonder now, supposing Harris, say, turned over a new leaf, and became a great and good man, and got to be Prime Minister,

and died, if they would put up signs over the public-houses that he had patronized: "Harris had a glass of bitter in this house"; "Harris had two of Scotch cold here in the summer of '88"; "Harris was chucked from here in December, 1886."

No, there would be too many of them! It would be the houses that he had never entered that would become famous. "Only house in South London that Harris never had a drink in!" The people would flock to it to see what could have been the matter with it.

How poor weak-minded King Edwy must have hated Kynningestun! The coronation feast had been too much for him. Maybe boar's head stuffed with sugar-plums did not agree with him (it wouldn't with me, I know), and he had had enough of sack and mead; so he slipped from the noisy revel to steal a quiet moonlight hour with his beloved Elgiva.

Perhaps from the casement, standing hand-in-hand, they were watching the calm moonlight on the river, while from the distant halls the boisterous revelry floated in broken bursts of faint-heard din and tumult.

Then brutal Odo and St. Dunstan force their rude way into the quiet room, and hurl coarse insults at the sweet-faced Queen, and drag poor Edwy back to the loud clamour of the drunken brawl.

Years later, to the crash of battle-music, Saxon kings and Saxon revelry were buried side by side, and Kingston's greatness passed away for a time, to rise once more when Hampton Court became the palace of the Tudors and the Stuarts, and the royal barges strained at their moorings on the river's bank, and bright-cloaked gallants swaggered down the water-steps to cry: "What Ferry, ho! Gadzooks, gramercy."

Many of the old houses, round about, speak very plainly of those days when Kingston was a royal borough, and nobles and courtiers lived there, near their King, and the long road to the palace gates was gay all day with clanking steel and prancing palfreys and rustling silks and velvets, and fair faces. The large and spacious houses, with their oriel, latticed windows, their huge fireplaces, and their gabled roofs, breathe of the days of hose and doublet, of pearl-embroidered stomachers, and complicated oaths. They were upraised in the days "when men knew how to build". The hard red bricks have only grown more firmly set with time, and their oak

stairs do not creak and grunt when you try to go down them quietly.

Speaking of oak staircases reminds me that there is a magnificent carved oak staircase in one of the houses in Kingston. It is a shop now, in the market-place, but it was evidently once the mansion of some great personage. A friend of mine, who lives at Kingston, went in there to buy a hat one day, and, in a thoughtless moment, put his hand in his pocket and paid for it then and there.

The shopman (he knows my friend) was naturally a little staggered at first; but, quickly recovering himself, and feeling that something ought to be done to encourage this sort of thing, asked our hero if he would like to see some fine old carved oak. My friend said he would, and the shopman, thereupon, took him through the shop, and up the staircase of the house. The balusters were a superb piece of workmanship, and the wall all the way up was oak-panelled, with carving that would have done credit to a palace.

From the stairs they went into the drawing-room, which was a large bright room, decorated with a somewhat startling though cheerful paper of a blue ground. There was nothing, however, remarkable about the apartment, and my friend wondered why he had been brought there. The proprietor went up to the paper, and tapped it. It gave forth a wooden sound.

"Oak," he explained. "All carved oak, right up to the ceiling, just the same as you saw on the staircase."

"But, great Cæsar! man," expostulated my friend; "you don't mean to say you have covered over carved oak with blue wall-paper?"

"Yes," was the reply: "it was expensive work. Had to match-board it all over first, of course. But the room looks cheerful now. It was awful gloomy before."

I can't say I altogether blame the man (which is doubtless a great relief to his mind). From his point of view, which would be that of the average householder, desiring to take life as lightly as possible, and not that of the old curiosity-shop maniac, there is reason on his side. Carved oak is very pleasant to look at, and to have a little of, but it is no doubt somewhat depressing to live in, for those whose fancy does not lie that way. It would be like living in a church.

No, what was sad in his case was that he, who didn't

care for carved oak, should have his drawing-room panelled with it, while people who do care for it have to pay enormous prices to get it. It seems to be the rule of this world. Each person has what he doesn't want, and other people have what he does want.

Married men have wives, and don't seem to want them, and young single fellows cry out that they can't get them. Poor people who can hardly keep themselves have eight hearty children. Rich old couples, with no one to leave their money to, die childless.

Then there are girls with lovers. The girls that have lovers never want them. They say they would rather be without them, that they bother them, and why don't they go and make love to Miss Smith and Miss Brown, who are plain and elderly, and haven't got any lovers? They themselves don't want lovers. They never mean to marry.

It does not do to dwell on these things; it makes one so sad.

There was a boy at our school, we used to call him Sandford and Merton. His real name was Stivvings. He was the most extraordinary lad I ever came across. I believe he really liked study. He used to get into awful rows for sitting up in bed and reading Greek; and as for French irregular verbs, there was simply no keeping him away from them. He was full of weird and unnatural notions about being a credit to his parents and an honour to the school; and he yearned to win prizes, and grow up and be a clever man, and had all those sorts of weak-minded ideas. I never knew such a strange creature, yet harmless, mind you, as the babe unborn.

Well, that boy used to get ill about twice a week, so that he couldn't go to school. There never was such a boy to get ill as that Sandford and Merton. If there was any known disease going within ten miles of him, he had it, and had it badly. He would take bronchitis in the dog-days, and have hay-fever at Christmas. After a six weeks' period of drought, he would be stricken down with rheumatic fever; and he would go out in a November fog and come home with a sunstroke.

They put him under laughing-gas one year, poor lad, and drew all his teeth, and gave him a false set, because he suffered so terribly with toothache; and then it turned to neuralgia

and ear-ache. He was never without a cold, except once for nine weeks while he had scarlet fever; and he always had chilblains. During the great cholera scare of 1871, our neighbourhood was singularly free from it. There was only one reputed case in the whole parish: that case was young Stivvings.

He had to stop in bed when he was ill, and eat chicken and custards and hot-house grapes; and he would lie there and sob, because they wouldn't let him do Latin exercises, and took his German grammar away from him.

And we other boys, who would have sacrificed ten terms of our school-life for the sake of being ill for a day, and had no desire whatever to give our parents any excuse for being stuck-up about us, couldn't catch so much as a stiff neck. We fooled about in draughts, and it did us good, and freshened us up; and we took things to make us sick, and they made us fat, and gave us an appetite. Nothing we could think of seemed to make us ill until the holidays began. Then, on the breaking-up day, we caught colds, and whooping cough, and all kinds of disorders, which lasted till the term recommenced; when, in spite of everything we could manœuvre to the contrary, we would get suddenly well again, and be better than ever.

Such is life; and we are but as grass that is cut down, and put into the oven and baked.

To go back to the carved-oak question, they must have had very fair notions of the artistic and the beautiful, our great-great-grandfathers. Why, all our art treasures of to-day are only the dug-up commonplaces of three or four hundred years ago. I wonder if there is any real intrinsic beauty in the old soup-plates, beer-mugs, and candle-snuffers that we prize so now, or if it is only the halo of age glowing around them that gives them their charms in our eyes. The "old blue" that we hang about our walls as ornaments were the common everyday household utensils of a few centuries ago; and the pink shepherds and the yellow shepherdesses that we hand round now for all our friends to gush over, and pretend they understand, were the unvalued mantel-ornaments that the mother of the eighteenth century would have given the baby to suck when he cried.

Will it be the same in the future? Will the prized treasures of to-day always be the cheap trifles of the day

before? Will rows of our willow-pattern dinner-plates be ranged above the chimney-pieces of the great in the year 2000 and odd? Will the white cups with the gold rim and the beautiful gold flower inside (species unknown), that our Sarah Janes now break in sheer light-heartedness of spirit, be carefully mended, and stood upon a bracket, and dusted only by the lady of the house?

That china dog that ornaments the bedroom of my furnished lodgings. It is a white dog. Its eyes are blue. Its nose is a delicate red, with black spots. Its head is painfully erect, and its expression is amiability carried to the verge of imbecility. I do not admire it myself. Considered as a work of art, I may say it irritates me. Thoughtless friends jeer at it, and even my landlady herself has no admiration for it, and excuses its presence by the circumstance that her aunt gave it to her.

But in 200 years' time it is more than probable that that dog will be dug up from somewhere or other, minus its legs, and with its tail broken, and will be sold for old china, and put in a glass cabinet. And people will pass it round and admire it. They will be struck by the wonderful depth of the colour on the nose, and speculate as to how beautiful the bit of the tail that is lost no doubt was.

We, in this age, do not see the beauty of that dog. We are too familiar with it. It is like the sunset and the stars: we are not awed by their loveliness because they are common to our eyes. So it is with that china dog. In 2288 people will gush over it. The making of such dogs will have become a lost art. Our descendants will wonder how we did it, and say how clever we were. We shall be referred to lovingly as "those grand old artists that flourished in the nineteenth century, and produced those china dogs".

The "sampler" that the eldest daughter did at school will be spoken of as "tapestry of the Victorian era", and be almost priceless. The blue-and-white mugs of the present-day roadside inn will be hunted up, all cracked and chipped, sold for their weight in gold, and rich people will use them for claret cups; and travellers from Japan will buy up all the "Presents from Ramsgate", and "Souvenirs of Margate", that may have escaped destruction, and take them back to Jedo as ancient English curios.

At this point Harris threw away the sculls, got up and

left his seat, and sat on his back, and stuck his legs in the air. Montmorency howled, and turned a somersault, and the top hamper jumped up, and all the things came out.

I was somewhat surprised, but I did not lose my temper. I said, pleasantly enough :

“Hulloa ! what’s that for ?”

“What’s that for ? Why——”

No, on second thoughts, I will not repeat what Harris said. I may have been to blame, I admit it ; but nothing excuses violence of language and coarseness of expression especially in a man who has been carefully brought up, as I know Harris has been. I was thinking of other things and forgot, as anyone might easily understand, that I was steering and the consequence was that we had got mixed up a good deal with the tow-path. It was difficult to say, for the moment, which was us and which was the Middlesex bank of the river ; but we found out after a while, and separated ourselves.

Harris, however, said he had done enough for a bit, and proposed that I should take a turn ; so, as we were in, I got out and took the tow-line, and ran the boat on past Hampton Court. What a dear old wall that is that runs along by the river there ! I never pass it without feeling better for the sight of it. Such a mellow, bright, sweet old wall ; what a charming picture it would make, with the lichen creeping here and the moss growing there, a shy young vine peeping over the top at this spot, to see what is going on upon the busy river, and the sober old ivy clustering a little farther down ! There are fifty shades and tints and hues in every ten yards of that old wall. If I could only draw, and knew how to paint, I could make a lovely sketch of that old wall, I’m sure. € I’ve often thought I should like to live at Hampton Court. It looks so peaceful and so quiet, and it is such a dear old place to ramble round in the early morning before many people are about.

But, there, I don’t suppose I should really care for it when it came to actual practice. It would be so ghastly dull and depressing in the evening, when your lamp cast uncanny shadows on the panelled walls, and the echo of distant feet rang through the cold stone corridors, and now drew nearer, and now died away, and all was death-like silence, save the beating of one’s own heart.

We are creatures of the sun, we men and women. We love light and life. That is why we crowd into the towns and cities, and the country grows more and more deserted every year. In the sunlight—in the daytime, when Nature is alive and busy all around us, we like the open hill-sides and the deep woods well enough: but in the night, when our Mother Earth has gone to sleep, and left us waking, oh! the world seems so lonesome, and we get frightened, like children in a silent house. Then we sit and sob, and long for the gas-lit streets, and the sound of human voices, and the answering throb of human life. We feel so helpless and so little in the great stillness, when the dark trees rustle in the night-wind. There are so many ghosts about, and their silent sighs make us feel so sad. Let us gather together in the great cities, and light huge bonfires of a million gas-jets, and shout and sing together and feel brave.

Harris asked me if I'd ever been in the maze at Hampton Court. He said he went in once to show somebody else the way. He had studied it up in a map, and it was so simple that it seemed foolish—hardly worth the twopence charged for admission. Harris said he thought that map must have been got up as a practical joke, because it wasn't a bit like the real thing, and only misleading. It was a country cousin that Harris took in. He said:

"We'll just go in here, so that you can say you've been, but it's very simple. It's absurd to call it a maze. You keep on taking the first turning to the right. We'll just walk round for ten minutes, and then go and get some lunch."

They met some people soon after they had got inside, who said they had been there for three-quarters of an hour, and had had about enough of it. Harris told them they could follow him if they liked; he was just going in, and then should turn round and come out again. They said it was very kind of him, and fell behind, and followed.

They picked up various other people who wanted to get it over, as they went along, until they had absorbed all the persons in the maze. People who had given up all hopes of ever getting either in or out, or of ever seeing their home and friends again, plucked up courage, at the sight of Harris and his party, and joined the procession, blessing him. Harris said he should judge there must have been twenty people following him, in all; and one woman with a baby, who

had been there all the morning, insisted on taking his arm, for fear of losing him.

Harris kept on turning to the right, but it seemed a long way, and his cousin said he supposed it was a very big maze.

"Oh, one of the largest in Europe," said Harris.

"Yes, it must be," replied the cousin, "because we've walked a good two miles already."

Harris began to think it rather strange himself, but he held on until, at last, they passed the half of a penny bun on the ground that Harris's cousin swore he had noticed there seven minutes ago. Harris said: "Oh, impossible!" but the woman with the baby said, "Not at all," as she herself had taken it from the child, and thrown it down there, just before she met Harris. She also added that she wished she never had met Harris, and expressed an opinion that he was an impostor. That made Harris mad, and he produced his map, and explained his theory.

"The map may be all right enough," said one of the party, "if you know whereabouts in it we are now."

Harris didn't know, and suggested that the best thing to do would be to go back to the entrance, and begin again. For the beginning again part of it there was not much enthusiasm; but with regard to the advisability of going back to the entrance there was complete unanimity, and so they turned, and trailed after Harris again, in the opposite direction. About ten minutes more passed, and then they found themselves in the centre.

Harris thought at first of pretending that that was what he had been aiming at; but the crowd looked dangerous, and he decided to treat it as an accident.

Anyhow, they had got something to start from then. They did know where they were, and the map was once more consulted, and the thing seemed simpler than ever, and off they started for the third time.

And three minutes later they were back in the centre again.

After that they simply couldn't get anywhere else. Whatever way they turned brought them back to the middle. It became so regular at length, that some of the people stopped there, and waited for the others to take a walk round, and come back to them. Harris drew out his map again, after a while, but the sight of it only infuriated the mob, and they

told him to go and curl his hair with it. Harris said that he couldn't help feeling that, to a certain extent, he had become unpopular.

They all got crazy at last, and sang out for the keeper, and the man came and climbed up the ladder outside, and shouted out directions to them. But all their heads were, by this time, in such a confused whirl that they were incapable of grasping anything, and so the man told them to stop where they were, and he would come to them. They huddled together, and waited; and he climbed down, and came in.

He was a young keeper, as luck would have it, and new to the business; and when he got in, he couldn't get to them, and then *he* got lost. They caught sight of him every now and then, rushing about the other side of the hedge, and he would see them, and rush to get to them, and they would wait there for about five minutes, and then he would reappear again in exactly the same spot, and ask them where they had been.

They had to wait until one of the old keepers came back from his dinner before they got out.

Harris said he thought it was a very fine maze, so far as he was a judge; and we agreed that we would try to get George to go into it, on our way back.

## CHAPTER VIII

*Blackmailing.—The proper course to pursue.—Selfish boorishness of riverside landowner.—“Notice” boards.—Unchristianlike feelings of Harris.—How Harris sings a comic song.—A high-class party.—Shameful conduct of two abandoned young men.—Some useful information.—George buys a banjo.*

WE stopped under the willows by Kempton Park, and lunched. It is a pretty little spot there : a pleasant grass plateau, running along by the water's edge, and overhung by willows. We had just commenced the third course—the bread and jam—when a gentleman in shirt sleeves and a short pipe came along, and wanted to know if we knew that we were trespassing. We said we hadn't given the matter sufficient consideration as yet to enable us to arrive at a definite conclusion on that point, but that, if he assured us on his word as a gentleman that we *were* trespassing, we would, without further hesitation, believe it.

He gave us the required assurance, and we thanked him, but he still hung about, and seemed to be dissatisfied, so we asked him if there was anything further that we could do for him ; and Harris, who is of a chummy disposition, offered him a bit of bread and jam.

I fancy he must have belonged to some society sworn to abstain from bread and jam ; for he declined it quite gruffly, as if he were vexed at being tempted with it, and he added that it was his duty to turn us off.

Harris said that if it was a duty it ought to be done, and asked the man what was his idea with regard to the best means for accomplishing it. Harris is what you would call a well-made man of about number one size, and looks hard and bony, and the man measured him up and down, and said he would go and consult his master, and then come back and chuck us both into the river.

Of course, we never saw him any more, and, of course,

all he really wanted was a shilling. There are a certain number of riverside roughs who make quite an income during the summer, by slouching about the banks and blackmailing weak-minded noodles in this way. They represent themselves as sent by the proprietor. The proper course to pursue is to offer your name and address, and leave the owner, if he really has anything to do with the matter, to summon you, and prove what damage you have done to his land by sitting down on a bit of it. But the majority of people are so intensely lazy and timid, that they prefer to encourage the imposition by giving in to it rather than put an end to it by the exertion of a little firmness.

Where it is really the owners that are to blame, they ought to be shown up. The selfishness of the riparian proprietor grows with every year. If these men had their way they would close the river Thames altogether. They actually do this along the minor tributary streams and in the backwaters. They drive posts into the bed of the stream, and draw chains across from bank to bank, and nail huge notice-boards on every tree. The sight of those notice-boards rouses every evil instinct in my nature. I feel I want to tear each one down, and hammer it over the head of the man who put it up, until I have killed him, and then I would bury him, and put the board up over the grave as a tombstone.

I mentioned these feelings of mine to Harris, and he said he had them worse than that. He said he not only felt he wanted to kill the man who caused the board to be put up, but that he should like to slaughter the whole of his family and all his friends and relations, and then burn down his house. This seemed to me to be going too far, and I said so to Harris; but he answered:

"Not a bit of it. Serve 'em all jolly well right, and I'd go and sing comic songs on the ruins."

I was vexed to hear Harris go on in this blood-thirsty strain. We never ought to allow our instincts of justice to degenerate into mere vindictiveness. It was a long while before I could get Harris to take a more Christian view of the subject, but I succeeded at last, and he promised me that he would spare the friends and relations at all events, and would not sing comic songs on the ruins.

You have never heard Harris sing a comic song or you

would understand the service I had rendered to mankind. It is one of Harris's fixed ideas that he *can* sing a comic song; the fixed idea, on the contrary, among those of Harris's friends who have heard him try, is that he *can't*, and never will be able to, and that he ought not to be allowed to try.

When Harris is at a party, and is asked to sing, he replies: "Well, I can only sing a *comic* song, you know"; and he says it in a tone that implies that his singing of *that*, however, is a thing that you ought to hear once, and then die.

"Oh, that *is* nice," says the hostess. "Do sing one, Mr. Harris"; and Harris gets up, and makes for the piano, with the beaming cheeriness of a generous-minded man who is just about to give somebody something.

"Now, silence, please, everybody," says the hostess, turning round; "Mr. Harris is going to sing a comic song!"

"Oh, how jolly!" they murmur; and they hurry in from the conservatory, and come up from the stairs, and go and fetch each other from all over the house, and crowd into the drawing-room, and sit round, all smirking in anticipation.

Then Harris begins.

Well, you don't look for much of a voice in a comic song. You don't expect correct phrasing or vocalization. You don't mind if a man does find out, when in the middle of a note, that he is too high, and comes down with a jerk. You don't bother about time. You don't mind a man being two bars in front of the accompaniment, and easing up in the middle of a line to argue it out with the pianist, and then starting the verse afresh. But you do expect the words.

You don't expect a man to never remember more than the first three lines of the first verse, and to keep on repeating these until it is time to begin the chorus. You don't expect a man to break off in the middle of a line, and snigger, and say, it's very funny, but he's blest if he can think of the rest of it, and then try and make it up for himself, and, afterwards, suddenly recollect it, when he has got to an entirely different part of the song, and break off without a word of warning, to go back and let you have it then and there. You don't—well, I will just give you an idea of Harris's comic singing, and then you can judge of it for yourself.

HARRIS (*standing up in front of piano and addressing the expectant mob*): "I'm afraid it's a very old thing, you know. I expect you all know it, you know. But it's the only thing

I know. It's the Judge's song out of *Pinafore*—no, I don't mean *Pinafore*—I mean—you know what I mean—the other thing, you know. You must all join in the chorus, you know."

[*Murmurs of delight and anxiety to join in the chorus. Brilliant performance of prelude to the Judge's song in "Trial by Jury" by nervous pianist. Moment arrives for Harris to join in. Harris takes no notice of it. Nervous pianist commences prelude over again, and Harris, commencing singing at the same time, dashes off the first two lines of the First Lord's song out of "Pinafore". Nervous pianist tries to push on with prelude, gives it up, and tries to follow Harris with accompaniment to Judge's song out of "Trial by Jury", finds that doesn't answer, and tries to recollect what he is doing, and where he is, feels his mind giving way, and stops short.*]

HARRIS (*with kindly encouragement*): "It's all right. You're doing it very well, indeed—go on."

NERVOUS PIANIST: "I'm afraid there's a mistake somewhere. What are you singing?"

HARRIS (*promptly*): "Why the Judge's song out of *Trial by Jury*. Don't you know it?"

SOME FRIEND OF HARRIS'S (*from the back of the room*): "No you're not, you chuckle-head, you're singing the Admiral's song from *Pinafore*."

[*Long argument between Harris and Harris's friend as to what Harris is really singing. Friend finally suggests that it doesn't matter what Harris is singing so long as Harris gets on and sings it, and Harris, with an evident sense of injustice rankling inside him, requests pianist to begin again. Pianist, thereupon, starts prelude to the Admiral's song, and Harris, seizing what he considers to be a favourable opening in the music, begins.*]

HARRIS:

"'When I was young and called to the Bar.'"

[*General roar of laughter, taken by Harris as a compliment. Pianist, thinking of his wife and family, gives up the unequal contest and retires; his place being taken by a stronger-nerved man.*]

THE NEW PIANIST (*cheerily*): "Now then, old man, you start off, and I'll follow. We won't bother about any prelude."

HARRIS (*upon whom the explanation of matters has slowly dawned—laughing*): "By Jove! I beg your pardon. Of course—I've been mixing up the two songs. It was Jenkins who confused me, you know. Now then.

[*Singing, his voice appearing to come from the cellar, and suggesting the first low warnings of an approaching earthquake.*]

"'When I was young I served a term  
As office-boy to an attorney firm.'

(*Aside to pianist*): "It is too low, old man; we'll have that over again, if you don't mind."

[*Sings first two lines over again, in a high falsetto this time. Great surprise on the part of the audience. Nervous old lady near the fire begins to cry, and has to be led out.*]

HARRIS (*continuing*):

"'I swept the windows and I swept the door,  
And I——'

No—no, I cleaned the windows of the big front door. And I polished up the floor—no, dash it—I beg your pardon—funny thing, I can't think of that line. And I—and I—Oh, well, we'll get on to the chorus, and chance it (*sings*):

"'And I diddle-diddle-diddle-diddle-diddle-diddle-de,  
Till now I am ruler of the Queen's navee.'

Now then, chorus—it's the last two lines repeated, you know."

GENERAL CHORUS:

"'And he diddle-diddle-diddle-diddle-diddle-diddle-dēē'd  
Till now he is ruler of the Queen's navēē."

And Harris never sees what an ass he is making of himself, and how he is annoying a lot of people who never did him any harm. He honestly imagines that he has given them a treat, and says he will sing another comic song after supper.

Speaking of comic songs and parties, reminds me of a

rather curious incident at which I once assisted; which, as it throws much light upon the inner mental working of human nature in general, ought, I think, to be recorded in these pages.

We were a fashionable and highly cultured party. We had on our best clothes, and we talked pretty, and were very happy—all except two young fellows, students, just returned from Germany, commonplace young men, who seemed restless and uncomfortable, as if they found the proceedings slow. The truth was, we were too clever for them. Our brilliant but polished conversation, and our high-class tastes, were beyond them. They were out of place, among us. They never ought to have been there at all. Everybody agreed upon that, later on.

We played *morceaux* from the old German masters. We discussed philosophy and ethics. We flirted with graceful dignity. We were even humorous—in a high-class way.

Somebody recited a French poem after supper, and we said it was beautiful; and then a lady sang a sentimental ballad in Spanish, and it made one or two of us weep—it was so pathetic.

And then those two young men got up, and asked us if we had ever heard Herr Slossenn Boschen (who had just arrived, and was then down in the supper-room) sing his great German comic song.

None of us had heard it, that we could remember.

The young men said it was the funniest song that had ever been written, and that, if we liked, they would get Herr Slossenn Boschen, whom they knew very well, to sing it. They said it was so funny that, when Herr Slossenn Boschen had sung it once before the German Emperor, he (the German Emperor) had had to be carried off to bed.

They said nobody could sing it like Herr Slossenn Boschen; he was so intensely serious all through it that you might fancy he was reciting a tragedy, and that, of course, made it all the funnier. They said he never once suggested by his tone or manner that he was singing anything funny—that would spoil it. It was his air of seriousness, almost of pathos, that made it so irresistibly amusing.

We said we yearned to hear it, that we wanted a good laugh; and they went downstairs, and fetched Herr Slossenn Boschen.

He appeared to be quite pleased to sing it, for he came up at once, and sat down to the piano without another word.

"Oh, it will amuse you. You will laugh," whispered the two young men, as they passed through the room, and took up an unobtrusive position behind the Professor's back.

Herr Slossenn Boschen accompanied himself. The prelude did not suggest a comic song exactly. It was a weird, soulful air. It quite made one's flesh creep; but we murmured to one another that it was the German method, and prepared to enjoy it.

I don't understand German myself. I learned it at school, but forgot every word of it two years after I had left, and have felt much better ever since. Still, I did not want the people there to guess my ignorance; so I hit upon what I thought to be rather a good idea. I kept my eye on the two young students, and followed them. When they tittered, I tittered; when they roared, I roared; and I also threw in a little snigger all by myself now and then, as if I had seen a bit of humour that had escaped the others. I considered this particularly artful on my part.

I noticed, as the song progressed, that a good many other people seemed to have their eye fixed on the two young men, as well as myself. These other people also tittered when the young men tittered, and roared when the young men roared; and as the two young men tittered and roared and exploded with laughter pretty continuously all through the song, it went exceedingly well.

And yet that German Professor did not seem happy. At first, when we began to laugh the expression of his face was one of intense surprise, as if laughter were the very last thing he had expected to be greeted with. We thought this very funny: we said his earnest manner was half the humour. The slightest hint on his part that he knew how funny he was would have completely ruined it all. As we continued to laugh, his surprise gave way to an air of annoyance and indignation, and he scowled fiercely round upon us all (except upon the two young men who, being behind him, he could not see.) That sent us into convulsions. We told each other that it would be the death of us, this thing. The words alone, we said, were enough to send us into fits, but added to his mock seriousness—oh, it was too much!

In the last verse, he surpassed himself. He glowered

round upon us with a look of such concentrated ferocity that, but for our being forewarned as to the German method of comic singing, we should have been nervous; and he threw such a wailing note of agony into the weird music that, if we had not known it was a funny song, we might have wept.

He finished amid a perfect shriek of laughter. We said it was the funniest thing we had ever heard in all our lives. We said how strange it was that, in the face of things like these, there should be a popular notion that the Germans hadn't any sense of humour. And we asked the Professor why he didn't translate the song into English, so that the common people could understand it, and hear what a real comic song was like.

Then Herr Slossenn Boschen got up, and went on awful. He swore at us in German (which I should judge to be a singularly effective language for that purpose), and he danced, and shook his fists, and called us all the English he knew. He said he had never been so insulted in all his life.

It appeared that the song was not a comic song at all. It was about a young girl who lived in the Hartz Mountains, and who had given up her life to save her lover's soul; and he died, and met her spirit in the air; and then, in the last verse, he jilted her spirit, and went off with another spirit—I'm not quite sure of the details, but it was something very sad, I know. Herr Boschen said he had sung it once before the German Emperor, and he (the German Emperor) had sobbed like a little child. He (Herr Boschen) said it was generally acknowledged to be one of the most tragic and pathetic songs in the German language.

It was a trying situation for us—very trying. There seemed to be no answer. We looked round for the two young men who had done this thing, but they had left the house in an unostentatious manner immediately after the end of the song.

That was the end of that party. I never saw a party break up so quietly, and with so little fuss. We never said good night even to one another. We came downstairs one at a time, walking softly, and keeping the shady side. We asked the servant for our hats and coats in whispers, and opened the door for ourselves, and slipped out, and got round the corner quickly, avoiding each other as much as possible.

I have never taken much interest in German songs since then.

We reached Sunbury Lock at half-past three. The river is sweetly pretty just there before you come to the gates, and the backwater is charming; but don't attempt to row up it.

I tried to do so once. I was sculling, and asked the fellows who were steering if they thought it could be done, and they said, oh, yes, they thought so, if I pulled hard. We were just under the little foot-bridge that crosses it between the two weirs, when they said this, and I bent down over the sculls, and set myself up, and pulled.

I pulled splendidly. I got well into a steady rhythmical swing. I put my arms, and my legs, and my back into it. I set myself a good, quick, dashing stroke, and worked in really grand style. My two friends said it was a pleasure to watch me. At the end of five minutes, I thought we ought to be pretty near the weir, and I looked up. We were under the bridge, in exactly the same spot that we were when I began, and there were those two idiots, injuring themselves by violent laughing. I had been grinding away like mad to keep that boat stuck still under that bridge. I let other people pull up backwaters against strong streams now.

We sculled up to Walton, a rather large place for a riverside town. As with all riverside places, only the tiniest corner of it comes down to the water, so that from the boat you might fancy it was a village of some half-dozen houses, all told. Windsor and Abingdon are the only towns between London and Oxford that you can really see anything of from the stream. All the others hide round corners, and merely peep at the river down one street; my thanks to them for being so considerate, and leaving the river-banks to woods and fields and water-works.

Even Reading, though it does its best to spoil and sully and make hideous as much of the river as it can reach, is good-natured enough to keep its ugly face a good deal out of sight.

Cæsar, of course, had a little place at Walton—a camp, or entrenchment, or something of that sort. Cæsar was a regular up-river man. Also Queen Elizabeth, she was there, too. You can never get away from that woman, go where you will. Cromwell and Bradshaw (not the guide man, but

the King Charles's head man) likewise sojourned here. They must have been quite a pleasant little party, altogether.

There is an iron "scold's bridle" in Walton Church. They used these things in ancient days for curbing women's tongues. They have given up the attempt now. I suppose iron was getting scarce, and nothing else would be strong enough.

There are also tombs of note in the church, and I was afraid I should never get Harris past them; but he didn't seem to think of them, and we went on. Above the bridge the river winds tremendously. This makes it look picturesque; but it irritates you from a towing or sculling point of view, and causes argument between the man who is pulling and the man who is steering.

You pass Oatlands Park on the right bank here. It is a famous old place. Henry VIII stole it from someone or the other, I forget whom now, and lived in it. There is a grotto in the park which you can see for a fee, and which is supposed to be very wonderful; but I cannot see much in it myself. The late Duchess of York, who lived at Oatlands, was very fond of dogs, and kept an immense number. She had a special graveyard made, in which to bury them when they died, and there they lie, about fifty of them, with a tombstone over each, and an epitaph inscribed thereon.

Well, I dare say they deserve it quite as much as the average Christian does.

At "Corway Stakes"—the first bend above Walton Bridge—was fought a battle between Cæsar and Cassivelaunus. Cassivelaunus had prepared the river for Cæsar, by planting it full of stakes (and had, no doubt, put up a notice-board). But Cæsar crossed in spite of this. You couldn't choke Cæsar off that river. He is the sort of man we want round the backwaters now.

Halliford and Shepperton are both pretty little spots where they touch the river; but there is nothing remarkable about either of them. There is a tomb in Shepperton churchyard, however, with a poem on it, and I was nervous lest Harris should want to get out and fool round it. I saw him fix a longing eye on the landing-stage as we drew near it, so I managed, by an adroit movement, to jerk his cap into the water, and in the excitement of recovering that, and his indignation at my clumsiness, he forgot all about his beloved graves.

At Weybridge, the Wey (a pretty little stream, navigable for small boats up to Guildford, and one which I have always been making up my mind to explore, and never have), the Bourne, and the Basingstoke Canal all enter the Thames together. The lock is just opposite the town, and the first thing that we saw, when we came in view of it, was George's blazer on one of the lock gates, closer inspection showing that George was inside it.

Montmorency set up a furious barking, I shrieked, Harris roared; George waved his hat, and yelled back. The lock-keeper rushed out with a drag, under the impression that somebody had fallen into the lock, and appeared annoyed at finding that no one had.

George had rather a curious oilskin-covered parcel in his hand. It was round and flat at one end, with a long straight handle sticking out of it.

"What's that?" said Harris—"a frying-pan?"

"No," said George, with a strange, wild look glittering in his eyes; "they are all the rage this season; everybody has got them up the river. It's a banjo."

"I never knew you played the banjo!" cried Harris and I, in one breath.

"Not exactly," replied George: "but it's very easy, they tell me; and I've got the instruction book!"

## CHAPTER XV

*Household duties.—Love of work.—The old river hand, what he does and what he tells you he has done.—Scepticism of the new generation.—Early boating recollections.—Rafting.—George does the thing in style.—The old boatman, his method.—So calm, so full of peace.—The beginner.—Punting.—A sad accident.—Pleasures of friendship.—Sailing, my first experience.—Possible reason why we were not drowned.*

WE woke late the next morning, and, at Harris's earnest desire, partook of a plain breakfast, with "non dainties". Then we cleaned up, and put everything straight (a continual labour, which was beginning to afford me a pretty clear insight into a question that had often posed me—namely, how a woman with the work of only one house on her hands manages to pass away her time), and, at about ten, set out on what we had determined should be a good day's journey.

We agreed that we would pull this morning, as a change from towing; and Harris thought the best arrangement would be that George and I should scull, and he steer. I did not chime in with this idea at all; I said I thought Harris would have been showing a more proper spirit if he had suggested that he and George should work, and let me rest a bit. It seemed to me that I was doing more than my fair share of the work on this trip, and I was beginning to feel strongly on the subject.

It always does seem to me that I am doing more work than I should do. It is not that I object to the work, mind you; I like work: it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours. I love to keep it by me: the idea of getting rid of it nearly breaks my heart.

You cannot give me too much work; to accumulate work has almost become a passion with me: my study is so full of it now, that there is hardly an inch of room for any more. I shall have to throw out a wing soon.

And I am careful of my work, too. Why, some of the

work that I have by me now has been in my possession for years and years, and there isn't a finger-mark on it. I take a great pride in my work; I take it down now and then and dust it. No man keeps his work in a better state of preservation than I do.

But, though I crave for work, I still like to be fair. I do not ask for more than my proper share.

But I get it without asking for it—at least, so it appears to me—and this worries me.

George says he does not think I need trouble myself on the subject. He thinks it is only my over-scrupulous nature that makes me fear I am having more than my due; and that, as a matter of fact, I don't have half as much as I ought. But I expect he only says this to comfort me.

In a boat, I have always noticed that it is the fixed idea of each member of the crew that he is doing everything. Harris's notion was, that it was he alone who had been working, and that both George and I had been imposing upon him. George, on the other hand, ridiculed the idea of Harris's having done anything more than eat and sleep, and had a cast-iron opinion that it was he—George himself—who had done all the labour worth speaking of.

He said he had never been out with such a couple of lazily skulks as Harris and I.

That amused Harris.

"Fancy old George talking about work!" he laughed; "why, about half an hour of it would kill him. Have you ever seen George work?" he added, turning to me.

I agreed with Harris that I never had—most certainly not since we had started on this trip.

"Well, I don't see how *you* can know much about it, one way or the other," George retorted on Harris; "for I'm blest if you haven't been asleep half the time. Have you ever seen Harris fully awake, except at meal-time?" asked George, addressing me.

Truth compelled me to support George. Harris had been very little good in the boat, so far as helping was concerned, from the beginning.

"Well, hang it all, I've done more than old J., anyhow," rejoined Harris.

"Well, you couldn't very well have done less," added George.

"I suppose J. thinks he is the passenger," continued Harris.

And that was their gratitude to me for having brought them and their wretched old boat all the way up from Kingston, and for having superintended and managed everything for them, and taken care of them, and slaved for them. It is the way of the world.

We settled the present difficulty by arranging that Harris and George should scull up past Reading, and that I should tow the boat on from there. Pulling a heavy boat against a strong stream has few attractions for me now. There was a time, long ago, when I used to clamour for the hard work: now I like to give the youngsters a chance.

I notice that most of the old river hands are similarly retiring, whenever there is any stiff pulling to be done. You can always tell the old river hand by the way in which he stretches himself out upon the cushions at the bottom of the boat, and encourages the rowers by telling them anecdotes about the marvellous feats he performed last season.

"Call what you're doing hard work!" he drawls, between his contented whiffs, addressing the two perspiring novices, who have been grinding away steadily up stream for the last hour and a half; "why, Jim Biffles and Jack and I, last season, pulled up from Marlow to Goring in one afternoon—never stopped once. Do you remember that, Jack?"

Jack, who has made himself a bed up in the prow of all the rugs and coats he can collect, and who has been lying there asleep for the last two hours, partially wakes up on being thus appealed to, and recollects all about the matter, and also remembers that there was an unusually strong stream against them all the way—likewise a stiff wind.

"About thirty-four miles, I suppose, it must have been," adds the first speaker, reaching down another cushion to put under his head.

"No—no; don't exaggerate, Tom," murmurs Jack, reprovingly; "thirty-three at the outside."

And Jack and Tom, quite exhausted by this conversational effort, drop off to sleep once more. And the two simple-minded youngsters at the sculls feel quite proud of being allowed to row such wonderful oarsmen as Jack and Tom, and strain away harder than ever.

When I was a young man, I used to listen to these tales

from my elders, and take them in, and swallow them, and digest every word of them, and then come up for more; but the new generation do not seem to have the simple faith of the old times. We—George, Harris, and myself—took a “raw’un” up with us once last season, and we plied him with the customary stretchers about the wonderful things we had done all the way up.

We gave him all the regular ones—the time-honoured lies that have done duty up the river with every boating-man for years past—and added seven entirely original ones that we had invented for ourselves, including a really quite likely story, founded, to a certain extent, on an all but true episode, which had actually happened in a modified degree some years ago to friends of ours—a story that a mere child could have believed without injuring itself, much.

And that young man mocked at them all, and wanted us to repeat the feat then and there, and to bet us ten to one that we didn't.

We got to chatting about our rowing experiences this morning, and to recounting stories of our first efforts in the art of oarsmanship. My own earliest boating recollection is of five of us contributing threepence each and taking out a curiously constructed craft on the Regent's Park lake, drying ourselves subsequently in the park-keeper's lodge.

After that, having acquired a taste for the water, I did a good deal of rafting in various suburban brickfields—an exercise providing more interest and excitement than might be imagined, especially when you are in the middle of the pond and the proprietor of the materials of which the raft is constructed suddenly appears on the bank, with a big stick in his hand.

Your first sensation on seeing this gentleman is that, somehow or other, you don't feel equal to company and conversation, and that, if you could do so without appearing rude, you would rather avoid meeting him; and your object is, therefore, to get off on the opposite side of the pond to which he is, and to go home quietly and quickly, pretending not to see him. He, on the contrary, is yearning to take you by the hand, and talk to you.

It appears that he knows your father, and is intimately acquainted with yourself, but this does not draw you towards him. He says he'll teach you to take his boards and make

a raft of them ; but, seeing that you know how to do this pretty well already, the offer, though doubtless kindly meant, seems a superfluous one on his part, and you are reluctant to put him to any trouble by accepting it.

His anxiety to meet you, however, is proof against all your coolness, and the energetic manner in which he dodges up and down the pond so as to be on the spot to greet you when you land is really quite flattering.

If he be of a stout and short-winded build, you can easily avoid his advances ; but, when he is of the youthful and long-legged type, a meeting is inevitable. The interview is, however, extremely brief, most of the conversation being on his part, your remarks being mostly of an exclamatory and monosyllabic order, and as soon as you can tear yourself away you do so.

I devoted some three months to rafting, and, being then as proficient as there was any need to be at that branch of the art, I determined to go in for rowing proper, and joined one of the Lea boating clubs.

Being out in a boat on the river Lea, especially on Saturday afternoons, soon makes you smart at handling a craft, and spry at escaping being run down by roughs or swamped by barges ; and it also affords plenty of opportunity for acquiring the most prompt and graceful method of lying down flat at the bottom of the boat so as to avoid being chucked out into the river by passing tow-lines.

But it does not give you style. It was not till I came to the Thames that I got style. My style of rowing is very much admired now. People say it is so quaint.

George never went near the water until he was sixteen. Then he and eight other gentlemen of about the same age went down in a body to Kew one Saturday, with the idea of hiring a boat there, and pulling to Richmond and back ; one of their number, a shock-headed youth, named Joskins, who had once or twice taken out a boat on the Serpentine, told them it was jolly fun, boating !

The tide was running out pretty rapidly when they reached the landing-stage, and there was a stiff breeze blowing across the river, but this did not trouble them at all, and they proceeded to select their boat.

There was an eight-oared racing outrigger drawn up on the stage ; that was the one that took their fancy. They said

they'd have that one, please. The boatman was away, and only his boy was in charge. The boy tried to damp their ardour for the outrigger and showed them two or three very comfortable-looking boats of the family-party build, but those would not do at all; the outrigger was the boat they thought they would look best in.

So the boy launched it, and they took off their coats and prepared to take their seats. The boy suggested that George, who, even in those days, was always the heavy man of any party, should be number four. George said he should be happy to be number four, and promptly stepped into bow's place and sat down with his back to the stern. They got him into his proper position at last, and then the others followed.

A particularly nervous boy was appointed cox, and the steering principle explained to him by Joskins. Joskins himself took stroke. He told the others it was simple enough; all they had to do was to follow him.

They said they were ready, and the boy on the landing-stage took a boat-hook and shoved them off.

What then followed George is unable to describe in detail. He has a confused recollection of having, immediately on starting, received a violent blow in the small of the back from the butt-end of number five's scull, at the same time that his own seat seemed to disappear from under him by magic, and leaving him sitting on the boards. He also noticed, as a curious circumstance, that number two was at the same instant lying on his back at the bottom of the boat, with his legs in the air, apparently in a fit.

They passed under Kew Bridge, broadside, at the rate of eight miles an hour. Joskins being the only one who was rowing. George, on recovering his seat, tried to help him, but, on dipping his oar into the water, it immediately, to his intense surprise, disappeared under the boat, and nearly took him with it.

And the "cox" threw both rudder lines overboard and burst into tears.

How they got back George never knew, but it took them just forty minutes. A dense crowd watched the entertainment from Kew Bridge with much interest, and everybody shouted out to them different directions. Three times they managed to get the boat back through the arch, and three

times they were carried under it again, and every time "cox" looked up and saw the bridge above him he broke out into renewed sobs.

George said he little thought that afternoon that he should ever come to really like boating.

Harris is more accustomed to sea rowing than to river work, and says that, as an exercise, he prefers it. I don't. I remember taking a small boat out at Eastbourne last summer: I used to do a good deal of sea rowing years ago, and I thought I should be all right; but I found I had forgotten the art entirely. When one scull was deep down underneath the water, the other would be flourishing wildly about in the air. To get a grip of the water with both at the same time I had to stand up. The parade was crowded with the nobility and gentry, and I had to pull past them in this ridiculous fashion. I landed half-way down the beach, and secured the services of an old boatman to take me back.

I like to watch an old boatman rowing, especially one who has been hired by the hour. There is something so beautifully calm and restful about his method. It is so free from that fretful haste, that vehement striving, that is every day becoming more and more the bane of nineteenth-century life. He is not for ever straining himself to pass all the other boats. If another boat overtakes him and passes him it does not annoy him; as a matter of fact, they all do overtake him and pass him—all those that are going his way. This would trouble and irritate some people; the sublime equanimity of the hired boatman under the ordeal affords us a beautiful lesson against ambition and uppishness.

Plain practical rowing of the get-the-boat-along order is not a very difficult art to acquire, but it takes a good deal of practice before a man feels comfortable when rowing past girls. It is the "time" that worries a youngster. "It's jolly funny," he says, as for the twentieth time within five minutes he disentangles his sculls from yours; "I can get on all right when I'm by myself!"

To see two novices try to keep time with one another is very amusing. Bow finds it impossible to keep pace with stroke, because stroke rows in such an extraordinary fashion. Stroke is intensely indignant at this, and explains that what he has been endeavouring to do for the last ten minutes is to adapt his method to bow's limited capacity. Bow, in turn,

then becomes insulted, and requests stroke not to trouble his head about him (bow), but to devote his mind to setting a sensible stroke.

"Or, shall I take stroke?" he adds, with the evident idea that that would at once put the whole matter right.

They splash along for another hundred yards with still moderate success, and then the whole secret of their trouble bursts upon stroke like a flash of inspiration.

"I tell you what it is: you've got my sculls," he cries, turning to bow; "pass yours over."

"Well, do you know, I've been wondering how it was I couldn't get on with these," answers bow, quite brightening up, and most willingly assisting in the exchange. "Now we shall be all right."

But they are not—not even then. Stroke has to stretch his arms nearly out of their sockets to reach his sculls now; while bow's pair, at each recovery, hit him a violent blow in the chest. So they change back again, and come to the conclusion that the man has given them the wrong set altogether; and over their mutual abuse of this man they become quite friendly and sympathetic.

George said he had often longed to take to punting for a change. Punting is not as easy as it looks. As in rowing, you soon learn how to get along and handle the craft, but it takes long practice before you can do this with dignity and without getting the water all up your sleeve.

One young man I knew had a very sad accident happen to him the first time he went punting. He had been getting on so well that he had grown quite cheeky over the business, and was walking up and down the punt, working his pole with a careless grace that was quite fascinating to watch. Up he would march to the head of the punt, plant his pole, and then run along right to the other end, just like an old punter. Oh! it was grand.

And it would all have gone on being grand if he had not unfortunately, while looking round to enjoy the scenery, taken just one step more than there was any necessity for, and walked off the punt altogether. The pole was firmly fixed in the mud, and he was left clinging to it while the punt drifted away. It was an undignified position for him. A rude boy on the bank immediately yelled out to a lagging chum to "hurry up and see a real monkey on a stick".

I could not go to his assistance, because, as ill-luck would have it, we had not taken the proper precaution to bring out a spare pole with us. I could only sit and look at him. His expression as the pole slowly sank with him I shall never forget; there was so much thought in it.

I watched him gently let down into the water, and saw him scramble out, sad and wet. I could not help laughing, he looked such a ridiculous figure. I continued to chuckle to myself about it for some time, and then it was suddenly forced upon me that really I had got very little to laugh at when I came to think of it. Here was I, alone in a punt, without a pole, drifting helplessly down mid-stream—possibly towards a weir.

I began to feel very indignant with my friend for having stepped overboard and gone off in that way. He might, at all events, have left me the pole.

I drifted on for about a quarter of a mile, and then I came in sight of a fishing-punt moored in mid-stream, in which sat two old fishermen. They saw me bearing down upon them, and they called out to me to keep out of their way.

"I can't," I shouted back.

"But you don't try," they answered.

I explained the matter to them when I got nearer, and they caught me and lent me a pole. The weir was just fifty yards below. I am glad they happened to be there.

The first time I went punting was in company with three other fellows; they were going to show me how to do it. We could not all start together, so I said I would go down first and get out the punt, and then I could potter about and practise a bit until they came.

I could not get a punt out that afternoon, they were all engaged; so I had nothing else to do but to sit down on the bank, watching the river, and waiting for my friends.

I had not been sitting there long before my attention became attracted to a man in a punt who, I noticed with some surprise, wore a jacket and cap exactly like mine. He was evidently a novice at punting, and his performance was most interesting. You never knew what was going to happen when he put the pole in; he evidently did not know himself. Sometimes he shot up stream and sometimes he shot down stream, and at other times he simply spun round and came

up the other side of the pole. And with every result he seemed equally surprised and annoyed.

The people about the river began to get quite absorbed in him after a while, and to make bets with one another as to what would be the outcome of his next push.

In the course of time my friends arrived on the opposite bank, and they stopped and watched him too. His back was towards them, and they only saw his jacket and cap. From this they immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was I, their beloved companion, who was making an exhibition of himself, and their delight knew no bounds. They commenced to chaff him unmercifully.

I did not grasp their mistake at first, and I thought, "How rude of them to go on like that, with a perfect stranger, too!" But before I could call out and reprove them, the explanation of the matter occurred to me, and I withdrew behind a tree.

Oh, how they enjoyed themselves, ridiculing that young man! For five good minutes they stood there, shouting ribaldry at him, deriding him, mocking him, jeering at him. They peppered him with stale jokes, they even made a few new ones and threw at him. They hurled at him all the private family jokes belonging to our set, and which must have been perfectly unintelligible to him. And then, unable to stand their brutal jibes any longer, he turned round on them, and they saw his face!

I was glad to notice that they had sufficient decency left in them to look very foolish. They explained to him that they had thought he was someone they knew. They said they hoped he would not deem them capable of so insulting anyone except a personal friend of their own.

Of course their having mistaken him for a friend excused it. I remember Harris telling me once of a bathing experience he had at Boulogne. He was swimming about there near the beach, when he felt himself suddenly seized by the neck from behind, and forcibly plunged under water. He struggled violently, but whoever had got hold of him seemed to be a perfect Hercules in strength, and all his efforts to escape were unavailing. He had given up kicking, and was trying to turn his thoughts upon solemn things, when his captor released him.

He regained his feet, and looked round for his would-be murderer. The assassin was standing close by him, laughing

heartily, but the moment he caught sight of Harris's face, as it emerged from the water, he started back and seemed quite concerned.

"I really beg your pardon," he stammered confusedly, "but I took you for a friend of mine!"

Harris thought it was lucky for him the man had not mistaken him for a relation, or he would probably have been drowned outright.

Sailing is a thing that wants knowledge and practice too—though, as a boy, I did not think so. I had an idea it came natural to a body, like rounders and touch. I knew another boy who held this view likewise, and so, one windy day, we thought we would try the sport. We were stopping down at Yarmouth, and we decided we would go for a trip up the Yare. We hired a sailing boat at the yard by the bridge, and started off.

"It's rather a rough day," said the man to us, as we put off: "better take in a reef and luff sharp when you get round the bend."

We said we would make a point of it, and left him with a cheery "Good morning", wondering to ourselves how you "luffed", and where we were to get a "reef" from, and what we were to do with it when we had got it.

We rowed until we were out of sight of the town, and then, with a wide stretch of water in front of us, and the wind blowing a perfect hurricane across it, we felt that the time had come to commence operations.

Hector—I think that was his name—went on pulling while I unrolled the sail. It seemed a complicated job, but I accomplished it at length, and then came the question, which was the top end?

By a sort of natural instinct, we, of course, eventually decided that the bottom was the top, and set to work to fix it upside-down. But it was a long time before we could get it up, either that way or any other way. The impression on the mind of the sail seemed to be that we were playing at funerals, and that I was the corpse and itself was the winding sheet.

When it found that this was not the idea, it hit me over the head with the boom, and refused to do anything.

"Wet it," said Hector; "drop it over and get it wet."

He said people in ships always wetted the sails before they

put them up. So I wetted it; but that only made matters worse than they were before. A dry sail clinging to your legs and wrapping itself round your head is not pleasant, but, when the sail is sopping wet, it becomes quite vexing.

We did get the thing up at last, the two of us together. We fixed it, not exactly upside-down—more sideways like—and we tied it up to the mast with the painter, which we cut off for the purpose.

That the boat did not upset I simply state as a fact. Why it did not upset I am unable to offer any reason. I have often thought about the matter since, but I have never succeeded in arriving at any satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon.

Possibly the result may have been brought about by the natural obstinacy of all things in this world. The boat may possibly have come to the conclusion, judging from a cursory view of our behaviour, that we had come out for a morning's suicide, and had thereupon determined to disappoint us. That is the only suggestion I can offer.

By clinging like grim death to the gunwale, we just managed to keep inside the boat, but it was exhausting work. Hector said that pirates and other seafaring people generally lashed the rudder to something or other, and hauled in the main top-jib, during severe squalls, and thought we ought to try to do something of the kind; but I was for letting her have her head to the wind.

As my advice was by far the easiest to follow, we ended by adopting it, and contrived to embrace the gunwale and give her her head.

The boat travelled up stream for about a mile at a pace I have never sailed at since, and don't want to again. Then, at a bend, she heeled over till half her sail was under water. Then she righted herself by a miracle and flew for a long low bank of soft mud.

That mud-bank saved us. The boat ploughed its way into the middle of it, and then stuck. Finding that we were once more able to move according to our ideas, instead of being pitched and thrown about like peas in a bladder, we crept forward and cut down the sail.

We had had enough of sailing. We did not want to overdo the thing and get a surfeit of it. We had had a sail—a good all-round exciting, interesting sail—and now we thought we would have a row, just for a change like.

We took the sculls and tried to push the boat off the mud, and, in doing so, we broke one of the sculls. After that we proceeded with great caution, but they were a wretched old pair, and left us helpless.

The mud stretched out for about a hundred yards in front of us, and behind us was the water. The only thing to be done was to sit and wait until someone came by.

It was not the sort of day to attract people out on the river, and it was three hours before a soul came in sight. It was an old fisherman who, with immense difficulty, at last rescued us, and we were towed back in an ignominious fashion to the boatyard.

What between tipping the man who had brought us home, and paying for the broken sculls, and for having been out four hours and a half, it cost us a pretty considerable number of weeks' pocket money, that sail. But we learned experience, and they say that is always cheap at any price.

## HARRY GRAHAM

### *Biffin on Acquaintances*

Harry Graham was formerly an officer in the Coldstream Guards, and since retiring from the army has made a great name for himself as a writer of light verse and humorous stories, including the inimitable *Rivbless Rhymes*. He has also written the lyrics for *The Maid of the Mountains* and other successful plays.



## BIFFIN ON ACQUAINTANCES

WE were sitting in the pavilion at Lord's cricket ground, Reginald Biffin and I, eagerly watching a Test Match, in company with a host of other middle-aged enthusiasts. It was a typical English summer's day. A cold north wind swept across the ground, blowing up our legs and down our necks, making the draughty wooden benches seem better ventilated than ever. But though we might perhaps have been pardoned for feeling a trifle chilled and miserable, the excitement of the occasion kept us warm, and we huddled happily together, determined to miss no single incident of a momentous match upon the issue of which so much of our national honour depended.

The game that had just begun promised to be of a more than usually thrilling character. The two Australian batsmen who had opened the innings were playing with the confidence and caution that one has learnt to expect from first-class cricketers. In an hour and twenty-seven minutes one of them had succeeded in making eighteen runs, and although his partner had not yet scored, it was evident to such experts as Biffin and myself that within the next half-hour or so he would be tempted to open his shoulders and punish the bowling severely by snicking a ball past silly-point for at least one run.

In the pavilion the excitement was intense. Many of the older members, unable to stand the strain, had hurried away to the ground-floor bar, leaving umbrellas and match-cards on their seats to reserve their places and act as dumb witnesses of their passionate interest in the game. On a single row of benches I counted no less than fourteen of these tokens, and the distant clink of glass upon glass showed that their owners had not forsaken them, however temporarily, without a cause.

Biffin was as usual deriving a considerable amount of

innocent pleasure from pointing out to me many of the celebrities by whom we were surrounded whom I already knew quite well by sight. There in a far corner, with his back to us, was a deservedly popular figure, which, if only it could have been induced to turn round, we felt sure we should recognize as that of a well-known playwright and novelist. Next to him sat a man, who but for his clerical collar and episcopal gaiters, presented all the appearance of a famous pugilist. His eyes were half-closed, and his mouth half-open, and it was fairly evident that the worthy prelate was engaged in praying against rain.

All round us sat the great men of the day (or of past days) —politicians, soldiers, civil servants, statesmen—an ex-Prime Minister refilling his pipe, an ex-Lord Chancellor returning flushed from the tea-room, a well-known Sea Lord talking to a better-known Landlord, a distinguished Law Lord talking to himself: all the lovers of sport who have helped to make England what she is to-day but upon whom so brave a responsibility seemed at the moment to lie but lightly. Here and there among them, too, crouched the lesser fry, men like Reginald and myself, clergymen, schoolmasters, writers, rugged men with rugged faces (and occasionally rather rugged trousers), the best product of our public-school system, all united in the one desire to see the best side win, but fervently hoping that it would not do so unless it happened to be our own.

“You’ve heard of Sir George Tuff,” said Biffin suddenly, rather unnecessarily rousing me from a few moments’ well-earned slumber.

“No,” I said, “never.”

“Well, that’s him over there.” He pointed to a large man in a grey billycock hat, who was sitting in a centre seat behind the bowler’s arm, secretly grappling with the crossword in a morning paper. “A great leader of men,” he explained, “and a great follower of women.”

“Oh, really,” I said. “How extremely interesting.”

I turned over on the other side and settle down again, but Reginald was feeling remorselessly conversational.

“You know Colonel Barbecue?” he asked a moment later.

“No,” I said, “I’m afraid I don’t. Who is he?”

“I don’t know,” said Biffin, “but that’s him over there, scratching himself with a match-card.”

"Indeed?"

I could not help wishing I had brought my opera-glasses so that I could have examined the irritable colonel more closely.

The conversation flagged for a few moments.

"Did you ever meet old Lord Gorbals?" I asked at length, for it was clearly my turn to speak and I was determined not to be put to shame by my friend's superior knowledge of the world.

"No," said Biffin. "Did you?"

"No," I said, "but I thought that old gentleman by the flagstaff might be he."

"Why did you think it might be him?" he asked.

"I didn't. I thought it might be he."

"Do you know him by sight?" said Reginald.

"No."

"Then why——"

"I don't know."

"By the way," I added, "how's the Duke?"

"Which Duke?" said Biffin, bridling modestly.

"Any Duke."

"Oh."

Another brief silence ensued, broken at last by Biffin leaning across and whispering something unintelligible in my ear.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Sh-sh!" he answered in a low voice. "Don't look round!"

"Why not?"

"There's a fellow sitting just behind us," he replied, "who was at school with me."

"Good Lord!" I said. "I quite understand."

One of the great disadvantages of attending a popular cricket match at Lord's is that one is in constant danger of meeting old acquaintances whom one had believed—nay, even hoped—to be long since dead. It is almost impossible to walk round the ground without being greeted as a long-lost brother by boyhood's friends, whose names one had mercifully forgotten, whom one had justifiably counted upon never setting eyes on again. Oddly enough, too, one's contemporaries have all become excessively old, if not actually in their dotage, and I know few things more disturb-

ing than to find that the majority of men who were at school with one are suffering from senile decay. At Lord's this is a constant and bitter experience which it is very difficult to avoid. Biffin, however, has his own method of dealing with it.

As he and I were strolling across to examine the pitch, during one of those numerous intervals which help to make cricket so thrilling a game, we were suddenly accosted by a very old gentleman with a long grey beard and an Inverness cape, who looked as though the moth had been at him for some time.

"Well! Well! Well!" he exclaimed with every symptom of genuine delight as soon as he caught sight of my companion, "If it isn't Reginald Biffin!"

The remark itself was a singularly inane one, for of course if it wasn't Biffin it must have been somebody else, which it could not possibly be. In such circumstances, however, it seems to be a very favourite cliché.

"You don't remember me, eh?" the dotard continued, wagging his beard in a painfully roguish fashion.

"I'm afraid not," said Biffin rather coldly.

"We used to go caterpillar-hunting together at St. Domino's," the stranger explained, while a moth which at that moment flew out of his beard seemed to bear silent witness to the truth of his assertion.

"I was never at St. Domino's," said Biffin cruelly, "and I particularly dislike caterpillars." He brushed away the moth as he spoke, for it was obviously making advances to his hat.

"But——"

"My name is not Biffin," said Reginald. "I am Colonel Montmorency of the King's Own Loyal Buffs. Good afternoon!" With that, raising his hat (in which the moth had by this time succeeded in laying several eggs), he moved away, leaving the old gentleman a prey to the utmost perplexity and embarrassment.

"Aren't you being rather unkind, Reginald?" I said, as soon as we were out of earshot. (I belong to a society for the prevention of cruelty to beavers, and would willingly have subscribed to buy the old man a packet of moth-balls.)

"Nonsense," said Biffin. "Nonsense! Come away quickly!" he added, seizing me by the arm, for at that moment

a tall familiar figure could be seen bearing rapidly down upon us, and we had both recognized another companion of our youth from whom it was essential to escape.

Sir Pugsley Grout—for it was no less distinguished a man than he—is perhaps the most popular as well as one of the most eminent of our modern English surgeons. In the days when operations for appendicitis were still fashionable there were but few members of the British aristocracy who had not allowed Sir Pugsley to relieve them of some if not all of those superfluous internal organs with which Nature had so unnecessarily provided them. Many of the wealthiest residents of Mayfair still carry about with them mementos of his skill in the shape of various surgical appliances which in the hurry of the moment he so often leaves behind him. No wonder, then, that if Sir Pugsley is deservedly popular in Society he should be even better beloved by the medical fraternity, for whom his continual discovery of new and possibly fatal diseases supplies scope for much interesting experimental work of an amusing and lucrative character.

Only last year, you may remember, he wrote to the public press, prognosticating the imminent arrival, long overdue, of a particularly virulent epidemic of Russian influenza which was to decimate society. When this prophecy was not actually fulfilled—the public mind having unfortunately been temporarily diverted to the more absorbing subject of our lapse from the Gold Standard—when, as I say, the ravages of the fell disease did not at all come up to expectations, he was clever enough to invent a hitherto unknown nervous disorder which he named “Sciuridosis” and attributed to an obscure infection spread among the community by squirrels. The commonest symptoms included matudinal lassitude, a sense of fullness after meals and a general disinclination to work, and the ailment was chiefly confined to the wealthier classes.

You will recall the panic that ensued among all parents whose offspring possessed tame squirrels; how a special Squirrel Week was instituted to deal with these otherwise charming little creatures, and how the Board of Trade finally forbade the importation of foreign squirrels and suggested elaborate means of exterminating what had hitherto been regarded as a fairly harmless type of vermin.

In Sussex alone, in less than a month, three hundred red squirrels were shot or wounded by zealous hygienists; the

head master of Eton was forced to flog three members of Third Form for attempting to conceal squirrels in their ottomans, and the head master of Harrow issued an edict to the effect that any boy in Lower Shell found in possession of a squirrel, would be deprived of his straw hat and compelled to attend three military parades a week. Meanwhile Lord Porpentine wrote to *The Times* to boast that on his Berkshire estates not a single squirrel survived, and in the fur market the price of skunk fell to a ridiculously low figure.

It must be six months at least since Sir Pugsley has been able to infect the public mind with any fresh ailment of a serious nature, but his labours are unceasing and, given the wholehearted co-operation of his colleagues and a sufficiently hard winter, they will doubtless bear fruit before the year is out.

Sir Pugsley—Grout *minor* as we then knew him—had been at a private school with Biffin and myself. His intense love of Nature which there expressed itself in the habit of blowing addled birds' eggs and eviscerating the semi-decomposed carcasses of deceased mice in the dormitory, had caused him to be regarded with mixed feelings by his less scientifically-minded fellows. As far as I was concerned a long period of absence had in no way lessened my distaste for his society, and Reginald obviously shared my views.

"Come away quick!" he said, as the great surgeon hove in sight.

Alas! he had not spoken soon enough. As we looked round for a loophole of escape the chances of eluding our ancient playmate seemed excessively remote. All around us surged a crowd of bustling spectators obeying the summons of the first warning bell and hurrying back to the stands. They compassed us about on every side: they compassed us about, I say, on every side, while one obvious line of retreat was cut off by half a dozen brawny groundsmen who advanced towards us dragging the immense roller with which they had just been levelling the pitch. The situation was indeed a delicate and difficult one, but Biffin is a man of infinite resource and rose gallantly to the occasion.

Sir Pugsley Grout bore ruthlessly down upon us, as I have explained—and that "bore" is the *mot juste* (as M. Hugo would say) all his friends will readily admit. Scarcely, however, had he time to extend a welcoming hand and

exclaim : "Well, well, well, if it isn't—" before Reginald had seized his fingers with a grip of iron and proceeded to push him gently but implacably backwards into the track of the oncoming roller. At the same time he accidentally allowed the handle of his umbrella to become entangled round the surgeon's left ankle.

As the result of this brilliant manœuvre Sir Pugsley was forced to step backwards and, in so doing, lost his balance, slipped up and fell heavily upon the turf at our feet. The efforts of six agonized groundsmen were alas ! insufficient to bring the roller to a standstill before it had passed over his prostrate form. Amid the scenes of confusion that followed, while First Aid was being administered and ambulances summoned, Reginald and I managed to slink nonchalantly back to our seats in the pavilion, where we were soon engrossed once more in the details of the day's play.

Owing to recent heavy rains and the consequent softness of the ground, Sir Pugsley's accident inflicted a considerable amount of damage upon the outfield. He himself, on the other hand, was not nearly so seriously hurt as might have been expected. Unfortunately, however, he had been carrying in his tailcoat pocket a spare pair of forceps with which he proposed that very evening to extract the tonsils of a lady of title, and with the impact of the heavy roller these instruments became somewhat deeply embedded in his spine. He was consequently fated to experience much of the discomfort from which patients of his had often suffered, and spent nearly two months in a fashionable nursing-home which had just been opened in one of London's noisiest thoroughfares. Here, for the sum of twenty-five guineas a week, he was privileged to occupy a small attic bedroom on the sixth floor, and to enjoy a bill of fare consisting chiefly of underdone plaice and tepid tapioca pudding.

No account of the accident ever appeared in the press, though one of our more sensational Sunday papers published a paragraph cautiously headed : "Alleged Attempted Suicide of Alleged West End Club Man." Sinister rumours, however, were spread in certain Australian circles hinting that an attempt had been made to ruin the pitch and thus deprive the Commonwealth of a hard-won victory. The head groundsmen was luckily in a position to be able to issue a *dementi*, and the amicable relations between the Motherland and her far-

flung outposts were never seriously endangered. The story that described the grey squirrels from Regent's Park as holding a nocturnal mass meeting and thanksgiving service at Lord's cannot be regarded as credible, though it is true that the spread and popularity of *Sciuridosis* waned considerably during Sir Pugley's convalescence.

When I reproached Reginald for what I could not help regarding as the rather callous attitude that he adopted towards old acquaintances, he excused himself by evolving the following theory. Friends (he said) are all very well in their way, for to a certain extent one is able to pick and choose one's friends, though not so easily of course as one can choose one's enemies. Acquaintances, on the other hand, stand in a totally different category, and there is practically nothing to be urged in favour of encouraging their advances. To begin with, one has little or no say in their selection; they are more often than not wished upon one by circumstances or environment, and, as a rule, may be justly said to serve no useful purpose whatsoever. Furthermore, it is appalling to consider the waste of time involved in the revival of old acquaintanceships.

After a merciful Interval of many years two acquaintances are re-united, much to their mutual embarrassment.

"Hullo, old man! This *is* a surprise!" says one of them with an imitation of heartiness that deceives nobody. "It's *ages* since we met, eh?"

"Ages!" agrees the other thankfully.

"What are you doing with yourself these days?" asks the first—a purely rhetorical question which it would be impossible to answer in less than half an hour.

"Oh, I don't know. What are you?" is the recognized reply.

Thereupon conversation reaches an impasse, each of the two protagonists vainly searching his mind for a suitable excuse to get away from the other as quickly as possible. At the very bottom of either's mind lies the profound conviction—the certainty, rather—that the perfectly good reason why two persons have not met for ages is that neither of them has ever felt the slightest inclination to meet the other, or he would undoubtedly have done so; in fact, that they had both sincerely hoped that they would never meet again.

"Come, come, Reginald," I said, when he had finished

propounding these very cynical views. "That won't do at all!"

"Why not?"

"Should old acquaintance be forgot?" I asked, for I am a confirmed sentimentalist at heart.

"Undoubtedly," he replied with conviction, "and never brought to mind!"

"Perhaps you're right," I said, and as by this time it had begun to snow, we left our pavilion seats and hastened to join the more sensible of our fellow members in the bar.



A. A. MILNE

*The House-Warming*

A. A. Milne was for several years assistant editor of *Punch*, to which he contributed many humorous sketches and articles. Since the war he has turned his attention to the theatre, and many of his plays have had successful runs. He is also, of course, the creator of that celebrated character "Winnie-the-Pooh".



## THE HOUSE-WARMING

### I. WORK FOR ALL

**W**ELL," said Dahlia, "what do you think of it?" I knocked the ashes out of my after-breakfast pipe, arranged the cushions of my deck-chair, and let my eyes wander lazily over the house and its surroundings. After a year of hotels and other people's houses, Dahlia and Archie had come into their own.

"I've no complaints," I said happily.

A vision of white and gold appeared in the doorway and glided over the lawn toward us—Myra with a jug.

"None at all," said Simpson, sitting up eagerly.

"But Thomas isn't quite satisfied with one of the bathrooms, I'm afraid. I heard him saying something in the passage about it this morning when I was inside."

"I asked if you'd gone to sleep in the bath," explained Thomas.

"I hadn't. It is practically impossible, Thomas, to go to sleep in a cold bath."

"Except, perhaps, for a Civil Servant," said Blair.

"Exactly. Of the practice in the Admiralty Thomas can tell us later on. For myself I was at the window looking at the beautiful view."

"Why can't you look at it from your own window instead of keeping people out of the bathroom?" grunted Thomas.

"Because the view from my room is an entirely different one."

"There is no stint in this house," Dahlia pointed out.

"No," said Simpson, jumping up excitedly.

Myra put the jug of cider down in front of us.

"There!" she said. "Please count it, and see that I haven't drunk any on the way."

"This is awfully nice of you, Myra. And a complete

surprise to all of us except Simpson. We shall probably be here again to-morrow about the same time."

There was a long silence, broken only by the extremely jolly sound of liquid falling from a height.

Just as it was coming to an end Archie appeared suddenly among us and dropped on the grass by the side of Dahlia. Simpson looked guiltily at the empty jug, and then leant down to his host.

"*To-morrow!*" he said in a stage whisper. "*About the same time.*"

"I doubt it," said Archie.

"I know it for a fact," protested Simpson.

"I'm afraid Myra and Samuel made an assignation for this morning," said Dahlia.

"There's nothing in it, really," said Myra. "He's only trifling with me. He doesn't mean anything."

Simpson buried his confused head in his glass, and proceeded to change the subject

"We all like your house, Archie," he said.

"We do," I agreed, "and we think it's very nice of you to ask us down to open it."

"It is rather," said Archie.

"We are determined, therefore, to do all we can to give the house a homey appearance. I did what I could for the bathroom this morning. I flatter myself that the taint of newness has now been dispelled."

"I was sure it was you," said Myra. "How do you get the water right up the walls?"

"Easily. Further, Archie, if you want any suggestions as to how to improve the place, our ideas are at your disposal."

"For instance," said Thomas, "where do we play cricket?"

"By the way, you fellows," announced Simpson, "I've given up playing cricket."

We all looked at him in consternation.

"Do you mean you've given up *bowling*?" said Dahlia, with wide-open eyes.

"Aren't you ever going to walk to the wickets again?" asked Blair.

"Aren't you ever going to walk back to the pavilion again?" asked Archie.

"What will Montgomeryshire say?" wondered Myra in tones of awe.

"May I have your belt and your sand-shoes?" I begged. "It's the cider," said Thomas. "I knew he was over-doing it."

Simpson fixed his classes firmly on his nose and looked round at us benignly.

"I've given it up for golf," he observed.

"Traitor," said everyone.

"And the Triangular Tournament arranged for, and everything," added Myra.

"You could make a jolly little course round here," went on the infatuated victim. "If you like, Archie, I'll——"

Archie stood up and made a speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "at eleven-thirty tomorrow precisely I invite you to the paddock beyond the kitchen-garden."

"Myra and I have an appointment," put in Simpson hastily.

"A net will be erected," Archie went on, ignoring him, "and Mr. Simpson will take his stand therein, while we all bowl at him—or, if any prefer it, at the wicket—for five minutes. He will then bowl at us for an hour, after which he will have another hour's smart fielding practice. If he is still alive and still talks about golf, why, then, I won't say but what he mightn't be allowed to plan out a little course—or, at any rate, to do a little preliminary weeding."

"Good man," said Simpson.

"And if anybody else thinks he has given up cricket for ludo or croquet or oranges and lemons, then he can devote himself to planning out a little course for that too—or anyhow to removing a few plantains in preparation for it. In fact, ladies and gentlemen, all I want is for you to make yourselves as happy and as useful as you can."

"It's what you're here for," said Dahlia.

## II. A GALA PERFORMANCE

The sun came into my room early next morning and woke me up. It was followed immediately by a large blue-bottle which settled down to play with me. We adopted the usual formation, the blue bottle keeping mostly to the back of the court while I waned at the net for a kill. After two sets I decided to change my tactics. I looked up at the ceiling and

pretended I wasn't playing. The blue-bottle settled on my nose and walked up my forehead. "Heavens!" I cried, "I've forgotten my tooth-brush!" This took it completely by surprise, and I removed its corpse into the candlestick.

Then Simpson came in with a golf club in his hand.

"Great Scott," he shouted, "you're not still in bed?"

"I am not. This is telepathic suggestion. You think I'm in bed; I appear to be in bed; in reality there is no bed here. Do go away—I haven't had a wink of sleep yet."

"But, man, look at the lovely morning!"

"Simpson," I said sternly, rolling up the sleeves of my pyjamas with great deliberation, "I have had one visitor already to-day. His corpse is now in the candlestick. It is an omen, Simpson."

"I thought you'd like to come outside with me, and I'd show you my swing."

"Yes, yes, I shall like to see that, but *after* breakfast, Simpson. I suppose one of the gardeners put it up for you? You must show me your box of soldiers and your tricycle horse, too. But run away now, there's a good boy."

"My golf-swing, idiot."

I sat up in bed and stared at him in sheer amazement. For a long time words wouldn't come to me. Simpson backed nervously to the door.

"I saw the Coronation," I said at last, and I dropped back on my pillow and went to sleep.

. . . . .

"I feel very important," said Archie, coming on to the lawn where Myra and I were playing a quiet game of bowls with the croquet balls. "I've been paying the wages."

"Archie and I do hate it so," said Dahlia. "I'm luckier, because I only pay mine once a month."

"It would be much nicer if they did it for love," said Archie, "and just accepted a tie-pin occasionally. I never know what to say when I hand a man eighteen-and-six."

"Here's eighteen-and-six," I suggested, "and don't bite the half-sovereign, because it may be bad."

"You should shake his hand," said Myra, "and say, 'Thank you very much for the azaleas'."

"Or you might wrap the money up in paper and leave it for him in one of the beds."

"And then you'd know whether he had made it properly."

"Well, you're all very helpful," said Archie. "Thank you extremely. Where are the others? It's a pity that they should be left out of this."

"Simpson disappeared after breakfast with his golf clubs. He is in high dudgeon—which is the surname of a small fish—because no one wanted to see his swing."

"Oh, but I do!" said Dahlia eagerly. "Where is he?"

"We will track him down," announced Archie. "I will go to the stables, unchain the truffle-hounds, and show them one of his reversible cuffs."

We found Simpson in the pigsty. The third hole, as he was planning it out for Archie, necessitated the carrying of the farm buildings, which he described as a natural hazard. Unfortunately, his ball had fallen into a casual pigsty. It had not yet been decided whether the ball could be picked out without penalty—the more immediate need being to find the blessed thing. So Simpson was in the pigsty, searching.

"If you're looking for the old sow," I said, "there she is, just behind you."

"What's the local rule about loose pigs blown on to the course?" asked Archie.

"Oh, you fellows, there you are!" said Simpson rapidly. "I'm getting on first-rate. This is the third hole, Archie. It will be rather good, I think; the green is just the other side of the pond. I can make a very sporting little course."

"We've come to see your swing, Samuel," said Myra. "Can you do it in there, or is it too crowded?"

"I'll come out. This ball's lost, I'm afraid."

"One of the little pigs will eat it," complained Archie, "and we shall have india-rubber crackling."

Simpson came out and proceeded to give his display. Fortunately the weather kept fine, the conditions indeed being all that could be desired. The sun shone brightly, and there was a slight breeze from the south which tempered the heat and in no way militated against the general enjoyment. The performance was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of Mr. Simpson's swing *without* the ball, the second part being devoted to Mr. Simpson's swing *with* the ball.

"This is my swing," said Simpson.

He settled himself ostentatiously into his stance and placed his club-head stiffly on the ground three feet away from him.

"Middle," said Archie.

Simpson frowned and began to waggle his club. He waggled it carefully a dozen times.

"It's a very nice swing," said Myra at the end of the ninth movement, "but isn't it rather short?"

Simpson said nothing, but drew his club slowly and jerkily back, twisting his body and keeping his eye fixed on an imaginary ball until the back of his neck hid it from sight.

"You can see it better round this side now," suggested Archie.

"He'll split if he goes on," said Thomas anxiously.

"Watch this," I warned Myra. "He's going to pick a pin out of the back of his calf with his teeth."

Then Simpson let himself go, finishing up in a very creditable knot indeed.

"That's quite good," said Dahlia. "Does it do as well when there's a ball?"

"Well, I miss it sometimes, of course."

"We all do that," said Thomas.

Thus encouraged, Simpson put down a ball and began to address it. It was apparent at once that the last address had been only his telegraphic one; this was the genuine affair. After what seemed to be four or five minutes there was a general feeling that some apology was necessary. Simpson recognized this himself.

"I'm a little nervous," he said.

"Not so nervous as the pigs are," said Archie.

Simpson finished his address and got on to his swing. He swung. He hit the ball. The ball, which seemed to have too much left-hand side on it, whizzed off and disappeared into the pond. It sank. . . .

Luckily the weather had held up till the last.

"Well, well," said Archie, "it's time for lunch. We have had a riotous morning. Let's all take it easy this afternoon."

### III. UNEXPECTED GUESTS

Sometimes I do a little work in the morning. Doctors are agreed now that an occasional spell of work in the morning doesn't do me any harm. My announcement at breakfast that this was one of the mornings was greeted with a surprised enthusiasm which was most flattering. Archie offered me his

own room where he does his thinking; Simpson offered me a nib; and Dahlia promised me a quiet time till lunch. I thanked them all and settled down to work.

But Dahlia didn't keep her promise. My first hour was peaceful, but after that I had inquiries by every post. Blair looked in to know where Myra was; Archie asked if I'd seen Dahlia anywhere; and when finally Thomas's head appeared in the doorway I decided that I had had enough of it.

"Oh, I say," began Thomas, "will you come and—but I suppose you're busy."

"Not too busy," I said, "to spare a word or two for an old friend," and I picked up the dictionary to throw at him. But he was gone before I could take aim.

"This is the end," I said to myself, and after five minutes more decided to give up work and seek refreshment and congenial conversation. To my surprise I found neither. Every room seemed to be empty, the tennis lawn was deserted, and Archie's cricket bag and Simpson's golf clubs rested peacefully in the hall. Something was going on. I went back to my work and decided to have the secret out at lunch.

"Now then," I said, when that blessed hour arrived, "tell me about it. You've deserted me all morning, but I'm not going to be left out."

"It's your fault for shutting yourself up."

"Duty," I said, slapping my chest—"duty," and I knocked my glass over with an elbow. "Oh, Dahlia, I'm horribly sorry. May I go and stand in the corner?"

"Let's talk very fast and pretend we didn't notice it," said Myra, helping me to mop. "Go on, Archie."

"Well, it's like this," said Archie. "A little while ago the Vicar called here."

"I don't see that that's any reason for keeping me in the background. I have met clergymen before and I know what to say to them."

"When I say a little while ago I mean about three weeks. We'd have asked you down for the night if we'd known you were so keen on clergymen. Well, as the result of that unfortunate visit, the school treat takes place here this afternoon, and lorblessme if I hadn't forgotten all about it till this morning."

"You'll have to help, please," said Dahlia.

"Only don't spill anything," said Thomas.  
They have a poor sense of humour in the Admiralty.

. . . . .

I took a baby in each hand and wandered off to look for bees. Their idea, not mine.

"The best bees are round here," I said, and I led them along to the front of the house. On the lawn was Myra, surrounded by about eight babies.

"Two more for your collection," I announced. "Very fine specimens. The word with them is bees."

"Aren't they darlings? Sit down, babies, and the pretty gentleman will tell us all a story."

"Meaning me?" I asked in surprise. Myra looked beseechingly at me as she arranged the children all round her. I sat down near them and tried to think.

"Once upon a time," I said, "there was a—a—there was a—was a—a bee."

Myra nodded approvingly. She seemed to like the story so far. I didn't. The great dearth of adventures that could happen to a bee was revealed to me in a flash. I saw that I had been hasty.

"At least," I went on, "he thought he was a bee, but as he grew up his friends felt that he was not really a bee at all, but a dear little rabbit. His fur was too long for a bee."

Myra shook her head at me and frowned. My story was getting over-subtle for the infant mind. I determined to straighten it out finally.

"However," I added, "the old name stuck to him, and they all called him a bee. Now then I can get on. Where was I?"

But at this moment my story was interrupted.

"Come here," shouted Archie from the distance. "You're wanted."

"I'm sorry," I said, getting up quickly. "Will you finish the story for me? You'd better leave out the part where he stings the Shah of Persia. That's too exciting. Good-bye." And I hurried after Archie.

"Help Simpson with some of these races," said Archie. "He's getting himself into the dickens of a mess."

Simpson had started two races simultaneously; hence

the trouble. In one of them the bigger boys had to race to a sack containing their boots, rescue their own pair, put them on, and race back to the starting-point. Good! In the other the smaller boys, each armed with a paper containing a problem in arithmetic, had to run to their sisters, wait for the problem to be solved, and then run back with the answer. Excellent! Simpson at his most inventive. Unfortunately, when the bootless boys arrived at the turning-post, they found nothing but a small problem in arithmetic awaiting them, while on the adjoining stretch of grass young mathematicians were trying, with the help of their sisters, to get into two pairs of boots at once.

"Hallo, there you are," said Simpson. "Do help me; I shall be mobbed in a moment. It's the mothers. They think the whole thing is a scheme for stealing their children's boots. Can't you start a race for them?"

"You never ought to go about without somebody. Where's Thomas?"

"He's playing rounders. He scored a rounder by himself just now from an overthrow, but we shall hear about it at dinner. Look here there's a game called 'Two's and Threes'. Couldn't you start the mothers at that? You stand in twos, and whenever any one stands in front of the two then the person behind the two runs away."

"Are you sure?"

"What do you mean?" said Simpson.

"It sounds too exciting to be true. I can't believe it."

"Go on, there's a good chap. They'll know how to play all right."

"Oh, very well! Do they take their boots off first or not?"

Twos and Threes was a great success.

I found that I had quite a *flair* for the game. I seemed to take to it naturally.

By the time our match was finished Simpson's little footwear trouble was over, and he was organizing a grand three-legged race.

"I think they are all enjoying it," said Dahlia.

"They love it," I said; "Thomas is perfectly happy making rounders."

"But I meant the children. Don't you think they love it too? The babies seem so happy with Myra. I suppose she's telling them stories."

"I think so. She's got rather a good one about a bee. Oh, yes, they're happy enough with her!"

"I hope they all had enough to eat at tea."

"Allowing for a little natural shyness I think they did well. And I didn't spill anything. Altogether it has been rather a success."

Dahlia stood looking down at the children, young and old, playing in the field beneath her, and gave a sigh of happiness.

"Now," she said, "I feel the house is *really* warm."

#### IV. A WORD IN SEASON

"Archie," said Blair, "what's that big empty room above the billiards-room for?"

"That," said Archie, "is where we hide the corpses of our guests. I sleep with the key under my pillow."

"This is rather sudden," I said. "I'm not at all sure that I should have come if I had known that."

"Don't frighten them, dear; tell them the truth."

"Well, the truth is," said Archie, "that there was some idea of a little play-acting there occasionally. Hence the curtain-rod, the emergency exit and other devices."

"Then why haven't we done any? We came down here to open your house for you, and then you go and lock up the most important room of all, and sleep with the key under your pillow."

"It's too hot. But we'll do a little charade to night if you like—just to air the place."

"Hooray," said Myra, "I know a lovely word."

Myra's little word was in two syllables and required three performers. Archie and I were kindly included in her company. Simpson threatened to follow with something immense and archaic, and Thomas also had something rather good up his sleeve, but I am not going to bother you with these. One word will be enough for you.

#### *First Scene*

"Oh, good morning!" said Myra. She had added a hat and a sunshade to her evening frock, and was supported by

me in a gentleman's lounge-coat and boater for Henley wear.

"Good morning, mum," said Archie, hitching up his apron and spreading his hands on the table in front of him.

"I just want this ribbon matched, please."

"Certainly, mum. Won't your little boy—I beg pardon, the old gentleman, take a seat too? What colour did you want the ribbon, mum?"

"The same colour as this," I said. "Idiot."

"Your grandfather is in a bit of a draught, I'm afraid, mum. It always stimulates the flow of language. My grandfather was just the same. I'm afraid, mum, we haven't any ribbon as you might say the *same* colour as this."

"If it's very near it will do."

"Now what colour would you call that?" wondered Archie, with his head on one side. "Kind of puce-like, I should put it at. Puce-magenta, as we say in the trade. No; we're right out of puce-magenta."

"Show the lady what you have got," I said sternly.

"Well, mum, I'm right out of ribbon altogether. The fact is I'm more of an ironmonger really. The draper's is just the other side of the road. You wouldn't like a garden-roller now? I can do you a nice garden-roller for two pound five, and that's simply giving it away."

"Oh, shall we have a nice roller?" said Myra eagerly.

"I'm not going to carry it home," I said.

"That's all right, sir. My little lad will take it up on his bicycle. Two pounds five, mum, and sixpence for the mouse trap the gentleman's been sitting on. Say three pounds."

Myra took out her purse.

### *Second Scene*

We were back in our ordinary clothes.

"I wonder if they guessed that," said Archie.

"It was very easy," said Myra. "I should have thought they'd have seen it at once."

"But of course they're not a very clever lot," I explained. "That fellow with the spectacles——"

"Simpson his name is," said Archie. "I know him well. He's a professional golfer."

"Well, he *looks* learned enough. I expect *he* knows all right. But the others——"

"Do you think they knew that we were supposed to be in a shop?"

"Surely! Why, I should think even— What's that man's name over there? No; that one next to the pretty lady—ah, yes, Thomas. Is that Thomas, the wonderful cueist, by the way? Really! Well, I should think even Thomas guessed that much."

"Why not do it over again to make sure."

"Oh, no, it was perfectly obvious. Let's get on to the final scene."

"I'm afraid that will give it away rather," said Myra.

"I'm afraid so," agreed Archie.

### *Third Scene*

We sat on camp-stools and looked up at the ceiling with our mouths open.

"'E's late," said Archie.

"I don't believe 'e's coming, and I don't mind 'oo 'ears me sye so," said Myra. "So there!"

"'Ot work," I said, wiping my brow.

"Nar, not up there. Not 'ot. Nice and breezy like."

"But he's nearer the sun than wot we are, ain't 'e?"

"Ah, but 'e's not 'ot. Not up there."

"'Ere, there 'e is," cried Myra, jumping up excitedly. "Over there. 'Ow naow, it's a bird. I declare I quite thought it was 'im. Silly of me."

There was silence for a little, and then Archie took a sandwich out of his pocket.

"Wunner wot they'll invent next," he said, and munched stolidly.

. . . . .

"Well done," said Dahlia.

"Thomas and I have been trying to guess," said Simpson, "but the strain is terrific. My first idea was 'codfish', but I suppose that's wrong. It's either 'silkworm' or 'wardrobe'. Thomas suggests 'mangel-wurzel'. He says he never saw anybody who had so much the whole air of a wurzel as Archie. The indefinable *elan* of the wurzel was there."

"Can't you really guess?" said Myra eagerly. "I don't know whether I want you to or not. Oh, no, I don't want you to."

"Then I withdraw 'mangel-wurzel,'" said Simpson gallantly.

"I think I can guess," said Blair. "It's——"

"Whisper it," said Simpson. "I'm never going to know."

Blair whispered it.

"Yes," said Myra disappointedly, "that's it."

#### V. UNINVITED GUESTS

"Nine," said Archie, separating his latest victim from the marmalade spoon and dropping it into the hot water. "This is going to be a sanguinary day. With a pretty late cut into the peach jelly Mr. A. Mannering reached double figures. Ten. Battles are being won while Thomas still sleeps. Any advance on ten?"

"Does that include *my* wasp?" asked Myra.

"There are only ten here," said Archie, looking into the basin, "and they're all mine. I remember them perfectly. What was yours like?"

"Well, I didn't exactly kill him. I smacked him with a teaspoon and asked him to go away. And he went on to your marmalade, so I expect you thought he was yours. But it was really mine, and I don't think it's very sporting of you to kill another person's wasp."

"Have one of mine," I said, pushing my plate across. "Have Bernard—he's sitting on the greengage."

"I don't really want to kill anything. I killed a rabbit once and I wished I hadn't."

"I nearly killed a rabbit once, and I wished I had."

"Great sportsmen at a glance," said Archie. "Tell us about it before it goes into your reminiscences."

"It was a fierce affair while it lasted. The rabbit was sitting down and I was standing up, so that I rather had the advantage of him at the start. I waited till he seemed to be asleep and then fired."

"And missed him?"

"Y-yes. He heard the report, though. I mean, you mustn't think he ignored me altogether. I moved him. He got up and went away all right."

"A very lucky escape for you," said Archie. "I once knew a man who was gored to death by an angry rabbit." He slashed in the air with his napkin. "Fifteen. Dahlia, let's have breakfast indoors to-morrow. This is very jolly but it's just as hot, and it doesn't get Thomas up any earlier, as we hoped."

All that day we grilled in the heat. Myra and I started a game of croquet in the morning, but after one shot each we agreed to abandon it as a draw—slightly in my favour, because I had given her the chipped mallet. And in the afternoon Thomas and Simpson made a great effort to get up enthusiasm for lawn-tennis. Each of them returned the other's service into the net until the score stood at eight all, at which point they suddenly realized that nothing but the violent death of one of the competitors would ever end the match. They went on to ten all to make sure, and then retired to the lemonade and wasp jug, Simpson missing a couple of dead bodies by inches only. And after dinner it was hotter than ever.

"The heat in my room," announced Archie, "breaks all records. The thermometer says a hundred and fifty, the barometer says very dry, we've had twenty-five hours' sunshine, and there's not a drop of rain recorded in the soap-dish. Are we going to take this lying down?"

"No," said Thomas, "let's sleep out to-night."

"What do you say, Dahlia?"

"It's a good idea. You can all sleep on the croquet lawn, and Myra and I will take the tennis lawn."

"Hadn't you better have the croquet lawn? Thomas walks in his sleep, and we don't want to have him going through hoops all night."

"You'll have to bring down your own mattresses," went on Dahlia, "and you've not got to walk about the garden in the early morning, at least not until Myra and I are up, and if you're going to fall over croquet hoops you mustn't make a noise. That's all the rules, I think."

"I'm glad we've got the tennis lawn," said Myra; "it's much smoother. Do you prefer the right-hand court, dear, or the left-hand?"

"We shall be very close to Nature to-night," said Archie. "Now we shall know whether it really is the nightjar, or Simpson gargling."

We were very close to Nature that night, but in the early morning still closer. I was awakened by the noise of Simpson talking, as I hoped, in his sleep. However, it appeared that he was awake and quite conscious of the things he was saying.

"I can't help it," he explained to Archie, who had given expression to the general opinion about it; "these bally wasps are all over me."

"It's your own fault," said Archie. "Why do you egg them on? I don't have wasps all over *me*."

"Conf— There! I've been stung."

"You've been what?"

"Stung."

"Stung. Where?"

"In the neck."

"In the neck?" Archie turned over to me. "Simpson," he said, "has been stung in the neck. Tell Thomas."

I woke up Thomas. "Simpson," I said, "has been stung in the neck."

"Good," said Thomas, and went to sleep again.

"We've told Thomas," said Archie. "Now, are you satisfied?"

"Get away, you brute," shouted Simpson suddenly, and dived under the sheet.

Archie and I lay back, and shouted with laughter.

"It's really very silly of him," said Archie, "because—go away—because everybody knows that—get away, you ass—that wasps aren't dangerous unless—confound you—unless—I say isn't it time we got up?"

I came up from under my sheet and looked at my watch. "Four-thirty," I said, dodged a wasp, and went back again.

"We must wait till five-thirty," said Archie. "Simpson was quite right; he *was* stung, after all. I'll tell him so."

He leant out of bed to tell him so, and then thought better of it and retired beneath the sheets.

At five-thirty a gallant little party made its way to the house, its mattresses over its shoulders.

"Gently," said Archie, as we came in sight of the tennis lawn.

We went very gently. There were only wasps on the tennis lawn, but one does not want to disturb the little fellows.

## VI. A FINAL ARRANGEMENT

"Seeing that this is our last day together—" began Archie.

"Oh, *don't*," said Myra. "I can't bear it."

"Seeing that this is our first day together, we might have a little tournament of some kind, followed by a small distribution of prizes. What do you think, Dahlia?"

"Well, I dare say I can find something."

"Any old thing that we don't want will do; nothing showy or expensive. Victory is its own reward."

"Yes, but if there *is* a pot of home-made marmalade going with it," I said, "so much the better."

"Dahlia, earmark the marmalade for this gentleman. Now, what's it going to be? Golf, Simpson?"

"Why, of course," said Myra. "Hasn't he been getting it ready for days?"

"That will give him an unfair advantage," I pointed out. "He knows every single brick on the greens."

"Oh, I say, there aren't any greens yet," protested Simpson. "That'll take a year or two. But I've marked out white circles and you have to get inside them."

"I saw him doing that," said Archie. "I was afraid he expected us to play prisoners' base with him."

The game fixed upon, we proceeded to draw for partners.

"You'll have to play with me, Archie," said Dahlia, "because I'm no good at all."

"I shall have to play with Myra," I said, "because I'm no good at all."

"Oh, I'm very good," said Myra.

"That looks as though I should have to play with Simpson," }  
 Thomas, } said Thomas and Simpson together.

"You're all giving me a lot of trouble," said Archie putting his pencil back in his pocket. "I've just written your names out neatly on little bits of paper, and now they're all wasted. You'll have to stick them on yourselves so that the spectators will know who you are as you whiz past." He handed his bits of paper round and went in for his clubs.

It was a stroke competition, and each couple went round by itself. Myra and I started last.

"Now we've got to win this," she said, "because we shan't play together again for a long time."

"That's a nice cheery thing to say to a person just when he's driving. Now I shall have to address the ball all over again."

"Oh, *no!*"

I addressed and dispatched the ball. It struck a wall about eighty yards away and dropped. When we got there we found to our disgust that it was nestling at the very foot. Myra looked at it doubtfully.

"Can't you make it climb the wall?" I asked.

"We shall have to go back, I'm afraid. We can pretend we left our pocket-handkerchiefs behind."

She chipped it back about twenty yards, and I sent it on again about a hundred. Unfortunately it landed in a rut. However, Myra got it out with great resource, and I was lucky enough with my next to place it inside the magic circle.

"Five," I said. "You know, I don't think you're helping me much. All you did that hole was to go twenty-one yards in the wrong direction."

Myra smiled cheerfully at me and did the next hole in one. "Well played, partner," she said, as he put her club back in its bag.

"Oh, at the short holes I don't deny that you're useful. Where do we go now?"

"Over the barn. This is the long hole."

I got in an excellent drive, but unfortunately it didn't aviate quick enough. While the intrepid spectators were still holding their breath, there was an ominous crash.

"Did you say *in* the barn or *over* the barn?" I asked, as we hurried on to find the damage.

"We do play an exciting game, don't we?" said Myra.

We got into the barn and found the ball and a little glass on the floor.

"What a very small hole it made," said Myra, pointing to the broken pane. "What shall I do?"

"You'll have to go back through the hole. It's an awkward little shot."

"I don't think I could."

"No, it *is* rather a difficult stroke. You want to stand well behind the ball, and—however, there may be a local rule about it."

"I don't think there is or I should have heard it. Samuel's been telling me *everything* lately."

"Then there's only one thing for it." I pointed to the window at the other end of the barn. "Go straight on."

Myra gave a little gurgle of delight.

"But we shall have to save up our pocket-money," she said.

Her ball hit the wood in between two panes and bounded back. My next shot was just above the glass. Myra took a niblick and got the ball back into the middle of the floor.

"It's simply sickening that we can't break a window when we're really trying to. I should have thought that anyone could have broken a window. Now then."

"Oh, good *shot*!" cried Myra above the crash. We hurried out and did the hole in nine.

At lunch, having completed eighteen holes out of the thirty-six, we were seven strokes behind the leaders, Simpson and Thomas. Simpson, according to Thomas, had been playing like a book. *Golf Faults Analysed*—that book, I should think.

"But I expect he'll go to pieces in the afternoon," said Thomas. He turned to a servant and added, "Mr. Simpson won't have anything more."

We started our second round brilliantly; continued (after an unusual incident on the fifth tee) brilliantly; and ended up brilliantly. At the last tee we had played a hundred and thirty-seven. Myra got in a beautiful drive to within fifty yards of the circle.

"How many?" said the others, coming up excitedly.

"This is terrible," said Myra, putting her hand to her heart. "A hundred and—shall I tell them?—a—a——. Oh, dear—a—hundredandthirtyeight."

"Golly," said Thomas, "you've got one for it. We did a hundred and forty."

"We did a hundred and forty-two," said Archie. "Close play at the Oval."

"Oh," said Myra to me, "*do* be careful. Oh, but no," she went on quickly, "I don't mind a bit really if we lose. It's only a game. Besides, we——"

"You forget the little pot of home-made marmalade," I said reproachfully. "Dahlia, what *are* the prizes? Because

It's just possible that Myra might like the second one better than the first. In that case I should miss this."

"Go on," whispered Myra.

I went on. There was a moment's silence—and then a deep sigh from Myra.

"How about it?" I said calmly.

Loud applause.

"Well," said Dahlia, "you and Myra make a very good couple. I suppose I must find a prize for you."

"It doesn't really matter," said Myra breathlessly, "because on the fifth tee we—we arranged about the prizes."

"We arranged to give each other one," I said, smiling at Dahlia.

Dahlia looked very hard at us.

"You *don't* mean——"

Myra laughed happily.

"Oh," she said, "but that's just what we do."



W. PETT RIDGE

*What Great Events—*

W. Pett Ridge began his career in the Civil Service and did not take to journalism until he was nearly thirty. Some of his most popular books deal with the life of the poor in London slums, which he describes with close observation and humour.



## WHAT GREAT EVENTS—

MR BARDEN, of No. 21 Begonia Road, N.W., discovered, on the narrow gravelled walk of his back garden, a snail making leisurely progress. No permission had been given for it to enter the grounds, and Mr. Barden, finding a superannuated clothes-peg, jerked the snail over the wall. He went on, dismissing the trifling incident from his mind, and smoking a cigar presented to him that day by no less a person than one of his directors. Mr. Barden congratulated himself on the peacefulness of the district. He and Mrs. Barden, agreeing on many subjects, were especially at one on the topic of quiet surroundings.

“Great thing is,” Mrs. Barden had said, “not to know your neighbours. Once you get acquainted with them, you can no longer call your house your own.”

Mr. Barden had made the tour of the garden three times when he again encountered a snail. He remarked, in humorous vein, that it had better join its boon companion; the clothes-peg was once more used. On the next turn around the garden something fell upon the rim of his straw hat. Snatching off the headgear, he frowned at the snail, and it then occurred to him—all in a flash, so he described it later to his wife—that there was but one snail, and that the mollusc was being forced to pay flying visits from one garden to another. Mr. Barden hurled it over the wall, and instantly the head of a lady appeared. He guessed her to be standing on a wheelbarrow.

“I wish to goodness, sir,” said the lady, speaking with frank indignation, “that you would be kind enough, if you must keep snails, to keep them to yourself.”

Mr. Barden, as gentlemanly a man as you would encounter, in office hours, from one end to the other of Moorgate Street, City, had replaced his straw hat. He now took it off, bowed politely, and went forward with the intention of explaining

that his desire was not so much to keep snails as to get rid of them. At this moment the lady disappeared. He found himself hoping that the wheelbarrow had given way.

Indoors, Mrs. Barden, who had been watching the scene from an upper window, was able to confirm this bright anticipation, and to mention that the neighbour had limped her way back to the house.

Mrs. Barden supplied the information that the lady's name was Dunstan. The maid, it appeared, had heard it rumoured that Miss Dunstan was either a vegetarian or a Unitarian; the maid was not quite sure, but it was certainly something peculiar. "I never dream of taking any notice of her," Mrs. Barden went on, "when I meet her out. And after this I shall be more distant with her than ever."

"I think you're wise, my dear."

A ring came at the front door just as Mr. Barden was trying to remember where he had put the key of the liqueur-stand. The maid brought information that Mr. Dunstan had called, and wished to see Mr. Barden for two minutes. A hospitable invitation was sent out, but the visitor preferred not to come beyond the hall. From the dining-room Mrs. Barden listened tremulously to a quick, alert duel in conversation.

"I don't stand on ceremony," snapped the caller. "My sister has been telling me about this snail business. It appears you lost your temper, made a sudden dash at her."

"It's a lie!"

"You're making it worse," declared the caller heatedly. "My sister and I, you must understand, are not in the habit of putting up with any nonsense. As a matter of fact, this is much more serious than you appear to imagine. She is as nearly as possible engaged to someone she met at a restaurant in St. Martin's Lane, and he's got eugenic ideas; and if she's crippled for life, why, it simply means that I shall have to go on keeping her for——"

"Now look here," said Mr. Barden persuasively, "I've no desire to know anything about your troubles and worries; what they are, they are, and you must put up with them. Go out of my house!"

"When I'm ready," said Dunstan, with obstinacy.

Whereupon Mr. Barden took him firmly by the shoulder. The two struggled to the front gate, where a policeman

happened to be waiting in the hope of offering a few cordial words to Mrs. Barden's maid. The constable turned his bull's-eye on the scene, and, noting that Mr. Barden was getting the better of the fight, said no word until Mr. Dunstan, flung out on the asphalted pavement, ordered him to take the other in charge. The policeman asked each for his name and address, and, this furnished, made an exchange, and, in handing over the documents, said it was a case for a summons, if anything. The constable, five minutes later, was in a position to offer a toast to Mr. Barden. "Here's to your very good health, sir, and the same to your good lady, if she will kindly allow me to say so."

"I shan't sleep a wink," declared Mrs. Barden.

"Worse things might have happened," remarked the policeman. "Mark my words, it'll soon blow over."

News of the wrestling match went up and down Begonia Road early the following morning, and Mr. Barden, leaving for the City, was regarded from the shelter of venetian blinds with an interest equal to that shown concerning Miss Dunstan's brother when he, later, took his departure for Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was considered a matter of genuine regret that neither party bore signs of grievous injury, but close observers declared the two looked ashamed of themselves. Begonia Road said the incident was one calculated to let the neighbourhood down in a most terrible fashion; one might really almost as well be living in Holloway. Two ladies discussed the advisability of seeing the new vicar about it.

Mrs. Barden ordered the maid to call next door with a polite message of inquiry, and the answer was that Miss Dunstan had enjoyed a night of moderate rest, and returned thanks for kind inquiries. Following this, Mrs. Barden, appalled as though about to take a considerable journey, left No. 21 and paid a formal visit to No. 22. Miss Dunstan herself opened the door, and the card-case had to be put away, and friendly conversation took place. Miss Dunstan said it was a pity menfolk lost their heads whenever an excuse offered itself; admitted that the bruise sustained through want of stability on the part of a wheelbarrow, called upon to perform an unexpected duty, was already nearly well. She attributed this to the circumstance that a strict form of diet kept her in a good, healthy condition. Mrs. Barden had heard of vegetarianism, but was not acquainted with the

details. She came from the visit well supplied with literature on the subject, and exhilarated by the knowledge that she had met a difficult crisis with amiability.

Meanwhile the forces of the district were at work. The new vicar, made acquainted with the news, consulted his wife on the subject—he often spoke of her in public as his right hand and his never-failing adviser—and she counselled him to leave the Bardens and the Dunstans to settle the matter among themselves. He went at once to his study and wrote to Mr. Barden requesting him to call at the Mission House that evening, 7.30 precisely, to discuss a topic of “enormous import, not only to you, but to the community at large”. Mr. Barden, returning home, after an occupied day in Moor-gate Street, and well pleased at his wife’s action, assumed that the invitation contained something in the nature of a compliment; guessed that he would be expected to move or second a vote of thanks. The vicar, alone in a sparsely furnished room, received Mr. Barden defensively; ordered him to sit down on a packing-case.

“I am given to understand,” said the vicar heavily, “that you took a share, no longer ago than yesterday evening, in a scene of some violence.”

“Rather a good scrap while it lasted,” admitted Mr. Barden.

“I regret I was not present.”

“If it happens again, vicar, you shall have a card.”

“Had I been present, I should have flung myself between the two, and commanded you both to put an end to an incident unworthy of yourselves, and disgraceful—yes, disgraceful to the neighbourhood in which you live.”

“Perhaps,” said the other with spirit, “you will be good enough to explain what all this has got to do with you?”

“Mr. Barden,” remarked the vicar, “you don’t recognize the force of character and the alertness of action which are my distinguishing characteristics. The village in Wiltshire of which I had charge until my removal here, a few months ago, was, if I may say so, a model village.”

“How do you account for that?”

“I will tell you. I will tell you frankly. It was due to the fact that I watched and controlled the interests and the very actions of each one of my parishioners.”

“You try that game on up here in London,” threatened

Mr. Barden warmly, "and, by Jove, we'll teach you a lesson you won't easily forget."

So many events of a larger importance have happened since, that you may have forgotten the newspaper discussion that took place at about this time entitled "Why our Churches are Empty". Mr. Barden sent in a forcible contribution to the debate, and the vicar replied. The vicar, on the persuasion of his Bishop, agreed, later, to go back to Wiltshire; but the model village, at the prospect, organized a riot, and neighbouring villages joined in. For mishandling the situation when troops were brought from Salisbury, General Widdecombe was put upon half pay.

Begonia Road, N.W., watching events, and not altogether displeased to find itself a small but important cog in the machinery, felt disinclined to let the matter rest with the departure of the vicar for a living near Birmingham. One of the two ladies who had first moved in the affair of the wrestling-match induced a brother-in-law, about to leave the country for New Zealand, to write a strongly worded letter to the Member for the constituency, calling his attention to the inhuman treatment to which the late vicar had been subjected by his superiors, and demanding that the Member should put a question in the House without a moment's delay. "If you omit to do this," said the writer, "it is probable you will be taught a lesson when the next General Election comes round." The communication reached the Member at a time when he had been informed by the Prime Minister that, whilst his services to the Government of the day were recognized, it was impossible to hold out any hope that he would be appointed to the Under-Secretaryship that had recently become vacant.

"As a matter of fact, my dear chap," added the Prime Minister frankly, "you wouldn't be at all the ideal man for the job."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly you may ask why," said the Prime Minister, "but no power on earth can make me answer. I'm far too old a bird to give reasons. Have a cigarette?"

The letter from the intending emigrant was handed to the Member as he stamped his way out. He perused it, went instantly to the writing-room, and dashed off an impetuous reply. The last act of the voyager to New Zealand was to

send the letter to the office of a morning journal, where the sub-editor would have destroyed it only that he thought of an alliterative heading, "Amazing Missive of a Member". In the evening papers short leaders were based upon the subject. Was a Parliamentary representative, asked the short leaders, entitled to address one of his constituents in terms of this violent nature? Was courtesy in political affairs to be reckoned a thing of the past? Did a brusqueness of manner and a deplorable want of the ordinary considerations of good breeding justify one in representing a London borough, and how much longer were the people of a free country going to put up with such treatment? Even the newspapers on the Member's own side of thought suggested that the amenities of political life should be respected. "No doubt the communication was penned in a hasty moment, and the writer will be the first, we are sure, to offer the *amende honorable*."

Instead, the writer took up a high position. Disregarding the small point at issue, he announced that for some time past he had suspected the Government was playing fast and loose with the true interests of the country. He proposed to put the matter to a supreme test. Changing sides, he was returned by his constituency—thanks, partly, to his presence of mind in issuing a portrait of himself taken some fifteen years before—with a majority that ran into four figures. The Government, alarmed by this, asked, in the course of a debate, for a vote of confidence, and failed to obtain it. The General Election that followed cost, in all, well over a million pounds.

"Hullo!" said Barden to his neighbour in Begonia Road one evening. "How's the garden getting on, laddie?"

"First class, Bardie," replied Dunstan. "A few snails about, but nothing else to complain of."

"Doesn't do," agreed Barden, "to make a fuss over trifles!"

(From "Just Open", by kind permission of Messrs. Dean & Son.)

# WASHINGTON IRVING

## *Rip Van Winkle*

Washington Irving was an American by birth, though he lived for many years in England, where he wrote much of his *Sketchbook*. This contains among other charming pieces the immortal tale of Rip van Winkle which is included here. Of his longer works the most popular is *The Alhambra*.



## RIP VAN WINKLE

**T**HERE lived, many years since, while America was yet a province of Great Britain, a simple, good-natured fellow, of the name of Rip Van Winkle. He was a simple, good-natured man; he was, moreover, a kind neighbour, and an obedient henpecked husband.

Certain it is, that he was a great favourite among all the good wives of the village, who, as usual with the amiable sex, took his part in all family squabbles, and never failed, whenever they talked those matters over in their evening gossipings, to lay all the blame on Dame Van Winkle. The children of the village, too, would shout with joy whenever he approached. He assisted at their sports, made their playthings, taught them to fly kites and shoot marbles, and told them long stories of ghosts, witches, and Indians. Whenever he went dodging about the village, he was surrounded by a troop of them, hanging on his skirts, clambering on his back, and playing a thousand tricks on him with impunity; and not a dog would bark at him throughout the neighbourhood.

The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labour. It could not be for the want of assiduity or perseverance; for he would sit on a wet rock, with a rod as long and heavy as a Tartar's lance, and fish all day without a murmur, even though he should not be encouraged by a single nibble. He would carry a fowling-piece on his shoulder for hours together, trudging through woods and swamps, and up hill and down dale, to shoot a few squirrels or wild pigeons. He would never even refuse to assist a neighbour in the roughest toil, and was a foremost man at all country frolics for husking Indian corn or building stone fences; the women of the village, too, used to employ him to run their errands, and to do such little odd jobs as their less obliging husbands would not do for them—in a word, Rip was ready to attend to anybody's business but

his own; but as to doing family duty and keeping his farm in order, it was impossible.

In fact, he declared it was no use to work on his farm; it was the most pestilent little piece of ground in the whole county; everything about it went wrong, and would go wrong in spite of him. His fences were continually falling to pieces; his cow would either go astray, or get among the cabbages; weeds were sure to grow quicker in his fields than anywhere else; the rain always made a point of setting in just as he had some outdoor work to do. So that though his patrimonial estate had dwindled away under his management, acre by acre, until there was little more left than a mere patch of Indian corn and potatoes, yet it was the worst-conditioned farm in the neighbourhood.

His children, too, were as ragged and wild as if they belonged to nobody. His son Rip, an urchin begotten in his own likeness, promised to inherit the habits, with the old clothes, of his father. He was generally seen trooping like a colt at his mother's heels, equipped in a pair of his father's cast-off galligaskins, which he had much ado to hold up with one hand, as a fine lady does her train in bad weather.

Rip's sole domestic adherent was his dog Wolf, who was as much henpecked as his master; for Dame Van Winkle regarded them as companions in idleness, and even looked upon Wolf with an evil eye as the cause of his master's going so often astray. True it is, in all points of spirit befitting an honourable dog, he was as courageous an animal as ever scoured the woods; but what courage can withstand the ever-during and all-besetting terrors of a woman's tongue? The moment Wolf entered the house, his crest fell, his tail dropped to the ground or curled between his legs, he sneaked about with a gallows air, casting many a sidelong glance at Dame Van Winkle, and, at the least flourish of a broomstick or ladle, would flee to the door with yelping precipitation.

Times grew worse and worse with Rip Van Winkle as years of matrimony rolled on; a tart temper never mellows with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edge-tool that grows keener by constant use. For a long while he used to console himself, when driven from home, by frequenting a kind of perpetual club of the sages, philosophers and other idle personages of the village, that held its sessions on a bench before a small inn, designated by a rubicund portrait of His Majesty

George III. Here they used to sit in the shade, of a long lazy summer's day, talk listlessly over village gossip, or tell endless sleepy stories about nothing. But it would have been worth any statesman's money to have heard the profound discussions that sometimes took place, when by chance an old newspaper fell into their hands from some passing traveller. How solemnly they would listen to the contents, drawled out by Derrick Van Bummel, the schoolmaster, a dapper, learned little man, who was not to be daunted by the most gigantic word in the dictionary; and how sagely they would deliberate upon public events some months after they had taken place.

Poor Rip was at last reduced almost to despair; and his only alternative to escape from the labour of the farm and the clamour of his wife was to take gun in hand and stroll away into the woods. Here he would sometimes seat himself at the foot of a tree and share the contents of his wallet with Wolf, with whom he sympathized as a fellow-sufferer in persecution. "Poor Wolf," he would say, "thy mistress leads thee a dog's life of it; but never mind, my lad, whilst I live thou shalt never want a friend to stand by thee!" Wolf would wag his tail, look wistfully in his master's face, and if dogs can feel pity, I verily believe he reciprocated the sentiment with all his heart. In a long ramble of the kind on a fine autumnal day, Rip had unconsciously scrambled to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill Mountains. He was after his favourite sport of squirrel-shooting, and the still solitudes had echoed and re-echoed with the reports of his gun. Panting and fatigued, he threw himself, late in the afternoon, on a green knoll, covered with mountain herbage, that crowned the brow of a precipice.

For some time Rip lay musing; evening was gradually advancing, the mountains began to throw their long blue shadows over the valleys, he saw that it would be dark long before he could reach the village, and he heaved a heavy sigh when he thought of encountering the terrors of Dame Van Winkle.

As he was about to descend, he heard a voice from a distance, hallooing: "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!" He looked around, but could see nothing but a crow winging its solitary flight across the mountain. He thought his fancy must have deceived him, and turned again to descend, when he heard the same cry ring through the still evening air:

“Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!”—at the same time Wolf bristled up his back, and giving a low growl, skulked to his master’s side, looking fearfully down into the glen. Rip now felt a vague apprehension stealing over him; he looked down anxiously in the same direction, and perceived a strange figure slowly toiling up the rocks, and bending under the weight of something he carried on his back. He was surprised to see any human being in this lonely and unfrequented place, but supposing it to be someone of the neighbourhood in need of his assistance, he hastened down to yield it.

On nearer approach he was still more surprised at the singularity of the stranger’s appearance. He was a short, square-built old fellow, with thick, bushy hair and a grizzled beard. His dress was of the antique Dutch fashion—a cloth jerkin strapped round the waist—several pairs of breeches, the outer one of ample volume, decorated with rows of buttons down the sides and bunches at the knees. He bore on his shoulder a stout keg, that seemed full of liquor, and made signs for Rip to approach and assist him with the load. Though rather shy and distrustful of this new acquaintance, Rip complied with his usual alacrity, and, mutually relieving each other, they clambered up a narrow gully, apparently the dry bed of a mountain torrent. As they ascended, Rip every now and then heard long, rolling peals, like distant thunder, that seemed to issue out of a deep ravine, or rather cleft between lofty rocks, toward which their rugged path conducted. He paused for an instant, but supposing it to be the muttering of one of those transient thunder showers which often take place in mountain heights, he proceeded. Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheatre, surrounded by perpendicular precipices, over the brinks of which impending trees shot their branches, so that you only caught glimpses of the azure sky and the bright evening cloud. During the whole time, Rip and his companion had laboured on in silence; for though the former marvelled greatly what could be the object of carrying a keg of liquor up this wild mountain, yet there was something strange and incomprehensible about the unknown that inspired awe and checked familiarity.

On entering the amphitheatre, new objects of wonder presented themselves. On a level spot in the centre was a company of odd-looking personages playing at nine-pins.

They were dressed in a quaint outlandish fashion : some wore short doublets, others jerkins, with long knives in their belts, and most of them had enormous breeches of similar style with those of the guide. Their visages, too, were peculiar : one had a large head, broad face, and small piggish eyes ; the face of another seemed to consist entirely of nose, and was surmounted by a white, sugar-loaf hat, set off with a little red cock's tail. They all had beards, of various shapes and colours. There was one who seemed to be the commander. He was a stout, old gentleman, with a weather-beaten countenance ; he wore a laced doublet, broad belt, and hanger, high-crowned hat and feather, red stockings and high-heeled shoes, with roses in them. The whole group reminded Rip of the figures in an old Flemish painting in the parlour of Dominie Van Schaick, the village parson, and which had been brought over from Holland at the time of the settlement.

What seemed particularly odd to Rip was, that though these folks were evidently amusing themselves, yet they maintained the gravest faces, the most mysterious silence, and were, withal, the most melancholy party of pleasure he had ever witnessed. Nothing interrupted the stillness of the scene but the noise of the balls, which, whenever they were rolled, echoed along the mountains like rumbling peals of thunder.

As Rip and his companion approached them, they suddenly desisted from their play, and stared at him with such fixed statue-like gaze, and such strange, uncouth, lack-lustre countenances, that his heart turned within him, and his knees smote together. His companion now emptied the contents of the keg into large flagons and made signs to him to wait upon the company. He obeyed with fear and trembling ; they quaffed the liquor in profound silence, and then returned to their game.

By degrees Rip's awe and apprehension subsided. He even ventured when no eye was fixed upon him, to taste the beverage, which he found had much of the flavour of excellent Hollands. He was naturally a thirsty soul, and was soon tempted to repeat the draught. One taste provoked another, and he reiterated his visits to the flagon so often, that at length his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head, his head gradually declined, and he fell into a deep sleep.

On awaking he found himself on the green knoll from whence he had first seen the old man of the glen. He rubbed

his eyes—it was a bright sunny morning. The birds were hopping and twittering among the bushes, and the eagle was wheeling aloft, and breasting the pure mountain breeze. “Surely,” thought Rip, “I have not slept here all night.” He recalled the occurrences before he fell asleep. The strange man with the keg of liquor—the mountain ravine—the wild retreat among the rocks—the woe-begone party at nine-pins—the flagon—“Oh! that flagon! that wicked flagon!” thought Rip—“what excuse shall I make to Dame Van Winkle?”

He looked round for his gun, but in place of the clean well-oiled fowling-piece, he found an old firelock lying by him, the barrel encrusted with rust, the lock falling off, and the stock worm-eaten. He now suspected that the grave roysterers of the mountain had put a trick upon him, and having dosed him with liquor, had robbed him of his gun. Wolf, too, had disappeared, but he might have strayed away after a squirrel or partridge. He whistled after him and shouted his name, but all in vain; the echoes repeated his whistle, and shout, but no dog was to be seen.

As he approached the village he met a number of people, but none whom he knew, which somewhat surprised him, for he had thought himself acquainted with everyone in the country round. Their dress, too, was of a different fashion from that to which he was accustomed. They all stared at him with equal marks of surprise, and whenever they cast eyes upon him, invariably stroked their chins. The constant recurrence of this gesture induced Rip, involuntarily, to do the same, when to his astonishment he found his beard had grown a foot long!

He had now entered the skirts of the village. A troop of strange children ran at his heels, hooting after him, and pointing at his grey beard. The dogs, too, not one of which he recognized for an old acquaintance, barked at him as he passed. The very village was altered; it was larger and more populous. There were rows of houses which he had never seen before, and those which had been his familiar haunts had disappeared. Strange names were over the doors—strange faces at the windows—everything was strange. His mind now misgave him: he began to doubt whether both he and the world around him were not bewitched. Surely this was his native village, which he had left but the day before. There

stood the Kaatskill Mountains—there ran the silver Hudson at a distance—there was every hill and dale precisely as it had always been; Rip was sorely perplexed; “That flagon last night,” thought he, “has addled my poor head sadly!”

It was with some difficulty that he found the way to his own house, which he approached with silent awe, expecting every moment to hear the shrill voice of Dame Van Winkle. He found the house gone to decay—the roof fallen in, the windows shattered, and the doors off the hinges. A half-starved dog that looked like Wolf was skulking about it. Rip called him by name, but the cur snarled, showed his teeth, and passed on. This was an unkind cut indeed. “My very dog,” sighed poor Rip, “has forgotten me!”

He entered the house, which, to tell the truth, Dame Van Winkle had always kept in neat order. It was empty, forlorn, and apparently abandoned. This desolateness overcame all his connubial fears; he called loudly for his wife and children; the lonely chambers rung for a moment with his voice, and then all again was silence.

He now hurried forth and hastened to his old resort, the village inn; but it too was gone. A large rickety wooden building stood in its place, with great gaping windows, some of them broken, and mended with old hats and petticoats, and over the door was painted—“The Union Hotel, by Jonathan Doelittle”. Instead of the great tree that used to shelter the quiet little Dutch inn of yore, there now was reared a tall naked pole, with something on the top that looked like a red nightcap, and from it was fluttering a flag, on which was a singular assemblage of stars and stripes; all this was strange and incomprehensible. He recognized on the sign, however, the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe; but even this was singularly metamorphosed. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was held in the hand instead of a sceptre, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted, in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON.

The appearance of Rip, with his long grizzled beard, his rusty fowling-piece, his uncouth dress, and the army of women and children that had gathered at his heels, soon attracted the attention of the tavern politicians; and a short but busy little fellow pulled him by the arm, and rising on

tiptoe, inquired in his ear, "whether he was Federal or Democrat?" Rip was equally at a loss to comprehend the question when a knowing self-important old gentleman in a sharp cocked hat, made his way through the crowd, putting them to the right and left with his elbows as he passed, and planting himself before Van Winkle, with one arm akimbo, the other resting on his cane, his keen eyes and sharp hat penetrating, as it were, into his very soul, demanded in an austere tone: "What brought him to the election with a gun on his shoulder, and a mob at his heels? and whether he meant to breed a riot in the village?"—"Alas! gentlemen," cried Rip, somewhat dismayed, "I am a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the king, God bless him!"

Here a general shout burst from the bystanders—"A tory! a tory! a spy! a refugee! hustle him! away with him!" It was with great difficulty that the self-important man in the cocked hat restored order; and having assumed a tenfold austerity of brow, demanded again of the unknown culprit what he came there for, and whom he was seeking? The poor man humbly assured him that he meant no harm, but merely came there in search of some of his neighbours, who used to keep about the tavern.

"Well—who are they? Name them."

Rip bethought himself a moment, and inquired: "Where's Nicholas Vedder?"

There was a silence for a little while, when an old man replied, in a thin piping voice: "Nicholas Vedder? Why he is dead and gone these eighteen years! There was a wooden tombstone in the churchyard that used to tell all about him, but that's rotted and gone too."

"Where's Brom Dutcher?"

"Oh, he went off to the army in the beginning of the war; some say he was killed at the storming of Stoney-Point, others say he was drowned in a squall at the foot of Antony's Nose. I don't know, he never came back again."

"Where's Van Bummel, the schoolmaster?"

"He went off to the wars too, was a great militia general, and is now in Congress."

Rip's heart died away at hearing of these sad changes in his home and friends, and finding himself thus alone in the world. Every answer puzzled him, too, by treating of such enormous lapses of time, and of matters which he could not

understand: war—congress—Stoney-Point; he had no courage to ask after any more friends, but cried out in despair: “Does nobody here know Rip Van Winkle?”

“Oh, Rip Van Winkle!” exclaimed two or three. “Oh, to be sure! That’s Rip Van Winkle yonder, leaning against the tree.”

Rip looked and beheld a precise counterpart of himself, as he went up the mountain: apparently as lazy, and certainly as ragged. The poor fellow was now completely confounded. He doubted his own identity, and whether he was himself or another man. In the midst of his bewilderment the man in the cocked hat demanded who he was, and what was his name?

“God knows!” exclaimed he, at his wit’s end; “I’m not myself—I’m somebody else; that’s me yonder—no—that’s somebody else got into my shoes. I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they’ve changed my gun, and everything’s changed, and I am changed, and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!”

The bystanders began now to look at each other, nod, wink significantly, and tap their fingers against their foreheads. There was a whisper also about securing the gun, and keeping the old fellow from doing mischief, at the very suggestion of which the self-important man in the cocked hat retired with some precipitation. At this critical moment a fresh comely woman pressed through the throng to get a peep at the grey-bearded man. She had a chubby child in her arms, which, frightened at his looks, began to cry. “Hush, Rip,” cried she, “hush, you little fool, the old man won’t hurt you.” The name of the child, the air of the mother, the tone of her voice, all awakened a train of recollections in his mind. “What is your name, my good woman?” asked he.

“Judith Gardenier.”

“And your father’s name?”

“Ah, poor man, his name was Rip Van Winkle; it’s twenty years since he went away from home with his gun, and never has been heard of since; his dog came home without him; but whether he shot himself or was carried away by the Indians, nobody can tell. I was then but a little girl.”

Rip had but one more question to ask; but he put it with a faltering voice:

“Where’s your mother?”

“Oh, she too had died but a short time since; she broke a blood-vessel in a fit of passion at a New England pedlar.”

There was a drop of comfort at least in this intelligence. The honest man could contain himself no longer. He caught his daughter and her child in his arms. “I am your father!” cried he. “Young Rip Van Winkle once—old Rip Van Winkle now! Does nobody know poor Rip Van Winkle?”

All stood amazed, until an old woman, tottering out from among the crowd, put her hand to her brow, and peeping under it in his face for a moment, exclaimed: “Sure enough! it is Rip Van Winkle—it is himself! Welcome home again, old neighbour. Why, where have you been these twenty long years?”

Rip’s story was soon told, for the whole twenty years had been to him but as one night.

It was determined, however, to take the opinion of old Peter Vanderdonk, who was seen slowly advancing up the road. He was a descendant of the historian of that name, who wrote one of the earliest accounts of the province. Peter was the most ancient inhabitant of the village, and well versed in all the wonderful events and traditions of the neighbourhood. He recollected Rip at once, and corroborated his story in the most satisfactory manner. He assured the company that it was a fact, handed down from his ancestor the historian, that the Kaatskill Mountains had always been haunted by strange beings. That it was affirmed that the great Hendrick Hudson, the first discoverer of the river and country, kept a kind of vigil there every twenty years, with his crew of the *Half-moon*, being permitted in this way to revisit the scenes of his enterprise, and keep a guardian eye upon the river and the great city called by his name.

## CUTHBERT BEDE

### *The Hoax*

Cuthbert Bede, whose real name was Edward Bradley, was a prolific and popular writer of humorous stories of university and country life, of which the most famous is *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green*, an entertaining chronicle of an innocent undergraduate.



## THE HOAX

ONE morning, Mr. Verdant Green and Mr. Bouncer were lounging in the gateway of Brazenface when the latter's attention was riveted by the appearance on the other side of the street of a modest-looking young gentleman, who appeared to be so ill at ease in his frock-coat and "stick-up" collar as to lead to the strong presumption that he wore those articles of manly dress for the first time.

"I'll bet you a bottle of blacking, Gig-lamps," said little Mr. Bouncer, "that this respected party is an intending Freshman. Look at his customary suits of solemn black, as Othello, or Hamlet, or some other swell says in Shakespeare. And, besides his black go-to-meeting bags, please to observe," continued the little gentleman, in the tone of a waxwork showman; "please to observe the peccoliarity of the hair-chain, likewise the straps of the period. Look! he's coming this way. Gig-lamps, I vote we take a rise out of the youth. Hem! Good morning! Can we have the pleasure of assisting you in anything?"

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir," replied the youthful stranger, flushing like a girl to the roots of his curly auburn hair; "perhaps, sir, you can direct me to Brazenface College, sir?"

"Well, sir, it's not at all improbable, sir, but what I could, sir," replied Mr. Bouncer; "but perhaps, sir, you'll first favour me with your name, and your business there, sir."

"Certainly, sir!" rejoined the stranger; and, while he fumbled at his card-case, the experienced Mr. Bouncer whispered to our hero, "Told you he was a suckling Freshman, Gig-lamps! He has got a brand new card-case, and says 'sir' at sight of the academicals." The card handed to Mr. Bouncer bore the name of "MR. JAMES PUCKER"; and in small characters in the corner of the card were the words, "*Brazenface College, Oxford.*"

"I came, sir," said the blushing Mr. Pucker, "to enter

for my matriculation examination, and I wished to see the gentleman who will have to examine me, sir."

"The doose you do!" said Mr. Bouncer sternly; "then, young man, allow me to say that you've regularly been and gone and done it, and put your foot in it most completely."

"How-ow-ow—how, sir?" stammered the dupe.

"How?" replied Mr. Bouncer, still more sternly; "do you mean to brazen out your offence by asking how? What *could* have induced you, sir, to have had printed on this card the name of this college, when you've not a prospect of belonging to it—it may be for years, it may be for never, as the bard says? You've committed a most grievous offence against the University Statutes, young gentleman, as this gentleman here—Mr. Pluckem, the junior examiner—will tell you!" And with that Mr. Bouncer nudged Mr. Verdant Green, who took his cue with astonishing aptitude, and glared through his glasses at the trembling Mr. Pucker, who stood blushing and bowing, and heartily repenting that his schoolboy vanity had led him to invest four-and-sixpence on "100 cards, and plate, engraved with name and address".

"Put the cards in your pocket, sir, and don't let me see them again!" said the junior examiner, quite rejoiced at the opportunity afforded him of proving to his friend that *he* was no longer a Freshman.

"He forgives you for the sake of your family, young man!" said Mr. Bouncer with pathos; "you've come to the right shop, for *this* is Brazenface; and you've come just at the right time, for here is the gentleman who will assist Mr. Pluckem in examining you"; and Mr. Bouncer pointed to Mr. Four-in-hand Fosbrooke, who was coming up the street on his way from the Schools, where he was making a very laudable (but, as it proved, futile) endeavour "to get through his smalls", or, in other words, to pass his Little-go examination. The hoax which had been suggested to the ingenious mind of Mr. Bouncer was based upon the fact of Mr. Fosbrooke's being properly got-up for his sacrifice in a white tie and a pair of very small bands—the two articles which, with the usual academicals, form the costume demanded by Alma Mater of all her children when they take their places in her Schools. And, as Mr. Fosbrooke was far too politic a gentleman to irritate the Examiners by appearing in a

“loud” or sporting costume, he had carried out the idea of clerical character, suggested by the bands and choker, by a quiet, gentlemanly suit of black, which, he had fondly hoped, would have softened his Examiners’ manners, and not permitted them to be brutal.

Mr. Four-in-hand Fosbrooke, therefore, to the unsophisticated eye of the blushing Mr. Pucker, presented a very fine specimen of the Examining Tutor; and this impression on Mr. Pucker’s mind was heightened by Mr. Fosbrooke, after a few minutes’ private conversation with the two other gentlemen, turning to him and saying, “It will be extremely inconvenient to me to examine you now; but, as you probably wish to return home as soon as possible, I will endeavour to conclude the business at once—this gentleman, Mr. Pluckem,” pointing to our hero, “having kindly promised to assist me. Mr. Bouncer, will you have the goodness to follow with the young gentleman to my rooms?”

Leaving Mr. Pucker to express his thanks for the great kindness, and Mr. Bouncer to plunge him into the depths of trepidation by telling him terrible *stories* of the Examiner’s fondness for rejecting the candidates for examination, Mr. Fosbrooke and our hero ascended to the rooms of the former, where they hastily cleared away cigar-boxes and pipes, turned certain French pictures with their faces to the wall, and covered over with an outspread *Times* a regiment of porter and spirit bottles which had just been smuggled in, and were drawn up rank and file on the sofa. Having made this preparation, and furnished the table with pens, ink, and scribbling-paper, Mr. Bouncer and the victim were admitted.

“Take a seat, sir,” said Mr. Fosbrooke gravely; and Mr. Pucker put his hat on the ground, and sat down at the table in a state of blushing nervousness. “Have you been at a public school?”

“Yes, sir,” stammered the victim; “a very public one, sir; it was a boarding-school, sir; I was a day-boy, sir, and in the first class.”

“First class of an uncommon slow train!” muttered Mr. Bouncer.

“And are you going back to the boarding-school!” asked Mr. Verdant Green, with the air of an assistant judge.

“No, sir,” replied Mr. Pucker, “I have just done with it; quite done with school, sir, this last half; and papa is

going to put me to read with a clergyman until it is time for me to come to college."

"Refreshing innocence!" murmured Mr. Bouncer; while Mr. Fosbrooke and our hero conferred together, and hastily wrote on two sheets of the scribbling-paper.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Fosbrooke to the victim, after a paper had been completed, "let us see what your Latin writing is like. Have the goodness to turn what I have written into Latin; and be very careful, sir," added Mr. Fosbrooke sternly, "be very careful that it is Cicero's Latin, sir!" And he handed Mr. Pucker a sheet of paper, on which he had scribbled the following:

OF "TO BE TRANSLATED INTO PROSE-Y LATIN, IN THE MANNER  
CICERO'S ORATIONS AFTER DINNER.

"If, therefore, any on your bench, my luds, or in this assembly, should entertain an opinion that the proximate parts of a mellifluous mind are for ever conjoined and unconnected, I submit to you, my luds, that it will of necessity follow that, such clandestine conduct being a mere nothing—or, in the noble language of our philosophers, bosh—every individual act of overt misunderstanding will bring interminable limits to the empiricism of thought, and will redound in the very lowest degree to the credit of the malefactor."

"TO BE TURNED INTO LATIN, AFTER THE MANNER OF  
THE ANIMALS OF TACITUS.

"She went into the garden to cut a cabbage to make an apple-pie. Just then a great she-bear, coming down the street, poked its nose into the shop-window. 'What! no soap?' So he died, and she (very imprudently) married the barber. And there were present at the wedding the Joblillies, and the Piccannies, and the Gobelites, and the great Panjandrum himself, with the little button on top. So they all set to playing Catch-who-catch-can, till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots."

It was well for the purpose of the hoaxers that Mr. Pucker's trepidation prevented him from making a calm perusal of the paper; and he was nervously doing his best to turn the nonsensical English, word by word, into equally

nonsensical Latin when his limited powers of Latin writing were brought to a full stop by the untranslatable word "bosh". As he could make nothing of this, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and gazed appealingly at the benignant features of Mr. Verdant Green. The appealing gaze was answered by our hero ordering Mr. Pucker to hand in his paper for examination, and to endeavour to answer the questions which he and his brother examiner had been writing down for him.

Mr. Pucker took the two papers of questions, and read as follows :

#### "HISTORY

"1. Draw a historical parallel (after the manner of Plutarch) between Hannibal and Annie Laurie.

"2. What internal evidence does the Odyssey afford, that Homer sold his Trojan war-ballads at three yards an obolus ?

"3. In what way were the shades on the banks of the Styx supplied with spirits ?

"4. Give a brief account of the Roman Emperors who visited the United States, and state what they did there.

"5. Show from the words 'Hoc erat in votis' (Sat. vi., Lib. ii.) that Horace's favourite wine was hock, and that he meant to say 'he always voted for hock'.

"6. Draw a parallel between the Children in the Wood and Achilles in the Styx.

"7. Name the *prima donnas* who have appeared in the operas of Virgil and Horace since the *Virgilio Opera* and *Horatio Opera* were composed.

#### "EUCLID, ARITHMETIC, AND ALGEBRA

"1. 'The extremities of a line are points.' Prove this by the rule of railways.

"2. Show the fallacy of defining an angel as 'a worm at one end and a fool at the other'.

"3. If one side of a triangle be produced, what is there to prevent the other two sides from also being brought forward ?

"4. If the gnomon of a sundial be divided into two equal, and also into two unequal parts, what would be its value ?

“5. If seven horses eat twenty-five acres of grass in three days, what would be their condition on the fourth day? Prove by practice.

“6. Reduce two academical years to their lowest terms.”

Mr. Pucker did not know what to make of such extraordinary and unexpected questions. He blushed, attempted to write, fingered his curls, tried to collect his faculties, and then appeared to give himself over to despair; whereupon little Mr. Bouncer was seized with an immoderate fit of coughing which had wellnigh brought the farce to its *dénouement*.

“I’m afraid, young gentleman,” said Mr. Four-in-hand Fosbrooke, as he carelessly settled his white tie and bands, “I am afraid, Mr. Pucker, that your learning is not yet up to the Brazenface standard. We are particularly cautious about admitting any gentleman whose acquirements are not of the highest order. But we will be as lenient to you as we are able, and give you one more chance to retrieve yourself. We will try a little *viva voce*, Mr. Pucker. Perhaps, sir, you will favour me with your opinions on the Fourth Punic War, and will also give me a slight sketch of the constitution of ancient Heliopolis.”

Mr. Pucker waxed, if possible redder and hotter than before; he gasped like a fish out of water. But all was to no purpose; he was unable to frame an answer to Mr. Fosbrooke’s questions.

“Ah, sir,” continued his tormentor, “I see that you will not do for us yet awhile, and I am therefore under the painful necessity of rejecting you. I should advise you, sir, to read hard for another twelve months, and endeavour to master those subjects in which you have now failed. For a young man, Mr. Pucker, who knows nothing about the Fourth Punic War, and the constitution of ancient Heliopolis is quite unfit to be enrolled among the members of such a learned college as Brazenface. Mr. Pluckem quite coincides with me in this decision.” (Here Mr. Verdant Green gave a Burleigh nod.) “We feel very sorry for you, Mr. Pucker, and also for your unfortunate family; but we recommend you to add to your present stock of knowledge, and to keep those visiting-cards for another twelvemonth.” And Mr. Fosbrooke and our hero—disregarding poor Mr. Pucker’s entreaties that

they would consider his pa and ma, and would please to matriculate him this once, and he would read very hard, indeed he would—turned to Mr. Bouncer and gave some private instructions, which caused that gentleman to go and seek out Mr. Robert Filcher.

Five minutes after, that excellent scout met the dejected Mr. Pucker as he was crossing the quad on his way from Mr. Foshbrooke's rooms.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Filcher, touching his forehead—for as Mr. Filcher, after the manner of his tribe, never was seen in a head-covering, he was unable to raise his hat or cap—"beg your pardon, sir, but was you a-lookin' for the party as examines the young gents for their mattrickylation?"

"Eh? No! I have just come from him," replied Mr. Pucker dolefully.

"Beg your pardon, sir," remarked Mr. Filcher, "but his rooms ain't that way at all. Mr. Slowcoach, as is the party you *ought* to have seed, has *his* rooms quite in a hoppersite direction, sir; and he's the honly party as examines the mattrickylatin' gents."

"But I *have* been examined," observed Mr. Pucker, with the air of a plucked man; "and I am sorry to say that I was rejected, and——"

"I dessay, sir," interrupted Mr. Filcher; "but I think it's a 'oax, sir!"

"A what?" stammered Mr. Pucker.

"A 'oax—a sell!" replied the scout confidentially. "You see, sir, I think some of the gents have been makin' a little game of you, sir; they often does with fresh parties like you, sir. I dessay they've been makin' believe to examine you, sir. They don't mean no harm, sir; it's only their play, bless you!"

"Then," said Mr. Pucker, whose face had been clearing with every word the scout spoke, "then I'm not really rejected, but have still a chance of passing my examination?"

"Precisely so, sir," replied Mr. Filcher, "and excuse me, sir—but if you would let me advise you, sir, you wouldn't go for to mention anythin' about the 'oax to Mr. Slowcoach. If you like to go to him now, sir, I'll show you the way."

In twenty minutes after this Mr. Pucker issued from the Examining Tutor's rooms with a joyful countenance, and again encountered the scout.

"Hope you have done the job this time, 'sir," said the scout.

"Yes," replied the radiant Mr. Pucker; "I shall be able to come to college this time next year."

"Werry glad of it indeed, sir!" said Mr. Filcher, with an eye to future perquisites; "and I suppose you didn't say a word about the 'oax?"

"Not a word!"

"Then, sir, hexcuse me, but you're a trump, sir! And Mr. Fosbrooke's compliments to you, sir, and he'll be 'appy if you'll come up into his rooms, and take a glass of wine after the fatigues of the examination."

Need it be stated that, after this undergraduate display of hoaxing, Mr. Verdant Green would feel offended were he still to be called "an Oxford Freshman"?

(From "*Verdant Green*".)

E. M. DELAFIELD

*Men in Fiction*

E. M. Delafield is in private life Mrs. Dashwood, but writes under an Anglicised version of her maiden name of de la Pasture. She has published a number of books noted for their quite individual blend of humour, irony and satire, of which *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* and its sequels are most amusing.



## MEN IN FICTION

### PROFESSIONAL MEN

**N**OVELISTS, although they do not much like one to say so, are terribly conventional, especially when they write about men. Take professional men in fiction, for instance. They may be all kinds of things, but there are also all kinds of things that they mayn't be. Who, for instance, ever made his or her hero a dentist? The present writer does not want to be harsh about this. Beyond a doubt, it is difficult to visualize the scene in which a young man comes to the knowledge that his true vocation lies in fumbling about inside the open mouths of his fellow-creatures—but there must be ways of getting round this, and of making this very important and necessary calling sound as interesting as it really is. Writers, however, have as yet made no attempt to find out these ways.

Doctors, on the contrary, are numerous in fiction. Mostly, they come out well, but not in detective fiction. In detective fiction, the doctor is only put in because it is absolutely necessary that, after one glance at the corpse, he should look up and say with quiet certainty:

“The squire has been shot through the left lung, and his head battered in by a short, blunt instrument, almost certainly a poker like the one lying on the floor in a pool of blood beside him. The bruise on his left side was caused by a hob-nailed boot. Death must have occurred exactly six hours and fifteen minutes ago, which fixes the time of the murder at precisely quarter past eight this morning. There is nothing to be done for him now.”

After this, the doctor leaves the police in charge, and it isn't till hours afterwards that someone or other finds out that the old squire's injuries were all inflicted after death, which was really due to drowning.

It is never said, in the detective story, whether the doctor's

practice suffers heavily from this professional carelessness in failing to notice that the old squire's lungs were full of water all the time.

When the story is not a detective story, but a long novel about a doctor's whole life, he is a very different type of person. He is never called in to a murder case at all, and indeed, the only cases of which much notice is taken in the book are confinement cases. These take place usually in distant and obscure farm-houses, in the middle of the night, and to the accompaniment of a fearful gale, or a flood, or a snowstorm, or any other convulsion of Nature which will make it additionally inconvenient for the doctor to attend the scene.

Authors like obstetrical details, but the present writer does not, and knows, besides, that in real life doctors are quite often called out in the night on account of croup, or pleurisy, or even a bilious attack if sufficiently violent, as on account of child-birth.

The doctor in this kind of book always has a frightful financial struggle. He never attains to Harley Street, or anywhere in the least like it. His wife is almost always a perfectly lovely young creature with extravagant tastes that help to ruin him, or else she dies young, leaving him to a housekeeper who never puts flowers in the sitting-room. In the latter case the doctor thinks about his wife when he comes in, from one of his perpetual baby-cases, at three in the morning, with the prospect of the surgery before him at seven. (Doctors in books never get more than four hours' sleep on any night of the year, and often none at all. But they always persist in opening the surgery at this unreasonable hour.)

One could go on for a long while about doctors in fiction, but theirs, of course, is not the only profession dear to authors, although certainly one of the most popular.

Business men are much written about, and curiously enough are treated in an almost exactly opposite way to doctors, since they nearly always have helpful and endearing wives, who would never dream of dying and leaving them to housekeepers, and they end up highly successful, and immensely rich, although starting from a degree of poverty and illiteracy that would seem to make this practically impossible.

The early parts of the book are almost entirely given up

to the most terrifically sordid and realistic description of their early surroundings, the language—one word and two initials—that their fathers and neighbours used when intoxicated, the way in which their elder sisters went wrong, and the diseases that ravaged their mothers. But by degrees, this is worked through. The situation lightens, and the business—which started as a stall in the Warwick Road, or something like that—begins to prosper. Its owner turns his attention to social advancement, and in the course of it marries a pretty, innocent, but extremely practical young thing with quite a short name, like Anne, or Sally, or Jane. They rise in the world together. Then another woman, with a much longer name—more like Madeleine, or Rosalind—and of more exalted social standing, interferes.

The length to which the affair subsequently proceeds depends entirely upon what the author feels about his public: whether that's the sort of thing they want from him or whether it isn't. (Publishers are usually helpful about this, although biased on the side of propriety, as a rule, because of the circulating libraries.) Anyway, Anne, or Sally, or Jane takes him back in the long run, absolutely always.

Unlike real life, affairs of this kind, in books, never lead to the complete wreck of the homestead, or of the business. On the contrary. So that novels about business men have at least the advantage of a happy ending—a thing which some readers like, though others would go miles to avoid it.

#### LOVERS

THE well-known saying that All the world loves a lover, is, like so many other well-known sayings, quite inaccurate. There are numbers of people who find lovers more annoying than almost anything, and these include employers, doctors, many parents and grandparents, and others too numerous to mention. Authors of fiction, although such income as they achieve is largely derived from the exploitation of lovers and their various reactions, do not really care much about them in real life, for authors, unfortunately, are usually more than a little egotistical by nature.

In fiction, however, there is no doubt that lovers are popular. In fact it almost seems, sometimes—judging by the way editors and publishers go on about what they call

the love-interest—as if, but for that, fiction wouldn't ever be read at all, in which case there would be little point in writing it. We will not, however, dwell upon this improbable and melancholy contingency. Instead, we will get started about the men in fiction who are lovers—which, of course, most of them are. And we are bound to say that the first thing that strikes us about nearly all of them is that they attach much more importance to love than do the ordinary men of everyday life.

Take the agricultural lover—since authors are extraordinarily fond of writing about the passions of farm labourers, although comparatively indifferent to those of navvies, engine-drivers, or stokers.

The agricultural lover is seldom less than six feet tall, and he wears his shirt open at the neck whatever the weather, although there are many months in the year when a woollen muffler would be a sign of greater common sense; and if the novel is at all a modern one, he takes about with him a smell of soil and sweat wherever he goes. (In our experience, brilliantine is much more noticeable, at any rate on Sundays, but of this nothing is said.)

Well, this son of the soil is invariably fated to fall in love with somebody too utterly unsuitable for words, either because she lives in London, which constitutes—for reasons unstated—an immense social gulf between her and the farm labourer, or else because she is so frail and frivolous by nature that anyone, except a lover in a book, would have seen through her at the first glance.

In the first case, the outlook is bad, but not hopeless. The girl from London either writes, paints, dances, or does all three. She is probably engaged or semi-engaged, to a talented youth of her own social standing, and they exchange immense letters, full of quotations and similes and things, which are very often given in full. She has, to all appearances, never been in the country in her life before, because she always does something amazingly unpractical, like falling down an old mine-shaft—with which authors seem to think that the countryside is freely peppered—or setting out alone to cross the moors just when a snowstorm is coming up. Then, when she has got herself into serious difficulties, the agricultural lover pulls on his boots—boots play an enormous part in these idylls of the soil—and takes one look at the sky and says

with great confidence: "Reckon the moon should be up over the quarry by the time the cock crows from Hangman's Hill," and goes off, finding his way unerringly through pitch darkness, and floods of rain, and drifts of snow, and anything else the author can think of to show how well he understands Nature. And by the time he has found the girl and carried her into the farm as though she were a child, the whole thing is settled.

Though, personally, we have never thought, and never shall think, that that sort of girl is in the least likely to make a suitable wife for any farm labourer.

The other kind is quite different. She is a village girl, and is referred to by those who are taken in by her artifices as a "lil' maid", and by those who aren't as "a light o' love" or "a wanton lass". Her chief, sometimes her only, characteristics are vanity and sex-appeal. In the end, after the agricultural lover has fought somebody in a pub. for using a Word about her, and has thrown various other fits, she usually goes off and marries his stepbrother from the Colonies, or a rich widower forty years older than herself; and the lover, instead of realizing that this is all for the best, walks out into the night. Common sense tells one that sooner or later he will be obliged to walk out of it again, but before this inevitable, though unromantic, point is reached, the author usually brings the book to an end.

Lovers in books that are not agricultural are, of course, numerous, but there is not enough space to deal with them all in one article.

#### HUSBANDS

AUTHORS, beyond a doubt, go very wrong indeed when it comes to husbands in fiction. They only seem to know about two kinds. The first and most popular of these is quite young, and most deadly serious. He has a simple and yet manly sort of name, like John or Richard or Christopher. He marries, and his wife is lovely, and he adores her. Instead of getting accustomed to her charms with the rapidity so noticeable in real life, and taking her comfortably for granted by the end of the second year, he adores her more and more, although on every page she is growing colder, more heartless, and more extravagant. She lives, in fact, for nothing except

cocktails, night-clubs, clothes, and the admiration of other men.

(The present writer, who has been married for years and years, often wonders very much what makes authors think that any man ever looks at a married woman when there are unmarried girls anywhere within miles. The present writer is not complaining—only just wondering.)

To return to John :

He puts up with things that no husband outside the pages of a book would either tolerate, or be asked to tolerate, by even the most optimistic wife. He sits up at night over the bills that his Claire has run up. He always does his accounts at night, and they always take hours and hours. He never seems to have any bills of his own, although in real life it is usually six of one and half a dozen of the other.

One might suppose, after two or three of these nocturnal bouts, that John would either put a notice in the papers disclaiming responsibility for his wife's debts, or have the sense to separate from her. But neither of these courses so much as presents itself to him. He tells her that he is overdrawn at the bank, and so on (and makes as much fuss about it as though no one had ever before been in this painful, but thoroughly familiar, quandary), and explains that he is already working as hard as it is possible for anybody to work. And then he goes and spoils the effect of all of it by suddenly telling her how much he adores her.

In real life, very few English husbands ever say at all that they adore their wives—and absolutely none at the very moment when they have been scrutinizing bills that they cannot pay.

Sometimes John and Claire have a child, and Claire is not at all pleased about it. As she makes no secret of this, it is not reasonable of John to be filled with incredulous dismay and disappointment when she neglects it—but all the same, he is. After this, things run a rapid down-hill course, and Claire goes off with somebody else, and John is plunged into an abyss of despair, although it is perfectly impossible that there shouldn't be times when it must occur to him that he is thoroughly well rid of her.

But if so, we are never told about them.

And the child grows up, and adores her father, and they are perfectly happy together; and after about fifteen years

Claire wants to come back again, and John has the incredible idiocy to let her do so, and she turns out to be dying, and he forgives her.

And if that is the author's idea of being a successful husband, it does not coincide with ours.

The other type of husband in fiction has really only one noticeable characteristic, and that is a most phenomenal and cast-iron stupidity. He is, in fact, rather out of place in this article, because in the books where husbands are of this kind, it is naturally the wife upon whom the author has concentrated. A good many pages are given up to her struggles between Love and Honour, and in the end she decides that the brave, straightforward, and modern thing to do is to go to the man she loves. (This is not the husband, needless to say.) And authors, strangely enough, very seldom tell one what the husband feels about it, or what happened to him afterwards. Though after all, he has to go on living ordinary everyday life, just like anybody else.

On the whole, husbands are not particularly well viewed by authors. It is not, perhaps, for us to judge, but the thought does occur to one that possibly this may be because authors themselves very, very seldom make good husbands.

#### FATHERS

IN books, fathers are almost always called "Daddy", because this is somehow more touching than just "Father". And fathers in books are nothing if not touching. Unless they are absolute monsters of cruelty or stupidity. We will, however, deal with the touching ones first.

Their chief characteristic is a kind of whimsical playfulness, that would be quite bad enough taken on its own merits, but is made much worse by masking a broken heart, or an embittered spirit, or an intolerable loneliness. Fathers of this sort, conversationally, are terribly fond of metaphors, and talk like this :

"Life, sonny, is a wild beast. Something that lies in wait for you, and then springs out and tears you to pieces."

Or :

"Grown-ups have their own games, dear, just like you kiddies. Sometimes they pretend to be heroes, and princes,

and wear glittering armour and go about looking for dragons, and lovely princesses. But the armour has a way of falling to pieces, and when they find the princess, somebody else has got there first and carried her off, and there is only the dragon left."

"And is the dragon real, Daddy, or does he fall to pieces, too?" asks the obliging child, who never misses its cues.

"Yes, little one, the dragon is real enough," says Daddy, with a strange, far-away expression. "You'll learn that some day. The dragon is always real. It's only the prince and princess who are not real."

Also—this is our own addition—the entire conversation, which is not real. Because a flesh-and-blood father who went on like that would find his children quite unresponsive.

"Now," they would say, "tell us something sensible, about an aeroplane, or a cat-burglar."

But in books, the relation between the father and his child, or children, is a good deal idealized, so that the kind of conversation given above may take place frequently. Also, the children ask questions. Not the sort of question that one hears so frequently in daily life:

"Father, why can't we get a nicer car, like the one the Robinsons have?" or "Do you have to brush your *head* now, instead of hair?" or even "*Why* aren't we allowed to stay in the bathroom more than ten minutes and you have it for nearly an hour?"

But questions that give openings for every possible note to be struck in the entire gamut of whimsical pathos of humour:

"Has *your* heart ever been broken, Daddy?" and "Why do your eyes look so sad, even when you're smiling, Daddy?"

The answer to the first one is: "Hearts don't break very easily, girlie. Sometimes we think they're broken, but Time has a magic wand and mends the pieces, and we go on—not quite the same as before, ever, but able to work a little and dream a little, and even—laugh a little."

The answer to the second one is—but there are many alternatives, for it really is an admirable question, in the amount of scope that it gives. Daddy can talk about the

lady called Memory, who looks out of his eyes, and about the Help that a smile is, and all that kind of thing; or he may be of a more virile type—a clean-limbed, straight-gazing Englishman—and then he just says something brief but pregnant, about White Men who Play the Game and Keep Straight Upper Lips and Put their Backs into It. And, in any case, whatever he says sinks deeply into the consciousness of his child, and returns again and again to its assistance on strange and critical occasions, as when it violently wants to cheat at an examination, or—later in life—is in danger of sexual indiscretion.

Fathers in books are almost always either widowers, or else unfortunately married. This leaves them free to concentrate on their offspring, from the page when, with clumsy, unaccustomed fingers, they deal with unfamiliar buttons and tapes—(why unfamiliar? their own shirts and pyjamas have buttons, anyway)—till the end, when either the daughter marries, or the son is killed in India, and the father left alone. They are, indeed, a lesson against putting all one's eggs into a single basket.

The other type of father is generally either a professor, a country clergyman, or an unspecified bookworm—and always very, very absent-minded. His children are usually daughters, and he calls them "my dear", and everything he says, he says "mildly" or "absently".

The daughters of real-life professors, country clergymen, and bookworms must wish to goodness that their fathers were more like this, instead of—as they probably are—the usual quite kind, but interfering, domestically tyrannical and fault-finding, heads-of-the-household.

Finally, and fortunately not very often, we get the absolutely brutal father. He is usually lower-middle class, and his daughters have illegitimate babies—since this is the one thing of all others that infuriates such fathers—and his sons run into debt and then hang or shoot themselves sooner than face the parental wrath; and his wife dies, or goes mad, or deserts him. Books about this kind of father are compact of gloom, and are described by the reviewers as being Powerful.

On the whole, fathers in fiction are a poor lot, and bring us, by a natural transition, to the subject of the next article, which will be Criminals in Fiction.

## CRIMINALS

WHEN it comes to criminals, authors of fiction completely let themselves go. They endow their heroes with qualities that they simply wouldn't dare, for one moment, to bestow upon any respectable, law-abiding citizen—qualities like chivalry, and tender-heartedness, and idealism. You feel that they absolutely adore them, and admire their crimes far more than they would anybody else's virtues. And we will at once forestall the remark that shallow-minded readers may feel inclined to make, by saying definitely that it is *not* women writers who usually indulge in this kind of hero. On the contrary.

Well, the things that jump to the eye about the criminal of fiction are several. To begin with, he has no Christian name, but is just known as Jaggles, or Ginger Mac, or Flash Ferdinand. And he is always frightfully, frightfully quiet. Not so much when he is actually on the job—because then, after all, quietness would naturally be taken for granted—but in his manner, and appearance, and behaviour, and voice. And this quietness merely denotes his immense reserves of fire and fury, all of which come out later when the black-mailer is threatening the helpless girl, or the heavily armed householder is getting ready to shoot. But, even in his gravest straits, or most heated moments, the criminal hero never shouts. He just says, very, very quietly, things like: "The game's up, I think", or "Check-mate—Colonel". And he always remembers to smile a little, with the utmost nonchalance, whilst covering his man, or, if necessary, men, with a six-shooter, or heavy automatic, or machine-gun, or whatever it is that he carries about with him.

Curiously enough, the criminal of fiction is rather good at love-making. He takes an interest in it. This is probably because, as a rule, he seldom has any contacts at all, except with devoted but intellectually inferior male followers, detectives and victims. One is never told that he has parents or brothers and sisters, or ordinary social acquaintances. So, naturally, he can concentrate on the one woman he ever seems to have anything to do with.

And either she loves him and says that she will wait—(meaning until he has finished his sentence at Wormwood

Scrubbs)—or else she throws herself between him and the detective's gun, and dies of it.

Either *dénouement* is rather unsatisfactory.

In real life, people who serve sentences in prison very seldom come out quite the same as they went in, and it isn't every woman, unfortunately, who improves by waiting.

As for throwing oneself about in front of bullets, this is not really as easy as it sounds, and might quite well end in a mere flesh wound, and would anyhow almost certainly bring down the most frightful curses on the person who got in the way, for men like to settle things for themselves, unhampered by feminine interference.

A delicate question to those who have the interests of morality at heart is: Do these criminals of fiction ever repent? The answer is—as so often in life—both Yes and No.

If the book is to have a happy ending, Ginger Mac, just before embarking on a final enterprise, says: This is the last time—the very last! and then kills off somebody so unspeakably bad that it is almost a good deed to have rid the world of him, and then goes to find the woman he is in love with, and says that he is utterly unworthy of her, which is probably very true. And the book ends with some rather ambiguous phrase, as it wouldn't quite do for criminality to triumph openly. So the author just says something like:

“But as she turned away, he saw that there were tears in her beautiful eyes.”

Or:

“In a year's time,” she echoed. “In a year's time, *who knows?*”

Well—the author knows, and so does Flash Ferdinand, and so does the least experienced reader. So that's all right.

When the criminal does not repent, he dies. This rule is never violated. To the mind of the fiction-writer, there seems to be nothing whatever between reformation and death. The possibility of persistence in wrong-doing does not apparently occur to him. So Jaggles, gentleman-buccaneer or burglar-sportsman, or whatever he may be called, either jumps off the highest sky-scraper in New York to avoid capture, or is shot at the very last minute, and dies saying that it was a Great Game after all.

There are, of course, other types of criminals than the

ones we have indicated. There is the criminal in the detective-novel proper, for instance—but the writing of detective-novels proper has now been brought to such a fine art that nobody can possibly tell who the criminal is, till the last paragraph but one. And then it turns out to be the idiot grandmother, or the fine old white-haired magistrate, or the faithful servant.

Lastly, there is the criminal in those short, powerful, gloomy, sociological novels that have pages and pages without any conversation at all, and that are so full of little dots. . . . In these cases, there is never any doubt as to guilt. The criminal committed the murder all right, but the guilt lies with almost everybody else in the world—the rich, Society, the Church, politicians, the older generation, the younger generation, the men who administer the law, and so on.

It is all very painful and realistic, and ends up with the execution, and more dots, and then some utterly irrelevant statement like: “Outside, a small, orange-hued dog was nosing in the gutter—” and then a final crop of dots. . . .

W. W. JACOBS

*Bed Cases*

*Kitchen Company*

W. W. Jacobs introduced an entirely new type of humorous story with his entertaining yarns of barge skippers and sailormen, though he has proved by *The Monkey's Paw* that he is equally at home in a macabre atmosphere. *Many Cargoes*, *The Skipper's Wooing* and others of his numerous books are universally popular.



## BED CASES

THE night-watchman was ill at ease, and, all ordinary positions failing to give relief, adopted several entirely out of keeping with his age and figure. A voice from the next wharf which wanted to know whether he was going on to the stage, and, if so, whether he was going to wear tights, brought him at once to a more becoming position. His voice was broken with pain, but them asterly fashion in which he dealt with his tormentor's ancestors and the future behaviour of his descendants left nothing to be desired. Uncouth noises, lacking in variety, were the only retort.

"It took me sudden yesterday morning, just arter brekfuss," said the night-watchman. "The woman—if you can call 'er a woman—next door but one 'ad given my missus best part of a tin of salmon. I wondered at the time why she gave it away—now I know. I ate it all, except one mouthful wot my missis threw in the fireplace, and in less than a couple of hours arterwards I thought my last hour 'ad come."

He clasped his hands at the waist-line and rocked to and fro. Faint moans and indignant grunts attested to his suffering.

"I've been taking things for it ever since and nothing seems to do it any good," he resumed, in an interval. "Fust of all I tried a couple o' pints to see wot that 'ud do; and the barman told me to go and die outside. He said wot I ought to 'ave 'ad was rum, so I 'ad a quartern. Arter that 'e *put* me outside—me being too ill to stop 'im—and an old gentleman wot was passing took me into a chemist's shop and stood treat. I don't know wot it was the chemist gave me, but a'most direckly arterwards there was a little crowd round the door peeping in, and behaving theirselves as if I was a Punch and Judy show. Some of 'em follered me 'ome, and

it was all my missis could do to stop 'em coming inside and helping 'er to put me to bed."

He rose and, stifling a groan, took a few paces up and down the jetty.

"Seems to be passing off a bit for the time," he said, resuming his seat. "It sort o' comes and goes, but it comes longer than it goes. It's funny 'ow soft and kind-'earted illness makes you. Three times yesterday arternoon I called my missis upstairs to tell 'er that I couldn't pass away without letting 'er know I'd forgiven her everything. She on'y came the fust time, but that wasn't my fault. I called 'er loud enough.

"It seems to me to be the same complaint that Ginger Dick had a year ago—on'y worse—and he made a great deal more fuss about it, being a free-spoken man and not minding much wot he said about things he didn't like.

"It came on in a public-'ouse in the Commercial Road, and it was so sudden, and Ginger made such a funny noise, that Sam and Peter Russet thought at fust he 'ad swallowed 'is pipe.

"'Wot's the matter?' ses the landlord, leaning over the bar.

"'He's swallowed 'is pipe,' ses Sam.

"'You're—a—liar,' ses Ginger, groaning.

"'Wot is it, then?' ses the landlord.

"Ginger shook his 'ead. 'I don't know,' he ses in a weak voice. 'I think it's the beer.'

"'Outside,' ses the landlord. 'D'ye 'ear me? *Outside.*'

"Ginger went out with Sam propping 'im up on one side and Peter the other and the landlord shoving 'im behind. His groans was 'eart-rending and the way he talked against beer made Sam and Peter blush for shame. They stood on the pavement for a little while and then they helped 'im on to a tram-car, and two minutes arterwards the conductor and five passengers helped 'im off agin.

"'Wot's to be done now?' ses Sam.

"'Shove 'im in a puddle and leave 'im,' ses Peter, very savage.

"'I can't 'elp it—I feel as if I'd swallowed fireworks,' ses Ginger.

"'Little touch o' stummick-ache,' ses Sam.

“‘And they keeps going off,’ ses Ginger. ‘Oh! Oh, my!’

“‘‘Ave you got any pain?’ ses Peter. ‘That’ll do! That’ll do! Why can’t you give a civil answer to a civil question?’

“He walked on, leaving Ginger ’anging on to Sam and talking at the top of his voice. O’ course, a crowd got round and told Sam wot to do, until Ginger left off being ill for a little while to attend to a chap as ’ad told Sam to stand ’im on his ’ead. If it ’adn’t ha’ been for a cab wot ’ad stopped to see wot the row was about, Ginger would most likely ’ave been given some medicine by the doctor at the police-station, but, as it was, Sam pushed ’im into the cab and they drove off. Ginger sat on Sam’s lap with one arm round ’is next and one foot sticking out of the winder, and when Sam said they’d both be more comfortable if he sat up on the seat like a Christian he put ’is other arm round Sam’s neck and said if he ’ad any more of ’is lip he’d choke ’im.

“It was a most uncomfortable drive—especially for Sam. When Ginger wasn’t groaning he was swearing, with pain, and saying wot ’e would like to do to Sam and Peter and the cabmen and landlords and a boy on a bicycle wot ’ad caught ’old of his foot as he passed and tried to pull it off. By the time they got ’ome he was raving, but he kept ’is senses, and neither Sam or the cabman could get the money for the fare out of ’is trowsis pocket, and Sam ’ad to pay it ’imself. Peter Russet came in just as Sam was trying to take Ginger’s boots off without being kicked, and between ’em they got him undressed and made ’im wot they called comfortable, but wot ’e called a lot of other things.

“‘He’s gorn a nasty colour,’ ses Sam to Peter Russet.

“‘Like dirty putty,’ ses Peter, nodding.

“‘It’s often like that—just afore the end,’ ses Sam in wot ’e thought was a low voice.

“‘*End!* Wot end?’ ses Ginger, sitting up, with his eyes ’arf starting out of his ’ead.

“‘You lay down, Ginger,’ ses Sam in a kind voice; ‘you lay down, and ’ope for the best. We’re doing all we can for you. If you pass away it won’t be our fault.’

“‘*Pass away!*’ ses Ginger, in a choking voice. ‘I ain’t going to pass away.’

“‘No, no, o’ course not,’ ses Sam; ‘still——’

“ ‘Still wot ?’ ses Ginger, glaring at ’im.

“ ‘I should stop using that bad lɛngwidge if I was you,’ ses Sam.

“ ‘In case,’ ses Peter.

“Pore Ginger looked at ’em and then he wiped the perspiration off of ’is face with the sleeve of his shirt and laid down very quiet. Even when Peter Russet sat on ’is foot by mistake he didn’t say anything ; but no doubt ’is thoughts was just as bad.

“He laid quite quiet for about ’arf an hour, and then, finding that ’e was still alive, he began to pick up ’is spirits a bit. Fust of all he asked Sam if ’e didn’t know better than to smoke a filthy pipe, that ought to ha’ been thrown away years ago, in a sick mate’s bedroom ; and arter that he asked Peter if ’e would mind sitting with his back towards ’im, ’cos he thought as ’e was better-looking that way. He went on like that till they was both tired of listening to ’im, and then all of a sudden the pain come on agin worse than ever. He couldn’t describe it to ’em, ’cos, as soon as he started, the pain come on and he ’ad to leave off to say other things.

“ ‘Try and bear it, Ginger,’ ses Peter.

“ ‘Think of all the pore souls wot are in worse pain than wot you are,’ ses Sam.

“ ‘And bear it in silence,’ ses Peter.

“ ‘With a brave smile on their face,’ ses Sam. ‘Wot are you getting out of bed for, Ginger ?’

“ ‘You’ll find out as soon as I get ’old of you,’ ses Ginger, ’arf crying with temper.

“Sam put his ’ands up, but afore Ginger could get up to ’im he was took bad agin and ’ad to lean up against the mantelpiece till it was over. Then ’e crawled back to bed, and, arter swallowing ’ard three or four times, he fixed ’is eyes where Sam wasn’t and asked him, in a perlite voice, to go and fetch ’im a doctor.

“ ‘Why not leave it till to-morrow, Ginger ?’ ses Sam.

“ ‘ ’Cos I want ’im now,’ ses Ginger, getting fierce again.

“Sam and Peter looked at each other, and then, arter saying that it was nearly nine o’clock and they was tired and they supposed most doctors ’ad gone to bed, and they didn’t know where to find one, and if they did they didn’t suppose he could do Ginger any good, they put on their caps and went out grumbling.

“They walked along for some time with their ’eads down as though they expected to see a doctor sitting on the pavement waiting for them, and then Sam turned to Peter and asked ’im where they was going.

“‘There’s one in the Whitechapel Road,’ ses Peter.

“‘There must be one nearer than that,’ ses Sam. ‘Let’s go in somewhere and ask.’

“They ’appened to be passing the Turk’s Head as ’e spoke, and, not wanting everybody to know their business, they went into the private bar instead of the usual, and ’ad a couple o’ glasses o’ bitter.

“There was on’y one other chap there, a tall young man in a black tail-coat, a bowler ’at, and a collar and necktie. He ’ad a large nose and a pair of very sharp light eyes, and he sat there as if the place belonged to ’im, stroking ’is little sandy moustache and tapping ’is boots with a cane. Sam and Peter could see at once that he never went anywhere except in private bars, and for the fust minute or two they was talking a’most in whispers. They must ha’ talked a bit louder arter a bit, ’cos all of a sudden the gentleman emptied ’is glass and spoke to ’em.

“‘What’s that you want?’ he ses. ‘A doctor?’

“‘Yes,’ ses Sam, and the gentleman sat there with a smile on ’is face while Peter and Sam described Ginger’s illness and repeated some of ’is remarks about it.

“‘Funny you should tell me,’ ses the gentleman. ‘Very funny.’

“Sam looked at ’im, and waited.

“‘’Cos I’m a doctor myself,’ ses the gentleman, ‘Dr. Brown.’

“‘Wot a bit o’ luck I!’ ses Peter. ‘We thought we’d got to walk no end of a way.’

“The doctor shook his ’ead.

“‘I’m afraid I’m no good to you,’ ses he.

“‘Why not?’ ses Sam, staring.

“‘Too expensive,’ ses the doctor. ‘You see, I’m a West End man, and we’re not allowed to see a patient under a pound a visit.’

“He shook his ’ead and sat smiling at them sadlike and listening to Sam, wot was sitting perched up on a stool making a noise like bronchitis, with surprise.

“‘I on’y come this way for a stroll,’ he ses, ‘’cos I like to see ships and sailormen.’

“ ‘A—pound—a—visit ?’ ses Peter. ‘D’ye ’ear that, Sam ?’

“Sam looked at ’im, and arter a time he managed to nod.

“ ‘P’r’aps it does seem a lot,’ ses the doctor, ‘but it comes cheaper in the end to have a good man.’

“ ‘Not if the chap dies,’ ses Peter.

“ ‘My patients don’t die,’ ses the doctor. ‘It’s only cheap doctors wot loses their patients.’

“He took up ’is glass and then, finding as there was nothing in it, put it down agin. Sam gave a little cough, and arter waiting a moment asked whether ’e would do ’im the pleasure of having a drink with ’im.

“ ‘Well, I’ve ’ad enough really,’ ses the doctor. ‘Still, I don’t mind ’aving a glass of port with you.’

“Peter said he’d ’ave a port, too, afore Sam could stop ’im, and him and the doctor sat and drank Sam’s ’ealth, and Peter said ’ow well he was looking and wot a fine rosy colour he’d got. Then Sam told the doctor all about Ginger’s illness agin, and, in a off-hand sort o’ way, asked ’im wot Ginger could take for it.

“ ‘I couldn’t say without seeing ’im,’ ses the doctor ; ‘it ain’t allowed.’

“ ‘ ‘Ow much would it be to see ’im ?’ ses Sam.

“ ‘He ain’t much to look at,’ ses Peter, looking at him ’opeful-like.

“The doctor laughed, and then shook his ’ead at ’imself. ‘Well, I don’t know,’ he says, ‘but if you’ll keep it a dead secret and not let anybody know that I said—I mean, that I’m a doctor—I don’t mind seein’ ’im for ’arf a dollar a visit.’

“ ‘Ginger couldn’t say anything agin that,’ ses Peter.

“ ‘ ‘Couldn’t he ?’ ses Sam. ‘ ‘Owever, he’ll ’ave to put up with it. It’s your turn, Peter ; mine’s a port.’

“ ‘I suppose I’d better ’ave the same,’ says the doctor. ‘I don’t believe in mixing. Tell ’im to give us the special this time. It’s better.’

“Peter told ’im, and the landlord ’ad to tell ’im three times ’ow much it was afore he understood. He seemed ’arf dazed, and the noise Sam made smacking ’is lips over his wine nearly drove ’im crazy.

“The doctor got up as soon as he ’ad finished ’is glass, and they all went out into the street ; Sam and Peter wondering what Ginger would say when ’e saw the doctor and what

'e would do when he 'eard the price. They went upstairs very quiet, as the doctor said he didn't want anybody to see 'im, and the fust thing they saw when they got into the room was Ginger laying face downwards on the bed with 'is arms and legs spread out, groaning.

"'Wot 'ave you been all this time for?' he ses, as soon as he 'eard them. 'You've been gone long enough to find fifty doctors!'

"'This is a good 'un, Ginger,' ses Sam, very solemn. 'One o' the best.'

"'Charges as much as twenty ordinary doctors,' ses Peter.

"'Wot!' ses Ginger, turning over with surprise and temper.

"The doctor smiled and, arter fust putting the chair by the side of the bed and sitting down on it, put it back very careful and sat down on the bed instead.

"'Let's have a look at your tongue,' he ses.

"Ginger put it out, and then put it in again to tell Sam that when 'e wanted to 'ear his remarks about it he'd let 'im know.

"'I've seen a worse tongue than that,' ses the doctor. 'Once.'

"'Did 'e die?' ses Ginger.

"'Never mind,' ses the doctor.

"'But I do mind,' ses Ginger, very sharp.

"'No,' ses the doctor; 'I was called in at the last moment, and, arter sitting up with 'im all night, pulled 'im through.'

"'I told you wot he was, Ginger,' ses Peter Russet in a whisper that you could have 'eard downstairs.

"The doctor took 'old of Ginger's wrist; and then Sam got into trouble agin for taking upon himself to tell 'im that Ginger 'ad got a natural dark skin. The doctor took out 'is watch and they all 'eld their breath while he counted Ginger's pulse.

"'H'm!' he ses, putting the watch back. 'It's a fortunate thing you met me when you did. Now let's have a look at your chest.'

"Ginger unbuttoned 'is shirt, and the doctor, arter a good look at the ship wot was tattoed there, laid his 'ead on it amidships and listened.

"'Say ninety-nine,' he ses, 'and go on saying it.'

“‘Ninety-nine,’ ses Ginger, ‘ninety-nine, ninety-nine, ninety—if I get up to you, Sam, you’ll know it.’

“‘You’d laugh yourself if you could on’y see yourself, Ginger,’ ses Sam.

“‘H’sh!’ ses the doctor; ‘he ’asn’t got much to laugh about, poor chap.’

“He moved his ’ead a bit and told Ginger to keep quiet. Then he sat up and, buttoning Ginger’s shirt acrost ’is chest very careful, made a sign to Sam and Peter to keep quiet, and sat thinking.

“‘His ’eart has moved,’ he ses at last; ‘it’s about two inches out of place.’

“‘Good-bye, mates,’ ses pore Ginger.

“‘There’s no need to say good-bye,’ ses the doctor, very sharp. ‘If you’ll keep quite quiet and do as I tell you, you’ll be all right agin, in time.’

“He sat thinking agin for a bit, and then ’e sent Peter downstairs for a jug of ’ot water and a tumbler, and while it was being fetched he told Sam ’e was to be head-nurse and told ’im all he was to do.

“‘You don’t want to pay two or three pounds a week for a nurse, I suppose?’ he ses, when Sam began to speak up for ’imself and tell ’im ’ow much he enjoyed ’is sleep.

“‘I shan’t be much trouble to ’im,’ ses Ginger. ‘I can’ ’elp myself.’

“‘You mustn’t move,’ ses the doctor. ‘You’ve got to lay quite still. Even if a fly settled on your nose you mustn’t brush it off. You don’t know ’ow bad you are. I want you to keep per-feck-ly still. Till to-morrow, at any rate.’

“He took the ’ot water from Pater and, arter putting a little cold to it, put ’is arm round Ginger’s neck and ’eld the tumbler to ’is lips. He ’ad four tumblers, one arter the other, except for wot went down ’is chest, and then ’e laid his ’ead back on the piller without a word.

“‘That’ll do ’im good,’ ses the doctor, taking the ’arf-dollar wot Sam got out of Ginger’s pocket. ‘I’ll look around agin in the morning.’

“‘And wot about medicine?’ ses Sam.

“‘I’ll bring some with me,’ ses the doctor. ‘Good-bye.’

“Sam and Peter went to bed early. One thing was there was nothing to do, and another thing was Ginger wouldn’t let ’em do it. Every time they moved ’e spoke about it and

said wot it did to 'is 'eart, and once, when Sam sneezed, 'e called 'im a murderer.

"It was about two o'clock in the morning when Sam woke up from a dream of a beautiful gal with yaller 'air and blue eyes wot kept calling 'im by 'is Christian name. He woke up with a smile on 'is lips and was just shutting 'is eyes to go on dreaming if 'e could, when he 'eard it again.

"Sam! Sam! Sam! Sam!"

"Hullo!" he ses, sitting up in bed very cross.

"I thought you was dead," ses Ginger. 'I've been calling you for ten minutes or more. It's made my 'eart worse.'

"Wot d'ye want?" ses Sam.

"I've got a nasty itching feeling between my shoulders," ses Ginger.

"D'you mean to say—d'you mean to say you woke me up just to tell me that?" ses Sam, 'ardly able to speak for temper.

"I woke you up to come and rub it," ses Ginger. 'And look sharp about it. You know I mustn't move.'

"Hurry up, Sam," ses Peter Russet. 'Wot are you waiting for? I want to get to sleep agin.'

"Sam got out o' bed at last and stood rubbing Ginger's back with 'is fist while Ginger kept telling 'im 'ow not to do it, and reminding 'im wot a delikit skin he 'ad got.

"He woke 'im up twice arter that. Once to give 'im a drink of water, and once to ask him 'ow old he thought the doctor was. Wot with being woke up and being afraid of being woke up, Sam 'ardly got a wink of sleep.

"Him and Peter Russet 'ad their brekfuss at a coffee-shop next mornin', and they had 'ardly got back afore the doctor come in. He seemed pleased to 'ear that the pain was better, but 'e told Ginger that he'd 'ave to keep as still as he could for another day or two, and, arter putting 'is face on 'is chest agin, said that the 'eart 'ad stopped moving.

"I mean moving out of place," he ses, as Ginger sat up making a 'orrible noise and threw 'is arms round his neck. 'To-morrow I 'ope it will begin to move back.'

"He fished a bottle o' medicine out of 'is pocket which he said would be another bob, and, arter telling Sam to 'ave a lump o' sugar ready and pop it in quick, gave Ginger 'is fust dose. Sam popped it in all right, but unfortunately the medicine was so nasty that Ginger was quicker than wot 'e

was. Anybody might ha' thought he 'ad been killed the way 'e carried on.

"'I'll look in agin this evening,' ses the doctor as he put a 'arf-dollar and a bob o' Ginger's in his pocket. 'Don't let 'im move more than can be helped and— Hullo !'

"'Wot's the matter ?' ses Sam, taking 'is finger out of 'is mouth and staring at 'im.

"'The doctor didn't answer 'im. He lifted up 'is eyelids and looked at his eyes, and then he told Ginger to open 'is mouth, and looked at 'is teeth. Then he looked at Sam agin and felt all round 'is throat.

"'Wot is it ?' ses Sam, going pale.

"'It might be blood-poisoning,' ses the doctor, 'but I can't tell yet. His teeth are in a very bad state.'

"'Ow shall I know if it is ?' ses Sam.

"'You'll know fast enough,' ses the doctor, shaking his 'ead. 'P'r'aps you'd better 'ave a quiet time at 'ome to-day and keep your friend company, and I'll 'ave a look at you when I come in this evening. Keep your spirits up and be as cheerful as you can—for 'is sake.'

"He left 'em all staring at each other ; and then Sam sat down on 'is bed and told Peter Russet wot ought to be done to Ginger before England would be fit for decent people to live in. Peter said it was a wonder 'ow he could think of it all, and Ginger said it was because he 'ad got a nasty mind, and he told 'im wot he'd do to 'im when 'e got well agin.

"They spent most of the day quarrelling, and on'y left off to find fault with Peter when 'e came in from enjoying 'imself to see 'ow they was getting on. Sam was the worst, 'cos Ginger was afraid of 'is 'eart if he got too excited, but arter the doctor saw 'im in the evening 'e was as quiet as Ginger was.

"He said the poison 'ad got from Sam's finger down into 'is liver and an abscess was forming there. He showed Sam where 'is liver was—a thing he 'adn't known afore—and found out where the abscess was with 'is thumb-nail. He found it twice, and wass just going to find it agin when Sam pulled 'is shirt down.

"'There's no danger,' he ses, 'if you do just wot I tell you. If you keep quite quiet like your friend does, I'll 'ave you up agin in a week. If you move about or 'ave any violent shock you'll die afore you know where you are.'

“He sat talking with ’em for a little while, and, arter saying that Ginger’s ’cart was not going back as fast as he could wish, ’e took ’is money and went off. Peter sat looking at ’em till Sam asked ’im whether he thought they was wax-works, and then, arter punching up their pillers and tickling Ginger’s toes, playful-like, ’e picked up ’is cap and went out. He spent most of ’is time out, and, when ’e did come in, all he could talk about was the drinks he’d been ’aving and ’ow glad ’e was that *his* ’cart and liver was as sound as a bell.

“‘I wonder you ain’t sick of bed,’ he ses, arter Ginger had ’ad four days of it.

“‘Sick of it!’ ses Ginger, choking. ‘Sick of it! Why, you ugly, mutton-faced son of a——’

“‘Mind your ’cart, Ginger,’ ses Sam.

“‘I don’t believe in doctoring and laying in bed,’ ses Peter, picking ’is teeth with a pin. ‘I believe that if you and Sam was to get up and ’ave a little dance in your shirts it ’ud do you all the good in the world. *I’d* ’um to you.’

“‘Mind your ’cart, Ginger,’ ses Sam, very quick.

“Ginger minded it, but they was both so disagreeable that Peter got up and went out agin and didn’t come back until the pubs was closed. He woke ’em both up getting to bed, but when they tried to wake ’im up arterwards they might as well ’ave tried to wake the dead. All they did was to wake each other up and then ’ave words about it.

“They wouldn’t speak to Peter when ’e got up next morning, and, arter giving ’em both wot ’e called a bit of ’is mind, but wot other people would ’ave called nasty langwidge, ’e flung Ginger’s trowsis into Sam’s face and went off for the day.

“He didn’t come back until six o’clock, but when ’e did come back ’e was a reg’lar sunbeam, smiling all over ’is face. He ’ad a look at Ginger and smiled, and then ’e went and smiled at Sam, with his ’and over ’is mouth.

“‘He’s drunk,’ ses Sam, trying to sneer.

“‘Mad *and* drunk,’ ses Ginger.

“Peter didn’t say anything. He went and sat down on ’is bed and covered up ’is face with his ’andkerchief and the bed shook as if there was an earthquake sitting on it.

“‘‘Ow—’ow—’ow’s the ’cart, Ginger?’ he ses at last.

“Ginger didn’t answer ’im.

“‘And Sa—Sa—Sam’s pore old liver!’ ses Peter, going off agin.

“He wiped ’is eyes at last, and then ’e got up and walked up and down the room fighting for ’is breath and saying ’ow it hurt ’im. And when he saw them two pore invalids laying in bed and looking at each other ’elpless, ’e sat down and laughed till ’e cried.

“‘It’s the d-d-doctor,’ he ses at last. ‘The—the landlord told me.’

“‘Told you wot?’ ses Ginger, grinding ’is teeth.

“‘He—he ain’t a doctor,’ ses Peter, wiping ’is eyes; ‘he’s a bookmaker’s clerk, and you won’t see ’im agin, ’cos the police are arter ’im.’

“‘You might have ’eard a pin drop, as the saying is, if it ’adn’t ha’ been for the choking noise in Sam’s throat.

“‘You ought to ’ave ’eard the landlord laugh when I told ’im about you and Sam,’ ses Peter. ‘It would ha’ done you good. ’Ow much money ’as he ’ad off of you, Ginger?’

“Ginger didn’t answer ’im. He got out of bed very slow, and put on ’is boots and ’is trowsis. Then ’e got up and locked the door.

“‘Wot are you doing that for?’ ses Sam, wot was sitting on the edge of ’is bed putting on ’is socks.

“‘I’m going to give Peter something else to laugh about,’ ses Ginger.”

## KITCHEN COMPANY

PRACTICE makes perfect, and when Mrs. Brampton, from her seat by the window, announced the approach of the Captain, Mr. Leonard Scott kissed Miss Brampton in the small hall and made his usual dignified exit to the kitchen. To leave by the side-entrance was the best way of avoiding trouble with a man who was always looking out for it. Mr. Scott bestowed a nod upon the smiling young mistress of the kitchen, and with his hand upon the back-door waited to hear the Captain at the front.

"One o' these days," began Clara, who loved to dwell upon the gruesome, "he'll come——"

She broke off and listened. "He's coming," she said, in a thrilling whisper. "He's coming the back way."

Mr. Scott started, hesitated, and was lost.

"Fly!" exclaimed Clara, pointing by accident to the ceiling.

The young man scowled at her, and before he had time to alter his expression found himself gazing at the burly form and inflamed visage of Captain Brampton.

"Well?" barked the latter. "What are you doing in my kitchen? Eh? What have you got to say for yourself?"

Mr. Scott coughed and tried to collect his thoughts. In the front room Mrs. Brampton and her daughter eyed each other in silent consternation. Then, in response to a peremptory bellow, Mrs. Brampton rose and made a trembling passage to the kitchen.

"What does this mean?" demanded the Captain in grating accents.

His wife stood looking helplessly from one to the other, and, instead of answering the question passed it on.

"What does this mean, Clara?" she demanded.

"Eh?" said that astonished maiden. "What does what mean?"

"This," said the Captain sternly, with a jerk of his head towards Mr. Scott. "Did you invite him here?"

Clara started—but in a lesser degree than Mr. Scott—and looked down modestly at a hole in the hearth-rug. Mrs. Brampton and her daughter gazed at her in hushed expectation.

"I didn't, not to say, invite him," replied Clara, "but I can't help him coming here."

"H'm! Perhaps you didn't try," said the Captain with unexpected mildness. "How long have you known him?"

"Some time, sir," said Clara vaguely.

"Does he want to marry you?"

Clara looked at her mistress for guidance, but the latter was engaged at the moment in an eye-to-eye duel with the fermenting Mr. Scott. Over the Captain's face stole an expression of great and unusual benevolence.

"Well, well," he said slowly. "We've all been young once. He's not much to look at, but he looks clean and respectable. When do you think of getting married?"

"That's for him to say, sir," said the modest Clara.

"Well, there's no hurry," said the Captain, "no hurry. He can come round once a week for you on your evening out, but no other time, mind."

"Thank you, sir," said Clara, who was beginning to enjoy herself. "It's my evening out to-night, sir. He was going to take me to the pictures."

A stifled exclamation came from the direction where Mr. Scott was standing, which the Captain chose to interpret as an expression of gratitude. With instructions to Clara to regale her admirer with bread and cheese and one glass of beer, he shepherded his wife and daughter from the kitchen. Humming a light air, Clara began to set the table.

"What the devil did you want to say I was going to take you to the pictures for?" demanded the ungrateful Mr. Scott.

"'Cos I wanted to go," said his hostess calmly.

Mr. Scott regarded her coldly. "I will walk with you as far as the corner of this road," he said with an air of finality.

"We'll go to the best seats, and I'll have a box of chocolates," said Clara. "Do you like chocolates?"

"No," said the other sternly.

"Praise be!" said the girl piously. "My other young man——"

Mr. Scott coughed violently.

"All right," said the girl, "don't get excited. He's away on a job for a week or two, else I wouldn't dare to be seen with you. When the cat's away the mice will play," she added.

The young man eyed her in amazement. This was a new Clara. His lips quivered and his eyes watered. He took up his glass of beer and nodded.

"Right-o!" he agreed.

He smoked a cigarette while the girl went upstairs to dress, and a little later, watched by three pairs of eyes from the front window, sailed up the street with her arm-in-arm.

"She's too good for him," said the Captain, with decision.

"Much," assented his daughter, with a smile.

"Tailor's dummy?" soliloquized the Captain.

"Cheap tailor, too," murmured the acquiescent Miss Brampton. "Did you notice how baggy his trousers are at the knees?"

The Captain shot a glance at her. Twenty years' experience of a wife whose only anxiety was to please him was not the best preparation for handling a daughter who, to say the least of it, had other ambitions. He began to fear that she had inherited more of his strength of character—a quality for which some of his friends found another name—than was convenient.

"He's a softy," he growled. "He ought to have a year or two at sea. That might make a man of him."

He got up and went into the garden, leaving mother and daughter to discuss the possibilities of a situation which had found them somewhat unprepared.

"It might have been worse," said Mrs. Brampton, "if your father had caught him in here——"

"He couldn't eat him," said her daughter rebelliously.

"There are worse things than being eaten," said Mrs. Brampton, with some feeling.

Miss Brampton nodded. "Taking Clara to the pictures, for instance," she remarked. "Poor Leonard!"

Her mother sniffed. "I dare say he will get over it," she said dryly. "Unless Clara's young man gets to hear of it.

From what she has told me he is a very hot-tempered young man—and very strong.”

“Pity father didn’t find *him* in the kitchen,” said the dutiful daughter.

She sat down, and in sympathetic mood tried to share the misery of the absent one at the cinema. A vision of Clara’s hat, perilously near Mr. Scott’s shoulder, mercifully eluded her, but, the window being open to the summer air, she was unable to help hearing the cheerful babble of laughter that heralded their return. It seemed to strike a wrong note; and the couple of noisy kisses which Clara saw fit to bestow upon the back of her hand for the Captain’s benefit were registered on the wrong target.

Mrs. Brampton obtained the explanation from Clara next day, and accepted it without prejudice. Her daughter declined to accept it at all.

“You quite understand that he must not come to see you again?” she said stiffly.

“But he’s got to,” said the staring hand-maiden. “The Captain says so. And if he plays fast-and-loose with me I’m to have him up for breach of promise. Lively for me, ain’t it? When I think of Bill and his temper I get goose-flesh all over.”

The ladies eyed each other in silent consternation.

“Your father *knows*,” said the elder at last. “He has done this on purpose.”

“Set a trap for him,” said Clara, nodding. “Looks like it. And I’m the little bit o’ cheese, I suppose?”

Mrs. Brampton stared at her.

“Father forgets that I am nineteen,” said her daughter. “Why shouldn’t I——?”

“I was only fifteen when *I* started,” murmured Clara, “and not big for my age, neither.”

“That will do,” said Mrs. Brampton.

“Yes’m,” said the girl. “Still——”

“Still what?” demanded her mistress.

“I’ve been dragged into it,” said Clara mutinously. “Nobody asked me or troubled about my feelings. I do the best I can, and that’s all the thanks I get for it. Suppose I had told the Captain it was Miss Edith he was after? Where would you have been then?”

“We won’t discuss it,” said Mrs. Brampton with an air of feeble dignity.

She made as stately an exit as the size of the kitchen would allow, and, carefully closing the door of the sitting-room, made a few remarks on Clara's character, and more on her lack of it.

"It's no good blaming Clara," said her daughter. "It's father's doing. He wants to make Leonard look a fool first and scare him away afterwards. He'll tell all his friends about it."

"Mr. Hopkins, for one," said Mrs. Brampton, nodding sagely. "I wonder——"

"I don't," said the girl, reddening.

"Your father seems to have taken a great fancy to him," continued Mrs. Brampton. "Now, does he come here to see your father or——"

"Or," said her daughter bitterly. "It's just like father. I suppose he will want to choose my tooth-powder for me next. But he won't get any satisfaction out of me—or Leonard. I'll see to that. As for Mr. Hopkins—*brrb!*"

She beamed, however, on that innocent man when her father brought him in next day to see the garden, and when the wily Captain went indoors for his pipe made no attempt to follow him. It was a pipe that was notorious for the discovery of new and unusual hiding-places, and on this occasion made no attempt to belie its reputation.

Meantime, the delighted Mr. Hopkins, under the skilful management of Miss Brampton, walked with his head in the clouds and his feet on various choice border plants.

"Hadn't you better walk on the path?" inquired the girl, who had been monopolizing three-quarters of it. "It's more comfortable."

Mr. Hopkins started. "Good heavens!" he said in an alarmed voice, as he bent down to render first aid to a stock with a broken neck. "Did I do that?"

Miss Brampton nodded. "Those, too, I think," she replied with a wave of her hand. "Don't you care for flowers?"

Mr. Hopkins, who was fearfully endeavouring to conceal the traces of his crime, made no reply. When the Captain came out they were both speechless, but he was, if anything, the redder of the two.

"These paths are very narrow, father," remarked the humane Edith.

The Captain made a noise.

"Afraid—crowding—Miss E lith," panted the offender.

The Captain made another noise. In the present company all the useful words he knew were useless.

"Did you find your pipe, father?" inquired the persevering Miss Brampton.

The Captain was understood to say "Yes". At the same time he favoured her with a glance which would have made her mother tremble. On Miss Brampton it had a bracing effect.

"Father's always mislaying his pipe," she said, with a bright laugh. "I shouldn't trouble any more about those, if I were you, Mr. Hopkins. You can't do them any good, and you are standing on an antirrhinum."

Mr. Hopkins removed his foot hastily, and placing it carefully in the centre of the path offered up another apology. It was received with what the Captain fondly believed to be a smile.

"Accidents will happen," he said hoarsely.

"In the best-regulated families," said Miss Brampton, with a satisfied smile.

She paid a touching tribute to the excellence of the victims after the visitor had gone, and sought for some time for an explanation of the tragedy.

"He must have been 'wool-gathering'," she declared at length.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded her father.

"Absent-minded," said Edith. "He seemed like a man walking on air, instead of some of the best stocks in the neighbourhood. Even Clara's young man would have more sense than that."

"Clara's young man won't go into my garden," said the Captain. "The kitchen is the place for him."

He stalked out into the garden, and, digging up hopeless cases with a trowel, sought to revive the less badly injured with a water-can.

It might have been a sign of a forgiving nature, but was more likely due to an obstinate one, that he invited Mr. Hopkins back to the scene of his footwork a day or two later. Missing plants had been replaced by a consignment from the florist, and rolled paths and raked flower-beds testified to the Captain's industry. Everything was "shipshape and Bristol fashion" as the greatly relieved visitor walked with Miss Bramp-

ton in the garden in the cool of the evening. The Captain, after satisfying himself that Mr. Hopkins was walking almost as carefully as a performer on the tight-rope, had disappeared indoors.

The path was narrow, but even when Miss Brampton sent electric thrills through his being by leaning against him, Mr. Hopkins kept to it. The air was soft and the scent of the flowers delightful. Never before had his conversation been so appreciated. The low-voiced laughter of his companion was a tribute to his wit as rare as it was welcome.

"You ought to write plays," she said thoughtfully, as she planted her foot firmly on a geranium.

"You want influence to get them accepted," said Mr. Hopkins.

"I should try, if I were you, though," said the girl, nearly missing another geranium.

Mr. Hopkins purred. Miss Brampton, with downcast eyes, trod down six flowers in succession.

"Dialogue would be your strong point," mused the girl, continuing her ravages. "Crisp and sparkling."

She took the other side as they turned at the end of the path, and in a hushed voice called his attention to some beautiful cloud effects. Mr. Hopkins, with his head at an acute angle, murmured his admiration.

"An evening to remember," he said very softly.

He brought his gaze slowly to earth and started convulsively.

"Giddy?" inquired the girl, with much solicitude.

Mr. Hopkins shook his head and, speech failing him, pointed with a trembling finger to the prostrate victims of misdirected industry. Miss Brampton stared in her turn.

"Oh, Mr. Hopkins!" she said, in accusing tones.

"I—I haven't been near them," stammered the unfortunate.

"They must have done it themselves, then," said the girl calmly. "Perhaps they were not strong enough to stand the breeze."

Mr. Hopkins breathed heavily. "I—I really think—" he began.

"Yes?" said Miss Brampton.

"I don't know what to think," concluded the other feebly. His companion gazed wistfully at the wreckage.

"Poor father!" she said softly. "He is so fond of his garden. He seems to know every flower, but, of course, he hasn't had these long enough to know them."

Mr. Hopkins groaned and cast a fearful glance at the house.

"It's his one hobby," continued the girl. "I have heard him use worse language about cats than anything else, I think. And the doctor says excitement is so bad for him."

"I can't understand it," ventured Mr. Hopkins, with an appealing glance.

"I wonder whether father will?" said the girl. "He is coming out, I think."

Mr. Hopkins looked around panic-stricken. Then he pulled out his watch.

"Good gracious!" he murmured. "I must be going, I think. No idea so late. Appointment."

He moved hastily in the direction of the side-gate, and, hardly realizing the geniality of Miss Brampton's hand-clasp, disappeared. The girl stood watching until he had turned the corner, and then went into the house.

"Where's Hopkins?" inquired the Captain.

"He has just gone."

"Gone!" repeated her father. "Why, I asked him to stay to supper. Did you send him off? Eh?"

His daughter shook her head. "He went off in a hurry," she murmured. "I think he had an idea that perhaps he had offended you."

"Rubbish!" grunted the Captain, eyeing her suspiciously. "What should he offend me about?"

"Knowing how fond you are of your flowers—" began Miss Brampton.

The Captain uttered a smothered cry, and, springing from his chair, dashed into the garden. Cries that were anything but smothered, and words that ought to have been, brought his wife to her daughter's side. Together they watched the head of the house as, with fists raised to heaven, he danced a strange and frenzied dance down the path.

"He's wonderfully supple for his age," said the admiring daughter.

Mrs. Brampton shivered. "I don't suppose that poor young man will dare to show his face here again," she said slowly.

"If he does, there will be an accident to the rose trees," said her daughter, compressing her lips. "I've had all I can stand of Mr. Hopkins."

"And then there's Mr. Scott," said her mother plaintively. "Clara says that she thinks her young man has heard something, and if he should happen to meet them one evening——"

"It might be bad for the young man," said the girl calmly. "Leonard would have a better nose if he didn't box so much. Look at father!"

Mrs. Brampton looked.

"He—he seems to be examining the footmarks," she gasped.

"Time I changed your sensible low-heeled shoes for something more dressy," said her daughter, disappearing.

She was back before the Captain re-entered the house, and sitting cross-legged, displayed a pair of sharp-toed, high-heeled shoes of blameless aspect, which met his ardent gaze with a polished stare. He turned his back at last and stood gazing blankly out at his cherished garden.

It never occurred to him to accept defeat, and his daughter was therefore more annoyed than surprised to see Mr. Hopkins—a nervous, chastened Mr. Hopkins—back again after a few days. On this occasion, however, the Captain lingered in the garden, and from a deck-chair beneath the window watched his faltering steps.

Conscious of this scrutiny, the visitor babbled incoherences to Miss Brampton, until in self-defence she retreated to the house on the plea of a thorn in her foot.

The sound of Mr. Scott's voice in the kitchen did not add to her comfort. A glance from her window showed her that her father had taken her place with the visitor and was pointing out to him the merits of the rockery. She stole downstairs and, opening the kitchen-door, peeped in.

"I thought you were going to the cinema," she said, addressing Mr. Scott coldly.

"Can't," was the reply. "Clara's Bill is outside, and she's afraid to come."

"He's waiting for him," said Clara breathlessly. "There'll be murder done—and I shall be the cause of it."

"Cheer up," said Mr. Scott. "He'll only have a week or two in a nice comfortable hospital. You'll be able to see him on Sunday afternoons and take him grapes."

"I know who'll want the grapes," said Clara miserably. "You don't know his strength. I don't believe he knows it himself."

"Where is he?" demanded Miss Brampton.

"Outside the side-gate, miss," replied Clara. "Like a cat waiting for a mouse."

"A mouse!" ejaculated the startled Mr. Scott. "Now look here, Clara——"

"I'll go and send him away," said Miss Brampton with decision.

She slipped into the garden and, her father's back still being towards her, opened the side-gate and looked out. A bullet-headed young man, standing just outside, drew up sharply at her appearance and stood scowling at her.

"Do you want to see Clara?" she inquired.

"I'm waiting," said Mr. Bill Jones, "waiting for a toff."

Miss Brampton stood regarding him with a puzzled air. Then she had an inspiration that almost took her breath away.

"Do you mean the gentleman who is in the garden talking to father?" she inquired.

Mr. Jones's eyes glistened. He licked his lips and stood breathing hard and short. Miss Brampton, with an encouraging smile, pushed the door open.

Mr. Jones needed no further invitation. With head erect and eyes ablaze he entered the garden and, catching sight of the unconscious Mr. Hopkins, strode rapidly towards him.

"Here! What do you want?" demanded the astonished Captain.

Mr. Jones ignored him and, continuing his progress, thrust his face into that of Mr. Hopkins.

"Take my gal away, will yer?" he shouted. "Take 'er to the pictures, will yer? Take that!"

Mr. Hopkins took it and went down with a cry of anguish. Through a mist of pain he heard the voice of his assailant.

"Get up! Get up! else I'll jump on yer."

Mr. Hopkins got up, and the appearance of Mr. Jones was so terrible that he turned and fled, with the other in hot pursuit.

"Stop!" yelled the choking Captain. "Mind the flowers! Mind the fl——"

Mr. Hopkins paid no heed; neither to do him justice, did Mr. Jones. Firmly convinced that his life was in danger,

the former performed miracles of agility, while his opponent pounded doggedly behind. A bad third, owing to his keeping to the path, the Captain followed raving in the rear.

Broken plants lay in the wake of Mr. Hopkins ; churned-up earth marked the progress of Mr. Jones as he endeavoured to head him off. And at this juncture Mr. Scott appeared from the kitchen, shedding his coat.

“What the devil do you think you’re doing ?” he shouted.

Mr. Jones pulled up suddenly and favoured him with a menacing glare.

“Look at those flowers,” cried Mr. Scott severely. “You chump-headed, mutton-headed son of a gun !”

Mr. Jones stood irresolute. He looked longingly at Mr. Hopkins taking cover behind the Captain ; then with a loud roar he threw himself upon this new arrival.

Mr. Scott side-stepped neatly and smote him heavily on the chin. Mr. Jones, turning in amazement, took three more and, being by this time acclimatized, settled down to a steady mill.

“You’d better go,” said the Captain harshly, to Mr. Hopkins. “This isn’t a sight for you.”

Mr. Hopkins went, somewhat reluctantly. He was a man of peace, but the sight of Mr. Jones’s damages, seemed in some way to afford him an odd feeling of satisfaction. The Captain stayed to see fair play—also the only fight with fists he had seen since he left the sea. It was with almost a sigh that he went at length to help Mr. Scott assist his adversary to his feet. The dazed Mr. Jones, with Clara’s arm about his waist, was led indoors and his head placed under the scullery tap. The cooling sounds of running water and the heated comments of Mr. Jones alone broke the silence.

“Well, that’s over,” said Mr. Scott, tenderly dabbing his face with his handkerchief, as Miss Brampton came out. “I’m afraid Clara has jilted me, sir.”

The Captain grunted and eyed him curiously.

“I was going to take her to the cinema, now I suppose I shall have to go alone. Unless——”

“Well ?” barked the Captain, waiting.

“Unless Miss Brampton comes with me.”

The Captain stood up and faced him, choking.

“Cinema !” he roared. “Cinema ! If you want to do something to pass the evening, you can help her help me help make the garden tidy.”



## SELDON TRUSS

*Hugo and the Unnatural Mother*

Seldon Truss experimented in farming when he came home from the war, but having made an immediate success with his first novel promptly abandoned it, finding literature more profitable than the land. He is now established as a popular writer of thrillers, his most recent book being *Murder Paves the Way*.



## HUGO AND THE UNNATURAL MOTHER

**B**ASKING under the sunny skies of Honolulu, Hugo Stager received a wireless from home announcing the nuptials of that very old, very decrepit, and extremely deaf baronet, his uncle, Sir Nicholas Stager. With a wry face Hugo cast the flimsy aside, ordered another hair of the particular dog that had been biting him of late, and banished the annoying matter from his mind. Exactly nine months later came a letter to herald the birth of an heir. Unwelcome tidings, indeed, for an heir-presumptive to scan, yet Hugo still saw no good and valid reason for any amendment in his mode of life.

But when the next mail brought a curt and laconic missive from the family lawyer informing him that his allowance was now to be decimated to the unedifying figure of £25 per month, he sat up with a pained expression and took notice. After that he took four goes of the most potent cocktail he knew. The next thing he took was a boat for home. Twenty-five pounds a month! This, to a eupeptic young man who thought nothing of disbursing such a sum on one dinner-party or a suit of clothes, was, to say the least, paralysing.

Hugo travelled *via* Marseilles and Paris with the dread spectre of work gloating over him. From Paris he telephoned the friend of his youth, one Harry Paik, instructing that chronic reveller in the turn of events, and calling on him to relinquish forthwith the flat and domestic staff in Half-Moon Street; such premises being kept warm (very warm at times) by the aforesaid Harry Paik during Hugo's absence. After which Hugo crossed the Channel, and this story, more or less, begins.

It will be appreciated that he landed at Folkestone in a condition of abysmal gloom; heightened, deepened, and inspissated by the gloom all around him. Folkestone landing-stage at twilight on a drizzly winter's day is not calculated to

elevate the spirits when you've grown accustomed to the sunny skies of Rio or Honolulu. Hugo decided also that the vast majority of his fellow-beings were ugly. There is no doubt whatever that the lad was feeling hipped.

In the train he occupied himself by sombrely patrolling the corridors and planning drastic economies. The flat in Half-Moon Street, of course, would have to be given up. Likewise his clubs, ditto the car. No more theatres or dances or races. Ladies of the chorus, inevitably, would cease to discover that he was "rather a dear". His tailor would send in his bill. Life, in short, was to be joyless.

Hugo sighed heavily and fished for a cigarette as the train rattled on, bearing him to this grim destiny. He halted in his stride down the corridor and glanced moodily into the compartment next his own. There was a young woman in it, who was wrestling despairingly with the window-strap. Opposite the young woman sat an astoundingly ugly baby. Politely Hugo entered the compartment and pulled up the window. The young woman thanked him, and he discovered that she was goddess and siren combined, which is merely stating his view of her charming prettiness.

"Dada!" chortled the baby, encouragingly.

Hugo grinned doubtfully. He always distrusted this form of familiarity. But the girl——"

"Awfully good of you," she murmured shyly. "I'd been trying for ever so long——" She picked up the baby and sat it on her knees. "Was ickle ookums welly cold, then?"

"Dada!" repeated the baby, solemnly regarding Hugo. "Goo!"

The young woman lowered her head with apparent demureness, incidentally concealing a wicked smile. Hugo hung irresolute. These youthful matrons were not exactly in his line, but she was the one bright spot he had encountered since landing, and he badly wanted someone to talk to.

"Dada!" gurgled the baby again, holding out its arms. Hugo bestowed a surreptitious scowl on it. In reply it blew an enormous bubble, that presently burst all over its face. Hugo shuddered and began to withdraw.

"Glad to have been of use, and all that," he murmured. "Anything else I can do, y'know——" He met her eyes and stopped short. By Jove, she was a peach! With those dancing, provocative eyes, the cheeky smile——"

*Crash!*

With a fearful jar the train jerked to a standstill. A violent impact banged his head viciously against a view of Ramsgate that decorated the compartment, cracking the glass, and, as it seemed, his skull in unison. He had a vision of a baby hurtling through space . . . a woman screaming . . . and knew no more.

Voices rang in his subconscious mind. "No bones broken . . . shock . . . she's all right. So's the kid . . ."

A harassed official gazed worriedly at the trio. "'Spose they all belong to each other?" he queried at large.

"Goo!" ejaculated the baby, sitting on the floor of the compartment, its bonnet askew, but otherwise unperturbed.

The baby rolled over on all fours and crawled towards the unconscious Hugo. "Dada!" said the baby.

"That settles it," observed the guard, with relief. "And its got a better constitution than its father and mother. Look at 'em! Both knocked silly, and that baby thrives on it. Anyone'd think it had a railway collision for supper every night." He pulled Hugo's suit-case from the rack and perused the label.

"H. J. L. B. Stager, 35B, Half-Moon Street, London, W. Any of you gentlemen happen to be going that way?"

"Sure," said a nasal voice from the doorway. "Bring them here, Colonel. Me and my auto are hitting the trail for the little old Ritz right now."

"That's a good job, then," the guard returned, with satisfaction. "Lend a hand, somebody . . ."

When he came to, Hugo was reclining on the deep leather couch in his flat, painfully aware of a swimming head and parched throat. Hovering aside woodenly stood Binks, the domestic paragon, whilst the face of a stranger, a severe and grim countenance, was bending over him.

"He will do now," said the face, removing itself into the middle distance as its owner straightened his back. "Nothing serious. Same applies to his wife. That's a fine baby."

"Yes, sir," the domestic paragon agreed, respectfully escorting the doctor to the door. "No alcohol, I think you said, sir."

The doctor nodded. "Keep them both quiet. I will call again in the morning."

"Very good, sir." The door closed and Binks tiptoed back into the room.

"Binks!"

"Sir?"

"What about a Manhattan?"

"The doctor said no alcohol, sir."

"The doctor!" Hugo sat up suddenly. "Has it come to this! Speaking in the vernacular, Binks, *have I got 'em?*"

"Oh, no, sir. Not that. You and Mrs. Stager have had a nasty shock, sir."

"Mrs.—" Hugo collapsed weakly. "A nasty shock——"

"The baby's all right, sir."

"*The baby's all right!*" babbled Hugo, with glazed eyes. "Capital! Excellent! Take baby a Manhattan, Binks, with my compliments."

"Yes, sir," said the man, profoundly scandalized. He had accepted the sudden advent of a complete family with the impassivity that comes from long training, but such callousness as his young master now betrayed outraged his deepest sense of propriety.

"The doctor will be coming again in the morning, sir."

Hugo stared haggardly at the ceiling.

"I trust not, Binks. Decidedly I trust not. That means the Home for Stray Inebriates. Bring me a milk and soda at once."

"Yes, sir." The man withdrew, and presently the door opened to admit a girl, pale, but perfectly collected, with a half-defiant, half-whimsical smile on her lips. In her arms she carried a baby. With great care she set the baby on the hearthrug, whence it stared with intense expression at Hugo.

"I hope you feel better now, darling," said the girl, bending forward and deliberately stroking Hugo's forehead. Cool, soft hands that brought infinite relief to his throbbing temples. As in a dream he caught the flash of a plain gold ring on her left hand. His eyes travelled to her face. He knew her; it was the girl in the train.

"You have had a terrible shock, dear," she smiled tenderly.

"*Darling,*" murmured Hugo, "it is so. I am completely off my chump. Continue the treatment, please."

"Dada!" gurgled the baby.

"And how is the little one?" crooned Hugo.

"Baby's all right," the girl said shortly, knitting her brows. "An awful nuisance, as usual."

"An awful—" Hugo sat up. "What words are these, Harriet?"

"My name isn't Harriet. It's Monica."

"Ah, Monica. Much better. But is this a mother's love, Monica? Do you spurn your offspring thus?"

"We'd have a much better time without it," she pointed out frankly.

Hugo surveyed her pensively.

"So we would, Monica. In different circumstances I should escort you to the haunts of wine and song."

She looked at him calmly. "Why not in these circumstances?"

"Because—" retorted Hugo, in a firm voice, "you're—dash it all!" He glowered sombrely at the brat on the hearthrug. "I'm surprised at you, Monica!"

"We might farm it out," she murmured.

"Goo!" said the baby, suddenly emitting sounds like a lawn-mower.

"Remove it!" cried Hugo, apprehensively, "it's going to be sick."

The girl rippled with unconcerned laughter and walked to the mantelpiece for a cigarette, which she lit, blowing out the smoke daintily. With a splutter the baby regained its ventral equilibrium.

Hugo wrinkled his aching forehead and strove to think this matter out. She was an undeniable peach, but there was also that undeniable wedding-ring and very concrete baby. The rôle of wrecker of homes did not appeal to Hugo Stager in the least. And yet—one last fling before life was to be utterly drab. . . . He averted his eyes from the marbly gaze of the baby that read his guiltiest thoughts.

"Monica!"

She raised her brows serenely.

"Got any glad rags with you?"

She nodded. "My dressing-case is here."

"Exactly. I don't know who you are, Monica, but if you choose to drop across my path in this distinctly provocative manner you must take the consequences. To-night we pad

the hoof to Bacchanalia. In other words, Monica, you dine with me."

She nodded again, placidly. "I had intended to."

Hugo frowned in perplexity. The door opened to admit the manservant bearing milk and soda.

"Binks?"

"Sir?"

"Take baby for a nice walk in the park. When you come to the pond, Binks, drop baby therein and return here. Mrs.—er—Stager and I are dining out."

Concealing his perturbation under a mask of granite, the worthy man placed the tumbler at Hugo's elbow.

"The doctor said you were to be kept quiet, sir."

"Precisely, Binks. And how do you suppose I can be kept quiet with that baby's glassy optic fixed upon me? Remove the little one."

The manservant shifted uneasily. The girl puffed at her cigarette with placid amusement.

"Better leave it to me," she suggested. "I'll dispose of it somewhere."

"Dispose of it!" Hugo echoed. The words had a sinister sound. As if in protest the baby choked and then dribbled with lamentable freedom. Hugo shuddered.

"It ought to be put on the kerb outside a post-office," he said, "for people to wet their stamps on."

The manservant tiptoed from the room in shocked silence. The girl bubbling with laughter, began unconcernedly to put her hat on before a mirror. The baby, after a prolonged stare of aggression, blew out its cheeks and crawled towards Hugo's couch. Seizing his leg, it hauled itself into a position of insecure perpendicularity and dribbled again with studied insult. Hugo was on the point of appealing for protection against this attack, when his eye fell on a name-tab on the collar of the creature's woolly jacket. Gingerly he steadied the swaying infant whilst he read, and as he read his jaw dropped with consternation. The name was *Stager*.

He looked at the girl. She was powdering her nose at the mirror. Presently she turned, and with an expression of calm resolve bore the baby from the room.

Across a secluded table for two at the Carlton Hugo surveyed his companion moodily. She was, he decided, distractingly

pretty. She was also heartless, callous, and unprincipled.

"What have you done with that baby?" he growled.

"That's telling," she replied brightly.

"When are you going to collect it?"

"Never, I hope," she grimaced, daintily.

The ghastly thought assailed him. She *had* made away with it.

"Monica!"

"Hugo, dear?"

"Where's your husband?"

She shook her head and sighed. "Goodness knows where my husband is!"

"Goodness knows!" Hugo surveyed her with knit brows, cursing under his breath at the glint of that plain gold ring. "*So do I!*"

"Really?" She nodded placidly. "Dear boy, my champagne glass is very empty."

A waiter hurried forward. Hugo watched the girl sip delicately and met the provocative gleam in her eyes. She seemed to be laughing at him—the minx.

"Monica!" He took hold of himself desperately. It was a fearful effort to impart the needful solemnity to his mien in such circumstances. "Monica, you are unmasked. All is known. Upon the raiment of that innocent babe you have so heartlessly abandoned is the name of *Stager!*"

She started and stared at him for several seconds. Then: "So you know," she said slowly. "Funny meeting like that, wasn't it?"

"Excruciatingly humorous," Hugo agreed grimly; "I am sure my uncle would think so, too."

She met his eyes fairly.

"If you knew what my life has been, perhaps you would not blame me. I have been so dull, Hugo."

"Serves you right!" he scowled gloomily. "He must be seventy, if a day, and as deaf as a post."

"When I recovered after that railway collision," she went on, keeping her big eyes on his, "I found myself in your flat, Hugo, and your man took me for your—wife. When I realized who you were—perhaps it was devilry, perhaps because I have never known a day's real enjoyment, but I let him think it. Do you blame me for having just a leetle bit of fun, Hugo? It will so soon be all over."

The waiter brought coffee. Hugo bent himself morosely to the task of clipping a cigar. Intensely conscious of those big, pleading eyes, he was cursing Fate for allowing him to fall in love with his—aunt. Ghastly thought! She watched him; placid amusement was in the curve of her pretty mouth. He fancied he detected a flicker of her right eyelid. Cheeky little devil! To think that his uncle—no, it simply would not bear thinking of.

Suddenly the smile vanished from her lips and he saw her stiffen in alarm. Following her gaze he became aware that a waiter was declaiming the menu in stentorian tones to a very old, very decrepit, and extremely deaf diner at a nearby table. The diner was Sir Nicholas Stager. And in that instant he saw them.

Seizing a pair of gold-topped ebony canes the old man started to tremble his way towards them. Hugo gave himself up for lost.

“And so, madam,” snarled the old man, “I have found you out! What are you doing here, pray?”

The girl raised her eyes with magnificent serenity.

“Dining with your nephew.”

“So it seems! Ha! So it seems! Quite so. And what have you done with the child, may one ask?”

“Took it home,” replied Monica quite calmly, “and left it there.”

“Very good of you, madame, very good of you. If that’s all you think of the child you leave my house to-morrow.”

Hugo stared aghast. Monica merely nodded and smiled serenely.

“I had intended to,” she said. “I’ve had about enough of the shelter of your roof.”

The aged baronet swayed on the verge of apoplexy. An assiduous waiter hurried forward to render support. Hugo leapt to his feet.

“As for you, young puppy,” choked Sir Nicholas, “you shall hear further from my lawyers about this!”

Aided by the waiter he cluttered back to his table, and Hugo, facing Monica, sank down again with a gasp of consternation. She answered him with the softest little gurgle of laughter.

“The least you can do,” stuttered the young man indignantly, “is to go and apologize to him. Do you realize that I

have been shorn of my bank balance, deprived of my inheritance, and cast upon the world with literally not a bob to my name! To make matters worse, you—" He checked himself rigidly.

"And what else, Hugo?" She leant forward, chin cradled in hands.

Hugo bit savagely at his cigar and looked away. He wasn't going to show this heartless flirt that he had fallen in love with her.

"Never mind," he growled. "We had better consider this charming night's entertainment at an end. Shall I get you a taxi?"

"Hugo." She was regarding him with faint perplexity in her brows. "He can't disinherit you; the estate's entailed."

"Exactly. In the male line, Monica. And that brat—pardon me for referring to your offspring in such terms—"

Her big eyes opened very wide, and then she leant back with a peal of helpless laughter that brought appreciative masculine glances at her from various quarters of the room. "Oh, Hugo! How funny!"

"Quite so. D——d funny! Best joke I've heard for years! Shall we go now, Monica?"

"But, Hugo! Oh, I see it all now. You know how deaf he is——"

He gazed at her sternly. Heartless minx to laugh at an old man's infirmities.

"He didn't hear. He *wouldn't* hear!—he wanted a boy and—it's a *girl*!"

"What!" Hugo sat up electrified.

Hugo looked at her dumbly, realizing after the first shock of surprise what this meant to him, and, somehow, how little it meant. As if in sudden shame her glance fell.

"Thanks, Monica," he said gloomily, "it doesn't matter so much—now. But you might have left me out in your search for distraction. The best thing you can do is to go back to him and—make it up, and in future award the little one some of the consideration it has a right to—er—expect from its mother—oh, *dash* it all!" Hugo concluded fiercely, "I wish I'd never met you!"

He twisted round in his chair angrily and beckoned the waiter. In strained silence the bill was made out and paid. Hugo pushed away the change irritably, and told the waiter

to order a taxi. When he faced the girl again she was holding out her hands to him, palms up, as if in appeal. Fascinated, he looked at those pretty white palms, and saw the glint of gold on the third finger of the left hand. It was a signet ring, with the seal towards him.

"Dear Hugo," said the girl softly. "Won't you forgive me? I am not really as wicked as I seem." Her eyes dropped, the lashes demurely resting on her cheeks. "Not as heartless as I seem. . . . Not as *happy* as I seem, Hugo."

"Perhaps I am hardly anything that I seem——"

"The taxi is waiting, sir," a discreet voice murmured in the offing.

The girl looked at Hugo and Hugo looked at the signet-ring that was worn with the seal inwards. The fact that this was not a wedding-ring had definitely pierced his foggy consciousness.

"Hugo," she went on, "have you never heard of poor relations, forced to accept the charity of a cousin who has made a 'good' marriage; to do menial tasks and play the glorified nurse to that cousin's detestable baby, until one gets driven to almost any subterfuge to steal a few hours' pleasure? Until one longs to kick over the traces and do something really *disreputable* . . . Hugo . . ."

"The taxi-driver, sir. He says——"

Of a sudden Hugo sat up, his own eupeptic self once more.

"Tell the taxi-driver to go to Hades," said Hugo Stager.

WINIFRED HOLTBY

*Why Herbert killed his Mother*

Winifred Holtby was educated at Somerville College, Oxford, and takes a keen interest in women's work of all kinds. She has been a director of *Time and Tide* for several years and has written a number of novels and satires, including *The Land of Green Ginger* and *Mandoa, Mandoa*.



## WHY HERBERT KILLED HIS MOTHER

ONCE upon a time there was a Model Mother who had a Prize Baby. Nobody had ever had such a Baby before. He was a Son, of course. All prize babies are masculine, for should there be a flaw in their gender this might deprive them of at least twenty-five per cent. of the marks merited by their prize-worthiness.

The Mother's name was Mrs. Wilkins, and she had a husband called Mr. Wilkins; but he did not count much. It is true that he was the Baby's father, and on the night after the child was born he stood Drinks All Round at the Club; though he was careful to see that there were only two other members in the Bar at the time he suggested it, because although one must be a Good Father and celebrate properly, family responsibilities make a man remember his bank balance. Mr. Wilkins remembered his very often, particularly when Mrs. Wilkins bought a copy of *Vogue*, or remarked that the Simpsons, who lived next door but one, had changed their Austin Seven for a Bentley. The Wilkinsons had not even an old Ford; but then the buses passed the end of their road, and before the Prize Baby arrived, Mrs. Wilkins went to the Stores and ordered a very fine pram.

Mrs. Wilkins had determined to be a Real Old-Fashioned Mother. She had no use for these Modern Women who Drink Cocktails, Smoke Cigarettes, and dash about in cars at all hours with men who are not their husbands. She believed in the true ideal of Real Womanliness, Feminine Charm, and the Maternal Instinct. She won a ten-shilling prize once from a daily paper, with a circulation of nearly two million, for saying so, very prettily, on a postcard.

Before the Baby came she sat with her feet up every afternoon sewing little garments. She made long clothes with twenty tucks round the hem of each robe, and embroidered flannels, fifty inches from hem to shoulder tape,

and flutry bonnets, and teeny-weeny little net veils ; she draped a bassinet with white muslin and blue ribbons, and she thought a great deal about violets, forget-me-nots and summer seas in order that her baby might have blue eyes. When Mrs. Burton from "The Acacias" told her that long clothes were unhygienic, and that drapery on the bassinet held the dust, and that heredity had far more to do with blue eyes than thoughts about forget-me-nots, she shook her head charmingly, and said : "Ah, well. You *clever* women konw so much. I can only go by what my darling mother told me." Mrs. Burton said : "On the contrary. You have a lot of other authorities to go by nowadays," and she produced three pamphlets, a book on Infant Psychology, and a programme of lectures on "Health, Happiness and Hygiene in the Nursery". But Mrs. Wilkins sighed, and said : "My poor little brain won't take in all that stuff. I have only my Mother Love to guide me." And she dropped a pearly tear on to a flannel binder.

Mrs. Burton went home and told Mr. Burton that Mrs. Wilkins was hopeless, and that her baby would undoubtedly suffer from adenoids, curvature of the spine, flat feet, halitosis, bow legs, indigestion and the Œdipus Complex. Mr. Burton said "Quite, quite." And everyone was pleased.

The only dissentient was the Wilkins baby, who was born without any defect whatsoever. He was a splendid boy, and his more-than-proud parents had him christened Herbert James Rodney Stephen Christopher, which names they both agreed went very well with Wilkins. He wore for the ceremony two binders, four flannels, an embroidered robe with seventeen handmade tucks, a woolly coat, two shawls, and all other necessary and unnecessary garments, and when he stared into the Rector's face, and screamed lustily, his aunts said : "That means he'll be musical, bless him." But his mother thought : "What a strong will he has ! And what sympathy there is between us ! Perhaps he knows already what I think about the Rector."

As long as the monthly nurse was there, Mrs. Wilkins and Herbert got along very nicely on Mother Love ; but directly she left trouble began.

"My baby," Mrs. Wilkins had said, "shall never be allowed to lie awake and cry like Mrs. Burton's poor little wretch. Babies need cuddling." So whenever Herbert cried at first

she cuddled him. She cuddled him in the early morning when he woke up Mr. Wilkins and wanted his six o'clock bottle at four. She cuddled him at half-past six and half-past seven and eight. She cuddled him half-hourly for three days and then she smacked him. It was a terrible thing to do, but she did it. She fed him when he seemed hungry, and showed him to all the neighbours who called, and kept him indoors when it rained, which it did every day, and nursed him while she had her own meals, and when she didn't gave him Nestlé's. And he still flourished.

But what with the crying and the washing that hung in the garden, the neighbours began to complain, and Mrs. Burton said: "Of course, you're killing that child."

Mrs. Wilkins knew that the Maternal Instinct was the safest guide in the world; but when her husband showed her an advertisement in the evening paper which began: "Mother, does your child cry?" she read it. She learned there that babies cry because their food does not agree with them. "What-not's Natural Digestive Infants' Milk solves the Mother's problem." Mrs. Wilkins thought that no stone should be left unturned and bought a specimen tin of What-not's Natural Digestive Infants' Milk, and gave it to Herbert. Herbert flourished. He grew larger and rounder and pinker, and more dimpled than ever. But still he cried.

So Mrs. Wilkins read another advertisement in the evening paper. And there she learned that when Babies cry it is because they are not warm enough, and that all good mothers should buy Flopsy's Fleecy Pram Covers. So, being a good mother, she bought a Flopsy's Fleecy Pram Cover and wrapped Herbert in it. And still Herbert flourished. And still he cried.

So she continued to read the evening papers, for by this time both she and Mr. Wilkins were nearly distracted, and one of the neighbours threatened to complain to the landlord, and Mrs. Simpson kept her loud speaker going all night and day to drown the noise, she said. And now Mrs. Wilkins learned that the reason her baby cried was because his Elimination was inadequate so she bought him a bottle of Hebe's Nectar for the Difficult Child, and gave him a teaspoonful every morning. But still he cried.

Then the spring came, and the sun shone, and the bulbs in the garden of Number Seven were finer than they had ever

been before, and Mrs. Wilkins put Herbert out in the garden in his pram, and he stopped crying.

She was such a nice woman and such a proud mother that she wrote at once to the proprietors of What-not's Natural Digestive Infants' Milk, and Flopsy's Fleecy Pram Covers, and Hebe's Nectar for the Difficult Child, and told them that she had bought their things for Herbert and that he had stopped crying.

Two days later a sweet young woman came to the Wilkins' house, and said that What-not's Limited had sent her to see Herbert, and what a fine Baby he was, and how healthy, and could she take a photograph? And Mrs. Wilkins was very pleased, and thought: "Well, Herbert is the most beautiful Baby in the world, and won't this be a sell for Mrs. Burton," and was only too delighted. So the young woman photographed Herbert in his best embroidered robe drinking Natural Digestive Infants' Milk from a bottle, and went away.

The next day a kind old man came from Flopsy's Fleecy Pram Covers Limited, and photographed Herbert lying under a Fleecy Pram Cover. It was a hot afternoon and a butterfly came and settled on the pram; but the kind old man said that this was charming.

The next day a scientific-looking young man with horn-rimmed spectacles came from Hebe's Nectar Limited and photographed Herbert lying on a fur rug wearing nothing at all. And when Mr. Wilkins read his Sunday paper, there he saw his very own baby, with large black capitals printed above him, saying: "My Child is now no longer Difficult, declares Mrs. Wilkins, of Number 9, The Grove, S.W.10."

Mrs. Burton saw it too, and said to Mr. Burton: "No wonder, when at last they've taken a few stones of wool off the poor little wretch."

But Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins saw it differently. They took Herbert to a Court Photographer and had him taken dressed and undressed, with one parent, with both parents, standing up and sitting down; and always he was the most beautiful baby that the Wilkinses had ever seen.

One day they saw an announcement in a great Sunday paper of a £10,000 prize for the loveliest baby in the world. "Well, dear, this will be nice," said Mrs. Wilkins. "We shall be able to buy a saloon car now." Because, of course, she knew that Herbert would win the prize.

And so he did. He was photographed in eighteen different poses for the first heat; then he was taken for a personal inspection in private for the second heat; then he was publicly exhibited at the Crystal Palace for the semi-finals, and for the Final Judgment he was set in a pale blue bassinet and examined by three doctors, two nurses, a Child Psychologist, a film star, and Mr. Cecil Beaton. After that he was declared the Most Beautiful Baby in Britain.

That was only the beginning. Baby Britain had still to face Baby France, Baby Spain, Baby Italy, and Baby America. Signor Mussolini sent a special message to Baby Italy, which the other national competitors thought unfair. The Free State insisted upon sending twins, which were disqualified. The French President cabled inviting the entire contest to be removed to Paris, and the Germans declared that the girl known as Baby Poland, having been born in the Polish Corridor, was really an East Prussian and should be registered as such.

But it did not matter. These international complications made no difference to Herbert. Triumphantly he overcame all his competitors, and was crowned as World Baby on the eve of his first birthday.

Then, indeed, began a spectacular period for Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins. Mrs. Wilkins gave interviews to the Press on "The Power of Mother Love", "The Sweetest Thing in the World", and "How I Run My Nursery". Mr. Wilkins wrote some fine manly articles on "Fatherhood Faces Facts", and "A Man's Son"—or, rather, they were written for him by a bright young woman until Mrs. Wilkins decided that she should be present at the collaborations.

Then a firm of publishers suggested to Mr. Wilkins that he should write a Christmas book called *Herbert's Father*, all about what tender feelings fathers had, and what white, pure thoughts ran through their heads when they looked upon the sleeping faces of their sons, and about how strange and wonderful it was to watch little images of themselves growing daily in beauty, and how gloriously unspotted and magical were the fairy-like actions of little children. Mr. Wilkins thought that this was a good idea if someone would write the book for him, and if the advance royalties were not less than £3,000 on the date of publication; but he would have to ask Mrs. Wilkins. Mrs. Wilkins was a trifle hurt. Why

*Herbert's Father?* What right had Paternity to override Maternity? The publisher pointed out the success of Mr. A. A. Milne's *Christopher Robin*, and Mr. Lewis Hind's *Julius Cæsar*, and of Mr. A. S. M. Hutchinson's *Son Simon*, to say nothing of Sir James Barrie's *Little White Bird*. "But none of these children was my Herbert," declared Mrs. Wilkins—which, indeed, was undeniable. So the contract was finally signed for *The Book of Herbert*, by His Parents.

It was a success. Success? It was a Triumph, a Wow, a Scream, an Explosion. There was nothing like it. It was The Christmas Gift. It went into the third hundredth thousand before December 3rd. It was serialized simultaneously in the *Evening Standard*, *Home Chat*, and *The Nursery World*. Mr. Baldwin referred to it at a Guildhall Banquet. The Prince used a joke from it in a Broadcast Speech on England and the Empire. The Book Society failed to recommend it, but every bookstall in the United Kingdom organized a display stand in its honour, with photographs of Herbert and copies signed with a blot "Herbert, His Mark" exquisitely arranged.

The Herbert Boom continued. Small soap Herberts (undressed for the bath) were manufactured and sold for use in delighted nurseries. Royalty graciously accepted an ivory Herbert, designed as a paper-weight, from the loyal sculptor. A Herbert Day was instituted in order to raise money for the Children's Hospitals of England, and thirty-seven different types of Herbert Calendars, Christmas Cards, and Penwipers were offered for sale—and sold.

Mrs. Wilkins felt herself justified in her faith. This, she said, was what mother love could do. Mr. Wilkins demanded 10 per cent. royalties on every Herbert article sold. And they all bought a country house near Brighton, a Bentley car, six new frocks for Mrs. Wilkins, and an electric refrigerator, and lived happily ever after until Herbert grew up.

But Herbert grew up.

When he was four he wore curls and a Lord Fauntleroy suit and posed for photographers. When he was fourteen he wore jerseys and black finger-nails and collected beetles. When he left one of England's Great Public Schools he wore plus-fours and pimples and rode a motor-cycle and changed his tie three times in half an hour before he called on the young lady at the tobacconist's round the corner. He knew what a Fella does, by Jove, and he knew what a Fella doesn't.

His main interests in life were etiquette, Edgar Wallace, and the desire to live down his past. For on going to a preparatory school he had carefully insisted that his name was James. His father, who knew that boys will be boys, supported him, and as he grew to maturity, few guessed that young James Wilkins, whose beauty was certainly not discernible to the naked eye, was Herbert, the Loveliest Baby in the World. Only Mrs. Wilkins, in a locked spare bedroom, cherished a museum of the Herbert photographs, trophies, first editions, soap images, ivory statuettes, silver cups, and Christmas cards. The Herbert vogue had faded, as almost all vogues do, until not even a gag about Herbert on the music hall stage raised a feeble smile.

But Mrs. Wilkins found the position hard to bear. It is true that the fortunes of the family were soundly laid, that Mr. Wilkins had invested the profits of his son's juvenile triumphs in Trustee Stock, and that no household in South Kensington was more respected. But Mrs. Wilkins had tasted the sweet nectar of publicity and she thirsted for another drink.

It happened that one day, when (Herbert) James was twenty-three, he brought home the exciting news that he had become engaged to Selena Courtney, the daughter of Old Man Courtney, whose office in the city Herbert adorned for about six hours daily.

Nothing could have been more fortunate. Mr. Wilkins was delighted, for Courtney, of Courtney, Gilbert and Co., was worth nearly half a million. Herbert was delighted, for he was enjoying the full flavour of Young Love and Satisfied Snobbery combined, which is, as everyone knows, the perfect fulfilment of a True Man's dreams. The Courtneys were delighted, because they thought young Wilkins a very decent young man, with none of this damned nonsense about him. And Mrs. Wilkins—well, her feelings were mixed. It was she, after all, who had produced this marvel, and nobody seemed to remember her part in the production, nor to consider the product specially marvellous. Besides, she was a little jealous, as model mothers are allowed to be, of her prospective daughter-in-law. <sup>a</sup>

The engagement was announced in *The Times*—the reporters came, rather bored, to the Kensington home of Mrs. Wilkins. She was asked to supply any details about her

son's career. "Any adventures? Any accidents? Has he ever won any prizes?" asked a reporter.

This was too much. "Come here!" said Mrs. Wilkins; and she led the reporters up to the locked spare bedroom.

What happened there was soon known to the public. When (Herbert) James, two evenings later, left the office on his way to his future father-in-law's house in Belgrave Square, hoping to take his fiancée after dinner to a dance given by Lady Soxlet, he was confronted by placards announcing "The Perfect Baby to Wed". Taking no notice he went on to the Tube Station; but there he saw yet further placards. "The World's Loveliest Baby now a Man", and "Little Herbert Engaged".

Still hardly conscious of the doom awaiting him, he bought an evening paper, and there he saw in black letters across the front page: "Herbert's Identity at last Discovered", and underneath the fatal words: "The young City man, Mr. James Wilkins, whose engagement to Miss Selena Courtney, of 299 Belgrave Square, was announced two days ago, has been revealed by his mother, Mrs. Wilkins, to be Herbert, the Wonder Baby." There followed descriptions of the Perfect Childhood, stories taken from the Herbert Legend; rapid advertisements rushed out by What-Not's Natural Digestive Infants' Milk, Flopsy's Fleecy Pram Covers, and Hebe's Nectar for the Difficult Child, illustrated by photographs of the Infant Herbert. The publishers of the *Book of Herbert* announced a new edition, and a famous Daily Paper, whose circulation was guaranteed to be over 2,000,000, declared its intention of publishing a series of articles called "My Herbert is a Man, by Herbert's Mother".

Herbert did not proceed to Belgrave Square. He went to Kensington. With his own latchkey he opened the door and went up to his mother's boudoir. He found her laughing and crying with joy over the evening paper. She looked up and saw her son.

"Oh, darling," she said. "I thought you were taking Selena to a dance."

"There is no Selena," declared Herbert grimly. "There is no dance. There is only you and me."

He should, doubtless, have said: "You and I," but among the things a Fella does, correct grammar is not necessarily included.

"Oh, Herbert," cried Mrs. Wilkins, with ecstatic joy. "My mother instinct was right. Mother always knows, darling. You have come back to me."

"I have," said Herbert.

And he strangled her with a rope of twisted newspapers.

The judge declared it justifiable homicide, and Herbert changed his name to William Brown and went to plant tea or rubber or something in the Malay States, where Selena joined him two years later—and Mr. Wilkins lived to a ripe old age at the Brighton house and looked after his dividends, and everyone was really very happy after all.



PAUL SELVER  
*"Well, I'm Blowed!"*

Paul Selver is an authority on Czechoslovakian literature, and has translated into English the works of Capek, besides publishing a volume of his own verse and a novel called *Schooling*.



## “WELL, I’M BLOWED!”

**M**R. BRIGGS had read stories about people who came into money, but not until the same thing happened to him did he realize how true to life the stories had been. Yes, it was exactly the same. One day, quite unexpectedly, a letter had arrived from a solicitor. It contained such words as “probate” and “legatee”, and it had led to an interview with a bald-headed, clean-shaven, elderly gentleman who looked over his glasses and talked through his nose (quite a nice fellow, all the same, thought Mr. Briggs), amid a perfect warren of dingy offices in Bedford Row. The upshot of it all was that at the age of forty, Mr. Briggs, thanks to the freakish generosity of an unknown uncle in Australia, would be able to live in comfort for the rest of his life, without doing a stroke of work.

Mr. Briggs was cautious and he was therefore secretive. His was not what you would call an exuberant nature. Nor would you be altogether exuberant if, like Mr. Briggs, you had spent more than twenty years teaching in grubby little private schools up and down the country. Teaching anything and everything, from chemistry to physical drill, and from algebra to religious knowledge (actually, Mr. Briggs was very partial to religious knowledge, and could expound with particular gusto the Plagues of Egypt and the Parable of the Sower). Teaching, too, in return for about the same wage as a lower-grade dustman. He had drifted into it rather casually (as a matter of fact, it had practically been a toss up whether he did that or acted as a sort of understudy to an auctioneer’s clerk).

It is true that, by what he couldn’t help thinking, at the time, was a great stroke of luck, he had managed, nearly five years earlier, to escape from the hades of private schools into the comparative purgatory of a day-school. What happened was that Mr. Spencer Smith, the headmaster of St.

Christopher's High School for Boys, Kilburn, was obliged to dismiss one of his assistant masters under circumstances which had to be skilfully hushed up. Mr. Spencer Smith, who was rather good at this manoeuvre, accordingly hushed them up, and then informed Messrs. Wrickmanworth and Lapwing, the scholastic agents of Sackville Street, that he needed for the following term a good, all-round form-master, keen on games, must be communicant, with experience, and university graduate preferred, at a commencing salary of £130 per annum, non-resident. This really meant that Mr. Spencer Smith needed a docile drudge who, without asking questions, or otherwise demurring, would do any odd job which nobody else could be amicably induced to undertake. Messrs. Wrickmansworth and Lapwing thereupon circulated slips of smudgy green typescript announcing the requirements of Mr. Spencer Smith (in the official version, of course) to all the clients on their books (and they were many) who were likely to jump at the chance of serving Mr. Spencer Smith.

Among these was Mr. Briggs, who was specially attracted by the phrase "non-resident". Up till then, Mr. Briggs had "held resident posts", a scholastic equivalent to the shop-assistant's "living-in", and, if continued long enough, suspiciously similar to "dying out". That, at least, was what Mr. Briggs thought about it. At that time he had a very resident, a too-resident post, in a small private school in one of the drearier regions of Essex. Now, oddly enough, the smaller a school is, the more it needs looking after. Mr. Briggs never seemed to be able to get away from this particular establishment with its forty-five pupils for more than half an hour at a time. And what pupils they were, too! Mr. Briggs, whose experience in this matter was by no means despicable, had never before encountered so high a percentage of boobies and hooligans among the young. The headmaster, who was very deaf and more than half blind, was not aware of this, and was under the strange impression that his school harboured nothing but young lambs. Mr. Briggs, on the other hand, whose faculties were still unimpaired, often felt that he was not so much a schoolmaster as a woefully inefficient superintendent of maniacs. Moreover, he was tired of weak tea, Irish stew and golden syrup, which formed the staple diet of the establishment. The Irish stew, in fact, he loathed with an almost fanatical loathing.

Thus it came about that the application which Mr. Spencer Smith received from Mr. Briggs fairly throbbed with an eagerness to convince and persuade. It may have been these vibrations which caused Mr. Spencer Smith to invite Mr. Briggs to an interview. It may also have been the fact that of all the candidates, Mr. Briggs was the nearest at hand, which meant that his allowance for travelling expenses would be small. At all events, invited he was, and Mr. Spencer Smith was most affable—far more affable, indeed, than he ever was afterwards.

Seated face to face in Mr. Spencer Smith’s study, they went through his requirements seriatim. A good, all-round form-master? Well, Mr. Briggs thought that he could fairly lay claim to the description, seeing that, at one time and another, he had taught pretty well every subject on the curriculum. Keen on games? Mr. Briggs declared himself passionately devoted to football (“soccer” he called it), while as for cricket, the innings he had knocked up at Croodle House School in the Masters *v.* Old Boys Match, on which occasion he had carried his bat, constituted a local record. Communicant? Mr. Briggs smiled rather sadly, as if pained at the mere suggestion that he could be anything else. And so forth. Of course, Mr. Briggs had duly enumerated most of these details in his letter of application, and he had the impression that Mr. Spencer Smith was making sure that all the items tallied. And at a very early stage in their acquaintance, Mr. Briggs discovered that Mr. Spencer Smith was extremely fond of seeing whether things tallied.

This time they tallied fairly well. There was a slight hitch about Mr. Briggs’s academic qualifications. With the pertinacity of the spider which had conveyed so profound a moral lesson to Robert Bruce, he had managed to pass Intermediate Arts (he preferred to call it “the first B.A.”). Now Mr. Spencer Smith, it seemed, was really looking for a man with a degree. Still, he was prepared to compromise on this point, and in the end he proved delightfully accommodating. Suppose, he suggested, he were to offer Mr. Briggs the post, would Mr. Briggs be prepared to accept £110 per annum, on the understanding that, if and when he obtained his degree, he would become entitled to the stipulated £130? Mr. Briggs was prepared to do so, and that was how he came to St. Christopher’s High School for Boys.

On the occasion of that memorable interview, Mr. Briggs had worn his best suit, and Mr. Spencer Smith had been on his best behaviour. It was not long before the suit and the behaviour, both being of very shoddy material, had frayed badly, and Mr. Briggs began to wonder whether, after all, he was better off than before. There was no Irish stew, but there are worse things than Irish stew, and Mr. Spencer Smith was one of them. That, at any rate, was how Mr. Briggs looked at it. His prospects of a degree continued to recede like a mirage, until he decided that he had about as much chance of getting one as of becoming Prime Minister. Mr. Spencer Smith saw to that. Mr. Briggs used to arrive home every day with a brain like a soggy sponge, and even then there were piles of exercises for him to mark. He had two free periods per week, but as a rule Mr. Spencer Smith rendered them null and void by bringing him some little educational task, such as copying lists of boys whose tonsils needed attention, or who had qualified as entrants for the school swimming championship, or who were to be permitted to take part in the next paper-chase. And, to make matters worse, at odd moments, when the soul of Mr. Briggs was sick within him, he would drop pointed hints about the degree that was not forthcoming.

And so we come back to Mr. Briggs gloating over the prospect of lifelong freedom from the pinpricks and tantrums of Mr. Spencer Smith. That was perhaps only fit and proper. What was not so fit and proper, however, was the fact that Mr. Briggs was planning to take advantage of his good fortune to get "a little of his own back" (such was his own deplorable formula) from Mr. Spencer Smith. It may well be that, subconsciously at least, Mr. Briggs was preparing to settle accounts, not only with Mr. Spencer Smith, but also with his several predecessors for all the snubs, set-backs, and other forms of discomfiture which he had suffered at their hands, ever since, at the parting of the ways, he had espoused teaching and rejected auctioneering. But Mr. Spencer Smith was the only one of these gentlemen who was now at his mercy, and it was solely round the perky little figure of Mr. Spencer Smith that Mr. Briggs's plan for vengeance hovered. "Bally, bumptious, domineering little blighter" was how Mr. Briggs put it to himself (this was as near as he ever approached to the Great Unprinted Adjectives and Nouns), "I'll showim."

Briefly, what Mr. Briggs proposed to do was to leave Mr. Spencer Smith professionally in the lurch for an hour or so, and then in the wake of the disturbance which this act would produce, to make a farewell speech such as no headmaster had ever yet heard from a subordinate. He had planned this with what he considered quite diabolical ingenuity. He had waited until the last month of the term just before the school began to simmer with the oncoming ferment of examinations and reports, and he had chosen a Thursday morning for his exploit. Why Thursday? Because he knew that nobody had a free period during the first hour, and so Mr. Spencer Smith himself would have to step into the breach. And the breach was, in the particular case, Form IVb, whom Mr. Briggs would normally be instructing in arithmetic. A peculiarly repellent job, since Form IVb comprised a set of juveniles whose inability to learn was equalled only by their loutish unwillingness to be taught. Mr. Briggs chuckled as he reviewed the probable course of events. At first there would be a low murmur in the classroom. Then, while the rest of the school settled down to work, the murmur would gradually swell to a hullabaloo, variegated with queer bumping noises and hoots and cat-calls, and what the Greek dramatist, in a different context, described as "untimely laughter". This would bring Mr. Spencer Smith on the scene. He would arrive from his study, where he had been perusing *The Daily Telegraph*, livid with fury, but by no means speechless. He would distribute vast impositions (no doubt among the least inoffensive of the revellers), and would threaten to thrash the ringleaders of the shindy, when their identity had been established by a kind of Star Chamber inquiry (in which Mr. Spencer Smith excelled). Next there would be a silent interlude, with Mr. Spencer Smith glaring terrifically at a very cowed IVb.

They would all be waiting on tenterhooks for him, Mr. Briggs. Presently, Mr. Spencer Smith's patience, such as it was, would come to an end, and at that juncture almost anything might happen. He might even take IVb in arithmetic. Well, if he did, Mr. Briggs wished him joy of it. He experienced a few highly blissful moments as he pictured to himself Mr. Spencer Smith, his eye in a fine frenzy rolling, trying to teach IVb how to do sums about leaky cisterns being filled by inadequate taps. But whatever happened, there could be

no doubt that Mr. Spencer Smith was going to get the worst of it, especially when, at last, Mr. Briggs did arrive, unconcerned and nonchalant, and more especially when, countering Mr. Spencer Smith's attempts to bully him, he began to bristle with a sublime effrontery. Mr. Briggs rehearsed a few repartees which, he felt sure, would annoy Mr. Spencer Smith very much indeed, and for the first time in his life he realized what was meant by the peace which passeth all understanding.

While he was indulging in these raptures, somebody tapped at the door, and his landlady popped her countenance into the room, a countenance which was roseate in the wrong places, and doughy in the others.

"You'll be late for school, Mr. Briggs," she observed in a tone which was two-thirds severity and one-third solicitude. "It's gorn nine."

"Thassallri, Mrs. Randall," he replied spaciously through a mouthful of half-masticated bread and marmalade. "Quiallri." He picked up the newspaper to indicate that this was his last word on the subject, and Mrs. Randall's countenance withdrew, looking perplexed and also distinctly nettled.

The newspaper headlines were promising, and diverted Mr. Briggs's mind from his immediate preoccupations towards the outer world where big things were happening. "GIRL MURDERED IN EMPTY HOUSE" . . . "MINISTER HOWLED DOWN AT HUDDERSFIELD" . . . "SMART SENTENCE ON CONFIDENCE TRICKSTER" . . . "CENTENARIAN'S HINTS ON DIET". Mr. Briggs was very fond of items like these. They were, as he put it, "newsy", and he proceeded to enjoy them. Then he began to ponder on things. Girls would continue to be murdered, ministers would continue to be howled down, confidence tricksters would continue to receive smart sentences, centenarians would continue to give hints on diet—and all for his benefit. Henceforward, he would have nothing else to do but to look on while people did things, especially those things, the results of which were very awkward for them, but highly interesting to others. And this train of thought conveyed him gradually to a more detailed realization of the benefits in store for him. They presented themselves to him in negative terms: No more hurrying over breakfast. No more prayers. No more IVb. No more football. No more cricket. No more detention duty

(Mr. Briggs reflected that men were awarded medals for exploits far less heroic than detention duty). No more terminal reports. And, above all, no more Spencer Smith.

Mr. Briggs looked at his watch, and decided that it was about time to make a move. He lit his pipe with the deliberation of a man who is about to perform a ticklish job, and went. In the passage he encountered Mrs. Randall. She seemed to be under the impression that Mr. Briggs was not right in his head, and had been lying in wait to see what he would be up to next.

"Better take yer umbereller, Mr. Briggs," she counselled him in a pointed manner which matched her owlish stare. "It looks like rain."

Mr. Briggs ignored this entirely. A fat lot he cared whether it rained or not.

Nevertheless, now that the distance between Mr. Spencer Smith and himself had begun to diminish, he became aware of slight qualms in the region of the midriff. It was the kind of feeling he had had when about to face an examination paper concerning some subject as Cicero's little tractate on friendship, with the contents of which he knew himself to be very imperfectly familiar. But this was only a passing phase. Before very long, when he had got well into his stride, and was stepping out with that somewhat flat-footed gait which had so often caused pupil to nudge pupil with irreverent and not always adequately concealed glee, Mr. Briggs not only managed to overcome his misgivings, but even went as far as to start elaborating his original scheme. Why stop at telling Mr. Spencer Smith properly off? (this, of course, is Mr. Briggs's phraseology, not mine). Why not go the whole hog, and leave things in an unholy mess? A baleful glare was kindled in Mr. Briggs's lack-lustre eye, and his long, sallow face almost lost its hang-dog expression as he glimpsed the delicious possibilities now within his reach. He saw himself tearing to tatters the most indispensable, the most irreplaceable documents—detention records, containing particulars of hundreds and hundreds of punishments, mark-books, in which the figures ran into thousands and thousands. The activities of St. Christopher's High School for Boys would be paralysed without them. Their loss would cause Mr. Spencer Smith to lash himself into a titanic fury.

Mr. Briggs tugged fiercely at his bedraggled moustache in a sudden and unwonted itch for destruction. But wiser and more gentlemanly counsels (again Mr. Briggs's phrase, not mine) soon prevailed. Come, come! What did the poet say? It is something—something to have a giant's strength, but it is thingumajig to use it like a giant. Mr. Briggs absorbed all the moral lesson possible from as much of this tag as he could remember, and he felt a better man for it. No, he was prepared to score off Mr. Spencer Smith, but to go beyond that wouldn't be playing the game. Mr. Briggs realized, as never before, what a nice nature he really had.

He was still basking in the pure joy which this discovery had caused him, when he came within sight of St. Christopher's High School for Boys. It was not so much a stately pile as an untidy heap, but these architectural shortcomings had never worried Mr. Briggs, and they were not likely to do so now. What did, however, take him aback was to be greeted by an uncanny silence, when there ought to have been at least a steady murmur. He had arrived nearly ten minutes before the end of the first lesson, and at this hour anyone approaching St. Christopher's from whatever direction would, unless he were stone deaf, hear the tangled symphony of education in progress, with all its undertones and overtones and brawls and what not. But Mr. Briggs, to his bewilderment and consternation, heard nothing. He reached the gate leading to the playground, and there he beheld a few boys, strangely abashed in their demeanour, being chivvied along by Sergeant Shadd.

Sergeant Shadd (the "sergeant" was a courtesy title, as he had retired from His Majesty's forces with the rank of corporal) was the drill-instructor at St. Christopher's. He also acted as caretaker, and performed mysterious duties in the stokehold, together with a certain amount of scavenging or superintendence of scavenging. He was a wiry little man with freckles, a spiked, ginger moustache and a peak-cap, asserting his authority largely by means of a stout bunch of keys which he was apt to brandish, like an insignia, menacingly in front of him, and, if need be, to apply smartly to the rumps of transgressors. His voice was permanently hoarse as the result of bellowing many martial orders and quaffing many alcoholic beverages.

"'Ere, come along, you boys," he wheezed, "it's 'igh time you 'opped it. I got something else to do besides 'anging about 'ere all day, lo'oking after you."

The boys slunk off, sheepishly raising their caps to Mr. Briggs. Mr. Briggs approached the atmosphere of stale shag which accompanied Sergeant Shadd's comings and goings.

"Got a holiday, or something?" he inquired, assuming an off-hand tone.

Sergeant Shadd looked thunderstruck and also rather shocked.

"A 'oliday? A 'oliday, sir?" he gasped with a hint of reproof.

"Why, what's up? Anything wrong?"

"*Wrong*, sir? You don't mean to say you ain't 'eard?"

Mr. Briggs's embarrassment became more evident.

"Well, as a matter of fact," he began hesitantly. "I overslept myself this morning.

He grinned vacantly.

"Overslep' yourself, did yer?"

Sergeant Shadd pushed his peak-cap above his pinkish brow and scratched his head, contemplating Mr. Briggs quizzically, as if he were a recruit on parade who had committed some vast blunder against military etiquette. "Then it ain't surprising you ain't 'eard."

"Heard what?" Mr. Briggs was beginning to feel testy.

"Well, sir," began Sergeant Shadd deliberately, as if selecting with exquisite care the proper phraseology for imparting his unique titbit of news. "It's like this 'ere. Mr. Spencer Smith, sir, 'e was crossing the road this morning, and a young chap on a motor-bike buzzed round that there corner at a feeble rate—coo, a good forty mile an hour, I reckon it was—and Mr. Spencer Smith, 'e just stepped orf the kerb, and——"

"You don't mean to say he——"

Went plunk into 'im. 'E never 'ad a chance to dodge or anything. Plunk into 'im," repeated Sergeant Shadd with zest.

"Was he badly injured?" asked Mr. Briggs, feeling that he would get at the truth only by direct inquiry.

"Injured? *Injured?*" Sergeant Shadd uttered a noise to express petulance at such a ridiculous question. "Why it

was a 'opeless case. 'Opeless. They took 'im orf to the 'orspital, but 'e pegged out before they got 'im there."

"Then he's dead?" Mr. Briggs could not associate Mr. Spencer Smith with the idea of death. It was like hearing that the Marble Arch had passed away.

"I should think 'e blooming well is. That's why the school was dismissed for the day," declared Sergeant Shadd, with perhaps just a trifle more hearty emphasis than the occasion altogether demanded. "Why, sir, 'e 'ad a ruptured liver, and 'is stummick was all smashed, and——"

He lusciously enumerated further anatomical disasters, and concluded:

"I bet that young chap won't 'arf cop out. And serve 'im bally well right. These 'ere motor-bikes never ought to be allowed, that they never. Up and down that blooming road all day *and* all night. A pack of saucy young whipper-snappers, showing orf, with their gels 'anging on be'ind."

He mused blackly on this spectacle of decadent youth, and then expectorated with the unpretentious neatness of the British N.C.O.

Mr. Briggs stared. It was only a trivial act, but it had symbolical significance. Never during the lifetime of Mr. Spencer Smith would Sergeant Shadd have dared to expectorate on the playground of St. Christopher's.

Mr. Briggs caught Sergeant Shadd's red-rimmed, watery little eye, and they exchanged glances of mutual comprehension, although it was probable that Mr. Briggs read Sergeant Shadd's thoughts more accurately than Sergeant Shadd read his. But they both understood that, as Mr. Spencer Smith was no more, they could allow themselves a greater latitude than of old. And Mr. Briggs, matching Sergeant Shadd's act of emancipation by an analogous freedom of speech, exclaimed:

"Well, I'm blowed!"

STACY AUMONIER

*The Landlord of "The Love-a-Duck"*

Stacy Aumonier, one of the most brilliant recent writers of short stories, was an artist of great talent, and also a popular society entertainer, before he began writing. Some of his best stories are contained in the volume *Miss Bracegirdle and Others*.



## THE LANDLORD OF "THE LOVE-A-DUCK"

**I** FORGET the name of the wag in our town who first called him Mr. Seldom Right, but the name caught on. His proper name was James Selden Wright, and the inference of this obvious misnomer was too good to drop. James was invariably wrong, but so lavishly, outrageously, magnificently wrong that he invariably carried the thing through with flying colours. He was a kind of Tartarin of Tibbelsford, which was the name of the town.

Everything about Mr. Seldom Right was big, impressive, expansive. He himself was an enormous person, with fat, puffy cheeks with no determinate line between them and his innumerable chins. His large grey eyes with their tiny pupils seemed to embrace the whole universe in a glance. Upon his pendulous front there dangled thick gold chains with signets and seals like miniature flat-irons. His fingers were ribbed with gold bands like curtain-rings. His wife was big; his daughter was big; the great shire horses which worked on his adjoining farm seemed quite normal creatures in this Gargantuan scheme of things.

Above all, "The Love-a-duck" was big. It appeared to dominate the town. It was built at the top of the hill, with great rambling corridors, bars, coffee-rooms, dilapidated ball-rooms, staircases of creaking deal, bedrooms where a four-post bed was difficult to find, a cobbled courtyard with a covered entrance drive where two brewer's drays could have driven through abreast. There was no social function, no town council, no committee of importance that was not driven to meet at "The Love-a-duck". But the biggest thing in Tibbelsford was the voice of the landlord. At night amidst the glittering taps and tankards he would "preside". By this you must understand that the word be taken liberally. He was no ordinary potman to hand mugs of ale across the bar to thirsty carters, or nips of gin to thin-lipped clerks. He

would not appear till the evening was well advanced, and then he would stroll in and lean against the bar, his sleepy eyes adjusting the various phenomena of this perspective to a comfortable focus.

And then the old cronies and characters of Tibbelsford would touch their hats and say :

“ ‘Evening, Mr. Wright !”

And he would nod gravely, like an Emperor receiving the fealty of his serfs. And a stranger might whisper :

“Who is this fat old guy ?”

And the answer would be “H’sh !” for the eyes of Mr. Seldom Right missed nothing. Bumptious strangers were treated with complete indifference. If they addressed him, he looked right through them, and breathed heavily. But for the cronies and characters there was a finely-adjusted scale of treatment, a subtle under-current of masonry. To get into favour with Mr. Seldom Right one had to work one’s way up, and any bad mistake would land one back among the strangers. In which case one would be served fairly and squarely, but there the matter would end. For it should be stated at this point that everything about “The Love-a-duck” was good in quality, and lavish in quantity, and the rooms, in spite of their great size, were always spotlessly clean.

Having carefully considered the relative values of this human panorama, the landlord would single out some individual fortunate enough to catch his momentary favour, and in a voice which seemed to make the glasses tremble and the little Chelsea figures on the high mantelshelf gasp with surprise, he would exclaim :

“Well, Mr. Topsmith, and how are we ? Right on the top o’ life ? Full of beans, bone, blood and benevolence, eh ? Ha, ha, ha !”

And the laugh would clatter among the tankards, twist the gas-bracket, go rolling down the corridor and make the dogs bark in the kennels beyond the stables. And Mr. Topsmith would naturally blush, and spill his beer, and say :

“Oh, thank you, sir, nothin’ to grumble about ; pretty good goin’ altogether.”

“That’s right ! that RIGHT !”

There were plenty of waitresses and attendants at “The Love-a-duck”, but however busy the bars might be, the landlord himself always dined with his wife and daughter,

at seven-thirty precisely, in the oblong parlour at the back of the saloon bar. And they dined simply and prodigiously. A large steaming leg of mutton would be carried in, and in twenty minutes' time would return a forlorn white fragment of bone. Great dishes of fried potatoes, cabbages, and marrow, would all vanish. A stilton cheese would come back like an over-explored ruin of some ancient Assyrian town. And Mine Host would mellow these simple delicacies with three or four tankards of old ale. Occasionally some of the cronies and characters were invited to join the repast, but whoever was there, the shouts and laughter of the landlord rang out above everything, only seconded by the breezy giggles of Mrs. Wright, whose voice would be constantly heard exclaiming :

"Oh, Jim, you are a fule !"

It was when the dinner was finished that the landlord emerged into the president. He produced a long churchwarden and ambled hither and thither, with a pompous, benevolent, consciously proprietary air. The somewhat stilted formality of his first appearance expanded into a genial but autocratic courtliness. He was an Edwardian of Edwardians. He could be surprisingly gracious, tactful and charming, and he also had that Hanoverian faculty of seeing right through one—a perfectly crushing mannerism.

By slow degrees he would gently shepherd his favourite flock around the fire in the large bar parlour, decorated with stags' heads, pewter and old Chelsea. Then he would settle himself in the corner of the inglenook by the right side of the fire. Perhaps at this time I may be allowed to enumerate a few of the unbreakable rules which the novice had to learn by degrees. They were as follows :

You must always address the landlord as "sir".

You must never interrupt him in the course of a story.

You must never appear to disbelieve him.

You must never tell a bigger lie than he has just told.

If he offers you a drink you must accept it.

You must never, under any circumstances, offer to stand him a drink in return.

You may ask his opinion about anything, but never any question about his personal affairs.

You may disagree with him, but you must not let him think that you're not taking him seriously.

You must not get drunk.

These were the broad, abstract rules. There were other by-laws and covenants allowing for variable degrees of interpretation. That, for instance, which governed the improper story. A story could be suggestive but must never be flagrantly vulgar or profane. Also one might have had enough to drink to make one garrulous, but not enough to be boisterous, or maudlin, or even over-familiar.

I have stated that the quality of fare supplied at "The Love-a-duck" was excellent; and so it was. Beyond that, however, our landlord had his own special reserves. There was a little closet just off the central bar where on occasions he would suddenly disappear, and when in the humour produce some special bottle of old port or liqueur. He would come toddling with it back to his seat and exclaim:

"Gentlemen, this is the birthday of Her Imperial Highness the Princess Eulalie of Spain. I must ask you to drink her good health and prosperity!"

And the bar, who had never heard of the Princess Eulalie of Spain, would naturally do so with acclamation.

Over the little glasses he would tell most impressive and incredible stories. He had hunted lions with the King of Abyssinia. He had dined with the Czar of Russia. He had been a drummer-boy during the North and South war in America. He had travelled all over Africa, Spain, India, China and Japan. There was no crowned head in either of the hemispheres with whom he was not familiar. He knew everything there was to know about diamonds, oil, finance, horses, politics, Eastern religions, ratting, dogs, geology, women, political economy, tobacco, corn, or rubber. He was a prolific talker, but he did not object to listening, and he enjoyed an argument. In every way he was a difficult man to place. Perhaps in thinking of him one was apt not to make due allowance for the rather drab background against which his personality stood out so vividly. One must first visualize the company of "The Love-a-duck".

There was old Hargreaves, the local estate agent: a snuffy, gingery, pinched old ruffian, with a pretty bar-side manner, an infinite capacity for listening politely; one whose nature had been completely bowdlerized by years of showing likely tenants over empty houses, and keeping cheerful in draughty passages. There was Mr. Bean, the corn-merchant,

with a polished red-blue face and no voice. He would sit leaning forward on a thin gold-knobbed cane, and as the evening advanced he seemed to melt into one vast ingratiating smile. One dreaded every moment that the stick would give way and that he would fall forward on his face. There was an argumentative chemist, whose name I have forgotten ; he was a keen-faced man, and he wore gold-rimmed spectacles which made him look much cleverer than he really was. There was old Phene Sparfitt. Nobody knew how he lived. He was very old, much too old to be allowed out at night, but quite the most regular and persistent customer. He drank quantities of gin-and-water, his lower lip was always moist, and he professed an intimate knowledge of the life of birds. Dick Toom, the owner of the local livery-stables, was a spasmodic visitor. He generally came accompanied by several horsey-looking gentlemen. He always talked breezily about some distressing illness he was suffering from, and would want to make a bet with anyone present about some quite ridiculous proposition : for instance, that the distance from the cross-roads to the stone wall by Jenkins's black-pig farm was greater than the distance from the fountain in the middle of Piccadilly Circus to the tube station in Dover Street. A great number of these bets took place in the bar, and the fact that the landlord always lost was one of the reasons of his nickname.

It cannot be said that the general standard of intelligence reached a very high level, and against it it was difficult to tell quite how intelligent the landlord was. If he were not a well-educated man he certainly had more than a veneer of education. In an argument he was seldom extended. Sometimes he talked brilliantly for a moment, and then seemed to talk out of his hat. He had an extravagant, theatrical way of suddenly declaiming a statement, and then sinking his voice and repeating it. Sometimes he would be moodish and not talk at all. But at his best he was very good company.

It would be idle to pretend that the frequenters of the bar believed the landlord's stories. On the contrary, I'm afraid we were a very sceptical lot. Most of us had never been farther than London or the seaside, and our imagination shied at episodes in Rajahs' palaces and receptions in Spanish courts. It became a byword in the town : "Have you heard

old Seldom Right's latest?" Nevertheless he was extremely popular. At the time of which I write the landlord must have been well over sixty years of age, and his wife was possibly forty-five. They appeared to be an extremely happy and united family.

And then Septimus Stourway appeared on the scene. He was an acid, angular, middle-aged man, with sharp features, a heavy black moustache, and eyes too close together. He was a chartered accountant, and he came to the town to audit the books of a large brewery near by, and one or two other concerns. He brought his wife and his son, who was eleven years old. He was a man whom everybody disliked from the very beginning. He was probably clever at his job, quick-thinking, self-opinionated, precise, argumentative, aggressively assertive, and altogether objectionable.

The very first occasion on which he visited "The Love-a-duck" he broke every rule of the masonic ring except the one which concerned getting drunk. The company was in session under its president, and he bounced into the circle and joined in the conversation. He interrupted the landlord in the middle of a story, and plainly hinted that he didn't believe him. He called him "old chap", and offered to stand him a drink. He then told a long, boring story about some obscure episode in his own life. The effect of this intrusion was that the landlord, who never replied to him at all, rose heavily from his seat and disappeared. The rest of the company tried to show by their chilling unresponsiveness that they disapproved of him. But Mr. Stourway was not the kind of person to be sensitive to this. He rattled on, occasionally taking tiny sips of his brandy-and-water. He even had the audacity to ask old Hargreaves who the fat disagreeable old buffer was! And poor old Hargreaves was so upset that he nearly cried. He could only murmur feebly:

"He's the landlord."

"H'm! a nice sort of landlord! Now, I know a landlord at——"

The company gradually melted away and left the stranger to sip his brandy-and-water alone.

Everybody hoped, of course, that this first visit would also be the last. But oh, no! The next evening, at the same time, in bounced Mr. Septimus Stourway, quite

uncrushed. Again the landlord disappeared, and the company melted away. The third night some of them tried snubbing him and being rude, but it had no effect at all. At every attempt of this sort he merely laughed in his empty way, and exclaimed :

"My dear fellow, just listen to me——"

Before a week was out Mr. Septimus Stourway began to get on the nerves of the town. He swaggered about the streets as though he was doing us a great honour by being there at all. His wife and son were also seen. His wife was a tall, vinegary looking woman in a semi-fashionable, semi-sporting get-up. She wore a monocle and a short skirt, and carried a cane. The boy was a spectacled, round-shouldered, unattractive-looking youth, more like the mother than the father in appearance. He never seemed to leave his mother's side for an instant.

It appeared that his name was Nick, and that he was the most remarkable boy for his age who had ever lived. He knew Latin, and Greek, and French, and history, and mathematics, and philosophy, and science. Also he had a beautiful nature. Mr. Stourway spent hours boring anyone he could get to listen, with the narration of his son's marvellous attributes. If the *habitués* of "The Love-a-duck" tired of Mr. Stourway, they became thoroughly fed up with his son.

It was on the following Wednesday evening that the dramatic incident happened in the bar-parlour of the famous inn. The landlord had continued his attitude of utter indifference to the interloper. He had been just as cheerful and entertaining, only when Mr. Stourway entered the bar he simply dried up. But during the last two days he appeared to be thinking abstractedly about something. He was annoyed.

On this Wednesday evening the usual company had again assembled, and the landlord appeared anxious to resume his former position of genial host, when in came Mr. Septimus Stourway again. He had not been in the previous evening, and everyone was hoping that at last he had realized that he was not wanted. Up rose the landlord at once, and went away. There was an almost uncontrolled groan from the rest. Mr. Stourway took his seat, and began to talk affably.

It was then observed that the landlord, instead of going right away, was hovering about behind the bar. I don't know how the conversation got round to poetry, but after a time Mr. Stourway started talking about his son's marvellous memory for poetry.

"That boy of mine, you know," he said, "he would simply astound you. He remembers everything. The poetry he's learnt off by heart! Miles and miles of it! I don't suppose there's another boy of his age in the country who could quote half as much."

It was then that the bomb-shell fell. The landlord was leaning across the bar, and suddenly his enormous voice rang out:

"I'll bet you five pounds to one that I know a little boy of five who could quote twice as much poetry as you son!"

There was a dead silence, and everybody looked from the landlord to Mr. Stourway. That gentleman grinned superciliously, then he rubbed his hands together and said:

"Well, well, that's interesting. I can't believe it. My son's eleven. A boy of five? Ha, ha! I'd like to get a wager like that!"

The landlord's voice, louder than ever, exclaimed:

"I'll bet you a hundred pounds to five!"

Mr. Stourway looked slightly alarmed, but his eyes glittered.

"A hundred pounds to five! I'm not a betting man, but, by God! I'll take that."

"Is your son shy?"

"Oh, no, he enjoys reciting poetry."

"Would he come here and have an open competition?"

"H'm. Well, well, I don't know. He might. I should have to ask his mother. Who is this wonderful boy you speak of?"

"My nephew over at Chagham. They could drive him over in the dog-cart."

It need hardly be said that the members of "The Love-a-duck" fraternity were worked up to a great state of excitement over this sudden challenge. What did it all mean? No one knew that old Seldom Right had any relatives in the country. But then he was always such a secretive old

boy about his own affairs. Could a little boy of five possibly remember and repeat more poetry—twice as much!—than this phenomenal Nick Stourway? How was it all to be arranged?

It became evident, however, that the landlord was very much in earnest. He had apparently thought out all the details. It should be an open competition. It could take place in the ball-room of the hotel. The two boys should stand on the platform with their parents, and should recite poems or blank verse in turn. A small committee of judges should count the lines. When one had exhausted his complete repertoire the other, of course, would have won; but it would be necessary for Stephen—that was the name of old Wright's nephew—to go on for double the number of lines that Nick had spoken to win the wager for his uncle.

When it was first put to him Mr. Stourway looked startled, but on going into the details he soon became eager. It was the easiest way of making a hundred pounds he had ever encountered. Of course the little boy might be clever and have a good memory, but that he could possibly recite *twice* as much as the wonderful Nick was unthinkable. Moreover his back was up, and he hated the landlord. He knew that he snubbed him on every occasion, and this would be an opportunity to score. There was just the mild risk of losing a fiver, and his wife to be talked over, but—he thought he could persuade her. The rumour of the competition spread like wildfire all over the town.

It was not only the chief topic of conversation at "The Love-a-duck" but at all places where men met and talked. It cannot be denied that a considerable number of bets were made. Mr. Seldom Right's tremendous optimism found him many supporters, but the great odds and the fact that he invariably lost in wagers of this sort drove many into the opposing camp of backers.

A committee of ways and means was appointed the following night after Mrs. Septimus Stourway had given her consent and Nick had signified his willingness to display his histrionic abilities to a crowd of admirers.

Old Hargreaves, Mr. Bean, and a schoolmaster named McFarlane were appointed the judges. The ball-room was to be open to anyone, and there was to be no charge for

admission. The date of the competition was fixed for the following Saturday afternoon, at five o'clock.

I must now apologize for intruding my own personality into this narrative. I would rather not do so, but it is inevitable. It is true my part in the proceedings was only that of a spectator, but from your point of view—and from mine—it was an exceedingly important part. I must begin with the obvious confession that I had visited "The Love-a-duck" on occasions, and that is the kind of adventure that one naturally doesn't make too much of. Nevertheless I can say with a clear conscience that I was not one of the inner ring. I had so far only made the most tentative efforts to get into the good graces of the landlord. But everyone in Tibbelsford was talking of the forthcoming remarkable competition, and I naturally made a point of turning up in good time.

I managed to get a seat in the fourth row, and I was very fortunate, for the ball-room was packed, and a more remarkable competition I have never attended. The three judges sat in the front row, facing the platform. The Stourway party occupied the right side of the platform and the Wrights the left. The landlord sat with his party, but in the centre, so that he could act as a kind of chairman. He appeared to be in high good-humour, and he came on first and made a few facetious remarks before the performance began. In the first place, he apologized for the lighting. It was certainly very bad. There originally had been footlights, but it was so long since they had been used that they were out of repair. The large room was only lighted by a gas chandelier in the centre, so that the stage was somewhat dim, but, as he explained, this would only help to obscure the blushes of the performers when they received the plaudits of such a distinguished gathering.

The Stourway party entered first. They came in from a door at the back of the platform, Mr. Stourway noisily nonchalant, talking to everyone at random, in a tail-coat, with grey spats; his wife in a sports skirt and a small hat, looking rather bored and disgusted; and the boy in an Eton jacket and collar with a bunchy tie, and his hair neatly brushed. He looked very much at home and confident. Numerous prize-distributions at which he had played a conspicuous part had evidently inured him to such an ordeal.

And then the other party entered, and the proceedings

seemed likely to end before they had begun. Mrs. Wright came on first, followed by a lady dressed in black, leading a most diminutive boy. They only reached the door when apparently the sight of the large audience frightened the small person, and he began to cry. The landlord and his wife rushed up and with the mother tried to encourage him, and after a few minutes they succeeded in doing so. The lady in black, however—who was presumably the widowed mother—picked him up and carried him in and sat him on her knee.

The audience became keenly excited, and everyone was laughing and discussing whether the affair would materialize or not. At length they seemed to be arranged, and the landlord came forward and said :

“Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to the competitors—Master Nick Stourway, Master Stephen Wright. Good gracious! It sounds as though I were announcing the competitors in a prize-ring. But this is to be a very peaceful competition—at least, I hope so! I think you all know the particulars. We’re simply going to enjoy ourselves, aren’t we, Nick? Aren’t we, Stephen?”

Nick smiled indulgently and said, “Yes, sir.”

Stephen glanced up at him for a second, and then buried his face in his mother’s lap.

“Well, well,” said the landlord, “I will now call on Master Nick to open the ball.”

Master Nick was nothing loth. He stood up and bowed, and holding his right arm stiff, and twiddling a button of his waistcoat with his left, he declaimed in ringing tones :

“It was the schooner *Hesperus*  
That sailed the wintry sea ;  
And the skipper had taken his little daughter  
To bear him company.”

There were twenty-two verses of this, of four lines each, and the audience were somewhat impatient, because they had not come there to hear Master Nick recite. They had come for the competition, and it was still an open question whether there would be any competition. They were anxiously watching Master Stephen. He spent most of the period of his rival’s recitation of this long poem with his

face buried in his mother's lap, in the dark corner of the platform. His mother stroked his hair and kept on whispering a word to him, and occasionally he would peer round at Nick and watch him for a few seconds; then he glanced at the audience, and immediately ducked out of sight again.

When Nick had finished, he bowed and sat down, and there was a mild round of applause. The judges consulted, and agreed that he had scored 88 lines.

"Now, what was going to happen?"

The small boy seemed to be shaking his head and stamping his feet, and his mother was talking to him. The landlord coughed. He was obviously a little nervous. He went over to the group and said in a cheerful voice:

"Now, Stephen, tell us a poem!"

A little piping voice said, "No!" and there were all the wriggles and shakes of the recalcitrant youngster. Murmurs ran round the room, and a lot of people were laughing. The Stourway party was extremely amused. At length the landlord took a chair near him, and produced a long stick of barley-sugar.

"Now, Stephen," he said, "if you won't talk to these naughty people, tell *me* a poem. Tell me that beautiful 'Hymn to Apollo' that you told me last winter."

The little boy looked up at him and grinned; then he looked at his mother. Her widow's veil covered the upper part of her face. She kissed him, and said:

"Go on, dear; tell Uncle Jim."

There was a pause; the small boy looked up and down, and then, fixing his eyes solemnly on the landlord's face, he suddenly began in a queer little lispng voice:

God of the golden bow,  
And of the golden lyre,  
And of the golden hair,  
And of the golden fire;  
Charioteer  
Round the patient year,  
Where—where slept thine ire?

It was a short poem, but its rendering was received with vociferous applause. There was going to be a competition, after all! People who had money at stake were laughing and slapping their legs, and people who hadn't were doing

the same. Everyone was on the best of terms with each other. There was a certain amount of trouble with the judges, as they didn't know the poem, and they didn't grasp the length of the lines. Fortunately the schoolmaster had come armed with books, and after some discussion the poem was found to have been written by Keats, and Master Stephen was awarded thirty-six lines. He was cheered, clapped and kissed by the landlord, and his aunt, and his mother.

Master Nick's reply to this was to recite “The Pied Piper of Hamelin”, a performance which bored everyone to tears, especially as he would persist in gesticulating and doing it in a manner as though he thought that the people had simply come to hear his performance. “The Pied Piper of Hamelin” is 195 lines. This made his score 283.

The small boy was still very shy, and seemed disinclined to continue, but the landlord said :

“Now, come on, Stephen ; I'm sure you remember some more beautiful poetry.”

At last, to everyone's surprise, he began to lisp :

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more——”

It was screamingly funny. He went right through the speech, and when he got to :

“Cry ‘God for Harry, England, and Saint George !’ ”

the applause was deafening. People were calling out, and some of the barrackers had to be rebuked by the landlord. King Henry's speech was only 35 lines, so Master Stephen's total was 71. Nick then retaliated with an appalling poem, which commenced :

She stood at the bar of Justice,  
A creature wan and wild,  
In form too small for a woman,  
In feature too old for a child.

Fortunately, it was not quite as long as the other two, and only brought him 60 lines, making a total of 343.

Stephen, who seemed to be gaining a little more confidence and entering into the spirit of the thing, replied with

Robert Herrick's "Ode to a Daffodil", a charming little effort, although it only brought in 20 lines.

Master Nick now broke into Shakespeare, and let himself go on :

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."

He only did twenty-three lines, however, before he broke down and forgot. The committee had arranged for this. It was agreed that in the event of either competitor breaking down, he should still score the lines up to where he broke down, and at the end he should be allowed to quote odd lines, provided there were more than one.

At this point there was a very amusing incident. Master Stephen hesitated for some time, and then *he* began "Friends, Romans, countrymen," etc., and he went right through the same speech without a slip! It was the first distinct score for the landlord's party, and Master Stephen was credited with 128 lines. The scores, however, were still 366 to 219 in Nick's favour, and he proceeded to pile on the agony by reciting "Beth Gelert". However, at the end of the twelfth verse he again forgot, and only amassed 48 lines.

Balanced against his mother's knee, and looking unutterably solemn—as far as one could see in the dim light—and only occasionally glancing at the audience, Stephen then recited a charming poem by William Blake called "Night", which also contained 48 lines.

Nick then collected 40 lines with "Somebody's Darling", and as a contrast to this sentimental twaddle Stephen attempted Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality". Unfortunately it was his turn to break down, but not till he had notched 92 lines. It was quite a feature of the afternoon that whereas Nick's contributions for the most part were the utmost trash, Stephen only did good things.

It would perhaps be tedious to chronicle the full details of the poems attempted and the exact number of lines scored, although, as a matter of fact, at the time I did keep a careful record. But on that afternoon it did not appear tedious, except when Nick let himself go rather freely over some quite commonplace verse. Even then there was always the excitement as to whether he would break down. The audience indeed found it thrilling, and it became more and more

exciting as it went on, for it became apparent that both boys were getting to the end of their tether. They both began to forget, and the judges were kept very busy, and the parents were as occupied as seconds in a prize-ring. It must have been nearly half-past six when Master Nick eventually gave out. He started odds and ends, and forgot, and his parents were pulled up for prompting. He collected a few odd lines, and amassed a total of 822, a very considerable amount for a boy of his age.

At this point he was leading by 106 lines. So for Stephen to win the wager for the landlord he would not only have to score that odd 106, but he would have to remember an additional 822 lines! And he already gave evidence of forgetting! There was a fresh burst of betting in odd parts of the hall, and Dick Toom was offering 10 to 1 against the landlord's *protégé* and not getting many takers. The great thing in his favour was that he seemed to have quite lost his nervousness. He was keen on the job, and he seemed to realize that it *was* a competition, and that he had got to do his utmost. The landlord's party were allowed to talk to him and to make suggestions, but not to prompt if he forgot. There was a short interval, in which milk and other drinks were handed round. The landlord had one of the other drinks, and then he said :

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to ask your indulgence to be as quiet as possible. My small nephew has to recall 928 lines to win the competition, and he is going to try to do it."

The announcement was received with cheers. And then Stephen started again. He began excellently with Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale", and scored 80 lines, and without any pause went on to Milton's "L'Allegro", of which he delivered 126 lines before breaking down. He paused a little, and then did odds and ends of verses, some complete, and some not. Thomas Hood's "Departure of Summer" (14 lines), Shelley's "To-Night" (35) and a song by Shelley commencing :

Rarely, rarely comest thou  
Spirit of Delight! (48 lines)

I will not enumerate all these poems, but he amassed altogether 378 lines in this way. Then he had another brief rest, and reverted once more to Shakespeare. In his little

sing-song voice, without any attempt at dramatic expression, he reeled off 160 lines of the Balcony Scene from *Romeo and Juliet*; 96 lines of the scene between Hamlet and the Queen; 44 lines of the Brutus and Cassius quarrel; 31 of Jaques's speech on "All the world's a stage". It need hardly be said that by this time the good burghers of Tibbelsford were in a state of the wildest excitement.

The schoolmaster announced that Master Stephen had now scored 689 of the requisite 928, so that he only wanted 240 more to win. Mr. Stourway was biting his nails and looking green. Mrs. Stourway looked as though she was disgusted with her husband for having brought her among these common people. Nick sneered superciliously.

But, in the meantime, there was no question but that Master Stephen himself was getting distressed. His small voice was getting huskier and huskier, and tears seemed not far off. I heard Mrs. Rusbridger, sitting behind me, remark: "Poor little mite! I calls it a shime!"

It was also evident that he was getting seriously to the end of his quoting repertoire. He had no other long speeches. The landlord's party gathered round him and whispered. He tried again, short stanzas and odd verses, sometimes unfinished. He kept the schoolmaster very busy; but he blundered on. By these uncertain stages he managed to add another 127 lines; and then he suddenly brought off a veritable *tour de force*. It was quite uncanny. He quoted 109 lines of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*! The matter was quite unintelligible to the audience, and they were whispering to each other and asking what it was. When he broke down, the schoolmaster announced that it was quite in order, and that Master Stephen's total lines quoted now amounted to 1640, and therefore he only required four lines to win!

Even then the battle was apparently not over. Everyone was cheering and making such a noise that the small boy could not understand it, and he began crying. A lot of people in the audience were calling out "Shame!" and there was all the appearance of a disturbance. The landlord's party were very occupied. It was several minutes before order was restored, and then the landlord rapped on the table and called out "Order! Order!"

He drank a glass of water, and there was dead silence. Stephen's mother held the little boy very tight, and smiled

at him. At last, raising his voice for this last despairing effort, he declaimed quite loudly :

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd  
Of the two Worlds so wisely—they are thrust  
Like foolish Prophets forth ; their Words to Scorn  
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

The cheers which greeted this triumphant climax were split by various disturbances, the most distressing coming from Stephen himself, for almost as he uttered the last word he gave a yell, and burst into sobs. And he sobbed, and sobbed, and sobbed. And his mother picked him up and rocked him, and the landlord and his wife did what they could. But it was quite hopeless. Stephen was finished. His mother picked him up and hurried out of the door at the back with him. The Stourway party melted away. There were no more speeches, but people crowded on to the platform, and a lot of the women waited to just kiss Stephen before he went away ; but Mrs. Wright came back and said the poor child was very upset. She was afraid they ought not to have let him do it. His mother was putting him to bed in one of the rooms, and they were giving him some sal volatile. He would be all right soon. Of course it was a tremendous effort—such a tiny person, too !

Someone offered to go for the doctor, but Mrs. Wright said they would see how he was, and if he wasn't better in half an hour's time they'd send over to Dr. Winch.

Everyone was congratulating the landlord, and he was clapping hands and saying :

“A marvellous boy ! a marvellous boy ! I knew he would do it !”

The party gradually broke up.

I must now again revert to myself. I was enormously impressed by what I had seen and heard, and for the rest of the evening I could think of nothing else. After dinner I went out for a stroll. It was early March, and unseasonably cold. When I got down to the bridge, over which the high-road runs across the open country to Tisehurst, large snow-flakes were falling. I stood there for some time, looking at our dim little river, and thinking of the landlord and Stephen. And as I gazed around me I began to wonder what it was about the snow-flakes which seemed to dovetail

with certain subconscious movements going on within me.

And suddenly a phrase leapt into my mind. It was :

“Rotten cotton gloves !”

Rotten cotton gloves ! What was the connection ? The snow, the mood, something about Stephen’s voice quoting “The Faerie Queene”. Very slowly the thing began to unfold itself. And when I began to realize it all, I said to myself, “Yes, my friend, it was the *Faerie Queene* which gave the show away. The rest might have been possible. You were getting rather hard put to it !” The snow was falling heavily. It was Christmas-time—good Lord ! I did not like to think how long ago. Thirty years ? Forty years ? My sister and I at Drury Lane pantomime. “Rotten cotton gloves !” Yes, that was it ! I could remember nothing at all of the performance. But who was that great man they spoke of ? The star attraction ?—Some name like “The Great Borodin”, the world’s most famous humorist and ventriloquist. We were very excited, Phyllis and I, very small people then, not, surely, much older than Stephen himself. I could not remember the great Borodin, but I remembered that one phrase. There was a small lay figure which said most amusing things. It was called— No, I have forgotten. It was dressed in an Eton suit and it wore rather dilapidated-looking white cotton gloves. And every now and then, in the middle of a dialogue or discourse, it broke off, looked at its hands, and muttered :

“Rotten cotton gloves !”

It became a sort of catch-phrase in London in those days. On buses and trains people would murmur “Rotten cotton gloves !” A certain vague something about the way that Stephen recited Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. . . . Was it possible ?

And then certain very definite aspects of the competition presented themselves to my mind’s eye. It had all been very cleverly stage-managed. It must be observed that Stephen neither walked on nor walked off. He did not even stand. He hardly looked at the audience. And then the lighting was inexcusably bad. Even some of the lights in the central chandelier had unaccountably failed. And the landlord’s party had chosen the darkest side of the stage. No one had spoken to the boy. No one had seen him arrive, and immediately after the competition he had gone straight to bed.

I tried to probe my memory for knowledge of “The

Great Borodin", but at eight or nine one does not take great interest in these details. I know there was something. . . . I remember hearing my parents talking about it—some great scandal soon after I had seen him. He was disgraced, I am sure. I have a vague idea he was in some way well-connected. He was to marry a great lady, and then perhaps he eloped with a young barmaid? I cannot be certain. It was something like that. I know he disappeared from public life, for in after years, when people had been to similar performances I had heard our parents say :

"Ah, but you should have seen 'The Great Borodin'."

These memories, the peculiar thrill of the competition, the cold air, the lazy snow-flakes drifting hither and thither, all excited me. I walked on farther and farther into the country trying to piece it all together. I liked the landlord, and I shared the popular dislike of Mr. Stourway.

After a time I returned, and making my way towards the north of "The Love-a-duck". If I hurried I should be there ten minutes or so before closing-time.

When I entered the large bar-parlour the place was very crowded. I met old Hargreaves by the door. I'm afraid a good many of the rules of the society had been broken that evening. Old Hargreaves was not the only one who had had quite enough liquid refreshment. Everybody was in high spirits, and they were still all talking about the competition. I met Mr. Bean near the fireplace, and I said :

"Well, Mr. Bean, and have you heard how the boy is?"

"Oh, ay," he replied. "He soon got all right. Mrs. Wright says he were just a bit upset. He went off home not an hour since."

"Did you see him?"

"Eh? Oh, no, I didn't see'm. Mrs. Wright says he looked quite hisself."

The landlord was moving ponderously up and down behind the bar. I thought he looked tired, and there were dark rims round his eyes. I moved up towards the bar, and he did not notice me. The noise of talking was so loud that one could speak in a normal voice without being heard. Everything had apparently gone off quite successfully. Mr. Stourway had sent along his cheque for five pounds and it was not reckoned that he would ever show his face in "The Love-a-duck" again. I waited.

At last I noticed that the landlord was quite alone. He was leaning against the serving-hatch, flicking some crumbs from his waistcoat, as though waiting for the moment of release. I took my glass and sidled up to him. I leant forward as though to speak. He glanced at me, and inclined his head with a bored movement. When his ear was within a reasonable distance, I said quietly :

“Rotten cotton gloves !”

I shall never forget the expression on the face of the landlord as he slowly raised his head. I was conscious of being a pinpoint in a vast perspective. His large, rather colourless eyes appeared to sweep the whole room. They were moreover charged with a perfectly uncontrolled expression of surprise, and a kind of uncontrolled lustre of ironic humour. I had a feeling that if he laughed it would be the end of all things. He did not laugh ; he looked lugubriously right through my face, and breathed heavily. Then he swayed slightly from side to side, and looking at my hat, said :

“I’ve got some cherry-brandy here you’d like. You must have a glass, Mr.—”

Now, I do not wish to appear to you either as a prig, a traitor, or a profiteer. I am indeed a very ordinary, perhaps over-human member of Tibbelsford society. If I have taken certain advantages of the landlord, you must at any rate give me the credit of being the only member of a large audience who had the right intuitions at the right moment. In all other respects you must acknowledge that I have treated him rather well.

In any case, I became prominent in the inner circle without undergoing the tortuous novitiateship of the casual stranger.

The landlord and I are the best of friends to-day, although we exchange no confidences. I can break all the rules of the masonic understanding without getting into trouble. Some of the others are amazed at the liberties I take.

And in these days, when licensing restrictions are so severe, when certain things are not to be got (officially), and when I see my friends stealing home to a bone-dry supper, I only have to creep into the bar of “The Love-a-duck” and whisper “Rotten cotton gloves !” and lo ! all these forbidden luxuries are placed at my disposal ! Can you blame me ?

I have said that we exchange no confidences, and indeed I feel that that would be going too far, taking too great an advantage of my position. There is only one small point I would love to clear up, and I dare not ask. Presuming my theory to be right about “The Great Borodin”—which was he?

The landlord? Or the widow?



W. A. DARLINGTON

*The Gold Cup*

W. A. Darlington was schoolmaster, soldier and civil servant before he began journalism and authorship. He is well known as a dramatic critic and authority on the drama, and he has written a number of humorous books, including *Alf's Button*.



## THE GOLD CUP

### I

**S**IR GEOFFREY DE TOURS, that noble knight famed for skill and strength of arm shown in a thousand tourneys, suddenly reined in Boiredeleau (his no less famous charger).

"Stephen!" he called in anguished tones, "I've got a stiff neck."

Stephen the Silent, his esquire, who was not famous at all so far, came out of his day-dream about the Lady Lynette with a jerk.

"A stiff neck?" he repeated in horror.

"Yes. This confounded helmet must let in a draught somewhere. Here, help me down, and take the beastly thing off! Gently, now!"

With infinite care Stephen assisted the afflicted knight-errant to alight, and removed the offending headpiece. Sir Geoffrey sat down on a fallen log with his head poked forward at a most uncomfortable angle and caressed his neck. Stephen began to rub it.

"That's a bit better," said Sir Geoffrey gloomily. "These things come on so suddenly. I just raised my left arm like this and—ow!"

Stephen knew better than to speak during the sulphurous silence that followed. He massaged hopefully, and by degrees his employer regained the power of articulate speech.

"This is your fault, my lad," he said irritably, at last. "I must have got hot in that little affair with the Red Knight of the Forest this morning, and you forgot to rub me down afterwards."

Stephen went on rubbing. He thought it best not to remind Sir Geoffrey that he had offered—nay, begged—to rub his master down, and had met with a scornful refusal. The fact was that Sir Geoffrey was getting elderly. He was

still one of the finest professional knights-errant in the country; indeed, he had already won the All-England Gold Cup (presented by the Duke of the Land of Sagesse) nine times, and was generally expected to win it again in a fortnight's time, and so make it his own property. Still, the fact remained that he was beginning to find a long day in armour rather trying.

But he hated to be reminded of his age; so Stephen sighed and rubbed and said nothing.

Sir Geoffrey hunched himself up miserably. "Why is it," he asked, "that a little thing like a crick in the neck makes you long for death? Ow! . . ."

He became unprintable once more as the crick caught him.

"One thing is certain," he announced when he was calmer. "I must knock off for a day or two. I can't afford to take risks with the Championship so near. Must be fit when we get to Sagesse—eh, Stephen?"

"Yes, indeed, Sir Knight."

Stephen's fervour was not all, or even chiefly, due to loyalty to his master. At the Castle of Sagesse dwelt the Lady Lynette, the Duke's beautiful daughter, whom Stephen had long worshipped from afar. During the Championship meeting it would be possible for a humble squire to gaze on her loveliness and dream of the time when he should himself be a knight, able to break a lance in her honour. For this, if all went well, he would not have long to wait. Sir Geoffrey had once promised him, in an expansive moment, that on the day the old veteran won the Cup for the tenth time, Stephen should receive his knighthood.

He saw himself setting forth into the world with Lynette's favour worn proudly in his helm, and Lynette's white hand waving him farewell. True, he had never yet dared to speak to the lady, and had little reason to suppose that she even knew of his existence. But——

"Are you deaf?" The exasperated voice of Sir Geoffrey dispersed his thoughts. "My engagement-book! How many more times must I ask?"

Stephen hastily produced a parchment and unrolled it.

"Nothing important, thank goodness!" said Sir Geoffrey thankfully, reading over Stephen's shoulder and breathing heavily down the back of his neck. "What's that you've got down against Tuesday? 'Y. the B.' it looks like. Is that a 'B.'?"

"Yolande the Beautiful, Sir Knight," translated Stephen in the hushed voice of one standing on holy ground. He was an idealist where women were concerned.

Sir Geoffrey was not.

"Another of those confounded females in trouble!" he said disgustedly.

Stephen looked pained. His adoration of woman was only equalled by his hero-worship for the misogynistic old knight. To have to listen while one of his idols blasphemed against the other was a trying experience.

"What's Yolande's little bother, anyhow?" asked Sir Geoffrey. "I forget."

Stephen's ingenuous countenance assumed a shocked expression. Yolande and her adventure were on the lips of every bard—the latest society sensation, in fact. But Sir Geoffrey always composed himself for slumber when a bard began to tune his harp.

"The King of the Marshlands carried her off as she walked in the forest," explained Stephen. "But she repulsed his advances."

"More fool she," commented Sir Geoffrey.

"But," said Stephen earnestly, "the King of the Marshlands has three eyes, and is reputed to be a wizard."

Sir Geoffrey was unimpressed.

"If she wasn't prepared to take her chance," he insisted, "she ought not to have gone into the forest at all. There ought to be a law against it. Every chit of a girl who wants a husband nowadays simply walks out into the forest looking for trouble, and then grumbles when she gets it. I call the whole thing unmaidenly, and it ought to be stopped. And owing to the absurd laws of chivalry, a knight can't refuse when he's called upon to rescue them—except for reasons of health," he added, as a twinge in his shoulder-blade warned him that excitement was bad for him just at present.

"Well," he came back with suddenness to the matter in hand. "What did His Majesty do?"

"The fair maiden," said Stephen, "is to be thrown to the Seven-Headed Bull, unless she promises to marry the King, or a champion appears to rescue her."

"That's where I was to have come in, I suppose? Humph! I'm well out of that. This freak-animal fighting is apt to be messy. Give me a straightforward two-some every time.

Just send a varlet to Miss Yolande with a note, will you, regretting that circumstances over which——”

“But the maiden—!” gasped Stephen.

“Oh, she’ll get somebody. Plenty of enthusiastic young idiots about. And if she doesn’t, she’ll just have to marry the man. Serve her right too.”

“Would I were a knight,” muttered Stephen.

Sir Geoffrey eyed him keenly.

“A good thing you’re not,” he said. “You’re quite a promising fighter, my lad, and I will say you make a first-rate sparring-partner; but seven-headed bulls take experience. You’ll be a knight quite soon enough for your own good—if I win the Cup.”

As night wore on, Sir Geoffrey’s crick remained so painful that he could not continue his journey. There was no inn at hand, so Stephen unpacked the old campaigner’s patent portable pavilion, and pitched it in the forest. Then, having strewn a bed of rushes for his master, he went off to try and find a pharmaceutical wizard with a balsam guaranteed to cure cricks. His search took him far afield, and he was gone till morning.

With the dawn Sir Geoffrey awoke from a fitful sleep. He had found it impossible to sleep at all except by tucking his head under his armpit like a bird. His temper was worse than ever.

“Stephen,” he called.

“Good morning, Sir Geoffrey,” replied a strange voice in an ingratiating tone.

Sir Geoffrey turned over in bed. In the doorway of his domicile stood a tall and rather weedy youth flamboyantly dressed in scarlet velvet and yellow satin. In his cap was a long, curling feather. On his back was a harp.

“I,” volunteered the new-comer, “am Bertram the Bard. You know the name, perhaps?”

“I do not,” replied Sir Geoffrey, turning over again and closing his eyes,

Sir Geoffrey disapproved of bards in general. He considered poetry unmanly, though he would have admitted, if taxed, that bardism had been a respectable profession—once. In the old days, when bards had confined themselves to wander-

ing from castle to castle singing songs of derring-do, they had been glad enough to receive in return the shelter of a roof, a humble place at the table, and an occasional suit of old clothes. But now the profession was becoming commercialized. The modern race of bards had realized their importance as the only news-distributing medium of the country. They had begun to dress well, and to demand a place at table above the salt. For instance, here was this Bertram smirking at him like an equal.

Sir Geoffrey disapproved of him exactly as his modern counterpart, sitting in his club with the *Morning Post* on his knees, disapproves of other dailies.

"Go away!" he said forgetting his disability and sitting up suddenly. "Ow!" he shrieked, remembering it.

"What's the matter?" asked Bertram, all solicitude.

"Crick," Sir Geoffrey replied shortly.

"Let me rub it for you."

Sir Geoffrey tried to protest, but Bertram seemed to notice nothing. And then, as the pain began to abate under his soothing touch, Sir Geoffrey began to feel less disagreeable.

"Is there any news?" he asked.

"News?" Bertram's face lighted up at once. "I should think there is! In fact I came here especially to interview you about it." He unstrapped his harp from his back as he spoke. "You haven't heard the Gold Cup sensation yet, I suppose?"

Sir Geoffrey actually looked interested.

"No. What is it? Let's have it."

Bertram struck a chord on his harp, and began in a throaty tenor.

"A thousand knights are hastening up  
To battle for the Golden Cup  
To fight for honour——"

"Excuse me," interrupted the knight impatiently. "But—*need* you sing it?"

Bertram's hand paused in mid-air, in the very act of striking a chord. He seemed surprised and relieved.

"As a matter of fact, I much prefer not to, only most people insist. It's a fearful strain putting everything in rhyme."

"What *has* happened, then?"

"I'll tell you," said Bertram. "The Lady Lynette, daughter

of the Duke of Sagesse, is now of marriageable age; and the duke has decided that whoever wins the Cup this year shall win the lady too."

"WHAT!"

Sir Geoffrey, eyes and mouth wide open with horror, did not notice that his ejaculation was echoed with even deeper horror from the door of the tent, where Stephen had just entered.

"And I thought," concluded Bertram, "that you, being the favourite according to the latest betting, might care to give me your views on the innovation."

He produced an ink-horn, a quill, and an ivory tablet and prepared to take notes.

"Views?" shouted Sir Geoffrey. "It's a scandal!"

"When bold Sir Geoff. the news received,"

murmured Bertram to himself, writing busily,

"He was particularly peeved."

His pen paused.

"A crying scandal," went on the knight. "I believe it's a put-up job to palm off this girl on me. The hussy's after my money."

There was an indignant sound from Stephen, still frozen with horror in the doorway.

Bertram's pen was once more moving rapidly. The interview was taking shape.

"His bearings grew extremely hot.

'Gadzooks,' quoth he, 'this is a plot!'

he read quietly. But not quietly enough.

"Confound you, sir," Sir Geoffrey roared. "Will you take yourself off, or I'll dust your new coat with my mace, stiff neck or no stiff neck."

Bertram went. He had got all he wanted.

"Stephen," said Sir Geoffrey, "I've half a mind to withdraw my entry; only I cannot lose my chance of the Cup for any fortune-hunting chit of a girl. But if I win her, she'd better look out for herself, that's all. She needs a lesson. She shall have it."

At these dreadful words Stephen's whole soul revolted. He drew himself up to his full height.

He held out a small package.

"Your balsam, Sir Knight," he said formally. "And to-day I must leave your service."

Sir Geoffrey stared at him.

"Leave?" he said stupidly. "Leave *now*, and me with a stiff neck? But *why*?"

"Urgent private affairs," said Stephen. And without another word he turned and left the pavilion.

## II

A fortnight later—on Monday, July 22nd, to be quite exact—the great Castle of Sagesse was all a-bustle with life. Entrants for the Gold Cup were pouring in from every side; for the Duke was fabulously wealthy and the Lady Lynette was his only child. On the morrow the preliminary eliminating rounds were to begin.

The throng of knights was far greater than could be accommodated even in the Duke's enormous dwelling-place. Every scrap of house-room that could be spared had been requisitioned as a temporary sleeping chamber. One late-comer had even been given a dungeon that did not happen to be in use at the moment, where he slept—rather uneasily—on the rack. Later comers still had perforce to pitch their pavilions in the great courtyard or the adjacent meadows, and to come to the Castle only for meals and entertainment.

At this moment the voice of Bertram the Bard could be heard in the hall, relating (with harp obbligato) his last tit-bit of stirring adventure—the rescue of Yolande the Beautiful from her seven-headed bull by a mysterious knight in black armour. Every day Bertram's excellent service of couriers brought him news of some fresh deed of prowess by the Black Knight; but none knew who he was. His doings and (of course) the praise of the beauty of the Lady Lynette kept Bertram going for three performances (or editions) a day.

From an upper window of the Castle, a little later in the afternoon, the Lady Lynette herself surveyed the crowded courtyard with an expression of excitement shadowed with doubt.

Below in the foreshortened courtyard she could see nothing but knights, knights, and yet more knights. It was rather wonderful to think that he who of all this great gathering showed himself to be bravest and strongest would, in the Cup final three weeks from to-day, win for himself the right to be her husband. But it would be terrible if the winner turned out to be not the dashing young knight of her dreams but a hard-bitten old woman-hater like Sir Geoffrey!

She put the thought resolutely aside. Sir Geoffrey must not win. His esquire now—that nice, shy boy who stared at her so—if he were only a knight, and could tilt in her honour. . . . She put that thought aside too.

After all, if the worst came to the worst, she could bob her hair and go out into the forest, disguised as a page. She had a suit all ready. It was only this consideration that had induced her to agree to her father's old-fashioned way of choosing a husband.

As she gazed out of the window, she half hoped that Sir Geoffrey would win after all. She rather fancied herself as a boy.

Suddenly her eye was caught by a spot of bright colour, standing out against the background of steel in the courtyard. A lady had arrived at the great gate, and was now riding up to the Castle escorted by a tall knight all in black armour.

Lynette slipped down from the window, a puzzled expression on her face; and a few minutes later Marianne, her maid, threw open the door and announced: "The Lady Yolande the Beautiful."

"My dear," said Lynette, running across the room and clasping her visitor in her arms. "How lovely to see you!"

They made excellent foils for each other, these two—a fact which possibly explains why they had been inseparable friends at school. Lynette was all life and colour, Yolande was slim and pale and dark and statuesque.

"We've been hearing of all your adventures," went on the hostess gaily. "Are you going to marry the Black Knight? And what's he like? I think it's all frightfully romantic!"

"Romantic!" repeated Yolande, sinking down upon a couch. "Good heavens!"

Lynette noticed suddenly that her friend seemed tired and out of temper.

"Why?" she asked innocently. "The Black Knight—don't you love him? And who is he?"

Yolande laughed bitterly.

"For the last week," she said, "I've been forced to follow that man about while he fought his absurd duels—getting himself fit, he said—and all that time I've never even seen his face. He never takes his helmet off—I might as well fall in love with a saucepan. Besides, he's cracked about you!"

"Me!"

"Yes. He's got a picture of you from somewhere which he worships. And you're the only subject he'll talk about and his one idea is to win this silly Cup—and you! . . . I tell you, my dear, I'm so sick of hearing about you that I can hardly bear to look at you now."

Lynette got up.

"Come and see your room," she suggested tactfully.

Yolande followed her dispiritedly.

"I think I won't appear again," she said. "I need a rest. You won't mind?"

"Not at all. You sleep the clock round, and you'll feel better."

Yolande sat down on the bed.

"What a fool I was not to marry the King of the Marshlands," she mused aloud. "He's quite an old dear, really, though he's not a beauty and his castle *is* damp. And it was nice of him to carry me off."

"Why didn't you?"

"Oh, the usual thing. . . . I thought it would be thrilling to be rescued, and there was always Marshlands to fall back on if nobody turned up. I wonder, if I went back *now*. . . . Oh, well! Good night, Lynette dear. You're a good sort."

Lynette, speeding back to her own apartments, was thankful that she had not Yolande to entertain. She had other things to do.

"Marianne!" she called excitedly. "Get me out my page's suit."

Half an hour later a slim page carrying a lantern paused outside the Black Knight's pavilion and read a notice inscribed on parchment at the entrance.

## THE BLACK KNIGHT

it said. Underneath was another, which read :

*ANYBODY who enters here without permission will be forthwith SLAIN.—B.K.*

A light was burning inside the pavilion. Lynette was not a duke's daughter for nothing. She slipped very quietly through the flap. The Black Knight—still in armour except for his helmet—had his back to her, and all she could see of him was a mass of yellow hair. He was gazing with adoration at something which she recognized, with a throb, as a miniature portrait of herself.

She must have made some small sound, for suddenly he sprang up and faced round with his mace upraised to strike.

Then both fell back a step in sheer surprise.

"You!" they both said.

The Black Knight was Stephen.

The mace dropped from his right hand. He tried involuntarily to conceal the miniature in his left. His face went pink and he began to perspire.

"I—er—you—er—I—" he stammered.

She gave him no help whatever. Here was a man who had bored poor Yolande to death for days with his talk of herself; and now that she stood before him he went dumb. He did not even pretend to be taken in by her disguise either. She waited. He came a step nearer.

"We—er—you—er—that is—" He tried again, taking another step forward. She did not move.

Suddenly she held out her hands, and he realized that words were not necessary. He covered the intervening space which remained in one large stride, and left the sympathetic but tactful author no alternative but to put a row of stars.

. . . . .

"For heaven's sake," said Lynette, a little later, "take off that breastplate. It's like—like hugging a cooking-stove," she went on, conscious that the metaphor owed something to Yolande's remark about loving a saucepan.

He obeyed.

"I think this is too perfectly splendid," she went on, when

they were once again comfortably settled. "How nice of old Sir Geoffrey to dub you knight in time for the tournament."

He blushed and hesitated. Then he decided to make a clean breast of it.

"I'm not one," he confessed.

She gazed at him, horror-struck.

"But—but if they find out, you'll be disgraced for ever. You know how strict the council are about people who enter on false pretences."

"I know. That's why I'm the Black Knight."

She gazed at him anxiously.

"You oughtn't to have done it."

"I had to," he answered simply. He told her of Sir Geoffrey's ungentlemanly threats concerning herself. "After that I had to have a shot at beating him. If I win, darling, we shall have to run away and get married before they find out who I am."

"Rather!" Her voice was enthusiastic. "But *can* you beat Sir Geoffrey?"

"Only by a fluke," he answered, with honesty.

She shook her head.

"There must be no fluke about it," she said firmly. "Not now!" She pressed a button on a talisman, which hung by a chain from her neck.

Stephen sighed.

"But what can we do?" he began.

"You leave this to me!" she said. "There's an old witch who arranges things for me sometimes. She'll be here in a minute."

A moment later the flap was thrown aside, and an aged crone appeared, carrying the broomstick upon which she had presumably made her journey.

"Good evening," she said briskly, to Lynette, taking not the slightest notice of Stephen. "You sent for me."

"Yes. This is Sir Stephen. I want him to win the Gold Cup. Can you help me?"

"Nothing easier. An enchanted spear——"

"Oh," broke in Stephen, "but enchanted weapons are against the rules."

"As I was saying," resumed the witch in a disagreeable tone. "An enchanted spear would be against the rules, but

there'd be nothing to forbid an enchanted shield, against which all weapons would break."

"Oh," said Stephen slowly, "but would that be——"

"You can't say a shield's a weapon," said the old woman cantankerously.

"No, but——"

Lynette put her hand on his arm.

"For *my* sake," she pleaded, "I must have you safe and sound."

"Oh, well——" he said, with a gesture of consent.

"Give me your shield," said the witch. She sat herself down cross-legged in a corner and began to coat Stephen's shield with a queer butter-coloured varnish from a bottle, muttering incantations all the while.

In the distance a cock crew suddenly, and Lynette began hastily to bundle her hair back under her jaunty feathered cap.

"I must go," she whispered, "or I shall be discovered. To-morrow we shall meet again as strangers, but, remember, I love you."

Stephen made a strange noise in his throat, and took her once more in his arms. She nodded towards the witch.

"Be sure to reward the old lady well," she whispered. "She's a mercenary old wretch."

The slim page flitted back to the Castle, leaving Stephen aghast. "Reward the old lady well!" It was easy for Lynette, a rich man's spoilt daughter, to speak of money in this airy way. Stephen was as poor as a rat. Even his second-hand armour and his pavilion were hired by the week, and all he possessed, after paying the merchant the deposit he demanded, was a crown and a few odd groats.

"There," said the witch. "A neat job. So long as you can catch the blows on your shield, young man, you'll be safe."

She picked up her broom. "A neat job," she repeated, with intention.

There was nothing else for it. Stephen produced his crown.

"I'm—I'm sorry," he mumbled. "All I have. Very sorry—er——"

She took the coin in silence, but departed with a nasty look in her eye. Stephen felt decidedly uncomfortable.

He would have felt even less easy had he followed her. She went up to a sentry.

"Young man," she said, "who is the favourite in this tournament?"

"Sir Geoffrey de Tours."

"And where does he lodge?"

"In the chief guest-room of the Castle."

She went in at a postern-gate, muttering to herself. "A crown?" she said. "A crown? Some people seem to prize the Gold Cup altogether too cheap."

. . . . .

The preliminary rounds of that year's tournament excited little public interest. No well-known champions were engaged until the first round proper. But the Black Knight (who, it was noticed, was using a curious butter-coloured shield) came through these eliminating trials in such style that his price shortened daily. Sir Geoffrey was still easily favourite, and it was remarked that he was looking extremely well and confident. When the proper draw was published, Lynette scanned it with anxious eyes. Sir Geoffrey's name was in the top half of the list, Stephen's in the bottom half, so that if these two redoubtable champions were destined to meet, it must be in the final round. So far, so good. But it was a shock to her to discover when Sir Geoffrey first took the field, that his shield also was of a familiar buttery hue.

There is no need for long description. Bertram the Bard did, it is true, run to thousands of lines every evening in describing the day's battles.

But then Bertram did not know what we know about Stephen, nor did he suspect what we must suspect about Sir Geoffrey. Suffice it to say that while the very flower of chivalry had entered their names for this tournament, no one could stand against the onslaught of Sir Geoffrey or of the Black Knight. Every spear, as it touched the yellow shield of either of these two, shivered into fragments and left its owner weaponless and unhorsed.

Each day the excitement grew. What would happen when these two invincible champions met in the final? The public asked this question, the bookmakers asked it with special anxiety. But nobody asked it with more complete bewilder-

ment than the three people most concerned—the two contestants and the Queen of Beauty.

According to Bertram, the crowd on the day of the final round broke all records. Every stand was full to suffocation, and even standing-room among the varletry commanded unheard-of prices. All the nobility and gentry were present except the Lady Yolande, who (it was understood) had departed on a visit to the King of the Marshlands the previous day.

The Lady Lynette was looking pale and anxious, and beneath her gorgeous robes as Queen of Beauty, she had donned her page's suit. She could hardly bear to look as the Duke, her father, gave the signal for battle to be joined.

The two champions charged. There was a sound as of a thousand zinc pails rolling down stone steps, and when Lynette opened her eyes she saw both antagonists safe in the saddle, and both spears shivered to fragments. Each rode back for a new spear. Once more the champions charged. More zinc pails crashed down more steps, and as the dust cleared away—but why labour the point? That first encounter repeated itself ninety-five times, till the ground was littered with broken spears, and a rowdy element in the cheap stands began to "barrack". The Duke, who had been getting increasingly restless for some time, went over to his daughter.

"I say, Linnie," he said, "we can't have this. They're using enchanted shields, I believe."

"Well," she said, "why not?"

He stared.

"It's hardly the thing, is it?"

"Shields aren't weapons."

"Nor they are." This seemed to be a new idea to him. He went back to the judge's box, pondering it. Meanwhile the champions continued to meet and the riff-raff to barrack. After the hundred and nineteenth impact the two combatants were seen to be reeling in their saddles from sheer weariness. The Duke could stand it no longer. A herald was sent out into the lists, bearing two ordinary shields, which—after a brief colloquy—he gave in exchange for the two butter coloured monstrosities. The barracking died down. Everybody understood that the climax of this strange duel was at hand at last. Wearily, for the hundred and twentieth time, the champions charged. And this time the force of the impact rolled both from their horses. They rose unsteadily,

drew their swords, and went at it hammer-and-tongs on foot.

Here at last was the thrill for which everybody had been hoping. Mad cheering burst forth on every side; the Duke leant forward with parted lips. And in her box the Queen of Beauty sat white-faced, with her hands gripping the rail before her.

It was no longer a contest of skill, but of sheer endurance. The champions hewed and hacked at one another. Both felt their strength failing after their strenuous and unusual morning. Both approaching the breaking point, Sir Geoffrey, the older man, reached it first. All of a sudden his blade flew up, striking Stephen on his second-hand helmet as it did so, and tearing away the visor, so that his face was visible. The sword described an arc in the air, and as it reached the ground Stephen put his foot upon it and called his adversary to yield.

But Sir Geoffrey, after one astonished glance at his rival's face, was hobbling towards the judge's box.

"Sir Duke," he said loudly, "I claim the victory. This Black Knight is no knight after all, but my runaway squire, Stephen. I claim the Cup."

Pandemonium seemed to break loose. The bookmakers, who were just preparing to pay out over Stephen, paused irresolute. Everybody else swarmed into the lists and began talking at once. In the middle of the vast crowd was a little group, consisting of the Duke, Sir Geoffrey, Stephen, and Lynette. She had her arm through her lover's, and was facing them defiantly.

"Is this true?" asked the Duke severely.

Stephen nodded a shamed head.

"But why did you do it?" asked Sir Geoffrey, in puzzled tones. "You must be mad."

Stephen's eyes flashed. He squeezed Lynette's hand.

"You said you'd teach her a lesson," he said. "And I loved her."

"And I love him," put in Lynette. "And I won't marry Sir Geoffrey for *anything*, or anybody but Stephen, so there."

Sir Geoffrey turned and looked at her in surprise.

"If I have done you an injustice," he said slowly, "I apologize."

She tossed her head and turned away.

The Duke, for whom events seemed to be moving altogether too fast, took his head in his hands.

"One thing's clear," he said to Sir Geoffrey. "You've won the Cup. It's yours for keeps."

He handed over the trophy amid the shouts of such of the populace as had backed the favourite; they turned as one man and stampeded in the direction of the disgruntled bookmakers.

"But what am I to do about the girl? She can't marry a fellow who breaks the laws of chivalry like this, you know. It isn't done. Some fathers would brick her up in a high tower for less."

He surveyed his daughter gloomily. She moved defiantly closer to Stephen.

"Come, come," said Sir Geoffrey, who—now that he had attained his heart's desire—had grown genial. "The lad's a good lad. I see a way out. Kneel down, Stephen."

Stephen knelt. It was all very well to dub him knight now; but the mischief was done, that he—as a mere esquire—had dared to compete with (and incidentally vanquish) his betters.

He felt the tap of a sword on his shoulder.

"I dub thee knight," said Sir Geoffrey's voice, "*with seniority from July 21st*. Rise, Sir Stephen!"

There was a moment's stunned silence while they all took it in. Then the Lady Lynette went up to Sir Geoffrey.

"You're an old darling," she said softly. "And if you won't think I've got designs on you, I should like to be allowed to kiss you."

OWEN RUTTER

*The Jonah*

Owen Rutter served for some years as a magistrate in British North Borneo and has travelled extensively in Europe, America and the far East, which is the scene of several of his books. *If Crab No Walk* a travel diary of the West Indies, is one of his most interesting and successful works.



## THE JONAH

THERE was nothing in Mr. Ernest Puddwater's appearance to suggest that his only diversion was horse-racing. He did not wear gaiters or go about with a flat-rimmed bowler hat crammed upon his head. He did not talk racing jargon, although he was familiar with it. While he knew how a stake was divided in the event of a dead-heat and could calculate the revenue that might accrue from a bet of five shillings each way at 13 to 8, he had never been astride a horse in his life and could not have told a hock from a pastern. Even had you expected him to prove knowledgeable on the subject of horses' teeth he would probably have told you, with a certain dignity, that he was a dentist, not a veterinary surgeon.

Now dentistry is an exact science. It does not allow a man to take risks. Moreover, although it is certainly not a sedentary occupation it does keep one indoors. Ernest Puddwater found both fresh air and exercise upon a race-course, and betting was his relaxation from the exactitude of professional life. For him life assumed heightened values the moment he heard the tumult of the bookies or watched the horses going to the post. The colours of the jockeys were to him more satisfying than flowers in a garden; the sudden murmur of "They're off!" stirred him like music; and his field-glasses were windows that opened on romance: as he raised them to watch the race, dental engines and decaying molars were forgotten and nothing else in the world existed for him but the flurry of the shifting colours and the flying hoofs.

So Mr. Puddwater went racing every Saturday and although he rarely gambled off the course, when he was on one it was his habit to have a bet on every race. But he never let himself get carried away. He was a prim little man, with the precision

of a robin, and although well-to-do, his rule was never to stake more than a pound each way. His normal wager was five shillings to win.

Now a dentist, like a barber, is in a position to "hear" things. It is perfectly true that a barber's customers are in a better position to talk, nevertheless Mr. Puddwater's patients, during the intervals between the excavations and reclamations that were being executed in their mouths, would occasionally find an opportunity to proffer tips.

Sometimes Mr. Puddwater would follow these. Sometimes he would accept the forecasts of the prophets of the Press. Or he might elect to follow a system, such as backing second favourites throughout a meeting, or taking the horse nearest to 3 to 1, or starting with a low stake and doubling up on first favourites. He never tried a system without first testing it in theory, and it was a perennial mystery to him why, when it produced so handsome a return on paper, in practice it should invariably lose.

Naturally, he would have preferred to win, but besides being a dentist he was a philosopher. He lost his money with composure. This was a swell, for whereas most punters, even the most unlucky, sometimes win, Mr. Puddwater never did. It was literally true that no horse he had ever backed had won a race—not even at an odds-on price. There had been a great moment once when Bitter Sweet, carrying ten shillings of Mr. Puddwater's money, had finished first past the post in the Tufton Selling Plate—only to be disqualified for bumping and boring. On another occasion Shooting Star (also well backed by Mr. Puddwater) had won a three mile military steeplechase at Hawthorn Hill, but the jockey, a young officer who had never ridden a winner before, had dismounted before reaching the winners' enclosure, so that both he and his backers had been robbed of victory. Apart from these two, no horse fancied by Mr. Puddwater had ever looked like winning.

Most people who back horses prate about their wins and keep mum about their losses. But Mr. Puddwater, having no wins to brag about, made no bones about his ill-luck. He admitted it freely. Even cheerfully. People liked him for that. It was why they so often tried to put him in the way of a good thing.

. . . . .

He was standing one April afternoon in the paddock at Sandown, watching the numbers go up for the first race and ticking off the starters on his card, when he felt a hand on his arm and looked up to see Sir Giles Mallaby, one of his clients.

Sir Giles led him away from the crowd in front of the number board, then bent his head until his mouth was level with Mr. Puddwater's left ear.

"Just thought I'd tell you Skyscraper's right for the Tudor Stakes," he said, in the conspiratorial tone in which one racing man conveys information to another.

"Oh, thanks very much," said Mr. Puddwater.

"You know I don't say much about my own horses as a rule," continued Sir Giles. "But you've been havin' a bad patch lately, haven't you? And this time you can help yourself."

Mr. Puddwater regarded him with a wan smile.

"I'm grateful, Sir Giles," he said. "But you're taking a big risk with Skyscraper's chances."

"What d'you mean?"

"No horse ever wins if I back it."

Sir Giles guffawed.

"My dear feller, even your luck can't stop it. It's *right*. Nicely handicapped, good going, Prikett up. Nothing to stop it. Don't mind tellin' you the stable are all on it. Keep it to yourself, though. We don't want to bring the price down."

"Well, then, I'll have a modest pound on."

"Good feller. Like to see you win."

As Sir Giles went off to join his party, a man who had been standing near approached Mr. Puddwater.

"My name's Dyer," he said by way of introduction.

"The trainer?" asked Mr. Puddwater.

Dyer nodded.

"You train for Sir Giles, don't you?"

"That's right." Dyer hesitated a moment. Then he went on: "Look here, sir, I heard what you said. Are you really going to have that bet?"

"Oh, I think I may as well," replied Mr. Puddwater. Hope, long dead, had been resurrected in his heart. "I've never known Sir Giles so sure."

"That's it. It *is* right. That's why we don't want to take any risks."

"How d'you mean?"

"Well, sir, you told Sir Giles the truth, didn't you?"

"About my bad luck?"

"Yes. I know you well by sight, sir. I've heard about you, too. Don't often win?"

"Very seldom."

"Might say never?"

"Well, not up to now."

"I know. People talk about it. Almost uncanny, it is."

"It certainly is odd," agreed Mr. Puddwater. "But one's luck is bound to turn, you know. It may turn to-day. By all the laws of probability——"

"Any horse you back has a funny way of losing. We both know that. Now look here, supposing you lay me the odds to a pound about Skyscraper?"

"But if my luck's still out it'll win."

"That's what we want it to do."

"Then where do I come in?"

"You'll be no worse off. You'll lose either way. Why you bet at all, I can't think."

"I like it," replied Mr. Puddwater simply.

"Well, I tell you what I'll do with you, sir. You were going to have a pound investment. The horse ought to start at fives. I'll pay you a fiver not to back it."

"I couldn't think of such a thing," said Mr. Puddwater in a scandalized tone.

"As a favour," persisted Dyer. "The stable's got a big interest. You can call me superstitious if you like. I am, where horses are concerned. Some of us can't help it. And I believe that if you back Skyscraper you'll upset his chance. So why not be a sport and take my offer?"

"Oh, well, if you put it like that——"

"Thank you, sir. A fiver then, win or lose. On the understanding that you leave it alone."

"You have my word," said Mr. Puddwater.

. . . . .

Skyscraper won by ten lengths from a field of twelve. Mr. Puddwater, having no money on the race, missed his usual thrill, but it certainly was agreeable to take in five pounds. He had a bet in each of the remaining races and lost them all.

But for the first time since he had gone racing he reached his home with more money than he had left it.

From that day life changed for him. Dyer insisted on regarding him as a kind of inverted mascot. Whenever the stable was running a horse that was fancied he would pay Mr. Puddwater the starting price odds to a pound not to back it. Mr. Puddwater, who had a generous nature, did offer to refrain from betting on Dyer's horses without honorarium, but Dyer would not hear of this. To his superstitious mind Mr. Puddwater's bets must be bought off, just as the bet on Skyscraper had been. And just as the first experiment had been successful, so were the others. The Dyer stable had an extraordinary run of luck. The racing journalists called it phenomenal, having in vain racked their memories (and their reference books) to find so long a winning sequence.

Tipsters began to find that they could "nap" Dyer's horses with perfect confidence. But while they preened themselves on their perspicacity next day the betting public had no need of their assistance, since it came to follow the stable blindly, even when there was nothing in the form of a horse to justify confidence—nothing but Dyer's luck, which, however, appeared to be a more invariable factor than the steadiest form.

As the season wore on, rumours got about, as rumours will. Mr. Puddwater was approached on behalf of another stable. He was a fair-minded man and he referred the matter to Dyer, who at once agreed in future to lay him the odds to £10. Mr. Puddwater found this more profitable (and more agreeable) than stopping or extracting teeth. On days when there was racing within a couple of hours of London he took to working only from 9.30 to 12. In vain did patients telephone for appointments in the afternoons. A well-trained secretary regretted that Mr. Puddwater's engagements were becoming unusually heavy—as indeed they were. Had Mr. Puddwater desired to increase his practice, he could have found no better way. Theatre managers do not display the legend "Standing Room Only" to deter the public from trying to get a seat next day.

The flat-racing season drew to a close. Dyer carried off the Autumn double and paid Mr. Puddwater a bonus of £500. The jumping season began. The stable's success continued. Meanwhile Mr. Puddwater still had his modest

bets—on horses other than Dyer's. He never won. As he said playfully, these bets were a sort of extra insurance for the stable. It was this remark that gave Dyer his great idea.

"In the ordinary way I'm out to win for my owner," he said one day to Mr. Puddwater, in the paddock at Hurst Park. "A tenner on the horse, if I fancy it, that's enough for me. But with this a man 'ud be a fool not to make what he can while the going's good. But with the public and the professional backers following the stable like they are we never get a price. The best you can get is 7 to 4. More often it's evens or odds-on. We've got two horses running in the Reading Chase at Newbury on Thursday. Cinderella and Water-Kelpie. I'm going to win with Cinderella. The trouble is the price'll open short and get shorter as soon as we start backing her, and Water-Kelpie'll be fours or longer."

"I don't see that the price matters, so long as the bet's safe," said Mr. Puddwater.

"One won't be able to get enough on. I want to make a packet this time. This luck can't last for ever. I've got a feeling it won't last into the New Year. Newbury's the last meeting of the year and I want to pull off something big and then nail what I've got to the wall."

"Well, it'll be the usual arrangement about Cinderella, I suppose?"

"Yeah. But as well as that I've got a scheme that'll shorten Water-Kelpie's price and push Cinderella's out."

"How?"

"I want you to back Water-Kelpie for the stable up to a thousand."

Mr. Puddwater whistled.

"That's a lot of money."

"Don't you worry. It'll be worth it. First of all, if you put all that on it's a sort of double insurance. It makes Cinderella a cinch. And nothing less will bring the price down at Newbury. You may have to go to £1,500. There's a big market there. Needn't worry about the Tote. Fix the bookies. Begin at the top by the stand and work down. You'll hear the price shortening as you go."

"And Cinderella's price lengthening?"

"That's the idea. The Ring'll think I'm going to win with Water-Kelpie."

"Is it quite cricket?" asked Mr. Puddwater dubiously.

"This isn't cricket, it's racing," Dyer told him. "And if we can push Cinderella out to sixes from evens it'll be worth it."

"But when you plank your packet on you'll keep the price of Cinderella down," objected Mr. Puddwater.

"Don't you worry. I've made my arrangements." Dyer smiled grimly. "We'll get busy with the wires. A lot of wires, there'll be. The money won't get back to the course, so the starting price won't be affected, see?"

"Very well, then."

"Good. I'll have a couple of monkeys ready for you."

"Right," agreed Mr. Puddwater. "And if any more is necessary I can do it on the nod. Even though I don't bet big the Ring know who I am."

"That'll be O.K. by me," said Dyer. "Keep an account and I'll pay you the difference. Plus a bonus when we see Prickett first past the post on Cinderella."

The usual biting wind was blustering across the Members' Enclosure at Newbury as Mr. Puddwater, his coat collar about his ears, made for the bookmakers, his mind braced to a great resolve.

It was still early. Betting on the race had scarcely started, but already raucous voices were shouting. "Even money on the field!" "I'll lay four to one bar one!" "I'll lay any 'oss!" "Six to one Water-Kelpie." "Fours The Ambassador." And again "Even money on the field."

"What are they making favourite?" asked Mr. Puddwater of the bookmaker whose pitch was nearest the steps of the Members' stand.

"Cinderella. Evens."

"What price is Water-Kelpie?"

"Sixes."

"I'll take six hundred to a hundred, then."

He handed over the notes, made an entry in his betting book, and passed on, making a similar bet a little lower down the line. A moment later his heart beat quicker with excitement as he heard them offering. "Five to one, Water-Kelpie." The price had shortened a point already.

At that moment Mr. Puddwater went mad. That morning as he lay drowsily in the no man's land between dreaming and

awaking it had seemed that a little piping voice had told him Water-Kelpie was going to win. He had tried to shut his ears to it, but it would not be denied. He had told himself that he was a fool; that he had had a "feeling" about a horse often enough before and had always been let down. Nevertheless, as the morning wore on he had kept hearing the little voice, and now his feeling developed into a conviction. The voice kept shouting "Water-Kelpie! Back Water-Kelpie! Put every spare bob you've got on Water-Kelpie!" For the first time he realized how bitterly he had always resented Dyer's treatment of him. He had been played with, made use of, bought off with fivers and tenners! Now that he came to think of it, he had been right for weeks, though Dyer had never let him back his fancy. Why, he might have made thousands! But this time he would show them. No paltry bets of a pound each way for him. He had £600 on deposit at the bank awaiting prudent investment. He would plunk every penny of it on Water-Kelpie and do Dyer's commissions for him as well. It would suit Dyer. It would make Water-Kelpie's price shorter than ever, but he and Dyer would average the price.

He continued his progress, making his bets as he went: another hundred; then fifty here, a pony there, sometimes in cash, sometimes on the nod. The price dropped to 5 to 2. That meant Water-Kelpie was favourite. Cinderella was being shouted at 5 to 1. He went through the gate from the enclosure into Tattersall's, betting with the smaller bookies—fivers and tenners now—until his calculations showed him that he had invested £1,800. That was Dyer's thousand and eight hundred of his own. Two hundred more than he had intended, but what did it matter? Water-Kelpie was going to win! It was good enough. Water-Kelpie was now 2 to 1, while Cinderella stood at sixes. The S.P. would probably be 7 to 1. Dyer would be satisfied.

He glanced at the clock above the stand. It was three minutes to two. The horses were going down. There was no need to see Dyer. Dyer would know that he had done his bit. He felt tremendously excited. He was more excited than ever in his life before. He decided to go over to the start. That would give one something to do. There would just be time.

The Reading Steeple Chase is two miles and fifty yards

and the starting post is close to the stand. Mr. Puddwater reached it just in time to see Cinderella (No. 2) and Water-Kelpie (No. 7) get nicely away in a field of nine. They took the first fence together, well in hand. He watched them over the water-jump and then bolted across the course to the Open Ditch, knowing that if any trouble came to Cinderella it would be there. But she sailed over, landed half a length in front of Water-Kelpie and went pelting after The Ambassador, who was leading the field.

Mr. Puddwater ran back with the crowd towards the last jump, halting now and then to read the race hastily through his glasses. At the last turn the field was strung out. He saw Cinderella and Water-Kelpie going up until they passed the leaders. He reached the last fence, breathless, heart pounding, just as Cinderella rose to it, strongly and surely like a wave, and now a clear length ahead of Water-Kelpie. As he watched her, his lowered glasses clutched tight between both hands, the hopes that had kindled in his breast suddenly went out. There was no doubt now. The race was Cinderella's. Once safely over nothing could pass her on the run in. Dyer would make his packet, after all.

Mr. Puddwater thought of his own £800—all gone, yet that didn't matter so much, for Dyer would be generous, he knew that. But a bitter feeling of utter disillusion moved him more than he had ever been moved before. The voice that had shouted Water-Kelpie's name had been bogus. His belief in his impending good fortune had been as futile as ever. His ill-luck seemed as inescapable as death. He was to be a Jonah to the end of the chapter. He turned hot, then cold. A shiver went over him. He clenched the rail in front of him. Horses, turf, sky became a blur and to his shame and consternation, he felt that he was going to be sick.

Then he heard a great *ooh* of surprise go up from the crowd, just as Water-Kelpie took the jump, going hard. The Ambassador, a length behind. He looked at Cinderella. She had faltered at the landing, but had not fallen. She was still leading, but apparently distressed. Water-Kelpie's jockey thrust his mount past her, trying to throw The Ambassador off. To his amazement Mr. Puddwater saw Prikett pull Cinderella up. He waited to see no more, but dashed after the two leaders. The Ambassador was challenging, fighting to get on terms. The crowd was yelling now. Then a great

shout went up and died away, showing that the race was over.

From where he stood it had been impossible to be certain of the winner. Some said one, some the other. Then a number shot up on the board. He clapped his glasses to his eyes. Number 7! Water-Kelpie had done it! For the first time in his life Mr. Puddwater had backed a winner.

He encountered Dyer in the paddock.

"What happened to Cinderella?" he asked. "It was extraordinary."

"Lived up to her blinking name," replied Dyer bitterly. "Twisted one of her perishing plates at the last fence."

"And went lame as she landed?"

"That's it. Well, the *coup's* failed, but we've saved on Water-Kelpie. You did your best."

"I did indeed," agreed Mr. Puddwater, his eyes still large with excitement. "Besides what I put on for you I backed Water-Kelpie very heavily myself. Very heavily."

"Then you've won?" gasped Dyer.

Mr. Puddwater nodded.

"Much?"

"Averaging the price, something like two thousand."

"Well . . . I'm . . . jiggered," said Dyer. "So you've done it at last." For a moment resentment struggled with generosity. Then sporting instincts won. He grasped Mr. Puddwater by the hand. "You deserve it," he said admiringly. "My God, what a risk to take."

"I knew my luck was bound to turn some day."

"Yeah. And it has. So our arrangement's off. You've done us well in the past, Mr. Puddwater, but now you've won the Lord only knows which way you'll jump. And I don't suppose he'll split."

. . . . .

Ernest Puddwater's increased practice does not give him much leisure these days, but on a Saturday afternoon you may sometimes see him in the Members' Enclosure at Sandown, Newbury, or Hurst Park. His interest in racing is now purely academic. He does not bet, not even on Dyer's selected, for he has adopted the course that trainer had hoped to follow and has nailed his winnings to the wall.

H. F. ELLIS

*Ephraim's Undoing*

H. F. Ellis is another of the band of typically English humorous writers whose work first gained recognition in the pages of *Punch*, to which he has contributed for a number of years. The entertaining skit on the agricultural school of novelists which is included here, is an excellent example of his deft satire.



## EPHRAIM'S UNDOING

### CHAPTER I

#### AT THE "BULL AND SCISSORS"

THE little hamlet of Clodbury lay basking in the warm sunlight of a bright May morning. Butterflies flitted from flower to flower in the colourful cottage-gardens, rooks cawed in the distant elm-trees, and by the trim white-painted bridge a gentle gurgling showed that Ebenezer Truelove was taking his midday beer. The village street wore a deserted air and the old man, seeing little chance of getting any more, drank slowly as he listened with grave politeness to the girl who sat beside him at the door of the "Bull and Scissors". A stranger approaching more closely (for no one who knew Ebenezer would do such a foolhardy thing) would have seen at a glance that here, if anywhere, was the heroine of the kind of story upon which we are now embarked. The roses in her cheeks and also (I regret to say) in her hair, the freckles on her nose, and the dimple at the side of her enormous mulberry-coloured mouth all marked her out as the best type of simple English girlhood. Beneath her simple muslin frock—but I am forgetting; this is not a war-book. Beneath her simple muslin hat two eyes of cornflower-blue looked out with frank directness, and in their limpid depths one might see reflected not only Ebenezer's mug of beer but the purity and sweet simplicity of her beautiful character. Wherever she went she seemed to carry with her the scent of new-mown hay. A very child of Nature, men called her; though she was, as a matter of fact, the daughter of Simon Earwhacker, one of the hardest-bitten farmers in all the countryside and the kind of father that only a girl like Prudence could possibly be saddled with. She was speaking of him at this very moment to Ebenezer.

"Father is determined to engineer a matrimonial alliance between myself and Ephraim Mathers, and threatens to

excoriate my name from the Family Bible if I oppose his wishes," she said, speaking with the quaint adorable accent of the B.B.C.

"Owd slubberdegullion!" said Ebenezer, who had no wireless-set. "And doan't 'ee loike Ephraim then, Miss Prue?"

"I detest him, the gurt—great toad! but father is such a cruel hard man, and says he is the wealthiest farmer in the whole district and worth fifty Mr. Williamses. And, oh, Mr. Truelove, I *do* love Mr. Williams so!"

"Be that the poet-chap from Lunnon town yew du mean?" asked Ebenezer, more for the convenience of the reader than because he was in any real doubt about the matter. "Gentleman-born 'e be—ah, an' wunnerful clever tu, so I've 'eerd tell; though not so big and strong as Ephraim, no, not be a hubbock\* or more. But 'twill arl cum right i' the end, so doan't 'ee fret theeself, lass."

"It cannot, it cannot!" cried the unhappy girl, and great tear-drops splashed on the gravel path as she told of the unfair test by which her father had decided to select her mate.

"If yon numskull," he had said, alluding to Aubrey Williams in his rough unkindly way, "be a better man than Ephraim here, an' kin beat him at ploughing an' milking—ah, an' win t' prize for t' best beetroot at t' Flower-Show into t' bargain—ye shall have him an' welcome." And then and there he had drawn up the rules for the triple contest, which was to begin without delay.

"But my Aubrey has never even seen a plough, Mr. Truelove, and cows offend his sense of artistic values, so whatever shall I do? It du seem as I mun wed Ephraim—I mean, it looks as if I shall have to marry Ephraim Mathers after all."

"It be main late for ploughin' sartinly." Ebenezer's answer was a little vague. He was wondering whether an offer of a hundred to one against Williams for the triple event would find any takers.

A few moments later he entered the tap-room to make sure, and Prudence, gathering up her basket of eggs, and tucking a cauliflower under her arm, strode sadly home to lunch.

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\*A kind of three-handled trowel, now obsolete.

## CHAPTER II

## THE MILKING CONTEST

THE day of the opening contest dawned bright and clear, with just enough wind to make conditions ideal, and a goodly crowd assembled at Earwhacker Farm to see the sport. Conspicuous among them all was Simon Earwhacker himself as he moved from place to place setting everything to rights, now whispering to the judges, now ordering the lines of cows, and ever and anon turning to glance with lowered brows at the corner by the pig-sties where Prudence, her fair head close to Aubrey's, read him hurried extracts from *The Dairyman's Guide*. To tell the truth, Simon was uneasy. Already his gigantic watch pointed to six minutes to the hour, and by the rules of the competition either competitor failing to appear by ten o'clock was automatically disqualified. Yet Ephraim Mathers was nowhere to be seen. Minute by minute his agitation grew, until at last a fast-driven gig was reported approaching rapidly from Middle Hutchley. On the very stroke of ten it drew up with a clatter before the gate, and a foul green hat came skimming over the heads of the people into the byre, to be followed a moment later by Ephraim himself, looking fit and well in purple corduroys.

"Ephraim! Ephraim!" shouted the onlookers in a frenzy of excitement, some of them even taking the straws out of their mouths in their enthusiasm, for public sympathy was on the side of the local champion. Outside the milking-shed the rivals met, and a great silence fell upon all as Aubrey spun a bright new sixpence (borrowed from Prudence) high into the air. It fell on a pig, and a mighty roar greeted the announcement that Ephraim had won the toss and would go in first.

Ephraim Mathers came of a long line of skilful milkers, but on this occasion at least he surpassed them all. He was brilliant. Experienced cowherds in the company said that never had they seen a man milk as Ephraim Mathers milked that day. A brindled shorthorn of proved capacity accompanied him to the stool, but in less than two minutes he was calling for another cow. And so it went on, until at the end of the allotted half-hour seventeen empties stood lowing in the yard and as many brimming pails were ranged against the

wall. "A phenomenal display," as Prudence observed with grudging admiration.

And now it was Aubrey's turn. A man of extreme delicacy, his whole being shrank from contact with an animal with four stomachs; but, reminding himself that it was for Miss Earwhacker's sake, he shook back his long dark curls and plunged boldly into the shed.

Half an hour later, when the officials entered the building, they found him sketching on the back of an old envelope.

"Where be t' milk?" asked Simon roughly.

"What milk?" said Aubrey.

"Why, t' milk as was to help thee win my darter's hand."

"Dear me! I must have forgotten. I have been doing a little still-life work. But I will begin at once."

"'Tis too late, lad," said Simon triumphantly; and so indeed it was. Already the judges had begun their announcement: "We hereby proclaim Ephraim Mathers the winner by seventeen clear——"

"Hold!" cried a voice in bell-like tones, and Prudence, leaping upon a wheelbarrow, waved aloft the envelope which she had snatched from Aubrey's unresisting hand. "By the rules of the contest the winner was to be he who in the space of thirty minutes drew the greater amount of milk. Ephraim Mathers has drawn seventeen pails. Now let *these* be counted," and with a gesture of defiance she hurled the paper at the feet of the judges.

Aubrey Williams had drawn twenty-three!

In an instant all was confusion. Men shouted, dogs barked and horses swooned. Two Buff Orpingtons were so affected that they never laid again; and amid the tumult Aubrey, with his head in the clouds and his feet in a bucket of pig-wash, clasped the radiant Prudence to his breast.

"Prue!" he whispered.

"Aubrey!" she murmured.

"Dang it!" said Simon Earwhacker.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PLOUGHING-MATCH

THE milking contest had ended in an unexpected and glorious victory, but the heart of Prudence Earwhacker grew heavy

within her as the date of the ploughing-match drew near. Every evening she took Aubrey down to the Five-Acre to practise, but, do what she would, she could not keep him on his course. Sometimes he would be straight for forty, fifty, sixty yards, and then that old dreamy look would come back and away he would go in great sweeping curves, carolling blithely as he went.

"It is the creative spirit," he would say when she chided him, and would point out to her the nobility and grace of his twining furrows.

Once, when his whirling share had marked out a pattern of almost unearthly beauty—a thing of curves and loops and complex involutions, he turned to her and, falling on his knees before her in an ecstasy of love, cried, "It is yours, Prue—all yours! I dedicate this work to you!" And she, poor girl, though her heart was breaking, only reproved him gently, saying, "Oh, Aubrey, you have made the horses giddy!" and then, turning away to hide her heaving cheeks, went lumbering home to supper.

She was a difficult girl at times, thought Aubrey sadly.

. . . . .

The tale of the match itself—a single-furrow affair over Simon's Ten-acre—is soon told. Ephraim, ploughing with less than his usual care, developed a nasty kink two furlongs from home which marred an otherwise tidy furrow; but even so no one, not even loyal little Prudence, could doubt that the effort was good enough to beat so unworldly a ploughman as Aubrey. Indeed, for all her courage the girl's hopes had sunk to zero, and as she knelt to tie the string below her sweetheart's knees unbidden tears fell thick and fast upon the big boots he had borrowed from Ebenezer.

"Remember what it says in *How to Plough*, beloved," she faltered as she rose; and for answer he pressed into her hand some verses on the Infinite, then, without word or glance, sprang lightly to the plough-handles. Next instant he had burst into song.

Old men in Clodbury still speak with reverence of the sight they saw that day. Forward at a tremendous pace dashed the two great horses, spurred by the sweet sad music, and behind them, running easily over the clods, went Aubrey Williams, the light of genius in his eyes. And when it was

all over and the three of them stood sweating at the farther end, a great shout of wonder arose from the spectators. It was the straightest furrow ever seen in Clodbury!

“Good lad! good lad!” said Squire Aitchbone heartily, wringing our hero’s hand.

Simon and Ephraim were biting their nails.

“What about they boots?” said Ebenezer.

Prudence had fainted with joy.

But Aubrey, who had read Sneebohl on *The Beauty of the Straight Line* the night before, cared for none of these things. He was seeking a rhyme for “tilth”.

## CHAPTER IV

### A HOPELESS DAWN

MAY passed into June and June into July; the corn ripened, hollyhocks burst into bloom, and Ephraim Mathers grew steadily hotter and hotter under his ill-fitting collar. Twice he had been baulked of victory, and now, on the eve of the Flower-Show, he brooded darkly on the fateful issues of the morrow. Prudence was *his*; he loved her madly, fiercely. The very thought of her in another’s keeping set his teeth on edge and sent the dark blood surging into his ears. At all costs Aubrey Williams must not win the Beetroot Cup, and he, Ephraim, could alone prevent it! Not a man save himself was willing to oppose him, so completely had the debonair young poet, dang him! won all hearts by his gallant bearing at the ploughing-match. Once more it was a straight fight between them, but this time, by gubber! the result should be different. With the fearful oath on his lips Ephraim went out to look at his beet.

Night found him still standing among the roots, turning over in his mind the details of a monstrous plan. He had some lovely beet, but what if Aubrey had some lovelier? He must take no risks—must make sure in time. . . .

Half an hour later he was on his way to Aubrey’s garden, a tape-measure clasped firmly in his huge right hand. To such lengths will the evil passion of jealousy drive its frenzied victims.

"I give you good day, Miss Prudence," said Aubrey in his courtly way at five o'clock the following morning. The girl was on her way back from somewhere or other, and he hailed her as she passed his gate.

"Good morning, Aubrey," she flashed back at him, her face shining from the effects of too much soap and water. "May I come in?"

Together they walked in silence through the kitchen-garden, and Prue's heart sank within her for about the fifth time since the beginning of May as she surveyed the bedraggled beetroot. She could not conceal from herself the fact that it was wretched stuff, unfit even for the basest cow; but her lover was smiling happily and she said no word.

Outside the tool-shed he took her in his arms. "Prudence," he said, "I have been keeping something from you all these months. Inside this shed lies the Queen of the West, thirty-three inches round the waist, and the finest, handsomest——"

"Beast! Roué! Deceiver!" she cried, the tears starting to her eyes as she flung herself in a frenzy of despair on to an onion-bed. "That you of all men should treat me so!"

Aubrey was puzzled. He had meant to surprise her, but not to this extent. "Come, come," he said sternly—"the shock has been too much for you. I should have broken it more gently. But what, after all, is a beetroot? In the great harmony of the universe——"

"A beetroot?" she gasped, looking positively hideous in her relief.

"Certainly—a champion beetroot."

"Oh, Aubrey—and I doubted you! Forgive me."

"With all my heart."

"Will you show it to me, dearest?" She was all leaf-mould and contrition.

Proudly he threw open the door of the tool-shed. "Look!" he cried—and gave a shuddering gasp of dismay.

The Queen of the West had gone!

## CHAPTER V

### THE FLOWER-SHOW

THE grounds of Biggeley Manor, the old-world residence of Colonel Harry ("Squire") Aitchbone, were ablaze with life

and colour. On the spacious lawns some of the best people in the neighbourhood strolled to and fro, halting now and again to exchange a greeting or to watch the finish of the Mothers' Sack-race. Admiral Fluke was there in full-dress uniform; Lord Isinglass had brought his stupid daughters; in the refreshment tent Lady Ipswich was cracking jokes with the Duchess of Havant and Hook. From the distance came the haunting strains of a roundabout. Clodbury's Annual Fête and Flower-Show was at its height.

There were many lovely faces and expensive frocks to be seen that afternoon, but none looked sweeter than Prudence in her simple white organdie with the crimson sash, and more than one baronet turned to glance at her as she made her way towards the vegetable tent on Aubrey's arm.

"Dashed pretty girl, that—what?" said Sir Archibald Crawshay, M.F.H., cracking his whip to emphasize the words.

"You're right, by gad!" It was the Vicar of Minchin-under-Tapley who so readily expressed his agreement with his companion's views.

Meanwhile, Prudence, unconscious of the interest she was exciting, had passed with her escort beneath the flap of the giant marquee, and now stood gazing with lack-lustre eyes at a highly-commended carrot. The judging was over, but the disappointed lovers had little or no interest in the results. The mysterious disappearance of the Queen of the West had been a crushing blow, and, though Aubrey had sent in the best beetroot left in the garden, it was without hope that he did so. Probably it would not even be commended.

A surprise awaited them when they came at last, via the cauliflowers and sea-kale, to the beetroot stall. There were only two, and the second prize, in the absence of any other entries, had gone to Aubrey! Upon the winning exhibit, a veritable monster, were pinned two cards—a red one which said:

#### FIRST PRIZE

and a white one on which was written:

#### SPECIAL PRIZE

*For the Best Vegetable in the Show.*

Prudence regarded its great empurpled sides with awe.

"Oh, Aubrey," she asked wistfully, "was the Queen of the West as big as that?"

"That *is* the Queen of the West," he said fairly quietly. "There has been dirty work."

"But who——?"

Their eyes met.

"You must denounce him, Aubrey. You must—you shall!"

"Leave this to me," he said with a compelling gesture that brought half-a-hundredweight of potatoes about their ears. "I go to find a hammer."

. . . . .

We will not attempt to describe in any detail the emotions that racked poor Prudence's bosom as she sat beside her father at the prize-giving some two hours later. The situation seemed indeed a desperate one. What could Aubrey do, even if he found a hammer, to prove the guilt of Ephraim Mathers? Mere violence would not suffice. To add to her misery Ephraim was trying to hold her hand. Would Aubrey never come?

Ephraim himself was at the top of his form. He had certainly stolen the beetroot which now reposed in a place of honour on the judges' table, but who would believe the charge if it were made? Nary a one. It was his hour of triumph.

"We come now," Squire Aitchbone was saying, "to the award of the Beetroot Cup, which goes this year, very deservedly in my opinion, to— Well, well, my boy, what is it?"

A slim figure had pushed its way through the throng and now stood in a graceful attitude before him.

"I wish to show you something," said Aubrey, and, taking a hammer from his pocket caught the Queen of the West a savage wallop in the middle.

She burst into a thousand fragments.

"What is the meaning of this?" roared the Squire.

"Plaster-of-Paris, I fancy," said Aubrey, and there were tears in his eyes as he spoke. After all, she had been one of his noblest creations.

In the silence that followed all eyes were turned upon Ephraim, who sat as though thunderstruck in his seat. How could he reveal the real author of this false fruit without

admitting his own guilty deed? Twice he rose to speak and twice thought better of it. And then:

“I claim the Beetroot Cup,” said Aubrey Williams.

. . . . .

The honeymoon will be spent at Uggely Parva.

## PETER FLEMING

### *The Treasure Hunt*

Peter Fleming is one of the most brilliant of the younger generation of writers. He made an immediate success with his first book *Brazilian Adventure*, describing his experience with an expedition despatched in search of Colonel Fawcett, the explorer who vanished in the jungles of South America some years ago.



## THE TREASURE HUNT

“GOOD morning, everybody!” cried Lady Leatherhead, shutting the door with that arch benignity which characterized most of her actions. “I’m afraid I was wrong about the weather.”

“As usual,” said her son, loudly, emphatically, and truthfully. Harold was too supercilious to be amusingly rude.

The guests made perfunctory, deprecating noises through their kedgerees. You gathered that, although Lady Leatherhead had actually been wrong, she had come within an ace of being right; and that anyhow such phenomenal misbehaviour on the part of the climate should really be left out of account as something altogether beyond the bounds of either prophecy or good taste.

Rain lashed the windows. The tall but sturdy yew hedge at the bottom of the garden quivered with an irritation which had its roots in alarm. On the hill opposite the house a field of standing corn stood no longer, but lay in damp, untidy swathes. The potting-shed had lost its chimney. It was the last week in July.

“Will you put it off?” asked Major Tiler, greatly daring. He was an old friend of the family.

“Put it off?” repeated Lady Leatherhead incredulously, ringing for more hot milk. “But this is *just the weather* for a Treasure Hunt!” Her voice had that formidable cooing note so dreaded by friend and enemy alike.

“*Rather!*” cried Miss Buxter. She had always been known for a jolly girl, and though her girlhood was on the wane, she was as full of fun as ever; rather fuller, if anything.

“I should just say it was!” agreed Mr. Rusk, in the kind of modulated shout in which all his enthusiasms were expressed. He beamed gaily at the streaming window panes. It was the first time he had been asked to the house, and it

was the opinion of his fellow-guests that he would be lucky if he was asked again; he tried too hard.

Lady Leatherhead sat down at the head of the table and began to spread gooseberry jam on one of those pock-marked wafers known as Swedish Bread, which combine with the plays of Ibsen to produce in the mind of the average Englishman so cheerless an impression of Scandinavian home-life.

"We start at eleven," she announced, sweeping the assembly with a glance reminiscent of a temporarily well-disposed basilisk.

Eleven o'clock found the house-party rallied in the hall. Their mackintoshes rustled nervously. They grumbled to each other in whispers. Even the hardiest were wishing they had brought thicker shoes; the less resolute weighed the respective advantages of a head, which might be alleged to ache then and there, and an ankle, which might be supposedly twisted as soon as the hunt began. One and all felt intolerably put upon, and looked extremely unhappy.

Lady Leatherhead appeared on the staircase, a commanding figure if ever there was one. She came to them fresh and fiery from an argument with Harold. Harold was writing a novel about middle-class life; as he knew very little about life, and nothing at all about the middle classes, it did not look like being an outstandingly good novel. But experience had taught him that the Muse makes an admirable guardian angel and entitles you to use the word "fritter" when speaking of organized amusements in which you have no wish to take part.

"Where do you suppose Chaucer would have been," he asked his mother, "if he'd spent half his time Treasure-hunting?"

Lady Leatherhead (and who shall blame her?) could find no answer to this difficult but interesting question. She contented herself with pointing out to her son that *he* was not *Chaucer*. Harold looked hurt by this remark (of whose truth, however, he must have long been aware) and his mother left the room with a slight advantage.

She now confronted her guests with an assurance rather more aggressive than usual, like a lion-tamer who enters the cage immediately after tripping over the cat.

"Just a minute," she said, in that deceptively fluted voice, "while I explain the rules."

Whether their owners wished it or not, the faces in the hall automatically assumed an air of eager but intelligent expectation, such as is worn by schoolboys, before the lights go out, at a lantern lecture.

"First of all," announced Lady Leatherhead, "the clues are all written on cards like this." (She held one up.) "Now these cards are *numbered*," she went on, somehow managing to suggest that this made them immensely valuable, "and the clues are arranged in sequence—first No. 1, then No. 2, then 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and so on. Do you all understand that?" she asked doubtfully, as if it was practically impossible to understand.

"Yes, Lady Leatherhead," they cried.

"There are twelve clues in all," she continued, "and the twelfth directs you to the treasure. Now no one must on *any* account take a short cut. If you find a clue bearing a number which isn't the number directly following the number of the clue you found last you must just put it back where you found it and go on looking for the clue you were looking for before!" Lady Leatherhead paused dramatically, as if she had suggested the most fantastic and unheard-of expedient. "Now you will do that, won't you?" she begged, in her most suavely menacing voice.

"Of course, Lady Leatherhead," they cried.

"Very well, then," she said, "here is the first clue." She cleared her throat, and the mackintoshes rustled uneasily. Zero hour was on them.

"Clocks tell the time (chanted their hotess)

In rain or shine :

But I am done

If there's no sun."

What Milton has described as "a dismal universal hiss" made itself heard in the hall; everyone was whispering to his neighbour "the sun-dial". It was an awkward moment. Their blood was not yet up; whatever zest they might hope to acquire for this compulsory chase had so far had no chance of infecting them. Where all should have sprung forward, nobody moved. They felt a keen reluctance, now that the crucial moment had come, to behave like children. The spirit of competition was strangled at birth.

Lady Leatherhead saw how it was with them. "Off you go!" she trumpeted. "It's in the garden, I warn you. Off you go!"

And off Miss Buxter went, with a laugh of ineffable jollity and a cry (for which none of those present forgave her) of "Come on, chaps!" They followed her, buttoning their collars about their chins, out of the front door and across the lawn, where the wind beat them about and blew Mr. Rusk's hat into a bird-bath.

"Oh, Hell!" groaned Virginia Gollstone, who, as a gently nurtured and socially successful *débutante* might fairly be said (as far as country life was concerned) to be done if there was no sun; "this is ghastly."

It was, rather. To Harold, who observed them from his window, the scene as they stood round the sun-dial was irresistibly suggestive of a burial at sea, though he had never actually witnessed one of those melancholy ceremonies. The strenuously crackling mackintoshes, the heads bowed (though not so much in reverence as in a desire to keep the rain off their faces), a general air of griefs unvoiced and murmured prayers, of helplessness in the face of the elements—all these things struck Harold as so vividly analogous that he made a note of the conceit, hoping to work it in somewhere in his portrayal of middle-class life.

Miss Buxter was reading out the second clue from the steps of the sun-dial. A large hank of clay-coloured hair, escaping from the confines of a hat which can most charitably be described as "sensible", was flattened across her broad face by the wind and got in her mouth a good deal, interfering with her vowel-sounds. Luckily it was a very short clue:

"Bird thou never wert . . ."

"I love Swinburne, don't you?" shrieked Virginia Gollstone to Henry Taint above the raging of the storm. Henry Taint was a young M.P.; for ten years people had kept on saying he was promising, but he had yet to perform. Virginia wanted it clearly understood that this out-of-door stuff was not her line at all. "Don't you love Swinburne?" she repeated, seeing that he had not heard.

"Not in this weather!" he shouted; he had understood her to say "swimming" and was surprised when she laughed as at some witty retort. "Silly girl!" he decided: "giggles when you answer a question sensibly."

Meanwhile an air of painful indecision hung over the treasure-seekers. "Bird thou never wert . . ." ? There were so many things of which that could be said. Somebody suggested Lady Leatherhead's parrot—a loathsome bird, and a martyr to ringworm; it was a promising solution, but finally rejected, because, however you chose to define the walk of life to which God had now called the creature there was little or no doubt that it had once been a bird. A far more acceptable interpretation was "The Swan"—an inn not far from the drive gates—and thither the company moved off, in a straggling procession noticeably headed by the men.

Hugo Rolluck, a cricket Blue and a man with very strong views on how the second half of every morning should be spent, reached the inn first. The clue was pinned to the door of the public bar; but the door of the public bar was locked. There was half an hour to go before they opened. Rolluck, a quick thinker and a gentleman, tore down the card, climbed on to a bench, and dropped the too accessible paste-board through the exiguous crack of open window which was considered sufficient to ventilate the public bar during the summer months. The vanguard of the hunt swung round the corner as he stepped down, dusting his enormous hands on his enormous trousers.

"Is it there?" cried some. But more cried: "Are they open?"

The clue, explained this admirable youth, in whom athletic prowess was so happily united to a keen practical intelligence, was not actually visible from the outside of the inn, but he had very little doubt that it would be found inside. They had but to wait till the landlord threw open his hospitable doors, and it would then be no difficult matter to search the more commonly frequented premises of the building, in some conspicuous part of which their considerate hostess had, he was prepared to wager, deposited the clue.

The men looked avidly at their watches, the women curiously at Rolluck, whose histrionic powers, to tell the truth, were scarcely adequate to the role he had so nobly assumed. It would, in fact, have been hard to imagine a more thoughtfully executed portrayal of a guilty man; if the unfortunate Rolluck had committed the foulest of murders by the clumsiest of methods a second or two before their arrival he could hardly have shifted more frequently from one

leg to the other, or more appealingly eyed those of the party whom he accounted his friends, or more convulsively and unconvincingly burst out with snatches of irrelevant conversation. Guilt was writ large on his well-developed features; perspiration bedewed them. The women smelt a rat.

It was Miss Buxter who disinterred it. Peering through the window of the bar she descried the object of their search lying, as ill-luck would have it, face upwards and the right way round on the broad sill inside, plain to be read by all. She gave an exultant yelp.

"Here it is," she cried; "you can see it from here!"

At that moment there was not a man present who would not, cheerfully and without compunction, have shot Miss Buxter, or killed her with some blunt instrument, or pushed her over Niagara Falls. But no opportunity for doing any of these things presented itself; Miss Buxter continued to live, and breathe, and have her insufferable being. The treasure-seekers surged round the window in a damp press. Major Tiler read out the clue.

"Oh for the wings of a dove!" he announced; and you could see that he meant it.

"Another of these quotations," said Hugo Rolluck, in the voice of a man speaking intelligently; he was not yet quite sure how he stood with public opinion.

The clue could hardly be called a baffling one. It referred, obviously, to the old dove-cote under the eaves of the stables. They trooped off, with all the alacrity of prisoners detailed for Siberia in a Russian film. Major Tiler stayed behind in the porch; apparently he was trying to light his pipe.

A quarter of an hour later the bedraggled posse stood in a long, low loft at the farther end of which pigeon-holes punctured the obscurity in a little pyramid. There was a strong, almost an overwhelming smell of horses, decomposition, and old mice. It was, to all intents and purposes, pitch dark.

With a cheerful click Mr. Rusk lit his gold cigarette-lighter. It showed them little beyond their own shiny and disgruntled faces and a number of horribly indefinable shapes which might have been anything from ectoplasm to bales of jute. With an eerie cry Miss Gollstone announced that a rat had passed over her foot.

"Poor thing," said Miss Buxter ambiguously. "I'm going ahead."

She went ahead, and the hue and cry followed her, shuffling along in a gingerly way, like young men dancing with their aunts. Their feet ploughed through a layer of nameless debris; they cursed Lady Leatherhead in their hearts.

Suddenly there was a rending crash and, from somewhere below them, a sound which had more in it of the wallop than the thud. The party stood rooted to the spot. A large, ragged hole gaped in the worm-eaten boards before them, and through it filtered up the voice of Miss Buxter, swearing like a *débutante*.

"Are you all right?" they called down to her. You could not, from the way they asked the question, have deduced whether they expected the answer "Yes" or "No"; but it was less difficult to gather which would have pleased them best.

It appeared, however, that she was all right, comparatively speaking. She had landed on a pile of hay in a loose-box, and was suffering from nothing more than slight nervous shock. They, who were suffering from as much themselves, made haste to descend. They found Miss Buxter in her loose-box, but the reunion was not, from her point of view, a wholly satisfactory one, since the door was locked and it was quite impossible to climb out. As they moved off in search of help one and all were surprised to find how apt, how vivid, was the analogy which each had unconsciously half-formulated between Miss Buxter and a horse. To see her now you would have thought that she had lived all her life in a loose-box. It seemed really almost a pity to detach her from so perfect a setting. . . .

Shortly before all this happened Harold laid down his fountain pen. His novel of middle-class life was the bigger, if not the better, by some seventy words. They described the heroine's anguish of mind as she prepared a high tea for her drunken father and his friends. Her father had begun the book as an upholsterer, but someone had told Harold that the members of this profession were recruited largely from the lower, not the middle, classes; so the heroine's father was promoted, with the minimum of erasion, to "master-upholsterer", which sounded at once more dignified and more brutal.

At the moment Harold was having difficulty with the Licensing Laws. If you had your high tea at six, did that give the master-upholsterer and his cronies a fair chance of getting partially intoxicated on the way home? He made a note: "Ask Major Tiler about pubs." It paid to be thorough, even in literature.

He re-read his morning's work; substituted "anti-macassar" for "aspidistra" in one of the local colour bits; yawned; and wandered downstairs. His mother found him, as ill-luck would have it, reading *The Tatler* in the drawing-room. Lady Leatherhead was in a very domineering mood. Unable, in the circumstances, even to pretend that he was looking for "copy", Harold was driven out to join and superintend the treasure-hunters. Most bitter blow of all, he had his own gambit played on him with conspicuous success. "Do you suppose," bayed his mother, "that Tolstoi sat about reading *The Tatler* all day?"

Harold stumbled blindly away in search of his Aquascutum, to all intents and purposes a broken man. But even as he twitched it irritably from its peg inspiration came to him. He remembered that he knew where the treasure was hidden. The sweets of revenge were as good as his. . . .

The next ten minutes he spent at a writing-table. Then he went out to face the elements and his mother's guests, blithely, with head erect.

The pack, when he came up with it, could hardly be described as in full cry, though Virginia Gollstone was not far from tears, having sustained contusions from a bradawl in the potting-shed. Major Tiler, reappearing from the direction of "The Swan", alone seemed cheerful, and insisted on singing the Marseillaise. Henry Taint took Harold aside.

"Look here," he said, in a voice which strong men use when asking their best friend to save a bullet for the woman, "can't you get this over a bit quicker? We're only at the seventh clue."

"Leave it to me," said Harold, an elfin gleam flickering in his salient eyeballs.

"'Mark over's' the cry  
 And August's the season.  
 If you want to know why,  
 Ask sportsmen the reason."

It was Clue No. 12—Lady Leatherhead's swan-song as a poetess.

"I know!" cried Miss Buxter. "The stuffed grouse in the billiards-room!"

Their goal in sight, her fellow-seekers felt the spirit of competition stir within them for the first time. They began to shamble off with a kind of furtive alacrity.

But "Hey!" roared a voice, and they stopped. It was Rolluck, lodging a sportsman's protest. "I say" (he said), "look here; I mean, they aren't grouse, you know. They're ptarmigan." But no one else was in a mood to split ornithological straws. In this crisis one *lagopus* was as good as another. They resumed their surge towards the billiards-room.

Harold saw to it that he was there first. The two stuffed ptarmigan watched each other intently, like duellists, over a tuft of blasted heather. Moths had long since eaten the better part of their plumage, but by one of those accidents so common in old-fashioned taxidermy the one looked immutably quizzical, the other perpetually indignant. There was drama in their eternal vigil.

The treasure—a large parcel containing Kinglake's *History of the Crimean War* and two pots of home-made jam—Harold had already removed and hidden. The hunt arrived panting, to find him with nothing but an envelope in his hands.

"Money," thought most, and were conscious of a renewed interest.

"Tickets for a charity ball," thought Hugo Rolluck, who had been stung that way before.

"More ruddy verse," prophesied Major Tiler, not quite under his very noticeable breath.

Gravely and in silence Harold opened the envelope; gravely and in silence read the single sheet of notepaper it contained. Then he looked up and passed his hand across his brow in a dazed way.

"This is a very strange thing," he said in a hollow voice, "but I am compelled to read it out, for the treasure is to be shared by all who sought it."

He cleared his throat. "Oh, do go on," urged someone.

"The treasure" (Harold's voice was a little shaky to begin with) "is Self-Knowledge." Here he broke off and looked round him in a sorrowful, deprecating way. "I ought to

explain," he went on, "that the whole thing appears to have been written under the stress of some violent emotion, and is in parts legible only with difficulty. But I must admit that the first word, which is followed by three unmistakable exclamation marks, looks to me very much like 'Parasites'. The second is certainly 'Numskulls'; and (here he looked full at his audience) the third is 'Pests'. It goes on: 'Be off with you, scum! Why do you come clambering over each other after my food, cluttering my house with your over-dressed little bodies, drooling out your insufferable small-talk at my table? Why do you submit to the infantile and degrading pastimes which I devise for you? You are like so many performing fleas, only far less sagacious; I only wish you were the same size as they are, so that I could crush you all with a sharp downward blow of my hand. Run away, horrible little things! Know yourselves for what you are, and run away while you can.'"

Harold paused. "There is a good deal more," he said, "but I would rather not read it, if you don't mind. My mother has these moods. . . ."

An awful silence hung over the billiard-room. The very hackles on the bearskin rug seemed to rise in horror. On the wall Landseer's creations, down to the humblest fawn, grew liquid-eyed with panic. A pair of boar's tusks made as if to chatter in alarm. The clock, egg-bound these twenty-seven years, began to tick nervously.

"Shall I order the cars?" asked Harold in a low voice. "Your luggage can be sent on."

They nodded in silence; and in silence left the room.

"Heigh ho!" sighed Miss Buxter, bloody but unbowed; "better luck next time." She was that sort of woman.

LOUIS GOLDING

*Wimpole's Woe*

Louis Golding, novelist, essayist and lecturer, spends the greater part of his time in tramping along the remoter shores of the Mediterranean, and seems able to write brilliantly under conditions of discomfort that few authors would endure. Of his many novels *Magnolia Street*, a powerful study of Jewish life, is the most remarkable.



## WIMPOLE'S WOE

ALBERT WIMPOLE was the sort of little man concerning whom women nudge each other in omnibuses and say, "What a nice kind face he's got!" He was too kind to be a success as a business man, too industrious to be a success as a bricklayer, too tiny to make a good thing out of odd jobs in Covent Garden. So he became, because even editors could not resist his nice kind face, a literary critic.

He became the nicest and kindest literary critic in London. He found something of novelty in the most laboriously stereotyped novel, a certain lightness of touch in the most thunderous of sermons. Even about minor poetry he could not bring himself to be unkind. As he wrote his criticism he had a feeling that the author he was treating stood by his elbow with clasped hands and beseeching eyes. He could no more bring himself to say an unkind word about the book before him than he could have pushed its author into a vat of hot oil.

So he went on from season to season, finding somehow, somewhere, a little extenuation for the jejune, the lewd, the preposterous. A split infinitive might perhaps earn a gentle rebuke, but he would promptly apologize for his temerity by drawing attention to the author's delicacy or profundity. A nice kind critic.

And then one morning a volume appeared on Wimpole's table entitled *Gangrene and Lilies*, the author being Mr. Eustace Chasuble. I want to insist on this—Wimpole had not, as the saying is, got out of bed the wrong side that morning. His landlady had not scorched the bacon. He suffered occasionally from gumboils, but he was free at that time from that minor but unpleasing affliction. Yet the fact remains that even as he unwrapped the book from the parcel, he felt that *Gangrene and Lilies* gave off an offensive odour. It stank.

It was a volume of verses, an astonishing amalgam of the jejune, the lewd, the preposterous. No book had ever affected Wimpole in this desperate fashion before. It made him blink, his ears burned with shame, his gorge rose. And he sat down and wrote about it. All the ferocity he had suppressed for years blazed into one tempest of denunciation. (Is not the nicest and kindest little man in the world fundamentally a shrieking ape from the primordial jungles?) Whatever in the past he might have said about all the authors he had been nice and kind to, he now heaped upon Eustace Chasuble. And lots more. The sheets of paper flew from his pen like sparks from a knife-grinder's wheel. Wimpole grunted. Wimpole sweated. Then he sent his landlady's small daughter to the post with the completed jeremiad, and lay back on his chair and wept.

I assure you it was not the last time that Eustace Chasuble dissolved little Wimpole into a pool of tears. It was not the last time that Chasuble's large-eyed phantom came reproachfully into the room and stood beside Wimpole and wrung its hands and moaned. Poor little Wimpole! He could not have felt a more consummate blackguard if he had murdered his grandmother. Waves of repentance surged over him and drowned him. Not a single word he had ever written could have so much as troubled a fly's wing. And now . . . And now . . . He beat his bosom.

He sometimes wondered whether his review had caused Eustace Chasuble to commit suicide. He paraded various methods of suicide in grisly pageantry before him. Chasuble hanging from a beam, his lips and tongue purple . . . Chasuble contorted in the unspeakable anguish of strychnine . . . Chasuble a dismembered corpse in the wake of the great North express. But always the original picture asserted itself in the end, the large-eyed phantom that came reproachfully into the room and stood beside him and wrung its hands and moaned.

He developed in his mind an extraordinary precise picture of Eustace Chasuble. He was about five feet four inches in height, his head was pear-shaped and rather too big for his body. The hair was long and jet black, the lips a vivid scarlet upon a sallow face. The finger-nails were long and (if the truth were told) a little dirty. He was knock-kneed. He had a fluting, high pitched voice. But his eyes, his

reproachful, melancholy eyes . . . Wimpole lay back in his chair and sobbed.

Many years passed. Never again did Wimpole utter a word of criticism which was not in the last degree nice and kind. But he could not ever exorcise the phantom of Eustace Chasuble—the knock-kneed, long-haired, sad-eyed phantom of little Eustace Chasuble.

Behold him at this moment in the tiny market town of Bugmarsh, where he has a couple of hours to idle away before catching his connection for Town. He has been spending his annual fortnight's holiday in the heart of the country. But now the call of duty has gone forth and he must return to his labours. It is dusk. He is rather short-sighted. He is peering at the posters pasted up outside the parish hall of Bugmarsh. He learns that there is to be an auction sale of farm implements and effects next Tuesday, that to-morrow night an illustrious pianist from the Metropolis is actually going to honour Bugmarsh with his presence, that to-night—that to-night—O Heavens! No!

Wimpole's scalp froze. His hairs stood on end. As if to make it quite, quite certain that there could not be two Eustace Chasubles in the world, you were informed in chaste lettering under his name that he was the "author of *Gangrene and Lilies*". Mr. Eustace Chasuble was to lecture that night, that very night, in the parish hall of Bugmarsh. His theme was to be—how blunt, how direct it was—"Pigs". No more than that—"Pigs". The lecture had started at seven o'clock. It was now half-past seven. Even if Eustace Chasuble continued for another hour there would be ample time to catch his train. Could he repudiate this opportunity, after so many years, to make amends? His heart filled with pity. Once more the phantom of little Chasuble stretched out its hands, stared mournfully and reproachfully upon him. Perhaps it was his own vitriolic review that had driven little Chasuble from the rivers of poetry (even though he had made them smell like sewers) and caused him to abandon lilies for mangel-wurzels, gazelles for pigs.

No, he must express his regrets for his intolerable unkindness. At last, at last, the chance he had not dared to hope for had been granted him. True that Chasuble had not thrown himself before a train or tossed off a flask of strychn-

nine. But what if he bore with him to the grave a crushed, a broken heart?

"Pigs" . . . a curious theme. . . .

Wimpole pushed his way through the door and across a vestibule. He heard a voice, assured and resonant. The chairman had obviously not finished his introductory remarks. Wimpole pushed open another door. It squeaked frightfully. A hundred large faces turned towards him, large as a harvest moon and red as an apple—ninety-eight in the hall, two upon the platform. A hundred pairs of eyes concentrated upon Wimpole. A wild instinct of flight seized him. All these healthy faces, these breeches and gaiters and leggings and side-whiskers . . . There was one empty chair in the middle of the room. The chairman pointed at it with a peremptory gesture. It must have been the lecturer he had interrupted, not the chairman. The chairman sat in the centre of the table before a bell and a flask. The lecturer held a bundle of notes in his hands and resumed his interrupted flow.

He roared, he bellowed, like the bull of Bashan. Not because he was angry with anything or anybody, but because that was his natural mode of utterance. He was a genial gentleman and hearty. He must have stood six foot and one or two inches in his stockinged feet. But he looked smaller because of the enormous bulk of his shoulders. He had huge red hands. His knees were like the nobbly ends of lopped branches on the trunk of an oak.

There was an especial species of pig, one gathered, that had won Mr. Eustace Chasuble's affections. It was entitled the "Large Black Pig".

He recommended its virtues to his audience. His audience shook their heads in slow and weighty approbation, and tapped with their gnarled sticks on the ground. "No breed," proclaimed Mr. Chasuble, "could achieve such popularity without genuine merit, in the production both of pork and bacon: in the production of those cuts known as 'Medium', 'Fat', or 'Lean Sizeable' . . ."

Slowly a sweat of terror gathered upon Wimpole's brow. He tried to rise from his chair. The chair grated on the floor. He stumbled over somebody's stick. A hundred pairs of eyes concentrated upon him once more. The chairman touched the bell. Wimpole relapsed upon his chair.

His heart tolled a muffled dirge within him. Mr. Chasuble returned to the Large Black Pig.

"The great weight to which the Large Black Pig was bred formerly has now given way to greater quality, and at an early age it yields a long, deep-sided carcass of 160 lb. to 190 lb. dead weight, light in the shoulder, jowl, and offal . . ."

"They can't stop me," thought Wimpole, "slinking away when it's all over. God help me!"

But the lecture drew to an end and questions followed, and votes of thanks followed those, and the farmers ambled out of the hall. But little Wimpole still sat upon his chair like one hypnotized, his pale grey eyes staring from his head.

"Now's your chance to escape!" said Wimpole to himself. But his limbs would not obey him. A palsy, a terror had descended upon him. He was aware that Eustace Chasuble came striding like a tree over to him. Chasuble opened his mouth and spoke.

"If it's some more advice about the Large Black Pig you're wanting, sir . . ."

Then suddenly Wimpole found words, or words found Wimpole. He must now and for ever deliver himself from this phantom, even though the phantom had taken to itself so strange and terrible a shape.

"Your book of poems," he cried, "called *Gangrene and Lilies*. It was me. I wrote the review. My name's Wimpole! Sir, I assure you . . ."

"You!" exclaimed the other. "So you're Wimpole!"

Wimpole saw his vast arm shoot through the air towards him like Jove's thunderbolt. He ducked. He found his tiny fingers crushed in a gigantic hand.

"I've been wanting to meet you for years, Mr. Wimpole!" the vast voice boomed. "The only critic who took any notice of my book. Thank you, Mr. Wimpole, thank you! I can't say how grateful I am! Come round to the Pig and Whistle and let me try and tell you! No? Mr. Wimpole, no! I'll take no refusals!"

Mr. Wimpole blinked.



## A. CONAN DOYLE

*The Parish Magazine*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle practised as a doctor for some years before he decided to devote himself to literature. Besides the immortal Sherlock Holmes stories he wrote a large number of romances and plays, and in later life took a keen interest in spiritualism.



## THE PARISH MAGAZINE

IT was six o'clock on a winter evening. Mr. Pomeroy, the printer, was on the point of leaving his office, which was his back room, for his home, which was his front room, when young Murphy entered. Murphy was an imperturbable youth with a fat face and sleepy eyes, who had the rare quality of always doing without question whatever he was told. It is usually a great virtue—but there are exceptions.

"There are two folk to see you," said Murphy, laying two cards upon the table.

Mr. Pomeroy glanced at them.

"Mr. Robert Anderson. Miss Julia Duncan. I don't know the names. Well, show them in."

A long, sad-faced youth entered, accompanied by a mournful young lady, clad in black. Their appearance was respectable, but depressing.

"I dare say you know this," said the youth, holding up a small, grey-covered volume, the outer cover of which was ornamented with the picture of a church. "It's the *St. Olivia's Church Magazine*. What I mean, it's the Parish Magazine. This lady and I are what you might call the editors. It has been printed by——"

"Elliot and Dark, in the City," said the lady, as her companion seemed to stumble. "But they have suddenly closed down their works. We have the month's issue all ready, but we want to add to it."

"A Supplement, if you get my meaning," said the youth. "That's the word—supplement. The thing has become too dam'——"

"What he is trying to say," cried the girl, "is that the magazine wants lighting up on the social side."

"That's it," said the youth. "Just a bit of ginger, so to speak. So we arranged a Supplement. We will put it in as a loose leaf, if you follow my meaning. It's all typewritten and clear"—here he drew a folded paper from his pocket—"and

it needs no reading or correcting. Just rush it through, five hundred copies, as quickly as you can do it."

"The issue is overdue," said the lady. "We must have it out by midday to-morrow. They tell me Ferguson and Co. could easily have it ready in the time, and if you won't guarantee it, we must take it to them."

"Absolutely," said the youth.

Mr. Pomeroy picked up the typed copy and glanced at it. His eyes fell upon the words, "Our beloved Vicar, Mr. Ffolliott-Sharp, B.A." There was some allusion to a bishopric. Pomeroy threw the paper across to his assistant. "Get on with it!" he said.

"We should like to pay at once," said Miss Duncan, opening her bag. "Here is a five-pound note, and you can account for it afterwards. Of course, you don't know us, and might not trust us."

"Well, if one did not trust the Parish Magazine—" said Pomeroy, smiling.

"Absolutely," cried the youth. "But what I mean is that we want to pay now. You'll send the stuff round to me at 16 Colgrove Road. Got it? Not later than twelve. Rush it through. What?"

"It shall be there," said Pomeroy.

The pair were leaving the room when the girl turned back.

"Put your name as printer at the bottom," she said. "It's the law. Besides, you may get the printing of the Magazine in the future."

"Certainly. We always print our name."

The couple passed out, and hugged each other in the passage.

"I think we put it across," said he.

"Marvellous!" said she.

"That fiver was my idea."

"Incredible!" she cried. "We've got him."

"Absolutely!" said he, and they passed out into the night.

The stolid Murphy wrought long and hard, and the Pomeroy Press was working till unconscionable hours. The assistant found the matter less dull than most which he handled, and a smile spread itself occasionally over his fat face. Surely some of this was rather unusual stuff. He had never read

anything quite like it. However, "his not to reason why". He had been well drilled to do exactly what he was told. The packet was ready next morning, and before twelve o'clock it had been duly dispatched to the house mentioned. Murphy carried it himself and was surprised to find their client waiting for it at the garden gate. It took some energy, apparently, to be the editor of a Parish Magazine.

It was twenty-four hours before the bomb burst, which blew Mr. Pomeroy and his household into fragments. The first intimation of trouble was the following letter :

"Sir,

*"We can hardly imagine that you have read the contents of the so-called Supplement to the Parish Magazine which has been distributed to the members of the congregation of St. Olivia's Church. If you had you would hardly have dared to make yourself responsible by putting your name to it. I need not say that you are likely to hear a good deal more of the matter. As to my teeth, I may say that they are remarkably sound, and that I have never been to a dentist in my life.*

"JAMES WILSON

*"(Major)."*

There was a second letter upon the breakfast table. The dazed printer picked it up. It was in a feminine hand, and read thus :

"Sir,

*"With regard to the infamous paragraph in the new issue of the Parish Magazine, I may say that if I have bought a new car it is no business of anyone else, and the remarks about my private affairs are most unkind and uncalled for. I understand that as you are the printer you are legally responsible. You will hear in the course of a few days from my legal advisers.*

*"Yours faithfully,*

*"JANE PEDDIGREW.*

*"14, Elton Square."*

"What the devil does it mean?" cried Pomeroy, staring wildly at his wife and daughter. "Murphy! Murphy!"

His assistant entered from the office.

"Have you a copy of that Supplement, which you printed for the Parish Magazine?"

"Yes, sir. I delivered five hundred, but there are a few in the office."

"Bring it in! Bring it in! Quick!"

Then Mr. Pomeroy began to read aloud, and apoplexy grew nearer and nearer. The document was head Social Notes, and began with several dates and allusions to services which might give confidence to the superficial and rapid reader. Then it opened out in this way:

"Our beloved Vicar (Mr. Ffolliott-Sharp, B.A.) is still busy trying to wangle a bishopric. This time he says in his breezy way that it is 'a perfect sitter', but we have our doubts. It is notorious that he has pulled strings in the past, and that the said strings broke. However, he has a cousin in the Lord Chancellor's office, so there is always hope."

"Gracious!" cried Pomeroy. "In the Parish Magazine, too!"

"In the last fortnight sixteen hymn books have disappeared from the church. There is no need for public scandal, so if Mr. James Bagshaw, Junior, of 113 Lower Cheltenham Place, will call upon the Churchwardens, all will be arranged."

"That's the son of old Bagshaw, of the bank," cried Pomeroy. "What can they have been dreaming of?"

"The Vicar (the Rev. Ffolliott-Sharp, B.A.) would take this opportunity to beg the younger Miss Ormerod to desist from her present tactics. Delicacy forbids the Vicar from saying what those tactics are. It is not necessary for a young lady to attend every service, and to push herself into the front pew, which is already owned (though not paid for) by the Dawson-Braggs family. The Vicar has asked us to send marked copies of this paragraph to Mrs. Delmar, Miss Featherstone, and Miss Poppy Crewe."

Pomeroy wiped his forehead. "This is pretty awful!" said he. Then:

"Some of these Sundays Major Wilson's false teeth will drop into the collecting bag. Let him either get a new set, or else take off that smile when he walks round with the bag. With lips firmly compressed there is no reason why the present set may not last for years."

"That's where the answer comes in," said Pomeroy, glancing at the open letter upon his table. "I expect he'll be round with a stick presently. What's this?"

“We don't know if Miss Cissy Dufour and Captain Copperley are secretly married or not. If not, they should be. He could then enter Laburnum Villa instead of wearing out the garden gate by leaning on it!”

“Good heavens, listen to this one! ‘Mr. Malceby, the grocer, is back from Hythe. But why the bag of sand among his luggage? Surely sugar gives a sufficient profit at its present price. As we are on the subject, we cannot but remark upon the increased water rate paid last quarter by the Silverside Dairy Company. What do they do with all this water? The public has a right to know.’”

“Good Lord, listen to this! ‘It is very wrong to say that our popular member, Sir James Tonder, was drunk at the garden party of the Mayor. It is true that he tripped over his own leg when he tried to dance the tango, but that can fairly be attributed to his own obvious physical disabilities. As a matter of fact, several guests who only drank one glass of the Mayor's champagne (natural 1928) were very ill in consequence, so that it is most unfair to put so uncharitable an interpretation upon our member's *faux pas*.’”

“That's worth a thousand pounds in any Court,” groaned Pomeroy. “My dear, Rothschild couldn't stand the actions that this paper will bring on us.”

The ladies of the family had shown a regrettable inclination to laugh, but his words made them properly solemn. He continued his reading.

“Mrs. Peddigrew has started a six-cylinder which is listed at seven hundred and fifty pounds. How she does it nobody knows. Her late husband was a little rat of a man who did odd jobs down in the City. He could not have left so much. This matter wants looking into.’”

“Why, he was the vice-chairman of the Baltic,” said Pomeroy. “These people are stark, staring mad. Listen to this.

“‘Evensong will be at six-thirty. Yes, Mrs. Mould, at six-thirty sharp. And Mr. King will be on the left-hand seat well within view. We can count on your attendance. If you are not a pillar of the church, you are generally sneaking behind one!’ Oh, Lord, here's another.

“‘If Mr. Goldbury, of 7 Cheesman Place, will call at the Vicarage he will receive back the trouser-button which he put in the bag last Sunday. It is useless to the Vicar, whereas in

its right place it might be most important to Mr. Goldbury! There's no use laughing, you two. You won't laugh when you see the lawyer's letters. Listen to this.

““Prithee why so pale, fond lover? Prithee why so pale?” The question is addressed to William Briggs, our dentist friend of Hope Street. Has the lady in pink chiffon turned you down, or is it merely that you are behind with your rent, as usual? Cheer up, William. You have our best wishes.’

“Good gracious! They grow worse and worse. Just listen to this.

“If any motorists get into trouble, my advice to them is to see Chief Constable Walton in his private room at the Town Hall. Cheques will, of course, not be received. But surely it is far better to pay a small sum across the table in ready cash—asking for no receipt—than to have the trouble and expense of proceedings in the Court.’

“My word, we shall have some proceedings in the Court before we are through. Here is a tit-bit which will keep the lawyers busy: “The Voyd-Merriman wedding was a most interesting affair and we wish the young couple every happiness. We say “young” out of courtesy, for it is an open secret that the bride will never see thirty-five again. The groom also is, we should say, getting rather long in the tooth. By the way, why did he start and look over his shoulder when the clergyman spoke of “any just cause or impediment”? No doubt it was perfectly harmless, but it gave rise to some ill-natured gossip. We had pleasure in attending the reception afterwards. There was a detective to guard the presents. We really think that his services could have been dispensed with, for they would never have been in danger. Major Wilson's two brass napkin rings were the pick of the bunch. There was a cheque in an envelope from the bride's father. We have heard what the exact figure was, and we quite appreciate the need for an envelope. However, it will pay for the cab to the station. It is understood that the happy couple will get as far as Margate for their honeymoon, and if the money holds out they may extend their travels to Ramsgate. Address: the Red Cow public house, near the Station.’

“Why, these are the richest people in Rotherheath,” said Pomeroy, wiping his forehead.

“There is a lot more, but that is enough to settle our hash.

I think we had best sell up for what we can get and clear out of the town. My gosh, those two folk must have got out of an asylum. Anyhow, my first job must be to see them. Maybe they are millionaires who can afford to pay for their little jokes."

His mission proved, however, to be fruitless. On inquiry at the address given he found that it was an empty house. The caretaker from next door knew nothing of the matter. It was clear now why the young man had waited at the gate for his parcel. What was Pomeroy to do next? Apparently he could only sit and wait for the arrival of the writs. However, it was a very different document which was handed in at his door two evenings later, It was headed

"R.S.B.Y.P."

and ran thus :

*"A special meeting of the R.S.B.Y.P. will be held at 16 Stanmore Terrace, in the billiards-room of John Anderson, J.P., to-night at 9 p.m. The presence of Mr. James Pomeroy, printer, is urgently needed. The matter under discussion is his liability for certain scandalous statements recently printed in the Parish Magazine."*

It may well be imagined that Mr. Pomeroy was punctual at the appointment.

"Mr. Anderson is not at home himself," said the footman, "but young Mr. Robert Anderson and his friends are receiving." There was a humorous twinkle in the footman's eyes.

The printer was shown into a small waiting-room, where two men, one a postman and the other apparently a small tradesman, were seated. He could not help observing that they were both as harassed and miserable as he was himself. They looked at him with dull, lack-lustre eyes, but were too dispirited to talk, nor did he feel sufficient energy to break the silence. Presently one of them and then the other was called out. Finally the footman came for him, and threw wide a door.

"Mr. James Pomeroy," cried the footman.

At the end of a large music-room, which was further adorned by a billiards-table, was sitting a semicircle of young

people, all very serious, and all with writing materials before them. None was above twenty-one years of age, and they were about equally divided as to sex. Among them were the two customers who had lured him to his doom. They both smiled at him most affectionately, in spite of his angry stare.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Pomeroy," said a very young man in evening dress, who acted as Chairman. "There are one or two questions which, as President of the R.S.B.Y.P., it is my duty to put to you. I believe that you have been somewhat alarmed by this incident of the Parish Magazine?"

"Of course I have," said Pomeroy, in a surly voice.

"May I ask if your sleep has been affected?"

"I have not closed my eyes since it happened."

There was a subdued murmur of applause, and several members leaned across to shake hands with Mr. Robert Anderson.

"Did it affect your future plans?"

"I had thought of leaving the town."

"Excellent! I think, fellow-members, that there is no doubt that the monthly gold medal should be awarded to Mr. Anderson and Miss Duncan for their very meritorious performance, which has been well conceived and cleverly carried out. To relieve your natural anxiety, we must tell you at once, Mr. Pomeroy, that you have been the victim of a joke."

"It's likely to be a pretty costly one," said the printer.

"Not at all. No harm has been done. No leaflets have been sent out. The letters which have reached you emanate from ourselves. We are, Mr. Pomeroy, the Rotherheath Society of Bright Young People, who endeavour to make the world a merrier and more lively place by the exercise of our wit. Upon this occasion a prize was offered for whichever member or members could most effectually put the wind up some resident in this suburb. There have been several candidates, but on the whole the prize must be awarded as already said."

"But—but—it's unjustifiable!" stammered Pomeroy.

"Entirely," said the Chairman, cheerfully. "I think that all our proceedings may come under that head. On the other hand, we remind our victims that they have unselfishly sacrificed themselves for the general hilarity of the community. A special silver medal, which I will now affix to your coat, will be your souvenir of the occasion."

"And I'll speak to my father when he comes back," said

Anderson. "What I mean is, there is printing and what not to be done for the firm."

"And my father really edits the Parish Magazine. That's what put it into our heads," said Miss Duncan. "Maybe we can get you the printing after all."

"And there is whisky-and-soda on the sideboard, and a good cigar," said the President.

So Mr. Pomeroy eventually went out into the night, thinking that after all youth will be served, and it would be a dull world without it.



WILL SCOTT

*The Life of Lord Coodle*

Will Scott started as a cartoonist and black-and-white artist, but began writing in 1920 and sold his first story to a magazine which had already rejected it twice. Since then he has written over one thousand short stories, which is probably a record, as well as four novels and the plays *Queer Fish* and *The Limping Man*.



## THE LIFE OF LORD COODLE

*In which a banana skin causes almost as much worry and trouble as the proverbial apple*

THESE are the facts.

Lord Coodle, on the dark night of February 17th, 1927, when walking along the ducal towing-path, slipped on a banana skin and fell into the Wimbledon Canal. Mark the date. The night of February 17th, 1927. Lord Coodle was almost drowned. He was as near as matters to becoming the late Lord Coodle, of Jermyn Mansions and Coodle Park, that pleasant buffer state to the south-west of London town. But for the presence—and the presence of mind—of Mr. Herbert Fawcitt, the life of Lord Coodle, from that moment on, would have been history.

Mr. Herbert Fawcitt saved the life of Lord Coodle.

“’Ello!” exclaimed Mr. Herbert Fawcitt, pulling up on the ducal towing-path and staring at the blob in the water. “What’s this?”

“Help!” cried Lord Coodle.

“Hang on, old man!” responded Mr. Herbert Fawcitt; and tearing off his coat—which happened to be not his only but his best coat—he promptly leapt into the murky waters of the Wimbledon Canal and got Lord Coodle by the hair.

“This way, old man,” he said swiftly. “Kick out! The devil! Don’t kick me! Kick *out*! ’Ere! Can’t yer swim?”

Lord Coodle merely guggling at this, Mr. Fawcitt got a tighter grip on the noble hair.

“If yer won’t make such a devil of a fuss I’ll have yer out in two ticks,” he promised. “Look ’ere—put yer hands on that stay. Stay! The devil! That lump of wood on top of the towing-path. That’s right. Now!”

The Wimbledon Canal is at its deepest at that particular spot, and the slimey wooden banking to the towing-path is nowhere steeper. If you couldn’t swim, and you happened

to have one or two aboard (Lord Coodle very often happened to have one or two aboard), you had precisely a dog's chance in the Wimbledon Canal. Lord Coodle realized very clearly that he owed his life to Mr. Herbert Fawcit.

He realized the fact very clearly before Mr. Fawcit had got him on the bank; and when Mr. Fawcit had got him on the bank he attempted to say so.

"Do you know," he said, "dash me if I wasn't next best thing to a goner when you got me by the scalp. Do you know, you saved my life!"

"You must have had a devil of a load on," observed Mr. Fawcit.

"I beg your pardon?" said Lord Coodle.

"Stewed," said Mr. Fawcit.

Lord Coodle said nothing to this, but began to grope about on the towing-path.

"I say, have you seen my monocle?" he asked presently. "Do you know, I believe I've lost the dashed thing."

"Shouldn't worry about a bit of a thing like a monocle," said Mr. Fawcit shaking the water out of his boots. "You've got a devil of a lot more to worry about than a bit of a thing like that, old man. You're absolutely soaked."

"I am wet, you know," Lord Coodle agreed. "I think I ought to be getting along. I shall be taking a chill."

"A devil of a chill, old man," said Mr. Fawcit.

"It will always be a puzzle to me how I came to be in the canal," Lord Coodle went on slackly. "I was walking along, as right as anything, and then, do you know, out went my legs and I was in. I was walking along, as right as anything, when out went my legs and splash! I was in."

"Devil of a mess!" said the sympathetic Mr. Fawcit. "Must have slipped on something, old man."

"But, I say, what could I have slipped on?"

And now, Mr. Fawcit, in his turn, began to grope about on the towing-path.

"I've got it!" he announced at length.

"Have you found my monocle?" asked Lord Coodle. "Good man!"

"To the devil with your monocle!" said Mr. Fawcit with a grin. "It's a banana skin. This is what you slipped on, old chap."

"Now isn't that extraordinary!" Lord Coodle exclaimed. "A little thing like that causing all this trouble! There was I one moment walking along as right as anything, and then, do you know, out went my legs and splash! I was in the canal. A most extraordinary thing. Right in the water. Do you know, I'm frightfully chilly."

"If I was you, old man," said Mr. Fawcit, "I'd nip along home and get into bed. You'll be catching a dose o' what-for if you don't take care. And a dose o' what-for," Mr. Fawcit concluded gravely, "is the very devil!"

"I say, I believe you're right," said Lord Coodle. "Do you know, I think I'll go home."

"Know your way?" inquired Mr. Fawcit.

"Oh, yes," said Lord Coodle. "Oh, yes, rather. I live just along here. No distance at all. In fact, I was just taking the little dog out for its stroll when I slipped on that infernal banana skin and fell in the canal."

"Where's the little dorg?" asked Mr. Fawcit.

Lord Coodle peered about him in the gloom.

"Do you know," he said, "it's a most remarkable thing, but I believe I forgot to bring the little dog out."

"Well, never mind about the little dorg, old man," said Mr. Fawcit. "You go home at a devil of a lick and get between the blankets. A dose of hot whisky'll soon put you to rights."

"I say, no!" exclaimed Lord Coodle as he staggered damply to his feet and took Mr. Fawcit by the arm.

"No?" said Mr. Fawcit.

"Matter of fact," explained Lord Coodle, "if I hadn't had quite so much already to-night, possibly—just possibly—I'd have seen that banana skin. Ha! ha!"

"Devil of a joke!" commented Mr. Fawcit. "Where do you live?"

"Just along," said Lord Coodle. "I go this way."

"So do I," said Mr. Fawcit.

"Then, I tell you what," said Lord Coodle, "we'll go along together. Do you know, I don't know your name."

"Fawcit," said Mr. Fawcit promptly. "Mr. Herbert Fawcit."

"Mr. Herbert Fawcit," Lord Coodle echoed gravely. "Ah! Do you know, old man, I don't know you!"

"That's all right, old man," said Mr. Fawcit.

"No, but I mean—it's rather remarkable, what? I mean

to say, dammit, you've just saved my life! And I don't know you. Do you know, I think that's dashed odd. By the way! Stop!"

"I'm as wet as the devil, and taking cold, old man," Mr. Fawcitt protested.

"Doesn't matter, dear fellow," said Lord Coodle. "Listen to me—listen to this. Now, what is it? How does it go? Um, toodle, oodle, um—um, toodle, oodle, um—how does it go, now? Thanks for the buggy ride, thanks for the buggy ride, I've had a wonderful time. My girl's got ginger hair, my girl's got— That's not it. How does it go, dear old boy?"

"Blowed if I know," said Mr. Fawcitt. "Sounds a devil of a mess to me. Now you come along, old man. You'll be takin' a fever if you stop here singing devilish silly songs like that all night."

"I believe you're right," said Lord Coodle. "You *are* right! Dashed odd! You're always right!"

And then he pulled up suddenly and let out an enormous piercing whistle.

"What the devil's the matter now, old man?" Mr. Fawcitt demanded.

"Dog," said Lord Coodle.

"You left it at home," said Mr. Fawcitt.

"Did I?" said Lord Coodle, very surprised. "Then what was I doing on the towing-path, dear boy?"

"You," said Mr. Fawcitt plainly, "had had a devil of a binge, old man, and *didn't know* you were on the towing-path."

"How you do manage to think of things," said Lord Coodle brightly. "You're a most convenient chap! Do you know, I'd have been drowned if it hadn't been for you."

"Well, you can forget about that, old man," said Mr. Fawcitt.

"I never *will* forget about it," declared Lord Coodle stoutly. "Day of my death——"

They stopped under the ornamental lamps at the gates of Coodle Park.

"What the devil's on your mind now?" Mr. Fawcitt wanted to know.

"Live here," said Lord Coodle.

"Go to the devil," said Mr. Fawcitt grinning.

"Fact!" said Lord Coodle. "Look here, dear fellow, you saved my life, and I've got to do something 'bout it. Can't

let it go at that. Got to do something. Look here now, what's your name?"

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcit. "Ain't you the blinkin' limit, old man? My name's Fawcit—Herbert Fawcit. Mr. Herbert Fawcit."

"Dashed odd!" muttered Lord Coodle. "Do you know, I've never heard of you, old chap."

"You're devilish stewed, my lad," said Mr. Fawcit sternly. "Best thing you can do is nip in home and get in the sheets. Otherwise," he added, "you goin' to have a devil of a 'flu."

"I'll do as you say," said Lord Coodle. "You always seem to be right, somehow. Remarkable thing! I say, dear fellow, I'll tell you what to do. To-morrow—you come in here and see me. You understand? Come in here and see me. Ask for me. If you told me your name I should only forget it, and if you gave me your address I should only lose the darn thing: so you hear what I say—pop in and see me to-morrow. See?"

"What the devil's your name, old man?" Mr. Fawcit asked.

"Name? Ah! Of course. Naturally. Coodle," said the worthy peer.

"Coodle?"

"Precisely, Coodle."

"Devil of a name!" remarked Mr. Fawcit.

"Well, good-bye, dear fellow," said Lord Coodle, gripping Mr. Fawcit by the lapels. "And a thousand thanks. You saved my life. I don't know what your name is, but I owe everything to you. I'll never forget it—never! Drop in and see me to-morrow. Coodle! Good-bye, dear fellow—good-bye!"

Lord Coodle gaily waved his hand, spun round and tottered up the drive of Coodle Park.

And a moment later Mr. Herbert Fawcit was proceeding to his own humble home, three wet miles away to the west.

"As binged as the devil!" he kept saying to himself, over and over again. "Coodle! Must be a species of valet or something. Oh, well. Decent chap. I'll look him up."

When he reached home he told his wife about it.

Coodle Park is not the place it used to be. The Coodles had had to do things to keep going. Doings things had mostly

consisted of selling slices of Coodle Park to vulgar builders. So that Coodle Park at the time of this chronicle, was bordered on one side entirely by a kind of cheap garden suburb, wherein you could purchase a villa for a hundred pounds down and harassment for the rest of your life. To the north-east it was bordered by the fag-ends of London, and to the south-west by the fag-ends of Surrey. On the remaining side it was bordered by the railway and the canal.

But whatever might happen to Coodle Park, Coodle Hall remained the same gay gem it had been for the last two hundred and fifty years. It was certainly the finest affair that Mr. Herbert Fawcitt had ever set eyes on; and he admitted as much when, on the morning following immersion, he climbed the wide stone steps and rang the ancient bell.

A kind of ambassador, a gilded being from the higher spheres, responded to the summons, and for a second took the breath out of Mr. Fawcitt's body.

"Morning, sir," he said at last. "Want to see Mr. Coodle."

"Mr. Coodle!" the butler sniffed.

"Don't he live here?" asked the doubting Mr. Fawcitt.

"Lord Coodle lives here," returned the beautiful one, staring blankly.

"Go hon!" Mr. Fawcitt grinned.

"What is your business?" the butler demanded.

"Oh, it ain't business, sir," said Mr. Fawcitt. "I sort o' just dropped in to see him."

"Indeed! I am afraid——"

"He asked me to, yer see."

How the duet might have ended can only be guessed at; but at that moment, luckily for Mr. Fawcitt, Lord Coodle himself crossed the hall and chanced to glance in Mr. Fawcitt's direction.

"Hello! old man," Mr. Fawcitt shouted. "Coo-ee!"

Lord Coodle tottered forward and stared.

Seen in the light of day, he was at least thirty-eight, minus chin and plus a long, inquisitive nose. Apparently he had a fund of monocles on which to draw, for one now reposed languidly in front of his right eye, and through it he blankly surveyed the unprepossessing form and features of Mr. Herbert Fawcitt.

"How goes it, old man?" Mr. Fawcitt inquired. "Thought

I'd just pop in an' see how you was gettin' on. Devilish weather, ain't it?"

"Do I—ah—do I know you?" drawled Lord Coodle uneasily.

"Well, I'll go to the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcit.

"I—ah—I know your face," said Lord Coodle, not trying very hard. "Yes, I suppose I know your face."

The butler was the uneasiest of the trio. He stroked his nose and looked away.

"What about last night in the canal?" said Mr. Fawcit.

"Why, goodness gracious me, yes!" cried Lord Coodle, blushing crimson as far as his collar, and possibly beyond. "Why, yes, of course! The canal. . . . Yes. . . ." He pulled at his tie and tittered. "Er—do you know, you'd better come in."

Mr. Fawcit came in, and the butler retired, much intrigued by the suggestion about the canal and the night before. He had been making rough guesses at the reason for the condition of Lord Coodle's clothes all the morning, but this was beyond his wildest hopes. Lord Coodle in the canal! He carried the spicy tit-bit to the servants' hall.

Meantime Mr. Fawcit was sitting in the poshest chair in the world, in front of the fire in Lord Coodle's library.

"Dashed odd, you know, my man," Lord Coodle was saying. "I woke up on the front steps at three o'clock this morning. Goodness knows how I've come to miss a cold. Sound constitution, I suppose. I say, I suppose I was a bit on last night, what?"

"A bit on? The devil! old man," said Mr. Fawcit.

"Look here, now—I fell in the canal and was drowning, or some stupid thing, and you trekked up and saved my life. Wasn't that about it?" said Lord Coodle.

"Oh, well, you can forget about that, old chap," said Mr. Fawcit.

"But that's just it, you see—I can't possibly forget about it," insisted Lord Coodle. "Do you know, if it hadn't been for you, I'd not be here now. No. I insist on doing something for you."

"But there's nothing I want, old man," said Mr. Fawcit.

"Surely there is," said Lord Coodle.

"The devil! I ought to know."

Mr. Fawcitt reached out and tapped Lord Coodle on the knee.

"'Ere," he said, "who the devil would have thought you was a lord? Why, you're just like me or the next bloke, ain't yer, old man? Now that johnny out there, what popped out when I rung the bell, I don't mind admittin' he fairly put the wind up me. Who is he? Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"Oh," said Lord Coodle, "he's the butler."

"Well, I'll go to the devil!" said Mr. Fawcitt.

"Now, look here," said Lord Coodle, with near-firmness. "You must let me get this thing settled right away. You saved my life, and I——"

"Tell yer what yer can do," said Mr. Fawcitt. "I seen some AR grapes in yer greenhouse as I was comin' up the drive here. I got a couple o' nippers at home what would give anything for to have some grapes growed an' cut by a real, live lord. What about nippin' out and cuttin' a couple of bunches? Then we'll call it quits."

"Well, I'll certainly do that, but you must see it is not enough, and if——"

"Listen to me, old man. I got my business, an' it pays me all right. I run a little greengrocery over by Cheam, an' it pays me very well. When I'm startin' out savin' lives as a going concern, I'll let yer know, see, old man?"

"This is most extraordinary!" sighed Lord Coodle.

"Now what about them grapes, old man?"

Lord Coodle stroked his pale hair and blinked.

"Ah, yes," he said.

They went out to the greenhouse. Most of the staff saw them go. The word went round. The butcher's boy was delivering meat as Lord Coodle and Mr. Fawcitt entered the greenhouse. He saw, he asked, he listened, he went away and talked. The word went farther round.

Grapes in hand, Mr. Fawcitt stood at the door of Coodle Hall, chatting amiably to the bewildered Lord Coodle.

"Wife's brother," Mr. Fawcitt burst out, "name o' Joe Perks, is one o' these red-hot Reds. 'To the devil with lords!' says he. He wants to have yer all boiled in frying fat. Well, I reckon I can tell him a thing or two. 'You go to the devil,' I shall say to him. 'A pal o' mine is a lord, see? An' he's a devil of a fine feller! No side an' nonsense about him."

Lord Coodle,' I shall say. And if he says: 'You go to the devil, what do you know about Lord Coodle?' I shall say: 'Well, I ought. I once fished him out of the canal when he was lit up.' Har! har! har!

"I'd like yer to meet Joe Perks," Mr. Fawcit concluded. "It'd do him a devil of a lot o' good."

A carriage rolled up the drive and a very grand personage of the pretty fair sex alighted and came up the steps. This was none other than the Countess Coodle, Lord Coodle's aunt, who helped him rule Coodle Hall until such time as some hopeless woman made up her mind to marry him. The Countess Coodle arched her eyebrows at her fluttered nephew and frowned at Mr. Fawcit, who, however, merely grinned pleasantly in return.

"Mornin'," said Mr. Fawcit. "Stinkin' weather, ain't it?"

The Countess Coodle said nothing. She swept on and through the portals of Coodle Hall and waited, boiling, in the hall.

"Well, so long, old man," said Mr. Fawcit, taking Lord Coodle's fishy hand in his. "Be seein' yer again. Your old woman's waiting for yer in there."

"My—ah—my aunt," said Lord Coodle weakly.

"My mistake. Well, ta-ta! Be seein' yer again."

Mr. Fawcit went down the steps. Lord Coodle went up the steps. At the bottom of the steps Mr. Fawcit paused and turned round.

"Coo-ee! Oi!" he called.

Wincing, Lord Coodle turned.

"Thanks fer the grapes!" shouted Mr. Fawcit.

He went off whistling. When he got home he told his wife about it.

Meantime the Countess Coodle was telling Lord Coodle about it.

"Reggie," she demanded, "tell me at once—who was that perfectly impossible person?"

"The—ah—the fact of the matter is, you see, dear old thing," said Lord Coodle limply, "I was a bit on last night and I slipped on a banana skin and fell in the canal. He fished me out. The fact of the matter is, he saved my life. I can't very well tick the perisher off. He's a perfectly perishing perisher, I know, but hang it! he saved my life. It's a

bit of an infernal mess, I know, but I can't very well snub him, what? He even wouldn't take any reward. Hanged if I know what to do."

"Well, so long as we see no more of him," said the Countess Coodle.

"Fact of the matter is, you see, old thing," said Lord Coodle, "the petisher seems to have taken a sort of fancy to me. He talks about coming again, you know. The fact of the matter is he talks about bringing his brother-in-law, or his wife's brother, or whatever he is. Jqe Perks, you know, old thing. The—er—the Socialist."

"Good Heavens!" cried the Countess Coodle.

The next day was Sunday. The Countess Coodle and Lord Coodle (by permission of the Countess) were entertaining at Coodle Hall the First Lord of the Inactivity, Sir William and Lady Nodd, and the Secretary for White Lines. In the afternoon they walked on the terrace to take the air.

Coming up the steps, but not for the purpose of taking the air, were two of the dirtiest children the Countess Coodle had ever seen. One of them carried a little wooden box, at the sight of which Lord Coodle wilted.

"'Ello!" said the boy child, beaming. "Please which is Lord Coodle?"

None of the others admitting to it, in the circumstances, Lord Coodle had to step forward.

"Ah—I am Lord Coodle," he whispered.

"Please, farver's sent yer box back," said the boy child. "The one wot yer give 'im the gripes in.

"An' please can me sister look at yer?" added the boy child daringly.

"Ah—I—ah—that is . . . here I am," faltered Lord Coodle.

"I want ter see the lord wot me farver fished out o' the canal," said the girl child. "I want to see the lord wot me farver fished out o' the can-a-a-al! I want to see the lord wot me farver fished out o' the can-a-a-al!"

"Very peculiar!" remarked Sir William Nodd.

"The fact of the matter is, old man," Lord Coodle explained, "I fell in the canal the other night, and this—ah—this—ah—child's father—ah—fished me out, you see, old man."

"Saved your life?" snapped Sir William Nodd.

"The fact of the matter is, old man, he did," confessed Lord Coodle.

"You was ti-i-ight!" shouted the two dirty children. "Farver says you was ti-i-ight!"

Lord Coodle hastily dragged a florin out of his pocket and threw it at the children. By the simple process of treading on his sister's hand the boy child contrived to secure it. They then ran away down the steps and pulled up ten yards along the drive. Here they stood and waved.

"Oo-oo! Lord Coodle! Oo-oo!" they cried.

They ran another ten yards and pulled up again.

"Oo-oo! Lord Coodle! Oo-oo!" they cried once more.

This time they ran as far as the gates, where they climbed up to the top of the rails and settled as if for ever.

"Oo-oo! Lord Coodle! Oo-oo! Lord Coodle! Oo-oo! Oo-oo!"

"Remarkably odd!" remarked the Secretary for White Lines.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Countess Coodle, leading the way into Coodle Hall.

A chronicle has its limits, particularly its time limits. We must pass over in the very briefest manner the minor hauntings of Lord Coodle by the man who fished him out of the canal. The occasion on which Mr. Herbert Fawcitt discovered Lord Coodle at the local horticultural show, took him by the arm and spent an hour with him, must be recounted in detail elsewhere. The Press, for example, contains a very full report. And there was that time when an enterprising Press photographer, having got hold of part of the story of Mr. Fawcitt's plucky rescue, took Mr. Fawcitt by the arm, led him to Coodle Hall, and photographed them together. The day on which the photograph appeared in the *Daily Snap* was Black Monday at Coodle Hall.

One week-end Lord Coodle had been entertaining the Hon. Vera Highgate at Coodle Hall (still by permission of the Countess Coodle), and it looked very much as if the Hon. Vera was to be the prime fool for whom Lord Coodle had so long waited. On the Monday morning he commanded his chauffeur to get out the Rolls-Royce and drive the Hon. Vera and himself into town. This the chauffeur did.

But when they were in the High Street, half a mile or so

from the gates of Coodle Park, a fatal figure leapt out from the kerb and threw up an arm. The chauffeur banged on the brakes and brought the big car to a standstill. The door opened. Mr. Herbert Fawcitt got in.

"Hallo, old man!" he said gaily. "Sorry to interrupt yer, but yer might drop me orf at Putney. I got some sprouts here that's a special order, an' hang me if I ain't missed the bus. Yer don't mind, old man?"

"Er—er—quite," said Lord Coodle, turning crimson.

"Then that's all right, old man," said Mr. Fawcitt. "Knew I could depend on you, eh? There'd ha' been no end of a row if Mrs. Thingummy hadn't had these 'ere sprouts in time. Oh, well, it's all right now."

His eye settled definitely on the Hon. Vera for the first time.

"Mornin', miss," he said pleasantly. "Havin' some rotten weather, eh?"

The Hon. Vera sniffed. And having sniffed, she sniffed again.

"Eucalyptus, miss," said Mr. Fawcitt, "is what you want."

He tapped Lord Coodle's knee.

"I 'ear my kids was up to see you the other day, old man," he said.

"Er—ah—the fact of the matter is, they were," said the now purple Lord Coodle.

"Give any sauce?"

Lord Coodle fumbled with his necktie.

"Saucy little devils, you know," Mr. Fawcitt confided. "Yer know what kids are, miss," he appealed to the Hon. Vera. And then once more to Lord Coodle: "If they start givin' you any sauce, don't stand for it, old man. Clout their heads and put 'em out. 'Swat I allus do."

They came to Putney and Mr. Fawcitt tapped wildly on the window to attract the chauffeur's attention.

"Oi! You! Owen Nares! Pull up!"

He alighted.

"Well, thanks for the buggy ride, old man. Be seein' you again. Good mornin', miss. Pleez tuv mecha. On away, Owen Nares! Let 'er 'ave it!"

He was gone. But one sprout remained.

Gone, too, were Lord Coodle's chances with the Hon. Vera.

It was no use explaining that once upon a time that fellow had saved Lord Coodle's life. Lord Coodle tried explaining for an hour. Then he gave it up.

That evening he explained again at even greater length—to his aunt, the Countess Coodle.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the Countess. "This is the last straw! This is just as far as we can permit it to go! This is the end!"

"Do you know, I think so too," said the agitated Lord Coodle. "But I mean to say, what can a chappie do? After all, if it hadn't been for him, I'd not be here. He *did* save my life. A chappie can't perishing well *snub* him. Dammit!"

"I am asking you to do nothing," said the Countess Coodle. "You're not firm enough to do anything. You haven't the spine! Leave the doing to me."

"So long as you don't snub the perisher," wailed Lord Coodle.

"Snub him! Good Heavens!" cried the Countess.

She wrote a letter and drew a cheque for five hundred pounds. And the next night Lord Coodle had the misfortune to meet Mr. Herbert Fawcitt in the High Street.

"Coo-ee! Oi!" cried Mr. Fawcitt, ploughing his way through the crowds. "'Arf a tic-tac, old man. I want to have a word with you. 'Ere! Will yer come an' have one?"

"Do you know," said Lord Coodle, "the fact of the matter is, no."

"All righto! We can talk just as well 'ere. Now, then, I got a letter from the old hen up at your place, to-day—Countess Wossername."

"Ah—my aunt," sighed Lord Coodle.

"Same bird," said Mr. Fawcitt. "She enclosed five hundred quid. Now, I been thinkin' it over, and I've decided to keep that five 'undred quid."

"Quite right," said Lord Coodle. "Exactly. Proper thing to do. Can't insult a lady, you know."

"'Tain't that I want to talk about," said Mr. Fawcitt. "She says in her letter that *you* don't want to see *me* no more!"

"Oh—ah—er—well," faltered Lord Coodle, "I meant to say, my dear chap——"

"Now, what have I ever done to 'er?" Mr. Fawcitt insisted.

"Do you know," said Lord Coodle timidly, "nothing!"

"Well, then! An' wot have I done *for* you?"

"Ah!" said Lord Coodle.

"Wouldn't you have been in Jericho, if I hadn't toddled along that night you was stewed an' fell in the canal?"

"Ah!" said Lord Coodle stupidly.

"Well then—is this any way to treat a pal—wot saved yer life? Eh?"

Mr. Fawcit was shouting. People were stopping to listen. Lord Coodle was hot and red all over.

"Saved yer life!" bawled Mr. Fawcit. "An' then—this sort o' thing! Hell-fire! An' I thought we was friends."

Something had to be done.

"The fact of the matter is, my dear fellow," said Lord Coodle—"you know what women are!"

"Ah!" Mr. Fawcit appeared to leap for joy. "Just what my old woman said. She said it was none o' your doin'. She said a fine gentleman like you, old man, wouldn't do the dirty on the likes o' me like that. And so you'd nothin' whatever to do with that letter?"

"Nothing whatever, my dear fellow, I assure you," said Lord Coodle, wiping his brow.

"Then I'm sorry I spoke, old man," said Mr. Fawcit. "And now come an' have one."

"Really—I—er . . ."

"*Come—and—have—one!*" insisted Mr. Fawcit.

And Lord Coodle, just in order to get away from the crowd, went and had one. People point out the pub to this day.

For a whole week Lord Coodle stayed indoors, moping. His aunt and he were not on speaking terms for six out of the seven days. She showed her contempt for him by ignoring his presence. On the seventh day they had words and he barged out of the house and went for a walk down the drive to cool off. Presently he came to the gates. And presently he heard a joyous yell from over the way.

"Oo-oo! Lord Coo-oo-dle! Oo-oo! Oo-oo!"

He raised his weary eyes and saw them, the two dirty brats of Mr. Herbert Fawcit, leaning over the gate of the nearest villa of the garden suburb, opposite the gates of Coodle Park. And then he saw Mr. Fawcit himself come out of the house and cuff the brats on the ears and send them indoors.

And then he was aware of Mr. Fawcitt himself standing by his side.

"Remember that five hundred quid?" said Mr. Fawcitt merrily. "I just bought this little kip with it. Bang opposite your gates, old man. Nice little place, too. I tell yer wot—come in an' have a look round. You've never met the wife, have you? She'll be as bucked as the devil to meet a real live lord."

"The fact of the matter is, my dear fellow," said Lord Coodle, "some other time."

He took a sinister delight in informing the Countess of the results of her handiwork.

"You've now got 'em, dear old thing," he said, "bang on the doorstep. I may be a perfectly perishin' fool and all that, but I mean to say! Bang on the jolly old dashed doorstep, old thing—and all through your perishin' butting-in. This is the last straw, this is!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the Countess.

These are the facts.

On the dark night of June 23rd, 1927, a policeman discovered a beautiful tall hat by the side of the Wimbledon Canal, five hundred yards from the gates of Coodle Park. By the side of the hat was a dog.

Five minutes later, from out the canal, the policeman was dragging Lord Coodle, of Jermyn Mansions and Coodle Park, in the county of Surrey, three-quarters drowned.

And there was no banana skin on the towing-path.



MICHAEL JOSEPH

*A Splash of Publicity*

Michael Joseph is a director of a well-known literary agency and has written a number of books on the art of writing. But his real interest in life, and his only recreation, according to *Who's Who*, is the study of the manners and morals of cats.



## A SPLASH OF PUBLICITY

**I**S there anything more depressing than being an unsuccessful artist? If you happen to know one, ask him and see what he says. His studio is probably full of the mute evidences of his failure. He hasn't the courage to destroy his unappreciated efforts. And as a rule he lacks the means to escape from their depressing influence by renting another studio.

Whatever Charlie Potts may have been, he certainly was unsuccessful. Of course, his name told against him. In vain the bold signature CHARLES POTTS adorned painting after painting. No one wanted to buy them. In fact, no one liked them, with one exception—who deserves the next paragraph all to herself. His friends insisted on calling him Charlie, treating his pictures with familiar disrespect, and preferring to talk instead about racing, food, and other more important matters.

Only one person believed in Charles. That was Marigold. Marigold was his wife, and a very pretty, delightful wife she was. Charles has always said she was much too good for him, and as a friend of Charles I am inclined to agree with him. There was nothing especially noticeable about Marigold, except that she was attractive in a slim, graceful fashion, which somehow suggested initiative and determination. She didn't really look at all masterful, but you were conscious that if she had set her heart on something she would get that something in the end.

So that it was just as well for dear, easy-going Charlie that Marigold had made up her mind that he *must* succeed. Charlie had the relic of a war pension, luckily, but Marigold knew that something would have to be done soon, for three people cannot live on the fag end of a pension. Two could, and did, manage, with the aid of lots of laughter and youthful philosophy. But Petal would need more than that, reflected Marigold. She hoped it would be a girl, did Marigold, as she

had made up her mind to call her Petal. Marigold was like that.

One fine morning, when the warm September sun filtered pleasantly through the trees, Marigold tackled the unsuccessful artist in earnest.

"Charles dear, you must listen," she said.

Charles obediently took the pipe out of his mouth and assumed the expression of an obedient but quite virtuous house dog.

"If you don't sell some pictures soon," she said, "we—shall—be—broke. Something's got to be done. Ever since the War you've been painting and you haven't sold a single, solitary picture."

"I know," said Charles, gloomily. "Don't rub it in."

"But, darling"—patiently—"other people sell heaps and"—loyally—"their work isn't a third as good as yours."

Charles brightened momentarily, then relapsed into melancholy.

"They get publicity," he said. "Sell anything with publicity nowadays."

He puffed away at his battered pipe, satisfied to have uttered such a profound truth. For a few moments Marigold watched the sun dancing on the waters of the river beneath. Then she thoughtfully tidied her cushions.

"Publicity," she said; "publicity——"

"You're going to have an idea," said Charles, from experience. "Let's hope it's nothing strenuous."

"It is, Charles, dear. *You* must have publicity; we must invent a *stunt*."

"A stunt?" echoed Charles, genuinely alarmed. He knew Marigold.

"Yes, dear," said Marigold, patiently. "Let me think."

And Marigold sat down determinedly and thought, while Charles strenuously puffed away at his pipe, hoping for the best.

"I can bear the suspense no longer," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "From the light in your eye I can see I am in for it. What is it this time?"

Marigold held up her hand.

"You are going to be drowned," she announced.

"What?"

"Drowned. At least, rescued from drowning."

"I'm not," said Charles, firmly.

Marigold surveyed him with affectionate toleration.

"For my sake, Charles dear, you will. It's really a brilliant idea. You will fall into the river and I will shriek for help. Someone's bound to jump in after you, and when you're rescued——"

"Supposing I'm not rescued?" interrupted Charles.

"You will be. Everybody always is. You're a splendid swimmer, so there's no danger. And when you're pulled out of the water, there will of course be crowds of newspaper reporters. I will deal with them. Think of the headlines, Charles! 'Artist Rescued from the Thames.' 'Beautiful Young Wife's Story.'"

"And how," said Charles, "is that going to help us?"

"Publicity," said Marigold triumphantly. "Publicity. You said so yourself. And you must wear your oldest suit of clothes," she added as an afterthought.

Charles groaned. He knew objections would be futile. They always were with Marigold. He most certainly was in for it.

And so, some days later, dutifully dressed in his most ancient suit, which was, as he pointed out to Marigold, exactly the same as his third best, Charles Potts fell into the river. The bridge they chose shall be nameless, for this is a story about publicity, and the Thames bridges have had quite enough publicity recently.

It was a warm day; Charles had insisted on that, at least. They had carefully rehearsed everything in the studio. Anyone passing who had troubled to look at them standing against the parapet would have seen a young man in a shabby suit with a quite realistically worried expression and an attractive girl looking, now it had come to the point, decidedly pale. However, as it happened, no one took the slightest notice of them. The agitated conversation which they had planned reduced itself to brief but pointed observations on the part of Charles.

"It's a long drop," he said, casting an anxious eye over the parapet.

"You're not going to back out of it now, Charles?" said Marigold, half hoping he would.

"No." He looked round, taking his bearings. "Well, here goes, old thing!"

And, as our old-fashioned novelists love to put it, in less time than it takes to tell, Charles vaulted on to the parapet and jumped headlong into the river.

Marigold's scream was perfectly genuine. For a brief second she heartily wished they hadn't undertaken such a crazy adventure. But the sight of Charles's head bobbing on the surface of the water beneath somehow reassured her. If he had not seemed so very far away, she could have sworn he flashed a grin up at her before submerging in accordance with their plan.

This suddenly recalled her own prearranged role. Without further ado she clung to the parapet in a tolerable imitation of a half-fainting condition and began to shriek hoarsely for help.

There was really no need to shriek, for, attracted by her scream and the resounding splash Charles had made on entering the water, a fair-sized crowd had already collected around her and was increasing with extraordinary rapidity.

Out of the corner of her eye, at which she was dabbing furiously with an absurdly small pocket-handkerchief, Marigold observed with dismay that the interest displayed by the spectators was, to say the least of it, casual.

One elderly female stood by her side, peering morbidly at the river.

"Poor feller!" she said, with obvious relish. "Never see 'im no more."

Others struggled eagerly for favourable observation posts. But with a sinking heart it dawned on Marigold that no one was going to make any attempt at a rescue.

Supposing Charles had been unable to swim, and had really fallen in! Marigold suddenly flamed into passion at the thought.

She swung round and faced the crowd.

"Isn't there a man among you?" she cried. "Won't someone go in after him?"

"It's no good, miss," said the voice of the disreputable female at her elbow. "Talk about men! They're a shockin' lot nowadays. Now if *I* was a man——"

Someone in the crowd laughed. Marigold burst into tears—real tears this time. She felt ashamed. A hundred thoughts raced through her mind at once. What would Charles say? He wouldn't care, anyhow, if their scheme failed. He would

just change his clothes, grin, and light his pipe. That would be much worse than reproaches, she thought bitterly. And this horrible crowd of people. How she longed to get away! Then she caught sight of a policeman's helmet and the remnants of her courage vanished. What would happen now?

Quite suddenly an inquiring voice, a strong, compelling voice, pierced through the murmur. It was followed an instant later by a tall, athletic man vigorously elbowing a passage through the crowd. He reached Marigold's side just as Charles was patiently reappearing on the surface of the water, to all appearances a drowning man.

The stranger took in the situation at a glance, and, to the accompaniment of vociferous cheers from the small boys and half-hearted applause from the others, stepped on to the parapet, glanced swiftly downwards, and, ignoring Marigold's outstretched hand, dived to the rescue.

Marigold's mind subconsciously registered the fact that he was well dressed and extremely good-looking. It suddenly struck her that his clothes would be completely ruined, and she felt horribly mean. But she could not disguise her relief that something had turned up to save the situation.

"Exactly like one of them Orstralians, ain't he?" the old woman said, admiringly. "What I call a proper gentleman. Now if——"

Her wheezy voice was drowned by the clamour of the crowd as it was seen that the stranger had seized the struggling figure in the water below and was steadily propelling him towards the shore.

"My! Ain't 'e a fine swimmer?" cried one of the small boys, shrilly. "And wiv 'is clothes on an' all!"

As the figure in the water drew in closer, the crowd began to make hastily for the steps which led down to the river's bank, and Marigold hurried in the same direction.

Somebody cried: "Make way for the young lidy!" And Marigold was thrust forward as Charles was in the act of being unceremoniously hauled up on to the river's bank. There was now no lack of willing helpers, and the crowd surged round the two dripping figures as if determined to miss none of the excitement.

"Stand back there," ordered the stranger, a dignified figure in spite of his soaked garments. Even the two policemen who

now officiously pushed their way forward seemed to acknowledge the ring of authority in his voice and began to push the crowd back. The stranger proceeded to run an expert eye over the recumbent Charles, who was loyally doing his best to simulate complete exhaustion.

Marigold bent hastily over Charles. A glance satisfied her that all was well. So far, she thought triumphantly, everything had gone according to plan.

But where were the newspaper reporters? Anxiously she made a rapid survey of the seedy onlookers. Not one looked in the least like a reporter. Once more panic seized her.

Her hopes revived at a movement on the outskirts of the crowd. The newcomer, a clean-shaven man in horn-rimmed glasses, proved to be a doctor.

Marigold was getting desperate. She was just giving up hope altogether when suddenly two men emerged from the crowd and one produced a note-book from his hip-pocket.

The elder of the two men put out a restraining hand.

"Put it away, son," he said. "There isn't a story here. It's only another darn fool attempt at suicide. Let's get on."

Marigold nearly collapsed. Fate was against her. It really was too bad.

The tall stranger, who had divested himself of his coat and was methodically wringing water out of it, nodded to the doctor and began to speak to her. He had a pleasant voice, with a slightly American accent. She only dimly realized that he was trying to assure her that Charles would be all right if he were taken straight home, rubbed down with a dry towel, and put to bed. She failed altogether to notice his puzzled smile and his quick glance in the direction of her wedding-ring.

Then, amazingly, the young man with the note-book pointed suddenly in the direction of the group and whispered something excitedly to his companion.

For a second the other looked incredulous. Then his expression underwent a complete change. He strode hastily forward.

"Excuse me, Mr. Brigadayne," he said, pleasantly.

The stranger swung round on his heel.

"What the——" he began. Then he laughed as if there was something funny about it after all.

Her attention absorbed by this strange development, Marigold became aware just in time that the doctor and policemen between them were removing the faintly protesting Charles in the direction of the road. Someone shouted distantly for a taxi.

This would never do. She turned to the newspaper men.

"They're taking him away," she cried. "I'm his wife. Aren't you going to——"

Her voice died away. The two reporters, one on each side of "Mr. Brigadayne", were scribbling away furiously, no longer aware of her existence. Tears of mortification came into her eyes.

It flashed upon her. Of course! Mr. Brigadayne—the famous Hubert Brigadayne, known to millions of film "fans" the whole world over as the hero of a thousand daring exploits on the screen.

In that moment she hated Mr. Hubert Brigadayne with an awful intensity. Why couldn't he have stayed in California, or wherever it was that film stars performed, instead of coming to spoil her carefully-laid plans like this? As if Hubert Brigadayne hadn't had enough publicity already! It was a disgusting trick to play on her. She determined to make one last effort.

"Don't interrupt, miss, please," said one of the newspaper men without looking up.

"Stop!" broke in the voice of Hubert Brigadayne, firmly. "I won't answer any more questions. I want to talk to this young lady. And I'm cold and wet, and want to be left alone."

The two journalists stepped back to avoid the sweep of his wet-sleeved arm. Hubert Brigadayne seized Marigold by the shoulder and hurried her forward in the direction of the retreating crowd.

Before Marigold could recover from her surprise the celebrated film actor had steered her rapidly past the onlookers, bundled her into a taxi which had drawn up beside the kerb, dismissed the doctor and the policemen, asked her address, given rapid instructions to the driver, got in beside her, and slammed the door.

The sudden jerk of the starting taxicab precipitated Charles on the floor. He sat up and regarded Marigold and the newcomer with a whimsical smile.

"I'm infernally cold," he said. "Of all the ghastly frosts——" He broke off abruptly. "I mean, it was very decent of you to jump in after me."

There was a long pause. Charles and his rescuer simultaneously began to shiver. The celebrated film actor stared hard at Charles.

Marigold broke the silence.

"My husband, Charles," she said absently. "Mr. Hubert Brigadayne."

"I guess we're going to have a nice long talk," said Mr. Brigadayne, pleasantly. "But some dry clothes are indicated first."

Half an hour later, Charles, in spite of vigorous protests, was put to bed. Marigold and Brigadayne were sitting in front of a cheerful fire in the studio, Brigadayne looking like an overgrown schoolboy in an old tweed jacket and flannel trousers belonging to Charles.

"A hot drink makes a whale of a difference, doesn't it?" smiled the film star, putting down his teacup. "It's given me courage to ask you a question. Why did your husband fall in the river?"

Marigold hesitated—and was lost. In a few breathless sentences she told the truth.

Hubert Brigadayne, who had listened in sympathetic silence, waved aside her contrite apology.

"I was glad to get back to my job," he said, with a stray smile which indicated that his thoughts were elsewhere. "Now, publicity's just a fine idea. You leave it to me. Before I go I'd like to look over some of these pictures, if I may."

In the few minutes before his departure, Marigold, feeling, as she told Charles afterwards, a very poor body of troops, did her best to make the sincerity of her apologies evident. But Hubert Brigadayne insisted on treating the whole thing as a joke. He admired Charles's pictures, told her, with a twinkle in his eye, to give the invalid hot bread and milk and keep him between two blankets for twenty-four hours, and finally departed, still wearing Charles's incongruous garments, in a hastily-summoned taxi.

"And that's that," said Marigold, ruefully.

But it wasn't.

Arrived safely at his hotel, which he discreetly entered by the back way, Hubert Brigadayne hurriedly divested himself

of his unfamiliar clothing, put on a flowered-silk dressing-gown, and devoted energetic attention to the telephone receiver in his bedroom. He put down the receiver with a chuckle.

"I'm sorry, Maisie," he said enigmatically, to no one in particular, "but I guess it's got to be done."

The following morning the fun began. When she first saw the headlines Marigold whooped with joy. Then for a moment she thought it was a huge practical joke. Even Charles, looking over Marigold's shoulder, dropped his pipe in astonishment.

In large black type these were the headlines that met their astounded eyes :

FAMOUS FILM STAR RESCUES YOUNG ARTIST  
HUBERT BRIGADAYNE IN ENGLAND  
SENSATIONAL DIVE INTO THAMES

Beneath, punctuating a long column of type, appeared photographs of Hubert Brigadayne—and Charles !

"Well, I'm——" began Charles.

"That photograph !" cried Marigold in the same instant. "He must have taken it while I got the taxi."

But the real surprise was yet to come. They read eagerly what the newspaper had to say about it all. After a graphic description of the rescue and a brief reference to Hubert Brigadayne's famous career, there followed an interview with Hubert Brigadayne at his hotel :

". . . but the distinguished film actor refused to talk about himself.

"I have always been keenly interested in art," he declared. "This young artist is a discovery, and I claim the credit for it. I have already bought three of his pictures and am confident that true connoisseurs of art will follow suit. In fact, I am so impressed by his work that I am losing no time in arranging for an exhibition of his pictures, which will be held in the very near future."

"Holy smoke !" said Charles, eloquently.

The newspaper slid from Marigold's fingers. She felt that she wanted to put her head on Charles's shoulder and laugh and cry together.

A sudden ring at the studio bell brought them sharply back to earth.

Marigold opened the door. Two men ("I *knew* they were reporters!" declared Marigold, triumphantly, afterwards) and a special messenger boy, carrying a bulky parcel, stood on the doorstep.

She signed for the parcel and, while the two newspaper men fired questions at Charles, opened it.

It contained Charles's trousers and tweed jacket, and a letter. Marigold slit it open, and a cheque fell out.

"I hope you will forgive me," she read, "but I really do admire your husband's work, and these are the three pictures I want, to begin with . . ."

There was only one sentence Marigold couldn't understand. In fact, neither she nor Charles—who is now so prosperous that Marigold is always scolding him about his pipe—has ever been able to understand it. This was the sentence: "It's an ill wind that blows no one any good."

But I think you ought to know what Hubert Brigadayne meant.

Before sending his Thames-soaked suit to be cleaned—for Hubert Brigadayne, unlike some film stars, was a sensible fellow—he turned out the pockets. From one of them he drew a letter, addressed to Mrs. Hubert Brigadayne, somewhere in California, sealed and stamped, and ready to be posted.

But alas! The muddy Thames had done its work.

He opened it slowly and re-read what he had written the morning before. Most of it concerns nobody but Mrs. and Mr. Hubert Brigadayne, but on the third page he had written:

" . . . and not a soul knows I am in London. I can't tell you how delightful it is to be for once out of the lime-light you know I detest so much. It's a real holiday, no interviews, no publicity . . ."

"The joke's on me," he murmured, as he tore up the letter and threw it into the fire.

FRANK R. STOCKTON

*Lord Edward and the Tree-man*

Frank R. Stockton was one of the most popular American humorous writers in the closing years of the last century, and there is a pleasant mingling of fancy and sentiment in many of his tales. Besides *Rudder Grange*, from which the story that follows is taken, his most successful work was *The Lady and the Tiger*.



## LORD EDWARD AND THE TREE-MAN

IT was winter at Rudder Grange. The season was the same at other places, but that fact did not particularly interest Euphemia and myself. It was winter with us, and we were ready for it. That was the great point, and it made us proud to think that we had not been taken unawares, notwithstanding the many things that were to be thought of on a little farm like ours.

It is true that we had always been prepared for winter, wherever we had lived; but this was a different case. In other days it did not matter much whether we were ready or not; but our house, our cow, our poultry, and, indeed, ourselves might have suffered—there is no way of finding out exactly how much—if we had not made all possible preparations for the coming of cold weather.

But there was yet a great deal to be thought of and planned out, although we were ready for winter. The next thing to think of was spring.

We laid out the farm. We decided where we would have wheat, corn, potatoes and oats. We would have a man by the day to sow and reap. The intermediate processes I thought I could attend to myself.

Everything was talked over, ciphered over, and freely discussed by my wife and myself, except one matter, which I planned and worked out alone, doing most of the necessary calculations at the office, so as not to excite Euphemia's curiosity.

I had determined to buy a horse. This would be one of the most important events of our married life, and it demanded a great deal of thought, which I gave it.

The horse was chosen for me by a friend. He was an excellent beast (the horse), excelling, as my friend told me, in muscle and wit. Nothing better than this could be said about a horse. He was a sorrel animal, quite handsome, gentle enough for Euphemia to drive, and not too high-minded to do a little farm work if necessary. He was exactly the animal I needed.

The carriage was not quite such a success. The horse having cost a good deal more than I expected to pay, I found that I could only afford a second-hand carriage. I bought a good, serviceable vehicle, which would hold four persons if necessary, and there was room enough to pack all sorts of parcels and baskets. It was with great satisfaction that I contemplated this feature of the carriage, which was a rather rusty looking affair, although sound and strong enough. The harness was new, and set off the horse admirably.

On the afternoon when my purchases were completed, I did not come home by the train. I drove home in my own carriage, drawn by my own horse! The ten-miles' drive was over a smooth road, and the sorrel travelled splendidly. If I had been a line of kings a mile long, all in their chariots of state, with gold and silver, and outriders, and music, and banners waving in the wind, I could not have been prouder than when I drew up in front of my house.

There was a waggon-gate at one side of the front fence which had never been used except by the man who brought coal, and I got out and opened this, very quietly, so as not to attract the attention of Euphemia. It was earlier than I usually returned, and she would not be expecting me. I was then about to lead the horse up a somewhat grass-grown carriage-way to the front door, but I reflected that Euphemia might be looking out of some of the windows and I had better drive up. So I got in and drove very slowly to the door.

However, she heard the unaccustomed noise of wheels, and looked out of the parlour window. She did not see me, but immediately came around to the door. I hurried out of the carriage so quickly that, not being familiar with the steps, I barely escaped tripping.

When she opened the front door she was surprised to see me standing by the horse.

"Have you hired a carriage?" she cried. "Are we going to ride?"

"My dear," said I, as I took her by the hand, "we are going to ride. But I have not hired a carriage. I have bought one. Do you see this horse? He is ours—our own horse!"

If you could have seen the face that was turned up to me—all you other men in the world—you would have torn your hair in despair.

Afterward she went around and around that horse; she

patted his smooth sides ; she looked with admiration at his strong, well-formed legs ; she stroked his head ; she smoothed his mane ; she was brimful of joy.

When I had brought the horse some water in a bucket—and what a pleasure it was to water one's own horse!—Euphemia rushed into the house and got her hat and cloak, and we took a little drive.

I doubt if any horse ever drew two happier people. Euphemia said but little about the carriage. That was a necessary adjunct, and it was good enough for the present. But the horse! How nobly and with what vigour he pulled us up the hills, and how carefully and strongly he held the carriage back as we went down! How easily he trotted over the level road, caring nothing for the ten miles he had gone that afternoon! What a sensation of power it gave us to think that all that strength and speed and endurance was ours, that it would go where we wished, that it would wait for us as long as we chose, that it was at our service day and night, that it was a horse, and we owned it!

When we returned, Pomona saw us drive in—she had not known of our ride—and when she heard the news she was as wild with proud delight as anybody. She wanted to unharness him, but this I could not allow. We did not wish to be selfish, but after she had seen and heard what we thought was enough for her, we were obliged to send her back to the kitchen for the sake of the dinner.

Then we unharnessed him. I say we, for Euphemia stood by, and I explained everything, for some day, she said, she might want to do it herself. Then I led him into the stable. How nobly he trod! and how finely his hoofs sounded on the stable floor!

There was hay in the mow, and I had brought a bag of oats under the seat of the carriage.

“Isn't it just delightful,” said Euphemia, “that we haven't any man? If we had a man, he would take the horse at the door, and we should be deprived of all this. It wouldn't be half like owning a horse.”

In the morning I drove down to the station, Euphemia by my side. She drove back, and old John came up and attended to the horse. This he was to do, for the present, for a small stipend. In the afternoon Euphemia came down after me. How I enjoyed those rides! Before this I had thought it ever

so much more pleasant and healthful to walk to and from the station than to ride, but then I did not own a horse. At night I attended to everything, Euphemia generally following me about the stable with a lantern. When the days grew longer we would have delightful rides after dinner, and even now we planned to have early breakfasts, and go to the station by the longest possible way.

One day in the following spring, I was riding home from the station with Euphemia—we seldom took pleasure-drives now, we were so busy on the place—and as we reached the house I heard the dog barking savagely. He was loose in the little orchard by the side of the house. As I drove in, Pomona came running to the carriage.

“Man up the tree!” she shouted.

I helped Euphemia out, left the horse standing by the door, and ran to the dog, followed by my wife and Pomona. Sure enough, there was a man up the tree, and Lord Edward was doing his best to get at him, springing wildly at the tree and fairly shaking with rage. I looked up at the man. He was a thoroughbred tramp, burly, dirty, generally unkempt; but, unlike most tramps, he looked very much frightened. His position on a high crotch of an apple-tree was not altogether comfortable, and although, for the present, it was safe, the fellow seemed to have a wavering faith in the strength of apple-tree branches, and the moment he saw me he earnestly besought me to take that dog away and let him down.

I made no answer, but, turning to Pomona, I asked her what this all meant.

“Why, sir, you see,” said she, “I was in the kitchen bakin’ pies, and this fellow must have got over the fence at the side of the house, for the dog didn’t see him, and the first thing I know’d he was stickin’ his head in the window, and he asked me to give him somethin’ to eat. And when I said I’d see in a minute if there was anything for him, he says to me: ‘Gimme a piece of one of them pies’—pies I’d just baked and was settin’ to cool on the kitchen table! ‘No, sir,’ says I, ‘I’m not goin’ to cut one of them pies for you, or anyone like you.’ ‘All right!’ says he. ‘I’ll come in and help myself.’ He must have known there was no man about, and, comin’ the way he did, he hadn’t seen the dog. So he came round to the kitchen door, but I shot out before he got there and unchained Lord Edward. I guess he saw the dog when he got to the door, and

at any rate he heard the chain clankin', and he didn't go in, but just put for the gate. But Lord Edward was after him so quick that he hadn't no time to go to no gates. It was all he could do to scoot up this tree, and if he'd been a millionth part of a minute later he'd a' been in another world by this time."

The man, who had not attempted to interrupt Pomona's speech, now began again to implore me to let him down, while Euphemia looked pitifully at him, and was about, I think, to intercede with me in his favour, but my attention was drawn off from her by the strange conduct of the dog. Believing, I suppose, that he might leave the tramp for a moment, now that I had arrived, he had dashed away to another tree, where he was barking furiously, standing on his hind legs, and clawing at the trunk!

"What's the matter over there?" I asked.

"Oh, that's the other fellow," said Pomona. "He's no harm." And then, as the tramp made a movement as if he would try to come down and make a rush for safety during the absence of the dog, she called out: "Here, boy! here, boy!" and in an instant Lord Edward was again raging at his post at the foot of the apple-tree, followed, as before, by Euphemia and Pomona.

"This one," said the latter, "is a tree-man——"

"I should think so," said I, as I caught sight of a person in grey trousers standing among the branches of a cherry-tree not very far from the kitchen door. The tree was not a large one, and the branches were not strong enough to allow him to sit down on them, although they supported him well enough, as he stood close to the trunk, just out of reach of Lord Edward.

"This is a very unpleasant position, sir," said he, when I reached the tree. "I simply came into your yard, on a matter of business, and finding that raging beast attacking a person in a tree, I had barely time to get up into this tree myself before he dashed at me. Luckily I was out of his reach; but I very much fear I have lost some of my property."

"No, he hasn't," said Pomona. "It was a big book he dropped. I picked it up and took it into the house. It's full of pictures of pears and peaches and flowers. I've been lookin' at it. That's how I knew what he was. And there was no call for his gettin' up a tree. Lord Edward never would have gone after him if he hadn't run as if he had guilt on his soul."

“I suppose, then,” said I, addressing the individual in the cherry-tree, “that you came here to sell me some trees.”

“Yes, sir,” said he quickly. “Trees, shrubs, vines, ever-greens—everything suitable for a gentleman’s country villa. I can sell you something quite remarkable, sir, in the way of cherry-trees—French ones, just imported; bear fruit three times the size of anything that could be produced on a tree like this. And pears—fruit of the finest flavour and enormous size——”

“Yes,” said Pomona. “I seen them in the book. But they must grow on a ground-vine. No tree couldn’t hold such pears as them.”

Here Euphemia reprov’d Pomona’s forwardness, and I invited the tree agent to get down out of the tree.

“Thank you,” said he, “but not while that dog is loose. If you will kindly chain him up, I will get my book and show you specimens of some of the finest small fruits in the world, all imported from the first nurseries of Europe—the Redgold Amber Muscat grape—the——”

“Oh, please let him down!” said Euphemia, her eyes beginning to sparkle.

I slowly walked towards the tramp-tree, revolving various matters in my mind. We had not spent much money on the place during the winter, and we now had a small sum which we intended to use for the advantage of the farm, but had not yet decided what to do with it. It behoved me to be careful.

I told Pomona to run and get me the dog-chain, and I stood under the tree, listening as well as I could to the tree agent talking to Euphemia, and paying no attention to the impassioned entreaties of the tramp in the crotch above me. When the chain was brought, I hooked one end of it in Lord Edward’s collar, and then I took a firm grasp of the other. Telling Pomona to bring the tree agent’s book from the house, I called to that individual to get down from his tree. He promptly obeyed, and taking the book from Pomona, began to show the pictures to Euphemia.

“You had better hurry, sir,” I called out. “I can’t hold this dog very long.” And, indeed, Lord Edward had made a run toward the agent which jerked me very forcibly in his direction. But a movement by the tramp had quickly brought the dog back to his more-desired victim.

“If you will just tie up that dog, sir,” said the agent, “and

come this way, I would like to show you the Meltingua pear—dissolves in the mouth like snow, sir; trees will bear next year.”

“Oh, come, look at the Royal Sparkling Ruby grape!” cried Euphemia. “It glows in the sun like a gem!”

“Yes,” said the agent, “and fills the air with fragrance during the whole month of September——”

“I tell you,” I shouted, “I can’t hold this dog another minute! The chain is cutting the skin off my hands. Run, sir, run! I’m going to let go!”

“Run! run!” cried Pomona. “Fly for your life!”

The agent now began to be frightened, and shut up his book.

“If you only could see the plates, sir, I’m sure——”

“Are you ready?” I cried, as the dog, excited by Pomona’s wild shouts, made a bolt in his direction.

“Good day, if I must——” said the agent, as he hurried to the gate; but there he stopped.

“There is nothing, sir,” he said, “that would so improve your place as a row of the Spitzenberg Sweet-scented Balsam fir along this fence. I’ll sell you three-year-old trees——”

“He’s loose!” I shouted, as I dropped the chain.

In a second the agent was on the other side of the gate. Lord Edward made a dash towards him; but, stopping suddenly, flew back to the tree of the tramp.

“If you should conclude, sir,” said the tree agent, looking over the fence, “to have a row of those firs along here——”

“My good sir,” said I, “there is no row of firs there now, and the fence is not very high. My dog, as you see, is very much excited, and I cannot answer for the consequences if he takes it into his head to jump over.”

The tree agent turned and walked slowly away.

“Now, look-a-here,” cried the tramp from the tree, in the voice of a very ill-used person, “ain’t you goin’ to fasten up that dog and let me get down?”

I walked up close to the tree and addressed him.

“No,” said I, “I am not. When a man comes to my place, bullies a young girl who was about to relieve his hunger, and then boldly determines to enter my house and help himself to my property, I don’t propose to fasten up any dog that may happen to be after him. If I had another dog, I’d let him loose and give this faithful beast a rest. You can do as you please. You can come down and have it out with the dog, or you can

stay up there until I have had my dinner. Then I will drive down to the village and bring up the constable, and deliver you into his hands. We want no such fellows as you about."

With that, I unhooked the chain from Lord Edward and walked off to put up the horse. The man shouted after me, but I paid no attention. I did not feel in a good humour with him.

Euphemia was much disturbed by the various occurrences of the afternoon. She was sorry for the man in the tree; she was sorry that the agent for the Royal Ruby grape had been obliged to go away; and I had a good deal of trouble during dinner to make her see things in the proper light. But I succeeded at last.

I did not hurry through dinner, and when we had finished I went to my work at the barn. Tramps are not generally pressed for time, and Pomona had been told to give our captive something to eat.

I was just locking the door of the carriage house when Pomona came running to me to tell me that the tramp wanted to see me about something very important—just a minute, he said. I put the key in my pocket and walked over to the tree. It was now almost dark, but I could see that the dog, the tramp, and the tree still kept their respective places.

"Look-a-here," said the individual in the crotch, "you don't know how dreadful oneasy these limbs gits after you've been settin' up here as long as I have. And I don't want to have nuthin' to do with no constables. I'll tell you what I'll do: if you'll chain up that dog and let me go, I'll fix things so that you'll not be troubled no more by no tramps."

"How will you do that?" I asked.

"Oh, never you mind," said he. "I'll give you my word of honour I'll do it. There's a reg'lar understandin' among us fellers, you know."

I considered the matter. The word of honour of a fellow such as he was could not be worth much, but the merest chance of getting rid of tramps should not be neglected. I went in to talk to Euphemia about it, although I knew what she would say. I reasoned with myself as much as with her.

"If we put this one fellow in prison for a few weeks," I said, "the benefit is not very great. If we are freed from all tramps for the season, the benefit is very great. Shall we try for the greatest good?"

“Certainly,” said Euphemia; “and his legs must be dreadfully stiff.”

So I went out, and after a struggle of some minutes, I chained Lord Edward to a post at a little distance from the apple-tree. When he was secure, the tramp descended nimbly from his perch, notwithstanding his stiff legs, and hurried out of the gate. He stopped to make no remarks over the fence. With a wild howl of disappointed ambition, Lord Edward threw himself after him. But the chain held.

A lane of moderate length led from our house to the main road, and the next day, as we were riding home, I noticed on the trunk of a large tree, which stood at the corner of the lane and road, a curious mark. I drew up to see what it was, but we could not make it out. It was a very rude device, cut deeply into the tree, and somewhat resembled a square, a circle, a triangle, and a cross, with some smaller marks beneath it. I felt sure that our tramp had cut it, and that it had some significance, which would be understood by the members of his fraternity.

And it must have had, for no tramps came near us all that summer. We were visited by a needy person now and then, but by no member of the regular army of tramps.

One afternoon, that fall, I walked home, and at the corner of the lane I saw a tramp looking up at the mark on the tree, which was still quite distinct.

“What does that mean?” I said, stepping up to him.

“How do I know?” said the man, “and what do you want to know fur?”

“Just out of curiosity,” I said; “I have often noticed it. I think you can tell me what it means, and if you will do so, I’ll give you a dollar.”

“And keep mum about it?” said the man.

“Yes,” I replied, taking out the dollar.

“All right!” said the tramp. “That sign means that the man that lives up this lane is a mean, stingy cuss, with a wicked dog, and it’s no good to go there.”

I handed him the dollar, and went away perfectly satisfied with my reputation.

I wish here to make some mention of Euphemia’s methods of work in her chicken-yard. She kept a book, which she at first called her “Fowl Record,” but she afterwards changed the name to “Poultry Pegister.” I never could thoroughly understand

this book, although she has often explained every part of it to me. She had pages for registering the age, description, time of purchase or of birth, and subsequent performances of every fowl in her yard. She had divisions of the book for expenses, profits, probable losses, and positive losses; she noted the number of eggs put under each setting hen; the number of eggs cracked per day, the number spoiled, and finally, the number hatched. Each chick, on emerging from its shell, was registered, and an account kept of its subsequent life and adventures. There were frequent calculations regarding the advantages of various methods of treatment, and there were statements of the results of a great many experiments—something like this: “Set Topsy and her sister Pinky, 2nd April, 187-; Topsy with twelve eggs—three Brahma, four common, and five Leghorn; Pinky with thirteen eggs (as she weighs four ounces more than her sister), of which three were Leghorn, five common, and five Brahma. During the twenty-second and twenty-third of April (same year) Topsy hatched out four Brahmas, two commons, and three Leghorns, while her sister, on these days and the morning of the day following, hatched two Leghorns, six commons, and only one Brahma. Now, could Topsy, who had only three Brahma eggs, and hatched out four of that breed, have exchanged eggs with her sister, thus making it possible for her to hatch out six common chickens, when she only had five eggs of that kind? Or, did the eggs get mixed up in some way before going into the possession of the hens. Look into probabilities.”

These probabilities must have puzzled Euphemia a great deal, but they never disturbed her equanimity. She was always as tranquil and good-humoured about her poultry-yard as if every hen laid an egg every day, and a hen-chick was hatched out of every egg.

For it may be remembered that the principle underlying Euphemia's management of her poultry was what might be designated as the “cumulative hatch.” That is, she wished every chicken hatched in her year to become the mother of a brood of her own during the year, and every one of this brood to raise another brood the next year, and so on, in a kind of geometrical progression. The plan called for a great many mother-fowls, and so Euphemia based her highest hopes on a great annual preponderance of hens.

We ate a good many young roosters that fall, for Euphemia would not allow all the products of her yard to go to market, and also a great many eggs and fowls were sold. She had not contented herself with her original stock of poultry, but had bought fowls during the winter, and she certainly had extraordinary good luck, or else her extraordinary system worked extraordinarily well.



GEORGE AND WEEDON GROSSMITH

*The Diary of a Nobody*

The name of Grossmith is best known in its association with the theatre, but the two brothers George and Weedon, the most popular entertainers of their day, also collaborated in a number of humorous books and stories, of which the *Diary of a Nobody* was one of the most successful.



## THE DIARY OF A NOBODY

### I

AFTER THE MANSION HOUSE BALL. CARRIE OFFENDED. GOWING ALSO OFFENDED. A PLEASANT PARTY AT THE CUMMINGS'. MR. FRANCHING, OF PECKHAM, VISITS US

MAY 8.—I woke up with a most terrible headache. I could scarcely see, and the back of my neck was as if I had given it a crick. I thought first of sending for a doctor ; but I did not think it necessary. When up, I felt faint, and went to Brownish's, the chemist, who gave me a draught. So bad at the office, had to get leave to come home. Went to another chemist in the City, and I got a draught. Brownish's dose seems to have made me worse ; have eaten nothing all day. To make matters worse, Carrie, every time I spoke to her, answered me sharply—that is, when she answered at all.

In the evening I felt very much worse again and said to her : “ I do believe I've been poisoned by the lobster mayonnaise at the Mansion House last night ” ; she simply replied, without taking her eyes from her sewing : “ Champagne never did agree with you.” I felt irritated, and said : “ What nonsense you talk ; I only had a glass and a half, and you know as well as I do——” Before I could complete the sentence she bounced out of the room. I sat over an hour waiting for her to return ; but as she did not, I determined I would go to bed. I discovered Carrie had gone to bed without even saying “ good night ” ; leaving me to bar the scullery door and feed the cat. I shall certainly speak to her about this in the morning.

MAY 9.—Still a little shaky, with black specks. The *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News* contains a long list of the guests at the Mansion House Ball. Disappointed to find our names omitted, though Farmerson's is in plainly enough with M.L.L. after it, whatever that may mean. More than vexed, because we had ordered a dozen copies to send to our friends. Wrote to the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News*, pointing out their omission.

Carrie had commenced her breakfast when I entered the parlour. I helped myself to a cup of tea, and I said, perfectly calmly and quietly : " Carrie, I wish a little explanation of your conduct last night."

She replied, " Indeed ! and I desire something more than a *little* explanation of your conduct the night before."

I said, coolly : " Really, I don't understand you."

Carrie said sneeringly : " Probably not ; you were scarcely in a condition to understand anything."

I was astounded at this insinuation and simply ejaculated : " Caroline ! "

She said : " Don't be theatrical, it has no effect on me. Reserve that tone for your new friend, *Mister* Farmerson, the ironmonger."

I was about to speak, when Carrie, in a temper such as I have never seen her in before, told me to hold my tongue. She said : " Now *I'm* going to say something ! After professing to snub Mr. Farmerson, you permit him to snub *you*, in my presence, and then accept his invitation to take a glass of champagne with you, and you don't limit yourself to one glass. You then offer this vulgar man, who made a bungle of repairing our scraper, a seat in our cab on the way home. I say nothing about his tearing my dress in getting in the cab, nor of treading on Mrs. James's expensive fan, which you knocked out of my hand, and for which he never even apologised ; but you smoked all the way home without having the decency to ask my permission. That is not all ! At the end of the journey, although he did not offer you a farthing towards his share of the cab, you asked him in. Fortunately, he was sober enough to detect, from my manner, that his company was not desirable."

Goodness knows I felt humiliated enough at this ; but, to make matters worse, Gowing entered the room, without knocking, with two hats on his head and holding the garden rake in his hand, with Carrie's fur tippet (which he had taken off the downstairs hall-peg) round his neck, and announced himself in a loud, coarse voice : " His Royal Highness, the Lord Mayor ! " He marched twice round the room like a buffoon, and finding we took no notice, said : " Hulloh ! what's up ? Lovers' quarrel, eh ? "

There was silence for a moment, so I said quietly : " My dear Gowing, I'm not very well, and not quite in the humour

for joking; especially when you enter the room without knocking, an act which I fail to see the fun of."

Gowing said: "I'm very sorry, but I called for my stick, which I thought you would have sent round." I handed him his stick, which I remembered I had painted black with the enamel paint, thinking to improve it. He looked at it for a minute with a dazed expression and said: "Who did this?"

I said: "Eh, did what?"

He said: "Did what? Why, destroyed my stick! It belonged to my poor uncle, and I value it more than anything I have in the world! I'll know who did it."

I said: "I'm very sorry. I dare say it will come off. I did it for the best."

Gowing said: "Then all I can say is, it's a confounded liberty; and I *would* add, you're a bigger fool than you look, only *that's* absolutely impossible."

MAY 12.—Got a single copy of the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News*. There was a short list of several names they had omitted; but the stupid people had mentioned our names as "Mr. and Mrs. C. Porter." Most annoying! Wrote again and I took particular care to write our name in capital letters, POOTER, so that there should be no possible mistake this time.

MAY 16.—Absolutely disgusted on opening the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News* of to-day, to find the following paragraph: "We have received two letters from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Pewter, requesting us to announce the important fact that they were at the Mansion House Ball." I tore up the paper and threw it in the waste-paper basket. My time is far too valuable to bother about such trifles.

MAY 21.—The last week or ten days terribly dull, Carrie being away at Mrs. James's, at Sutton. Cummings also away. Gowing, I presume, is still offended with me for black-enamelling his stick without asking him.

MAY 22.—Purchased a new stick mounted with silver, which cost seven-and-sixpence (shall tell Carrie five shillings), and sent it round with nice note to Gowing.

MAY 23.—Received strange note from Gowing; he said: “Offended? not a bit, my boy. I thought you were offended with me for losing my temper. Besides, I found, after all, it was not my poor old uncle’s stick you painted. It was only a shilling thing I bought at a tobacconist’s. However, I am much obliged to you for your handsome present all same.”

MAY 24.—Carrie back. Hoorah! She looks wonderfully well, except that the sun has caught her nose.

MAY 25.—Carrie brought down some of my shirts and advised me to take them to Trillip’s round the corner. She said: “The fronts and cuffs are much frayed.” I said without a moment’s hesitation: “I’m *frayed* they are.” Lor! how we roared. I thought we should never stop laughing. As I happened to be sitting next the driver going to town on the ’bus, I told him my joke about the “frayed” shirts. I thought he would have rolled off his seat. They laughed at the office a good bit too over it.

MAY 26.—Left the shirts to be repaired at Trillip’s. I said to him: “I’m *’fraid* they are *frayed*.” He said, without a smile: “They’re bound to do that, sir.” Some people seem to be quite destitute of a sense of humour.

JUNE 1.—The last week has been like old times, Carrie being back, and Gowing and Cummings calling every evening nearly. Twice we sat out in the garden quite late. This evening we were like a pack of children, and played “consequences.” It is a good game.

JUNE 2.—“Consequences” again this evening. Not quite so successful as last night; Gowing having several times overstepped the limits of good taste.

JUNE 4.—In the evening Carrie and I went round to Mr. and Mrs. Cummings’ to spend a quiet evening with them. Gowing was there, also Mr. Stillbrook. It was quiet but pleasant. Mrs. Cummings sang five or six songs, “No, Sir,” and “The Garden of Sleep,” being best in my humble judgment; but what pleased me most was the duet she sang with Carrie—classical duet, too. I think it is called, “I would

that my love ! ” It was beautiful. If Carrie had been in better voice, I don't think professionals could have sung it better. After supper we made them sing it again. I never liked Mr. Stillbrook since the walk that Sunday to the “ Cow and Hedge,” but I must say he sings comic-songs well. His song : “ We don't Want the old men now,” made us shriek with laughter, especially the verse referring to Mr. Gladstone ; but there was one verse I think he might have omitted, and I said so, but Gowing thought it was the best of the lot.

JUNE 6.—Trillip brought round the shirts and, to my disgust, his charge for repairing was more than I gave for them when new. I told him so, and he impertinently replied : “ Well, they are better now than when they were new.” I paid him, and said it was a robbery. He said : “ If you wanted your shirt-fronts made out of pauper-linen, such as is used for packing and book-binding, why didn't you say so ? ”

JUNE 7.—A dreadful annoyance. Met Mr. Franching, who lives at Peckham, and who is a great swell in his way. I ventured to ask him to come home to meat-tea, and take pot-luck. I did not think he would accept such a humble invitation ; but he did, saying, in a most friendly way, he would rather “ peck ” with us than by himself. I said : “ We had better get into this blue 'bus.” He replied : “ No blue-bussing for me. I have had enough of the blues lately. I lost a cool 'thou ' over the Copper Scare. Step in here.”

We drove up home in style, in a hansom-cab, and I knocked three times at the front door without getting an answer. I saw Carrie, through the panels of ground-glass (with stars), rushing upstairs. I told Mr. Franching to wait at the door while I went round to the side. There I saw the grocer's boy actually picking off the paint on the door, which had formed into blisters. No time to reprove him ; so went round and effected an entrance through the kitchen window. I let in Mr. Franching, and showed him into the drawing-room. I went upstairs to Carrie, who was changing her dress, and told her I had persuaded Mr. Franching to come home. She replied : “ How can you do such a thing ? You know it's Sarah's holiday, and there's not a thing in the house, the cold mutton having turned with the hot weather.”

Eventually Carrie, like a good creature as she is, slipped

down, washed up the teacups, and laid the cloth, and I gave Franching our views of Japan to look at while I ran round to the butcher's to get three chops.

JULY 30.—The miserable cold weather is either upsetting me or Carrie, or both. We seem to break out into an argument about absolutely nothing, and this unpleasant state of things usually occurs at meal-times.

This morning, for some unaccountable reason, we were talking about balloons, and we were as merry as possible; but the conversation drifted into family matters, during which Carrie, without the slightest reason, referred in the most uncomplimentary manner to my poor father's pecuniary trouble. I retorted by saying that "Pa, at all events, was a gentleman," whereupon Carrie burst out crying. I positively could not eat any breakfast.

At the office I was sent for by Mr. Perkupp, who said he was very sorry, but I should have to take my annual holidays from next Saturday. Franching called at office and asked me to dine at his club, "The Constitutional." Fearing disagreeables at home after the "tiff" this morning, I sent a telegram to Carrie, telling her I was going out to dine and she was not to sit up. Bought a little silver bangle for Carrie.

JULY 31.—Carrie was very pleased with the bangle, which I left with an affectionate note on her dressing-table last night before going to bed. I told Carrie we should have to start for our holiday next Saturday. She replied quite happily that she did not mind, except that the weather was so bad, and she feared that Miss Jibbons would not be able to get her a seaside dress in time. I told Carrie that I thought the drab one with pink bows looked quite good enough; and Carrie said she should not think of wearing it. I was about to discuss the matter, when, remembering the argument yesterday, resolved to hold my tongue.

I said to Carrie: "I don't think we can do better than 'Good old Broadstairs.'" Carrie not only, to my astonishment, raised an objection to Broadstairs, for the first time; but begged me not to use the expression, "Good old," but to leave it to Mr. Stillbrook and other *gentlemen* of his type. Hearing my 'bus pass the window, I was obliged to rush out of the house without kissing Carrie as usual; and I shouted

to her: "I leave it to you to decide." On returning in the evening, Carrie said she thought as the time was so short she had decided on Broadstairs, and had written to Mrs. Beck, Harbour View Terrace, for apartments.

AUGUST 1.—Ordered a new pair of trousers at Edwards's, and told them not to cut them so loose over the boot; the last pair being so loose and also tight at the knee, looked like a sailor's, and I heard Pitt, that objectionable youth at the office, call out "Hornpipe" as I passed his desk. Carrie has ordered of Miss Gibbons a pink Garibaldi and blue-serge skirt, which I always think looks so pretty at the seaside. In the evening she trimmed herself a little sailor-hat, while I read to her the *Exchange and Mart*. We had a good laugh over my trying on the hat when she had finished it; Carrie saying it looked so funny with my beard, and how the people would have roared if I went on the stage like it.

AUGUST 2.—Mrs. Beck wrote to say we could have our usual rooms at Broadstairs. That's off our mind. Bought a coloured shirt and a pair of tan-coloured boots, which I see many of the swell clerks wearing in the City, and hear are all the "go."

AUGUST 3.—A beautiful day. Looking forward to tomorrow. Carrie bought a parasol about five feet long. I told her it was ridiculous. She said: "Mrs. James, of Sutton, has one twice as long"; so the matter dropped. I bought a capital hat for hot weather at the seaside. I don't know what it is called, but it is the shape of the helmet worn in India, only made of straw. Got three new ties, two coloured handkerchiefs, and a pair of navy-blue socks at Pope Brothers. Spent the evening packing. Carrie told me not to forget to borrow Mr. Higsworth's telescope, which he always lends me, knowing I know how to take care of it. Sent Sarah out for it. While everything was seeming so bright, the last post brought us a letter from Mrs. Beck, saying: "I have just let all my house to one party, and am sorry I must take back my words, and am sorry you must find other apartments; but Mrs. Womming, next door, will be pleased to accommodate you, but she cannot take you before Monday, as her rooms are engaged Bank Holiday week."

## II

THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL HOME OF OUR SON,  
WILLIE LUPIN POOTER

AUGUST 4.—The first post brought a nice letter from our dear son Willie, acknowledging a trifling present which Carrie sent him, the day before yesterday being his twentieth birthday. To our utter amazement he turned up himself in the afternoon, having journeyed all the way from Oldham. He said he had got leave from the bank, and as Monday was a holiday he thought he would give us a little surprise.

AUGUST 5, SUNDAY.—We have not seen Willie since last Christmas, and are pleased to notice what a fine young man he has grown. One would scarcely believe he was Carrie's son. He looks more like a younger brother. I rather disapprove of his wearing a check suit on a Sunday, and I think he ought to have gone to church this morning; but he said he was tired after yesterday's journey, so I refrained from any remark on the subject. We had a bottle of port for dinner, and drank dear Willie's health.

He said: "Oh, by-the-by, did I tell you I've cut my first name, 'William,' and taken the second name 'Lupin'?" In fact, I'm only known at Oldham as 'Lupin Pooter.' If you were to 'Willie' me there, they wouldn't know what you meant."

Of course, Lupin being a purely family name, Carrie was delighted, and began by giving a long history of the Lupins. I ventured to say that I thought William a nice simple name, and reminded him he was christened after his Uncle William, who was much respected in the City. Willie, in a manner which I did not much care for, said sneeringly: "Oh, I know all about that—Good old Bill!" and helped himself to a third glass of port.

Carrie objected strongly to my saying "Good old," but she made no remark when Willie used the double adjective. I said nothing, but looked at her, which meant more. I said: "My dear Willie, I hope you are happy with your colleagues at the Bank." He replied: "Lupin, if you please; and with respect to the Bank, there's not a clerk who is a gentleman, and the 'boss' is a cad." I felt so shocked, I could say nothing, and my instinct told me there was something wrong.

AUGUST 6, BANK HOLIDAY.—As there was no sign of Lupin moving at nine o'clock, I knocked at his door, and said we usually breakfasted at half-past eight, and asked how long would he be? Lupin replied that he had had a lively time of it, first with the train shaking the house all night, and then with the sun streaming in through the window in his eyes, and giving him a cracking headache. Carrie came up and asked if he would like some breakfast sent up, and he said he could do with a cup of tea, and didn't want anything to eat.

Lupin not having come down, I went up again at half-past one, and said we dined at two; he said he "would be there." He never came down till a quarter to three. I said: "We have not seen much of you, and you will have to return by the 5.30 train; therefore you will have to leave in an hour, unless you go by the midnight mail." He said: "Look here, Guv'nor, it's no use beating about the bush. I've tendered my resignation at the Bank."

For a moment I could not speak. When my speech came again, I said: "How dare you, sir? How dare you take such a serious step without consulting me? Don't answer me, sir!—you will sit down immediately, and write a note at my dictation, withdrawing your resignation and amply apologising for your thoughtlessness."

Imagine my dismay when he replied with a loud guffaw: "It's no use. If you want the good old truth, I've got the chuck!"

AUGUST 7.—Mr. Perkupp has given me leave to postpone my holiday a week, as we could not get the room. This will give us an opportunity of trying to find an appointment for Willie before we go. The ambition of my life would be to get him into Mr. Perkupp's firm.

AUGUST 11.—Although it is a serious matter having our boy Lupin on our hands, still it is satisfactory to know he was asked to resign from the Bank simply because "he took no interest in his work, and always arrived an hour (sometimes two hours) late." We can all start off on Monday to Broadstairs with a light heart. This will take my mind off the worry of the last few days, which have been wasted over a useless correspondence with the manager of the Bank at Oldham.

AUGUST 13.—Hurrah! at Broadstairs. Very nice apartments near the station. On the cliffs they would have been double the price. The landlady had a nice five-o'clock dinner and tea ready, which we all enjoyed, though Lupin seemed fastidious because there happened to be a fly in the butter. It was very wet in the evening, for which I was thankful, as it was a good excuse for going to bed early. Lupin said he would sit up and read a bit.

AUGUST 14.—I was a little annoyed to find Lupin, instead of reading last night, had gone to a common sort of entertainment, given at the Assembly Rooms. I expressed my opinion that such performances were unworthy of respectable patronage; but he replied: "Oh, it was only 'for one night only.' I had a fit of the blues come on, and thought I would go to see Polly Presswell, England's Particular Spark." I told him I was proud to say I had never heard of her. Carrie said: "Do let the boy alone. He's quite old enough to take care of himself, and won't forget he's a gentleman. Remember, you were young once yourself." Rained all day hard, but Lupin would go out.

AUGUST 15.—Cleared up a bit, so we all took the train to Margate, and the first person we met on the jetty was Gowing. I said: "Hulloh! I thought you had gone to Barmouth with your Birmingham friends?" He said: "Yes, but young Peter Lawrence was so ill, they postponed their visit, so I came down here. You know the Cummings' are here too?" Carrie said: "Oh, that will be delightful! We must have some evenings together and have games."

I introduced Lupin, saying: "You will be pleased to find we have our dear boy at home!" Gowing said: "How's that? You don't mean to say he's left the Bank?"

I changed the subject quickly, and thereby avoided any of those awkward questions which Gowing always has a knack of asking.

AUGUST 16.—Lupin positively refused to walk down the Parade with me because I was wearing my new straw helmet with my frock-coat. I don't know what the boy is coming to.

AUGUST 17.—Lupin not falling in with our views, Carrie and I went for a sail. It was a relief to be with her alone; for

when Lupin irritates me, she always sides with him. On our return, he said: "Oh, you've been on the 'Shilling Emetic,' have you? You'll come to six-pennorth on the 'Liver Jerker' next." I presume he meant a tricycle, but I affected not to understand him.

AUGUST 18.—Gowing and Cummings walked over to arrange an evening at Margate. It being wet, Gowing asked Cummings to accompany him to the hotel and have a game of billiards, knowing I never play, and in fact disapprove of the game. Cummings said he must hasten back to Margate; whereupon Lupin, to my horror, said: "I'll give you a game, Gowing—a hundred up. A walk round the cloth will give me an appetite for dinner." I said: "Perhaps *Mister* Gowing does not care to play with boys." Gowing surprised me by saying: "Oh yes, I do, if they play well," and they walked off together.

AUGUST 19, SUNDAY.—I was about to read Lupin a sermon on smoking (which he indulges in violently) and billiards, but he put on his hat and walked out. Carrie then read *me* a long sermon on the palpable inadvisability of treating Lupin as if he were a mere child. I felt she was somewhat right, so in the evening I offered him a cigar. He seemed pleased, but, after a few whiffs, said: "This is a good old tup'ny—try one of mine," and he handed me a cigar as long as it was strong, which is saying a good deal.

AUGUST 20.—I am glad our last day at the seaside was fine, though clouded overhead. We went over to Cummings' (at Margate) in the evening, and as it was cold, we stayed in and played games; Gowing, as usual, overstepping the mark. He suggested we should play "Cutlets," a game we never heard of. He sat on a chair, and asked Carrie to sit on his lap, an invitation which dear Carrie rightly declined.

After some species of wrangling, I sat on Gowing's knees and Carrie sat on the edge of mine. Lupin sat on the edge of Carrie's lap, then Cummings on Lupin's, and Mrs. Cummings on her husband's. We looked very ridiculous, and laughed a good deal.

Gowing then said: "Are you a believer in the Great Mogul?" We had to answer all together: "Yes—oh, yes!"

(three times). Gowing said : " So am I," and suddenly got up. The result of this stupid joke was that we all fell on the ground, and poor Carrie banged her head against the corner of the fender. Mrs. Cummings put some vinegar on ; but through this we missed the last train, and had to drive back to Broadstairs, which cost me seven-and-sixpence.

BARRY PAIN

*The Refugees*

Barry Pain started his journalistic career at Cambridge, where he was one of the best-known contributors to *The Granta*. In later years he wrote a great many humorous books and stories, of which *Eliza* and *Mrs. Murphy* are particularly notable for their shrewd observation of cockney character.



## THE REFUGEES

### I

ON the eastern border of Herne Bay, standing some way back from the sea, there is—or was at the period of this story—a small red-brick detached house, with the name St. Andrew's painted on the gate. Here Miss Bird, formerly a governess, but preferring to reign over three sets of furnished apartments rather than to serve in splendour and be snubbed by the butler, did very well for herself. She never took in families where there were babies; she kept two servants in the winter, and added a boy for boots and knives during the season; she objected to vulgarity, and she charged high. Her lodgers saw her but once a day, in the morning, when she appeared, rather well modelled on a lady housekeeper that she had known in her last situation, received the programme for the day, and never said "Sir" or "Ma'am." The rest of the day she worked in dim, remote regions; there she looked a little like a cook, and—which was more important—cooked like one. The house was plainly and very comfortably furnished, and free from the vice of over-decoration so common in the worst sea-side lodging-houses and the better London drawing-rooms. Not in one of the sitting-rooms did "The Soul's Awakening," or "An English Merry-making in the Olden Time," exercise its familiar influence; not in one of the bedrooms did a minatory text shout at you from above the washstand. It was a decent house, where the silver and the glass were bright, and the linen was good and clean. It had an excellent bathroom, and no sea-view at all.

As a rule, in the winter Miss Bird came up to the surface and breathed. She would live a life of cultured leisure, occupying the ground-floor set herself, reading the best of the novels from Tupper's Library, occasionally strolling on "the front," if the weather permitted. She loved to sit in the chief seats at any entertainment that might be given at the Town Hall. She even had a few discreet friendships, though she drew the

line, very properly, at anyone who kept lodgings. But she never touched the cottage piano in her drawing-room set; in her governess days she had taught the piano. When spring came, and brought visitors with it, like a black satin mermaid who had seen enough of the upper world, she sank gracefully into the basement again.

This year, for reasons which will shortly appear, Miss Bird subsided early in February. At ten in the morning a young man in blue serge stood in the ground-floor sitting-room, with his back to the fire, watching the tall and severe maid remove the breakfast things while he rolled his cigarette. The critics said he had a beautiful soul; he also had a misfit face, good in parts, and dark hair, and his name was Julius Poynt. At the moment, he seemed a little out of temper.

"I heard the footstep above, of course," he was saying, "but I never dreamed that the drawing-room floor could be let. I supposed the rooms were being cleaned, or aired, or something of that kind. At Herne Bay, in February, I did think I could have the place to myself. What else did I come for? Is it an old lady?"

"No, sir. Very young; she has her maid with her."

"Sings, of course."

"Sometimes, sir."

"Well, there's no help for it. The set at the top is not comfortable, but I must change. I must ask Miss Bird——"

The austere maid nearly smiled. "I fear, sir," she said, "that the other set is also let—has been let since Christmas. Miss Bird has never known such a thing in her experience before."

"Another lady?"

"No, sir; a gentleman has them, a Mr. Herewood."

"Well," said Julius Poynt in despair, "I must speak to Miss Bird about it."

Miss Bird, usually a woman of resource, could only say she was sorry. If Mr. Poynt had told her, when he wired to engage the rooms, that he did not want them if the rest of the house was occupied, she would have informed him. It was very unusual for any visitors to be at Herne Bay at that time of the year. Probably all the other lodgings in the place were vacant, if Mr. Poynt would like—— But Mr. Poynt did not like; he supposed he must make the best of it. He only hoped he would see nothing of the other lodgers.

He acquiesced so readily, from an appreciation of the hopelessness of trying to make his desire for complete withdrawal from his kind in any way intelligible to an ex-governess mind, which is for the ordinary purposes of life the most commonplace mind in the world after that of a minor poet. Besides, he had some regard for his own comfort, and if he left Miss Bird he knew that he might search long before he found a landlady to suit him so well.

On the afternoon before, on his arrival, he had made a survey of Herne Bay and had found it just what he wanted. He had gone out towards the Reculvers, along the cliffs. A succession of heavy rains, snow, hard frost, thaw, and frost again, had made the scene almost romantic in its desolation. Down the brown crumbling cliffs were frozen cascades, rigid and greenish-yellow. Amid the bushes at the base were ice-bound pools; and yet never had one boy with one brick come to profane the solitude and test the skating prospects. The whole scene vividly recalled the Swiss Alps to one who, like Julius Poynt, had never been there. Behind him a deserted bungalow complained from many frantic notice-boards to deaf and bitter winds. Julius turned and walked back along the sea-front, and still he found everywhere the same note. The white bathing-machines huddled together as if for warmth. Here the shutterless restaurant of Signor Chiantino made no secret that it was closed until the season. Julius put up his single eye-glass (every Julius wears a single eye-glass), and looked through into the interior. There were the glass jars for sweetmeats, empty now; in the middle of the shop, where once the festive holiday-maker took his lemon-water ice, the ebonized, cane-seated chairs were piled together symmetrically. Chiantino had gone to the sunny south; he would return with the swallows maybe; in a restaurant-keeper that would not be inappropriate. One or two of the better hotels made a brave show of spread tables near the ground-floor windows, but no one sat there. The mitre-folded napkins and ruby wine-glasses seemed almost pathetic to Julius in their useless declaration of what it was impossible to believe; it was like some poor devil shamming a competence to avoid charity. A sportsman on the beach, lonely and local, was missing the sea-birds, and then sending an annoyed and perplexed retriever into the water to fetch them out. The new pier was open, and there was no one on it. Further west, the old and ruined

pier was being slowly eaten by the icy sea, under a grey snow-laden sky.

The whole scene had been just what Julius Poynt wanted ; he had congratulated himself on having chosen this place for his escape. This atmosphere of death-in-life was peculiarly suited to his needs. He was flying from something that has been the ruin of many even of the greatest, something of which he was afraid. He wished to cut himself off from the sight and hearing of all old friends, or even acquaintances, for a while ; he was afraid to talk to any of them. He had been placed in a position where he no longer trusted himself ; he was going through an ordeal that for many men that he knew had proved too hard. The atmosphere of Herne Bay helped him. You will understand that, as soon as you know what the ordeal was. And if he did fail in some small respect, there would be no witnesses of it. People in Herne Bay either did not read that part of their daily paper, or would consider the name a coincidence. Poynt was not an outrageously uncommon name, and he had suppressed the Julius ; Miss Bird only had the initial.

And now there were people staying in the house who might be thrown in his way. He could dodge the girl all right, but there was nothing to stop that fool of a man from thinking it a friendly act to scrape acquaintance with him. Poynt could almost imagine him saying that it seemed absurd that they should both sit in solitude every night, seeing that they lived in the same house. Then, sooner or later, would come the question : " I wonder, by the way, if you are related to the Julius Poynt who——" It would be hateful.

Many persons of a nervous temperament find, when annoyed, a great difficulty in keeping still in one place. Poynt had a nervous temperament. He put on his hat and went out. Once more he walked towards the Reculvers, but this time he went along the beach. The tide was far out. I wish now that I had not said that, because you may expect that tide to come in and cut him off ; and it did not do that.

It was necessary for him to get control over his own thoughts. There was one subject that haunted him ; and that subject he was not to think about. Laboriously he turned his mind to some work that he had planned for the future, meditating and recasting. At that moment a tam-o'-shanter hit him in the face.

## II

LOOKING upward, he saw on the edge of the cliff a young lady without a hat. The tam-o'-shanter had a feather in it; there was a strong wind blowing. He made deductions, and the young girl proved them to be correct by calling to him.

"I'm so sorry. That's mine; the wind blew it off. Would you mind keeping it a moment while I climb down?"

"Don't come down," he called. "I'll bring it up to you."

The cliff was low, and presented no difficulties. In a minute he was standing by her side, and wishing that he dared put up his eye-glass in order to see her better. She did not seem to be more than twenty; she had an air of vitality and great self-confidence; she was pretty, and the cold wind had obliged her with a most charming colour.

"Thank you so much. I am sorry to have given you the trouble. And—indeed, that is not the only apology I owe you."

"It was no trouble at all. I'm afraid I don't understand the second apology."

"Only that I'm sorry that my rooms are over yours, Mr. Poynt, since that annoys you so much. But it's not all my fault; I came first."

"How on earth——" he began.

She smiled wistfully. "It's quite simple. You talked to Anna, Miss Bird's servant; Anna talked to my maid, Waters; Waters talked to me. And—— But I need not say that now."

"I'm distressed that what I said was repeated to you. Give me at least a chance to explain. May I walk a few steps with you? It is too cold for standing still. All that I said reflected not on you, but me. I do not wish to bore you with more of my private affairs than I can help, but at present I am—well—distrusting my own weakness in the circumstances in which I am placed. Frankly, I wanted to hide myself until I felt I had recovered my nerve and my sense of proportion. Other men have gone through what I am going through, and made no fuss at all. I despise my weakness, but at least I recognise it. I don't know if you understand."

"Not in the least. It would be less interesting if I did. But of course you were bound to be interesting."

“You don’t know who I am?” he asked with sudden terror.

“No; I only know your name, and that you have come to Herne Bay in the depth of winter. It is for the latter reason that I know you must be interesting—if not in yourself, by virtue of your circumstances. It could not possibly happen otherwise; it is impossible to come here in the winter, when the town is dead and the sea is cold, for a commonplace reason.”

“Then you——” He paused.

“Certainly; it was no commonplace reason that brought and keeps me here. Nor is it so with Mr. Herewood, the man whose rooms you wanted so as not to hear me singing overhead. But I must not keep you; you want to go and hide.”

“I shall not believe you understand and forgive, Miss—ah, I don’t know your name.”

“You may read it; it’s not pretty enough to say.” She gave him her card. It bore the name Miss Jane Smith. He put up his eye-glass to read the card, and did not drop it again. Yes, she was most abominably beautiful, and he felt more than ever anxious to be forgiven.

“I shall not believe you understand,” he resumed, and she interrupted him.

“But I don’t understand, and have said so. It does not matter, because you may explain, perhaps, later. At least Mr. Herewood did, and I don’t suppose that your motives for secrecy can be as strong as his. You may come a little farther, if that’s what you were going to ask. Shall I tell you about Mr. Herewood?”

“Do, please,” said Julius, who so far had taken no interest in the second-floor man, and now was beginning to dislike him.

“He is very tall, and has a very broad chest, and looks like a Viking. You ought to see him; but we shan’t this morning, because I have shut him up in his rooms.”

“Shut him up?”

“Yes, that’s what it comes to. I left my little terrier Vixen asleep on the mat outside my door, and he dare not come past her. Much less dare he ring and ask to have her moved for him. So we shan’t see him. The reason which brings him here is magnificent, and I wish I could tell you it. Can you keep a secret?”

“Certainly.”

“Are you a man with many prejudices?”

“Singularly few.”

“Then I will tell you. Mr. Herewood’s a criminal—steeped in crime. You can have no conception of the things he’s done. If the police knew he was here, they would be down on him in a moment; and he says it would be a lifer. Isn’t it nice?”

“Nice? It’s perfectly appalling! Really, Miss Smith, ought you to——”

“Oh, it’s all right. He’s not here on business now. He’s resting. Besides, he’s a very educated man; he says that they have to be in his profession nowadays. His conversation is perfectly enthralling; he has so many stories to tell of dark deeds in which he has been the leader. He likes burglary best, and says that the revolver is the burglar’s best friend. But he can make counterfeit coin as well.”

“I’ll remember that,” said Poynt, “in case he looks in and asks me to oblige him with change.”

“You would be quite safe,” said Miss Smith. “When he’s resting he never does anything professional. The other day we went into Canterbury by omnibus, and he pointed out to me a big old house, where he knows there is any amount of silver plate. He said it was only a one-man job, and that he could clear it all out any night; but that he did not dream of touching it while he was resting.”

“It’s queer,” said Julius, “that a desperado like that should be nervous with dogs.”

“With cows too; he gets over a gate until they are past when he meets them in the road. Oh, yes! And he wouldn’t climb up the cliff, as you did; I had to go down to him. I thought——”

She broke off abruptly, walked a little quicker, and looked annoyed with herself. At the same time, there was a flicker of checked humour in her eye. There was a moment’s silence, and then Julius asked drily:

“And when was it that Mr. Herewood wouldn’t climb the cliff?”

“Never mind. Well, it was the other time that my tam-o’-shanter blew off.”

“Oh!”

Again a short silence, and then Miss Smith spoke with some impetuosity. “I know what you think, of course. You think

two things, one right and one wrong. You are right in believing that I took the only way to make his acquaintance and yours intentionally. But you are wrong as to my motive. I can only tell you—and it is perfectly true—that I should have been just as eager to make the acquaintance if you had both been women. I wish you had, for then I should not have had to throw myself open to a misconstruction that would never have occurred to the mind of a woman if she had been a man. It is not for nothing that one takes lodgings in Herne Bay in February; it means romance somewhere. I have been wearied with commonplace all my days, but when I tell you that I thirst for romance, I do not want you to think that I am hunting a vulgar flirtation like a shop-girl on her Sunday out. I loathe any conventional unconventionality.”

Julius Poynt assured her that he had not thought any of the things that, as a matter of fact, he had thought. He could hardly have done less.

“I may add,” she said, “that I was glad to gather from your rather enigmatic explanations, that you are here seeking refuge from some affair of the heart, and that, therefore, you will be as little disposed as I am to—to stupidity. I like to talk to people who are even a little out of the groove; that’s the whole explanation. As for your story, I don’t want to be curious. Whether you tell it to me or not will depend entirely——” She broke off suddenly.

“Entirely on myself,” said Julius, finishing the sentence for her.

“Not at all. It will entirely depend on me. I thought I ought to warn you of that. Thanks for saving my tam-o’-shanter; I am not rich, and could not have afforded to lose it. Good-bye.”

She turned away, and went skimming down the slope of the cliff. Julius wondered whether he, or she, or Herewood, or all of them, were mad. He was particularly perplexed by her astonishing and needless allusion to her poverty in her last sentence. And he did not believe in the poverty either.

### III

ON the following morning, after breakfast, Miss Bird entered the sitting-room occupied by Miss Jane Smith, and discussed the question of luncheon and dinner with her, Miss Bird

providing the knowledge and Miss Smith the enthusiasm. When that was arranged, Miss Smith said :

“ I should be glad if you would sit down for a moment, Miss Bird. I want to ask your advice.”

Miss Bird seemed surprised, and sat down.

“ I want to ask you,” Miss Smith continued, “ if there would be any impropriety in my asking Mr. Herewood and Mr. Poynt to take tea with me here this afternoon.”

Miss Bird did not hesitate. “ To my mind there would be the appearance of it. You perhaps think me too strict ? ”

“ Not in the least. I only ask you, since I believe you to be a lady of great tact. If you will help me to devise some means by which I can have this little tea-party without that appearance. There must be conditions which, if they were strictly observed, would put things all right.”

If you wish to please a man, let him believe that you think him unusually courageous ; if you wish to please a woman, say that she has tact ; if you want to flatter a schoolmaster, tell him he is very sarcastic, which will probably be untrue.

It pleased Miss Bird to be accused of tact. She at once took an interest in the projected festivity. After thought, she produced the following conditions :

1. That the tea shall begin at five and conclude at six precisely.

2. That at no time shall Miss Smith be in the room alone with either of the two gentlemen, Waters being instructed so to regulate her presence in the sitting-room as to avoid this.

3. That no round games of any kind shall be played. (Miss Bird was particularly strong on this condition, and apparently had reminiscences ; she seemed rather surprised that no opposition was offered.)

4. That Miss Bird's maid, Anna, shall be instructed to enter the room three times during the hour without knocking, and at irregular intervals ; and that, to prevent the appearance of espionage, she shall, on the first occasion, ask if anything more is required, and on the second make up the fire, and on the third bring in a letter.

Under those conditions Miss Bird held that the tea could be given with her entire approval, and without the least risk of compromise.

Downstairs Julius sat back in his easy chair, with the

morning paper unread upon his knee, smoking a cigarette, and deep in thought. He was thinking about Miss Smith. He had been thinking a good deal about Miss Smith ; so much so that he noted with pleasure that his thoughts no longer ran on the subject which he had come to Herne Bay to escape. Even the out-of-season air of depression had not done as much to bring his mind to the state in which he would have it as his meeting with this pretty girl, who had such strange ways. And that she should ever touch in conversation on what he wished to forget was impossible ; for she had said plainly that she did not know who he was. Her guess that it was some disappointment in love which had brought him there was utterly wrong. He was unpleasantly conscious that he had not shown to advantage in talking to her ; she had taken him by surprise, and he had been awkward enough to take her up in the wrong light and let her think that he had a bad opinion of her. He meant to redeem himself, if he had a chance.

At that moment Waters knocked and entered. She handed him a note. "From Miss Smith," she said. "I was to wait for an answer."

The note ran as follows :

"DEAR MR. POYNT,

"I am anxious that you and Mr. Herewood should meet. I am asking you both to take tea with me to-day at five o'clock. It would be kind of you if you can spare an hour.

"Very truly yours,

"JANE SMITH."

Julius Poynt accepted. He would have much preferred not to meet Herewood, but he did wish to meet Jane Smith again, and see her from a new point of view in her own rooms.

At five o'clock punctually, he entered Miss Smith's sitting-room. Waters was arranging cups on a little table at the side ; a terrier barked at him tentatively, but gave it up on finding that Poynt liked dogs. Miss Smith rose from her chair by the fire, and welcomed him. She looked very young to be a hostess, and she seemed grave. The room was full of flowers ; Poynt had noticed the boxes of the Mentone florist in the hall that morning. He also noticed that the cottage piano, by the maker whose name is seen only in lodging-houses, had given place to a short Grand by a maker who does not require my

advertisement. He recalled that Miss Smith had told him that the loss of a tam-o'-shanter, price eighteenpence in the shops, would be a serious matter to her.

"I hope Mr. Herewood won't come down for half an hour," he was saying. "I want all that time for apologies. I have never more wanted to behave nicely, and I have been rude. I should have been delighted to appear sympathetic and quick to understand, and I have been stupid. No, stupidity is not half as bad as the mean acuteness that I was vulgar enough to show the other afternoon. To think that I stood there with my mouth shut and let you justify yourself, which was as much as to say that you required justification! I don't deserve any tea, nor cake, nor anything."

"Not justification," she said meditatively. "Call it explanation if you like."

"But neither did you need explanation. You are you. That is enough—gloriously enough."

Considering that this was only the second time that he had met Miss Smith, and that Waters was arranging cups in the room at the time, I consider that he spoke extravagantly. I hope Miss Smith thought so too; I am sure Waters did.

"You must forget all that I said about singing," he went on.

"Why should I?"

"Because you have turned out Miss Bird's box of jingle and have got that. Because I swear you are a musician. Because you sing folk-songs, and I adore them."

Miss Smith laughed. "I had not meant to give up singing altogether, but only to arrange so as not to disturb you. What folk-songs? How did you know? I do, of course. That is a volume of them on the piano desk now. Tell me."

"The charm of all folk-songs is alike, whatever their nationality. Scratch the civilised, and you find the barbarian in his primitiveness. We are all barbarian at heart, though we are wise enough to keep the rules and regulations of the civilised. In the folk-song we sing what we would love to do or feel, if we had not learned the indiscretion of it. Sometimes it is a girl who sings that her brown boy has stolen a horse; and she does not go on to whimper about the shame he has brought on his family, or the terrors of the police court. Or it is a man who has lost money and love and everything; what does it matter, for his country has suffered a shameful defeat? Or the girl, again, has stolen out to meet her lover while her

mother sleeps ; you can smell the pine-woods and see the full moon rise : the gipsy will master her. Why, I cannot hear a folk-song in London without wanting to dash my silk hat on the ground and trample on it."

"Well," said Miss Smith gravely, "so long as it is your own hat, you know."

"Hats," he said with meaning, "are expensive."

"I think," said Miss Smith, "that I hear Mr. Herewood on the stairs. You can take the dog out, Waters."

The step on the stairs was a heavy one, and when Mr. Herewood entered Poynt could see that this was a big man. He was six feet three, broad and erect. His hair was longer than it should have been, and he wore a fair beard. He had a scarlet tie and the pattern of his tweed suit was aggressive. His voice was a rich deep bass. But his eye was timid, and he had come with a biscuit in one hand to propitiate the dog. He looked like a Viking, but a Viking with a conscience. He looked like a nervous lion.

When he had greeted Miss Smith and had been introduced to Poynt, he settled himself massively in a comfortable chair and turned to Poynt again.

"I understand," said the deep voice, "from Miss Smith, that she has told you what career I follow, and why I am at present in retirement. That, I am sure, is equivalent to saying that I can rely on your discretion absolutely."

Poynt gave the assurance.

"I am greatly obliged to you," said Herewood. "My profession has been one into which I have been driven by the absolute colourlessness of modern life, rather than by necessity. Probably I give away more than I gain by it. But that makes no difference in the eyes of the law. If you take a purse from the pocket of some wealthy lady and give the contents to some poor woman who is in need of bread, you are still guilty in the eyes of the law."

"That is so, I believe," said Poynt drily.

"At this moment I am wanted for what is considered a serious offence by prejudiced people. If I am captured, that is the end. I shall never be allowed to regain my liberty again. But if by remaining quietly here I can tire out the patience of the police, it is my intention to give up burglary altogether, and seek a commission in the Spanish Army. You speak Spanish perhaps?"

“No,” said Poynt shortly.

“Nor I,” added Miss Smith.

“It is a beautiful language,” said Herewood thoughtfully. “I have not wanted to make any weak apology for my way of life; but there are so many sorts of burglar, and misunderstandings so easily arise.”

“I am sure,” said Miss Smith, “if I may speak for Mr. Poynt as well as myself, that we quite see that in your burglaries there is something of the old chivalry. It is the easier for us to understand, because we have both felt that colourlessness to which you allude. Only just now Mr. Poynt was saying something of the same kind. And now, Mr. Herewood, it would be kind of you if you would give us some account of the exploit which has brought you here in hiding.”

“With pleasure,” said Herewood, putting down his cup.

#### IV

THE door had just opened softly, but Herewood did not notice it. He began in his fruity bass :

“In the whole course of a life spent in crime——”

Here he stopped short because Anna, who had just entered, interrupted him by asking Miss Smith if she required anything further, as per contract with Miss Bird. He then began again :

“In the whole course of a life spent in crime, I can remember nothing to compare with this last incident in my career. The marvel is that I am here to tell the story. It was a burglary at Fulham, and as the swag promised to be rich, and the whole operation was one of extreme delicacy, I undertook it single-handed. Had it been a simpler matter, I should have probably sent a couple of my men with instructions, and not troubled to do the rough work myself.”

“When you send men like that, what do they get?” asked Miss Smith.

“Ten per cent on the net takings is the usual thing. They are content with that. The house in this instance was an old-fashioned house, standing in the very middle of about a third of an acre of garden, at a corner where two streets crossed. The garden was square, and surrounded by high walls. The two walls which formed the angle bordered by the two streets

were patrolled perpetually from dusk till dawn by a policeman in the employ of Mansford, the owner, who lived there. The other two walls could not be approached without going through a vast number of other gardens and backyards. Mansford was a curious old fellow ; he had been a great traveller, and had made a speciality of pearls. In fact, he had spent the great part of a considerable fortune on pearls, and was said to have the finest black pearl in Europe. It was also said that his precautions against burglary were something extraordinary. I tried to get further information ; I particularly wanted to know where the pearls were kept at night. I sent two of my cleverest men down for that purpose. One of them tried to work the servants ; but they were all dead honest, and wouldn't talk at all. The other went about among the tradespeople in the district, and the only piece of information that he could bring me back nearly made me give up the whole thing ; he had heard that Mansford kept some kind of a wild beast. Nobody seemed to know what it was exactly, but one man had complained of the noise it made at night when the moon was bright, and had said that he would have made a row about it but that Mansford was such a good customer. However, nothing venture nothing have. I made out my plan of campaign.

“ I determined to make my approach from the street. If I had tried from the other side I should have had to go through, or over, a dozen different private premises ; that would have meant a dozen different chances of being caught. As it was, I had only to fear the policeman guarding the walls next to the street ; and I soon found a way by which I could easily get over the walls, without a chance of the policeman discovering me. There was a row of elms in the garden against the walls. They had been pollarded, but not very closely, and had sprouted again well ; they overhung the pavement. I had also noticed that two evenings in the week loaded hay-carts came in from the country, and passed down one of those streets. I had only to put on my equipment, and wait for the cart on one of those nights.”

“ What was your equipment ? ” asked Miss Smith.

“ I had a machine for safes—my own invention—in my breast-pocket, with a pair of wire nippers, a box of silent matches, and a piece of curved wire with which I could give an account of most locks that were ever made. In another pocket

I had a small bottle of treacle and a sheet of brown paper. Finally, in my hip-pocket I had a loaded revolver, the burglar's best friend."

"No extra cartridges?" asked Poynt.

"No use," said Herewood, with an indulgent smile. "When it reaches the point that revolvers become necessary, the burglar never gets a chance to re-load."

"I see," said Poynt humbly.

"Isn't it horrible and nice!" said Miss Smith.

Just then Anna entered, made up the fire, and withdrew again. Herewood resumed:

"Well, one night about nine I swung myself up on to the tail of the hay-cart unseen, climbed up the trusses, and waited till we approached the house. Then I got into one of the trees, which I could now easily reach. The policeman was immediately underneath me, but he noticed nothing. People will look in front of them, or down, or left, or right, without any special motive. But ninety-nine people in a hundred never look up, unless for some particular purpose. You may have remarked that. As soon as the policeman had turned the corner, I let myself down from the tree into the garden. I had no intention of beginning until the house was quiet for the night, but I thought I had better look round to see if I could get any useful information. I got a good deal; the whole place was a mass of traps, alarms, and spring-guns. As no one was about I moved round, snipping wires and taking care to keep on the grass, for a step on gravel makes as decided a sound as a gun. By the time all the lights in the house had been out half an hour I was ready to start. I found a likely window, spread the treacle over the brown paper, put that on one pane, and then smashed it with my fist. Of course, as the broken glass stuck to the paper there was no sound. That enabled me to get my arm through and cut the alarm wires; there were no less than three of these. I had expected it, as the window was not shuttered or barred. I soon slipped in through the window, went to the dining-room and started work on the safe. It was a poor safe, and I had it open inside five minutes; it contained a few pounds in gold, and nothing else. I was sorry for this, because it meant that the old man took the pearls up to bed with him at night; and that meant there would be trouble before I should be able to get away. I knew he would not let them go without making a fight for it; and I felt pretty sure

he would have some dodge up there by which he could communicate with the police outside. However, I had started and I had to go on. I struck a match that would burn for two minutes, and crossed the hall to the front staircase. I didn't like the look of the first step; I bent down, and tried it gently with one finger. It was so arranged that if I had trodden on it, it would have swung round and struck a gong concealed beneath it. It was a nice little trick, and I was glad to see it because it showed me that I was on the right track for the pearls. I found the fifth and sixth stairs provided with a similar dodge; the rest were solid. After that I went very carefully. At the top of the stairs I entered a long and narrow passage; as I was going along this, I suddenly saw that the floor was up just in front of my foot. A deep pit yawned before me. I sprang back just in time, but in doing so I made a good deal of noise; I heard Mansford moving in his room, and I thought I was done for. In a moment he was out in the passage, in his dressing-gown and slippers, with a skull cap on, grinning like a monkey. He held his candle high. I had my revolver in my hand now, but I never shoot until I must. 'Say your prayers,' the old ruffian said, 'for you will be dead in a minute. Here, Lena!'

"Out from another room slunk a full-grown tigress. The old man just pointed at me, and the brute began to slink towards me, rubbing against one wall of the passage. There was I with this pit before me, of no great breadth but terribly deep, and beyond that a tigress coming nearer and nearer, getting ready to spring, urged on by its master. The time had come; I was too near the pearls to go back. I fired at the brute—and missed. It slunk back growling, then came on again, and twice more I missed; the old man was waving his candle about to spoil my aim. But the fourth time I wounded her, and immediately she sprang for me. As she sprang, I fired once more and she dropped like a stone down the pit. Mansford rushed back to his room, as I guessed, to get his revolver. I jumped across the pit, and went after him; I could hear servants moving, and I knew the police might be expected any moment now, but I meant to have my pearls. I found an electric-light switch just inside the door, and switched the light on. Now I could see better what I was doing.

"The old man had got his revolver pointed at me; but before he could do any damage I shot him in the hand, and he

dropped it. He then rushed towards the head of the bed ; that gave me my clue. He kept the pearls under his pillow, then. It was all I could do to keep him away from that bed without actually killing him. However, with a couple of shots I managed to hold him off while I thrust one hand under the pillow and drew out a canvas bag. By that time the stairs and passage were full of servants and police, and I knew it was hopeless to try to get back that way. I flung up the window, let myself down by one hand, and then took my chance and dropped. I dropped right in the arms of a policeman standing in the street under the window."

Here Anna entered with a letter for Miss Smith as per contract. Miss Smith seemed impatient at the interruption. "Pray go on," she said. "This letter is nothing of importance."

"There was a short struggle," Herewood went on, "and then I managed to free myself. I had thrown him to the ground ; but he was up in a minute, blew his whistle, and came after me. There are as plucky men in that division as you will find anywhere in the Force. I fired twice over his head ; I did not want to touch him, but only to keep him back. But he still came on, and now he had two more coming up behind him. I had no choice ; I had to drop him, and I did. I only trust that the wound was not serious, for he was a brave man. The rest of the story is soon told. I hid between two piles of woodblocks where the road was up, until the pursuit had gone by. And then, worn out, I went home to sleep. On the following morning I took the first train to Herne Bay."

"Thank you so much," said Miss Smith, with ecstatic eyes. "How wonderful it all is ! And how insipid ordinary life must seem to you after that adventure ! Tell me, what did you do with the pearls ?"

"The less important specimens will be sold gradually. I have an agent who does that sort of thing. The best specimens will go, after my death, to the British Museum."

The little clock on the mantelpiece here gave the preliminary grunt which signified that in another minute it would strike the hour. Miss Smith rose from her chair.

On the last stroke of six the two men found themselves outside her door. Poynt touched Herewood on the shoulder, and Herewood jumped ; he was certainly a nervous man. "Come

and have a smoke downstairs, won't you?" said Poynt genially.

Herewood thanked him, and assented. Poynt put up his eye-glass, and there was a flash of triumph in it. He had his excitement well under control. "Here we are," he said, opening the door of his sitting-room.

## V

"WHAT kind of revolver do you use in these expeditions?" asked Poynt casually, as he unfastened the wire on a soda-water bottle.

"An ordinary six-chambered revolver. Mine's quite an old one; but it shoots straight, and that's the great point. It belonged to Charles Peace of famous memory, and I got it from a friend of his." Herewood lay back in his chair, diligently sucking a cigarette, and appeared happy and pleased with himself. "This is really quite exceptional for me," he said, as he raised his glass to his lips.

Poynt took the chair on the other side of the fire. "Not many old houses with gardens all round them left in Fulham now," he said meditatively.

"Very few, very few," the deep bass voice assented.

"Mr. Herewood," said Poynt, his eye-glass flashing, "you fired five times at the tigress, three times at Mansford, and three times at the policeman. Eleven shots with six cartridges is good. Also, while I am on the subject, there was a garden all round the house. But when you dropped from the first-floor window you dropped—not into the garden, but into the street. That is even better. I might mention other points, but these are enough. Have you any explanation?"

Herewood took a long drink and cleared his throat. He then said, not without dignity: "If you were not deceived, I cannot see what you have to grumble at."

"I might tell you that I have good cause to resent an attempt to deceive me, whether it was successful or not. But I prefer to remind you that I was not the only person present, and that the other person was most distinctly deceived. Take another cigarette."

"Thanks, I will. Has Miss Smith given you any right to speak on her behalf?"

“That has nothing to do with it. If you see anybody being swindled, you do not want any special authority from them to warn them of it.”

“Good heavens! You don’t mean that you would tell Miss Smith?”

“Why not? You come swaggering here, making yourself out to be so much worse than anybody else, and the whole thing is a fraud. Why do you pretend to vices which you do not possess? It’s hypocritical; and it’s done to make a noble-hearted girl think better of you. You with a tigress! You with a bag of pearls! You attitudinising with a halo of crime on your head! How dare you call yourself a criminal? How dare you say that the police are after you? I accuse you of absolute innocence. That’s what’s the matter with you. And I’ll prove my words; I know a house in Herne Bay where the morning’s milk is left on the doorstep in a can at seven every day. If you are what you pretend to be, go and sneak that milk. Will you? Yes, or no.”

“I should prefer not to,” said the abashed Viking.

“Come along. You may take your patent revolver and one cartridge with you; that will be enough to kill a peck of policemen and any tigresses that there may happen to be about. You can get your agent to sell the can, and send the milk to the British Museum after your death.”

“Do not be bitter. It is true that I have been very eager to win the respect and admiration of Miss Smith, and that for that reason I have been led into some inaccuracies. But further than that I can never go. Suppose I were her accepted suitor, sooner or later the truth would come out that I was not the blackguard I had pretended to be. She would never forgive me. You have nothing to fear from my rivalry. Let me remain here, and do not tell Miss Smith. If you only knew my story, you would make allowances for me; I am sure of it.”

“Your allusion to rivalry would seem to show that you misunderstand my attitude in this matter altogether. If I interfere, it is because I know the mischief that an imitation criminal may do to a girl who, like Miss Smith, is devoted to folk-songs. If you tell me your story, how am I to believe it?”

“Many of the facts you will be able to check from independent sources.”

“Proceed then, but be more brief than you were when recounting your burglariousness.”

“Briefly, then, I am not what I seem. I am a Clerk in Holy Orders, and Curate of an Evangelical Church in a northern manufacturing town. My name is Ralph Herewood, and I am a B.A. of Oxford. I am compelled to take my holiday at the time most convenient to my vicar, and this year he directed me to take it in February. For two years before that I had no holiday at all.”

“Well?”

“I own that when you accused me of being innocent, there was some slight truth in the charge. Think what it means to be a good example for a little over two years without one holiday. I was not allowed to dance—a pastime of which I am fond. I was not allowed to play whist—a game that I enjoy and understand. I was not allowed to drink one glass of wine—a beverage to which, in moderation, I am partial. Every little action was watched and criticised. The fierce light which beats on a throne is a glow-worm to the illumination which a provincial parish of some enthusiasm throws on the doings of the curate. When at last my holiday came, I said to myself, I must have change, and change of manner of life more than of scene, if I am to preserve my health and sanity.”

“Reasonable enough,” said Poynt.

“I have a brother in Australia, whose figure is the same as mine. When he wants clothes I order them here, try them on, and sent them out to him. In this way I was able to procure lay clothes for myself without exciting the least suspicion in the parish. It was my plan to come to London, and live a life which, though not characterised by excess, would be as different as possible from that which, for so long, the narrowness of my parishioners had forced on me.”

“Then why the devil didn’t you?”

“Many of my parishioners are men of business, and are compelled to be frequently in London. Suppose they saw me in these clothes! Worse yet, suppose they saw me coming out of a theatre! There was too much risk. But who ever comes to Herne Bay in February?”

“At the same time,” said Poynt, “it hardly seems to me to be the place for a man who wanted to be a bit of a dog for a change.”

“Being a dog is, after all, a question of proportion. I can assure you that I read novels as much as I like, smoke when I like, have had some pleasant conversations with Miss Smith (whom you must admit to be a lady of great attractions), and have had my half-bottle of claret every day and no heel-taps.”

“I have no objection to your being a dog on those lines, or even on somewhat broader lines. But why did you deceive Miss Smith? Why did you become that much more objectionable animal, a sheep in wolf’s clothing?”

“I hardly know,” said the wretched Viking. “Her tam-o’-shanter blew off, and I rescued it. She was very grateful. It appears that she is not wealthy, and has to limit her expenditure on clothes severely. We got into conversation, and she said something about the romance of crime, showing that she could appreciate it. I dropped a hint or two designed to give myself a little interest for her. She took up the hints quicker than I should have expected, said that she knew that one did not come to Herne Bay in the winter for nothing, and made guesses as to what I was. I allowed her to think that the guesses were correct. You may think I was wrong, but if you could only have seen the look of pleasure on her face I think you would have forgiven me. She has few pleasures, I fear.”

“Have you anything more to say?”

“I think not.”

Julius Poynt finished his whisky and soda, and paced the room in thought and in silence.

“Well,” he said at last, “it was my intention to call Miss Smith’s attention to the fact that you fired eleven shots with a six-chambered revolver without reloading, and that the garden of that house obliged you by moving away and making room for the street; I should then have left her to take any action which she thought proper.”

“Oh, not that—not that!” pleaded Herewood.

“It is more from pity than anything else that, to some extent, I alter my decision. I will say nothing to her at all, provided that you yourself will inform her in any way you like that you have no claim to the reputation that you have usurped, a reputation that many worse men than yourself have given time and suffering to obtain. You must dare to say frankly that you never thieved at all.”

“May I say that I confined myself to the manufacture of counterfeit coin?”

“No, no. You must wrestle with your pride, and give up the whole thing.”

“It shall be done. Is there any other condition?”

“You must leave Herne Bay by the first train to-morrow morning.”

“I should have done so in any case; after the humiliating confession that you force from me, I could not wish to stay.”

“Go to London,” said Poynt, not unkindly. “The chances are a million to one that you would not be recognised, even if any of your parishioners met you. Clothes make a great difference.”

“What is there in London for a broken man, one whose virtues have found him out, who has lost a proud position and, for all you know, something dearer still?”

“In any case, you said yourself, you could not have married Miss Smith. Do you wish to remain here and break her heart?”

“That,” said Herewood, “is well put.”

“And I can give you a pass to the stalls at the Empress’s Theatre for to-morrow night.”

“Now you’re talking. You should have said that before. I will go to London.”

“Hand that card in at the box-office, and they will look after you. Good-bye.”

Herewood rose and walked to the door. Here with one hand on the handle, he turned, making an impressive figure. He cleared his throat, and said with considerable dignity:

“You are hard and cold. It is your turn to exult now, but who knows whether my turn may not come next? There is a weak spot in your armour; why is it that you are at Herne Bay in the winter? I may yet be able to answer that question. You have shown little mercy: expect little. I shall never marry Miss Smith; my own senseless folly, your power over me in consequence, and the fact that I happen to be engaged to another girl, alike combine to prevent it. But do not think that you are sure to succeed where Ralph Herewood has failed. Good-bye.”

He swept from the room, but returned again almost immediately.

“I say,” he said, “they have left that brute of a terrier on the landing again. Would you mind holding him while I get past?”

“With pleasure,” said Poynt.

When Poynt returned to his room, he remained for some time deep in thought. He had done a rash thing in bestowing that pass on Herewood. It might be, of course, that Herewood would never notice that the serious comedy, *Irene*, was by Julius Poynt. Though all London was ringing with nothing else, though allusions to *Irene* and the author were certainly to be found in every periodical issued, though its reception had been the most astonishing scene of wild enthusiasm that had been witnessed in a London theatre for the last twenty years, it was possible that the provincial might succeed in not knowing what everybody else knew. Even if he did find out, gorgeous in a rough way though his imagination was, it might never occur to him that here was the motive for Poynt’s visit to Herne Bay.

To take a success gracefully requires a great deal of practice, and Poynt had had none. He dreaded that a foolish smile under congratulation might stamp him as weak; he dreaded that a more reserved manner might be accounted as evidence of a swelled head. He dreaded that success might lead him into extravagance in living or carelessness in his work. His nerves were upset by success; he had suffered more than he had enjoyed from it; he had the instinct of decent people at times of emotion to hide themselves. Herne Bay had promised a salutary depression.

But Miss Smith had banished the thing from his mind altogether.

## VI

THE departure of the Rev. Ralph Herewood for London took place early on the following morning. He left behind him a letter for Miss Smith. Miss Bird was annoyed with him. Anna was so disgusted with what she had overheard of his story that she could not bring herself to thank him for the five shillings that he slipped into her hand. It was raining. The cab-horse was lame in its off foreleg. Everything seemed to be against him. Can it be wondered at that his thoughts turned to revenge?

Later in the morning Julius Poynt, sitting at his table and writing, heard a burst of music from the piano upstairs. He recognised it as the symphony of a well-known folk-song, a

folk-song so surcharged with primitive instinct that if it had not been a folk-song, it would have been almost improper. Then came a pause, a modulation into a different key, and an exercise intended to give flexibility to the voice rather than pleasure to the hearer.

What (he asked himself) did this mean? Had she forgotten for a moment that his room was underneath? Or had she meant to please him by singing the folk-song, and then been driven by coyness to deviate into the exercise? He was inclined to the latter view until that and other exercises had gone on for thirty minutes; then he did not feel so sure about it.

The rain ceased and the sun shone; the wind blew gently from the west. The change in the temperature had been great the last twenty-four hours. Presently Miss Smith passed his windows; she held two circulating library books in her hand. Julius gave her a timed four-minutes' start by his watch, and then put on his cap and went in the same direction. He felt that every minute was wasted until she was assured of his adoration. In the bright lexicon of Julius Poynt there was no such word as prematurity. A little later, at the door of the circulating library, he was asking Miss Smith if he might carry her books home for her.

"Thanks very much," she said. "I wish you would. I was going the other way myself."

To his experienced eye it looked as if she were trying to get rid of him. "Let me," he pleaded, "come with you. I have something to say."

Her air of confidence and independence had gone; she smiled nervously. "I am afraid of you," she said.

"Afraid of me? Why?"

"You have already guessed one secret; I had a note from Mr. Herewood this morning. He could not fly from his past. The conscientious curacy that he thought lay safely buried in a northern manufacturing town has risen up against him. Why did I ever seek romance, and forsake the steady security of the commonplace? Why did I come to Herne Bay in the winter—that hotbed of Machiavellian intrigue, in which I already feel myself too weak to hold my own? But the other day I thought that I had guessed your secret, or that I had but to wait to learn it; to-day I see how wrong my estimate of you was, and my principal terror is that you may learn my secret too."

“ Even if I have learnt it already, you have nothing to fear. Shall we take this path ? ”

“ Yes, yes. You know it already ? ”

“ Miss Smith,” he said quietly, “ you are an heiress.”

She turned her head away from him. “ Oh, you are hard—you are brutal ! ” she murmured.

“ No. I call a plain thing by a plain name ; that is all.”

“ It is true,” she said. “ My poor mother was like it before me. It is in the blood.”

“ I say again that you have nothing to fear from me. When I stripped the disguise of dashing brigandage from Herewood, and left him shivering in the white surplice of a stainless life ; when I took, so to speak, the gilt off his gingerbread, then I was actuated by far other motives than those which move me now.”

“ If you only knew my story,” she said.

“ Tell it to me ; I long to hear it.”

“ I am an orphan, but not as other orphans. Before I was twelve years old I had read enough story books for the young to realise that. Other orphans wept continually ; I wept seldom, if ever. It is impossible to feel poignantly the loss of people whom you have never known, and I had no sort of recollection of my parents. Other orphans were habitually ill-treated by their guardians, especially by the jealous wife of the guardian who favoured her own children and had no love for the little stranger who had been thrust on her. Other orphans looked in the glass and wept because they were not beautiful, though they generally picked up the trick of it later on. Other orphans spent whole days in the old library, and learned Latin and Greek without a tutor. What pathos, what romance, seemed to cling to every other orphan that had ever lived except myself ! I was not at all like that. My uncle and guardian, the Archdeacon of Bunchester, and his wife, were uniformly kind to me, perhaps even excessively indulgent ; they had no children of their own. Beauty is no sort of a treat to one who, like myself, has always been beautiful ; I once thought of cutting off my eyelashes——”

“ Don’t say that, even in jest,” Poynt interrupted her, breathless with emotion.

“ It is true. I did not do it, but I thought about it, in order that I might be able to enjoy them when they grew again. I did not do it, because I was not certain if they would grow

again, and if they had not I should have been annoyed. I never frequented the old library. The Archdeacon was generally there, and if I went there I had to keep quiet; and I was rather a rowdy child. I never learned anything without a tutor, and very little with tutors, except music, which I take seriously. I had everything in reason that I wanted; and nowhere in my life was there a touch of pathos or one breath of romance. Action, colour, warmth, thrill—all that the novels that I read had made dear to me never came within my own experience. One day was like another, and all were uneventful. Then, but a few months ago, I was told I was an heiress. That blow prostrated me. However well I sang, I should always be sneered at as an amateur. If in days far on ahead someone fell in love with me, and wished to marry me, he would learn that I was wealthy; and thinking that though he was poor, he might yet act with nobility, he would go away to India and leave me. People who are really noble are generally poor, and their nobility prevents them from marrying anybody who is any richer. The wealthy woman is a pariah and an outcast nowadays; the ignoble would marry her but only for her money; the noble will not marry her because of her money. When I have control of my fortune, I think I shall throw it into a hospital."

"Better do that than cut off your eye-lashes. Then you came here because——"

"I came here," said Miss Smith, "because in the first place I wanted to get into contact with the romance of life. There might not be another visitor in Herne Bay, but I knew that if there were that visitor would be there for some romantic reason. There was the possibility that I might stand on the edge and look on; as it happens, I have been dragged into the whirlpool. I wanted to taste the joys of independence. At home everything was done for me, including the thinking. I was the ordinary well-bred, milk-fed, ill-read English girl; but vaguely conscious that I had a mind of my own, and rather anxious to pull it out and look at it. Then again I was eager for awhile to live as the poor live."

"I beg your pardon?" said Poynt.

"As the poor live. Yes, I know that it has not been squalor exactly, but it has been far simpler and plainer than the life to which I am accustomed. The Archdeacon is rather fond of pomp and circumstance. I was already making plans to get it

more like the real thing ; you cannot pick up a new manner of life all in a moment. Before the blow fell, and I became irreparably rich, I wanted to taste some of the romance of poverty. Yes, I fled from wealth just as Mr. Herewood fled from goodness. I wonder what it is that you are escaping. When I saw you walking on the beach, I thought that you looked terribly melancholy ; I could have imagined you heart-broken."

"I was not," said Julius. "It rests with you whether I shall be."

"What do you mean ?"

"Listen ; there is probably not one man in the world who hates wealth as I do, who despises it as much as I do. The whole question of money is so unspeakably disgusting to me that I never let it enter my head at all. Had I fallen in love with a pauper, the question would have never arisen ; why should I allow it to arise if it happens that I love an heiress ? If I think of it at all, it is with a kind of pity. 'This wealth,' I would say, 'weighs hard on you. You are conscious that you have done nothing whatever to deserve it. You have my sympathy ; we all suffer from some hereditary curse or other. We must not let it make us morbid. It is not as if you had earned the money.' That is the way we must look at it."

"You seem to be saying, or implying——"

"My love for you is far too great and new to be sullied with the words or phrases that other lovers have used. I cannot say or imply. I am proud of the absolute uselessness of language."

"This is what I expected," said Miss Smith, "and also what I feared. That is my ordinary form of refusal."

"Pardon me," he said ; "but we are practically strangers. We have met but three times at the most. Do you think you know me well enough to refuse me altogether ?"

"You, personally, do not come into the question at all. I am glad that you take so kind a view of my misfortune ; I like talking to you. I am quite willing that you should go on adoring me ; but when it comes to the question of marriage, I must tell you that there my views were settled long ago. I made up my mind that if I married at all, it would be to a man of one of two kinds ; to the best of my belief, you are not of either kind."

“That may be, or may not be. Remember, that you do not yet know my secret. Remember, too, that though you may invest your money on a theory you can hardly give your heart in that way. Remember, that your views are changing and have been changing ever since we met.”

“You may speak of this again to-morrow; it is true that my views are changing. It is true, too, that I do not yet know your secret. It is unlikely that it would make any difference, but it might. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” he said regretfully.

But he did not go away. They went on walking and talking together for another hour and a half. They were both late for luncheon. Poynt had left the novels from the circulating library on a seat where they had rested for a minute.

And that afternoon (by request) she sang a folk-song which he could hear in the room below. It was to the effect that she had lost her favourite white goat. If it had strayed into the fold of one shepherd she would take it and bring it back, or if another shepherd had it she would bring it back. But if it was a third shepherd, a devil of a man, a brigand with white teeth, she would leave it with him; for he had her heart also. I believe we could turn out verses of a similar sweetness and consistency from our own home factories at about fifteen shillings the dozen; but unless they are foreign and have the word folk-song woven into every half-yard at the back they do not amount to anything.

That night Herewood witnessed the performance of Poynt's remarkably successful comedy *Irene*, at the Empress's Theatre. At least, he witnessed as much as he could see of it from a seat behind a pillar at the back of the dress circle. He was disappointed with the seat; but the house was packed, and for some time it had been a question whether they could give him a seat at all. He had already found out about the authorship. In fact, he had made a little collection of newspaper cuttings that day connected with it. The question which agitated him was if the authorship had been the reason that had brought Poynt to Herne Bay; it seemed to him unlikely. If it was so, could he use his knowledge for the purposes of revenge? That also seemed to him to be unlikely. But he decided that it was worth while to go to Herne Bay himself again the following morning, to see if he could do anything unpleasant.

## VII

ON the following day Herne Bay gave its imitation of the Riviera to a small audience. It was a glorious morning, something on account from the summer to follow. Herewood arrived early, breakfasted at an hotel, and then made his way up the East Cliff. His plans were not matured; he had the knowledge, which Miss Smith had not, that Julius was the author of a very successful comedy, and was much talked of in London, but he had not hit on any plan by which this would work his oppressor's downfall. He felt that his materials were not strong, but he was determined to do the best he could with them. He was, indeed, the more irritated that Poynt had written a play when he might have been guilty of cruelty to children; it looked as if he had intentionally thrown obstacles in his way.

Presently, from a seat high up on the cliff, Herewood saw a man come slowly up the asphalt path. A portion of this man's face twinkled like a diamond in the sun. Instantly, Herewood formed the conclusion that the twinkling portion was an eye-glass. A moment later he recognised that the rest of the figure was Julius Poynt. Poynt turned down off the path to a shelter facing the sea, near to a diminutive band-stand, without seeing Herewood. He took a seat in the shelter facing the sea. The important point to Herewood's mind was that he was not smoking a cigarette; it prepared Herewood for what was to follow. Ten minutes later Miss Smith appeared, and also went to the shelter; Poynt saluted her, and then they both sat down together.

Herewood's conviction was that his next action was brilliant; others than he have done their lowest on record with a similar idea. He stole softly down the cliff and seated himself in the same shelter, but on the other side of the screen, where, without being seen, he could hear every word that was said. He did not arrive in time to catch the first words of the conversation. When he took up his position Poynt was saying that he would be only too glad. Herewood's facial expression was unworthy of a curate. Then Miss Smith spoke:

"I must tell you then that the idea I had was, that if ever I married it should be either to a leader or a creator. I would have married a great general, or a chief of brigands who was

adored by his men. Or I would have married a great artist, or a poet, or a dramatic author—the latter of the three for preference. How foolish it was ! ”

“ I don’t think that,” said Poynt. “ At least, not entirely.”

“ Blackguard ! ” murmured Herewood, under his breath.

“ Yes, entirely wrong,” Miss Smith continued. “ Woman’s place is not to marry the strong, to shine with a reflected glory alone, to have the whole of her own individuality swamped in another stronger than her own. It is her place rather to comfort and sympathise, to marry the absolute failure, or at least, the man who has not yet succeeded. The more I think of it, the stronger is my repulsion to marrying anyone who has succeeded in any of the careers that I have mentioned. I do not want the full-blown flower ; I could take no interest in it. I would rather see the bud open, and feel that my tender care had something to do with its development. I could find, too, a melancholy charm in faded petals. But I will have nothing to do with success.”

“ Good ! ” whispered Herewood, on the other side of the shelter.

“ Success,” she went on, “ makes men braggarts ; it makes them give up taking trouble ; it makes them independent of a woman’s love. It spoils them utterly.”

Herewood felt that his moment had come. He sprang to his feet, swept round to the other side of the shelter, slipped on the short grass and fell over. Then he rose, brushed his clothes with his hand, and said with severity :

“ I have heard all ! ”

“ Then,” said Miss Smith, “ you ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“ Surprised at you,” said Poynt. “ You ought to be in London. Go back at once, and don’t give me all this trouble.”

“ At the Empress’s Theatre last night I saw a comedy in which a man hides behind a screen, and is thought rather highly of for it.”

“ We’ve nothing for you,” said Miss Smith. “ Do go away, please.”

“ Yes, I will go ; but first hear what I have to say, for it concerns you nearly. Your sentiments as to success are admirable, and I share them myself. But were you aware that the very man to whom you were speaking is himself a success, and of a most marked and notorious kind ? Do you know

what he has done? He has brought the scent of the hay-field across the footlights, that's what he has done. It was he who wrote the blatantly successful comedy that I witnessed last night. There was not a vacant seat in the house, nor a dry eye, nor any of the usual things. And this is the man who has attempted to take advantage of your ignorance of his past! He is a common object of conversation; he is in all the newspapers. Listen!

Herewood pulled a packet of newspaper cuttings from his pocket. "Here is one extract, saying that he is at present in the Italian Riviera. Here is another, saying that his favourite pastime is lawn-mowing. Here is a third, saying that he has been offered twenty thousand for his next piece, and that he has never been out of London in his life, for romantic reasons which are known to the writer but which he cannot divulge. He is the talk of the clubs. I heard a man in the hotel where I was stopping ask how the name Poynt was spelt. Doubtless he has concealed this from you, but I was watching your interests. I tell him to his face that he is a black-hearted success; he is full-blown; he is a braggart. There will never be any privacy in his life, either for himself or his wife; personal paragraphs will dog his steps wherever he goes. And that is the man who—but I will return to the subject later if I have an opportunity."

This somewhat hurried conclusion was due to the fact that Miss Smith's little terrier Vixen, having escaped from confinement, has just appeared on the path above in quest of her mistress. On sighting Herewood, Vixen came towards him with every sign that she wished to eat him, and he left with rapidity.

"What he has told you," said Poynt, "is partly true. You know you would have heard it later from me if that insufferable idiot had not interfered. I have produced a comedy which has had some success. But the next that I do may be a failure; these things are largely a matter of luck. Do not let one success spoil my whole life. Again, all that you said about the successful is true, as a general rule; but it was precisely because I knew it to be true that I ran away from compliments and flattery, to hide myself in Herne Bay. With your help, I think I might escape the curse of the successful. Do not fear the personal paragraphs that he showed you; if ever they say one word which is true, I promise that I will write and deny

it at once. Come ; you are an heiress, but I have forgiven and forgotten it. Will you not be equally generous to me ? I adore you."

"I seem to have changed my mind a good deal," said Miss Smith, shyly. "Can't I—if you don't mind—leave all this to you ?"

He said something to the effect that she could.

They were both very late for luncheon again that day.

In consideration of very ample apologies, coupled with a pair of silver-backed hat-brushes, all in the best possible taste, Herewood was forgiven ; he assisted the Archdeacon in performing the wedding ceremony.

D. B. WYNDHAM LEWIS

*By Numbers*  
*Scene with Harebells*

D. B. Wyndham Lewis is known to millions of newspaper readers as the writer of a humorous column full of pungent comment on modern life, but they may not have suspected that he is also a scholar with a deep knowledge of medieval literature, particularly that of France, where he now lives.



## BY NUMBERS

ON such a day as this, my little ones—a burning blue August day, with the golden cornfields hardly whispering in the stillness of noon and a drowsy sound of bees in the air—on such a day it is pleasant to lie on some thymy sun-kissed hill in Sussex and meditate on the undoubted fact that only a few leagues away, over the Hampshire border, Mr. Sidney Webb, President of the Board of Trade<sup>1</sup> and author of *Industrial Democracy*, *Problems of Modern Industry*, *English Poor-Law Policy*, *History of Liquor Licensing*, and other works of passion and ecstasy, is also solacing himself from the cares of State with a country holiday. Bring Nymphs, fresh Blue-books ! And you, sunburnt rustic deities, prepare new statistics ! But let us have no drunkenness and no revelry, but only that which is done neatly and in strict order, while on the grass the well-clothed Fauns trip to a Fabian song.

Musing a long time (not without tears) on this and endeavouring to evoke within my quaking mind the spectacle of Mr. Sidney Webb crowned with rose leaves at some country festival, I naturally began next to think of that rural feast which Grandgousier gave on the day when the great Gargantua was born. To this feast (as you know) all the burghers of Sainnais were invited, as well as those of Suillé, of Roche-Clermaud, of Vaugaudray, of Coudray, of Montpensier, and of Gué-de-Vede ; and after feasting they went pell-mell to the Grove of Willows, where on the green grass they danced to the sound of merry flageolets and sweet bagpipes, so joyously (says the misguided Rabelais) that it was a heavenly pleasure to see them frolic so—“*c'estoit passe-temps celeste les voir ainsi soy rigoller.*”

Alas ! How unproductive ! How economically wasteful ! How far removed from the glorious ideals of the Industrial State ! We (Mr. Webb and myself) would not have deprived these citizens of reasonable recreation ; but how much better,

<sup>1</sup> Not now. Alas !

my friends, to have had them, each labelled and clothed in a neat combination suit of official grey, capering in unison at the direction of a State Controller of Joy! It makes us sick to think of those careless, wasteful ages before Manchester became what she is to-day: a glory to mankind.

I mentioned this yesterday to Professor Dogbody, one of the most earnest Fabians I know—the famous Dogbody who was thrown out of the Folies-Bergère for shouting in a loud voice “Is this Co-Operation?” He told me that in Spain, in Italy, in France, and even in some parts of England, this passion on the part of the producing and consuming classes alike for uncontrolled revelry (especially in agricultural districts) still exists.

“Tck, tck,” I said sympathetically.

“Happily,” said the Professor, producing a sheaf of blue papers, “I have had some opportunity of putting into practice in the village of Hogsnorton, where I have been living for that purpose, the principles so admirably set forth in Euphemia Polk’s *Need Joy be Unconfined? A Plea for Rational Amusement in the Co-Operative Commonwealth*. The inhabitants at first, indeed, stubbornly refused to evince Joy on the days I set apart for that purpose, but I was determined that these days should be observed. With the aid of a capable Committee, including Mrs. Struggles, Professor Bodger, Miss Volumnia Bibb, Mrs. Martha Dillson Dudbody, of Athens, Pa., and Canon Boom, we examined and assessed every inhabitant of the village individually, afterwards classifying them as follows:

“CLASS A (Joy-value 40 per cent).—Fit for general joy-making, including such specified occupation as laughing, dancing, and any other approved by the Committee’s Controller.

“CLASS B (Joy-value 30 per cent).—Fit for moderate joy-making, including the specified occupations in Class A.

“CLASS C (Joy-value 20 per cent).—Fit for light or sedentary joy, such as songs in the Co-Operative Commonwealth Official Song Book, to be sung at the Controller’s discretion.

“CLASS D (Joy-value .5 per cent)—Totally incapacitated for any kind of organised joy whatsoever.

“Among this last class,” continued Professor Dogbody, trumpeting through his nose, “were, I regret to say, several aged and hairy men of agricultural occupation who not only

refused point-blank to be gay when requested peremptorily to do so by my Committee, but added mutinously that they would be gormed if they did. Canon Boom at once replied by having them drawn up in a line and ordering them to sing in chorus the Laughing Song (No. 98 A) from the Official Song Book, which goes :

We are so merry and gay, tra la,  
 We laugh and dance and sing :  
 Controlled in every way, tra la,  
 And drilled in everything.  
 All non-productive gladness we  
 Unanimously spurn ;  
 Our breasts with mass hilarity  
 Co-operatively burn !

CHORUS, TO BE SUNG WHILE DANCING—SEE CHART  
 PP. 87-89, SEC. 23 (A) (I).

Tra la tra la tra la tra la !  
 Hooray hooray hooray !  
 Huzza huzza huzza huzza !  
 Three cheers for Sidney Webb !

“ And on their again refusing (this time with rural oaths) to evince gaiety and move their limbs in the dance in the manner prescribed, we had them at once expelled from the village. It is now a pleasure to a serious and well-nourished mind,” said the Professor with strong emotion, “ to observe our weekly festival. One-two. One-two. Should any inhabitant neglect to smile on these occasions he (or she) is at once placed in solitary confinement with all the recent Blue-books pertaining to Local Government and the Factory Acts, and on a second offence soundly beaten. Here, indeed, is the Ideal State ! ”

“ Indeed, indeed yes,” I said fervently.

There was a pause.

“ You spoke just now of Rabelais,” said Professor Dogbody, coughing slightly. “ You may be interested to know—possibly the public might be interested to know—that I have been asked by Mr. Eustace Smiles——”

We both raised our hats reverently.

“ —to bring out a new Vegetarian Edition of Rabelais.

It is our belief that the substitution of nut-dishes and various proteid-containing foods (such as tapioca, Meggo, and Gloxo) for the various rich meat and flesh foods which form the extensive banquets over which this writer gloats to such a great extent in his works would not only improve their tone but make them a definite power for Good. At the same time we feel that his extravagant praise of wine (such as the wine called Chinon Grillé), if directed so as to praise instead the virtues of Milko, or some such beverage rich in vitamins, would materially assist our Movement ; for a nut diet does not heat the blood or minister to the baser passions."

So saying, Professor Dogbody, after performing a few deep-breathing exercises, grasped his umbrella firmly and went away.

But I remained for some time revolving many things, observing the disorderly arrangement of the trees, the untidy luxury of the hedgerows, the uneven skyline of the great Downs above me, the ragged flight of the rooks going home with such hoarse and unco-ordinated cries, the imperfect alignment, far away through a gap in the hills, of the long waves which rolled and broke on the shingle. Such things are distressing to a trained and tidy mind. I contemplated Nature for a little time very coldly and unfavourably through an eye-glass, with pursed mouth, just like a Fabian who might be, by some mischance, caught suddenly up to Paradise ; and then I went home to tea.

## SCENE WITH HAREBELLS

*High Court of Justice, King's Bench Division.*

**B**EFORE MR. JUSTICE CHEESE and a special jury the hearing was begun of the action *Mulberry v. Home Secretary*.

MR. RORING, K.C., said: My Lord, this is an action in which we ask for merely nominal damages for wrongful imprisonment. The facts pertaining may be stated very briefly. Miss Diana Mulberry is a maiden lady living in South Kensington and justly celebrated as a writer of dainty whimsical stories and playlets. On the——

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Has anybody got a pin?

A JUROR: A ordinary pin or a safety-pin, my Lord?

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Never mind, I can draw things instead. Well, Mr. Roring?

MR. RORING: On the night of the third of April, my Lord, towards half-past ten o'clock, Miss Mulberry was returning in a taxicab from a dinner-party in Hampstead. The night was clear and mild and there was a full moon. As her cab skirted the Heath Miss Mulberry perceived in a little distant dell a clump of harebells nodding in the breeze, and the sight suddenly caused her, in her own words, to 'come all over whimsy'. She therefore leaned out and stopped the taxicab, alighted, and, seizing the driver, Jas. Tomlinson, by the hand, ran swiftly towards the harebell clump. On arriving there she blew the harebells a kiss and ran tiptoe behind a tree, crying to Jas. Tomlinson: "Let's pretend!"

She then peeped from behind the tree, ran out, and kneeling down by the harebells pretended to telephone to Jas. Tomlinson, saying: "Hullo, Prince Wonderful, this is 9908 Fairyland speaking!"

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: And was it?

MR. RORING: Er—no, my Lord. After further indulgence in whimsiness, which the evidence will disclose, Miss Mulberry again took Jas. Tomlinson by the hand and danced

with him on tiptoe round the harebells, shouting with elfish glee. It was at this point that Police-Constable Bampton arrived and took Miss Mulberry, after a slight struggle, into custody.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: It's odd I can never draw necks properly.

MR. RORING: As y'Ludsh'p pleases.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Ears, yes. Necks, no.

Miss Mulberry then gave evidence bearing out counsel's opening.

MR. RORING: Harebells have a decided effect on you, Miss Mulberry?—Yes. They make me feel dancey! I always think the fairies use them for telephones!

MR. RORING: Bluebells have this effect also?—Certainly.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: And dumb-bells?—I beg your pardon?

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: When I said 'dumb-bells,' that was just a little whimsy crack of my own. Proceed, Mr. Roring.

Jas. Tomlinson, taxicab-driver, of Little Padge Street, Bermondsey, described the dance by moonlight among the harebells.

MR. RORING: You enjoyed the dance, Mr. Tomlinson?—Not so bad.

You ran after Miss Mulberry on tiptoe and blew her a kiss?—Not to the lady I didn't. I never blew kisses to no lady. I got my licence to think of.

Did you blow a kiss to the policeman when he appeared?—Well, I can't rightly say. The lady was telephoning to 'im, like. "'Ullo," she says, "is that Prince Winkipop? The darling 'arebells 'ave missed you, Prince!"

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: And had they?—I couldn't rightly say, melud.

P.C. Reginald Bampton, YY709, said that Miss Mulberry was dancing on tiptoe hand in hand with Tomlinson. He requested them to move away. The complainant then said: "'Oo knows but we are all enchanted 'ere to-night, in the moonlight, among the 'arebells?"

MR. RORING: You cautioned her?—I cautioned 'er, and she replied: "'Ush! The fairies are ringing us up!" I cautioned 'er further, and she replied: "Tinkle, tinkle. Princess 'Oneylocks speaking." She then 'opped up and down on 'er toes, very excited.

What was the taxicab-driver doing?—'E was larfing.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE (to Miss Mulberry): Were *you* laughing?—Oh, *no*. It was all so beautiful! The harebells were chiming a little cosy cuddly song and a little breeze came dancing in, curtsying to the trees, and——

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Can you draw horses' legs?—No.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Nor can I.

MISS MULBERRY: I should like to add that a tiny, wee, winsome baby rabbit peeped out at us!

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Can you draw a rabbit?—Oh, *no*. One doesn't *draw* rabbits, one *thinks* them! Lovely warm tender furry rabbity tricky thoughts peeping in and out of one's dreams! One thinks harebells, too. Slim, dancey, pale-blue thoughts! Every time a fairy trips over a rainbow a new harebell is born.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE (to P.C. Bumpton): Is that true?—I can't say, my Lord.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Is anybody here from the Royal Botanical Society?

MR. BOOMER, K.C. (for the Home Secretary): The Chief Conservator of Kew will be called, my Lord. He will tell the Court that the complainant's theory with regard to harebells is extremely doubtful.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: The Home Secretary is being called also?

MR. BOOMER, K.C.: Yes, m'lud. Our case is that the whimsy conduct with which the complainant was charged took place after eight P.M.

MR. JUSTICE CHEESE: Oh, Auntie!  
The Court adjourned for luncheon.



## EDEN PHILLPOTTS

*Quite Out of the Common*

Eden Phillpotts abandoned insurance for literature in the nineties, and since then has been a prolific writer of novels, poems, stories and plays, several of which, in particular *The Farmer's Wife*, have enjoyed very long runs. He lives on Dartmoor, which is the setting of many of his books.



## QUITE OUT OF THE COMMON

### I

**I** WASN'T even thinking of the fool. It is enough to be in the same market on 'Change with Norton Bellamy, and outside my office or the House I like to forget him.

But long ago he joined the City of London Club, to my regret, and now, in the smoking-room after lunch, during my cup of coffee, cigar, and game of dominoes, he will too often hurl himself uninvited into a conversation that he is neither asked to join nor desired to enlighten.

Upon a day in January last, my friend, Arthur Mathers, had a chill on the liver and was suffering under sustained professional ill-fortune. From his standpoint, therefore, in the Kaffir Market, he looked out at the world and agreed with Carlyle's unreasonable estimate of mankind. As a jobber in a large way he came to this conclusion; while I, who am a broker and a member of the Committee, could by no means agree with him.

“The spirit of common sense must be reckoned with,” I explained to Mathers. “This nation stands where it does by right of that virtue. Take the giving and receiving of advice. You may draw a line through that. There is a rare—a notable genius for giving advice in this country. The war illustrates my point. You will find every journal full of advice given by civilians to soldiers, by soldiers to civilians, by the man in the street to the man in the Cabinet, and by the man in the Cabinet to the man in the street. We think for ourselves—develop abnormal common sense, and, as a consequence, I maintain that much more good advice is given than bad.”

But Mathers, what with his chilled liver and business depression, was unreasonable. He derided my contention. He flouted it. He raised his voice in hard, simulated laughter, and attracted other men from their coffee and cigars. When he

had won their attention, he tried to crush me publicly. He said :

“ My dear chap, out of your own mouth I will confute you. If more good advice is given than bad, every man will get more good than harm by following advice. That’s logical : but you won’t pretend to maintain such a ridiculous position, surely ? ”

I like a war of words after luncheon. It sharpens the wits and assists digestion. So, without being particularly in earnest, I supported my contention.

“ Assuredly,” I said. “ We don’t take enough advice, in my opinion—just as we don’t take enough exercise, or wholesome food. It is too much the fashion to ask advice and not take it. But if we modelled our lives on the disinterested opinion of other people, and availed ourselves of the combined judgment of our fellows, the world would be both happier and wiser in many directions. And if men knew, when they were invited to express an opinion, that it was no mere conventional piece of civility or empty compliment which prompted us to ask their criticism, consider how they would put their best powers forward ! Yes, one who consistently followed the advice of his fellow-creatures would be paying a compliment to humanity and——”

“ Qualifying himself for a lunatic asylum ! ”

Here burst in the blatant Bellamy from his seat by the fire. He put down a financial journal ; and then turned to me. “ If there’s more good advice flying about than bad, old man, why don’t you take some ? ” he said. “ I could give you plenty of excellent advice at this moment, Honeybun. For instance, I could tell you to play the fool only in your own house ; but you wouldn’t thank me. You’d say it was uncalled for and impertinent—you know you would.”

Bellamy is the only man who has any power to annoy me after my lunch. And knowing it, he exercises that power. He can shake me at a word, can reach my nerve-centres quicker than a tin-tack. Yet, seen superficially, he appears to be the mere common stockbroker ; but his voice it is that makes him so hated—his voice, and his manners, and his sense of humour. I turned upon him and did a foolish thing—as one often does foolish things when suddenly maddened into them by some bigger fool than oneself. I answered :

“ There’s bad advice—idiotic advice—given as well as good.

When I've exhausted creation and want *your* opinion, my dear Bellamy, I'll trouble you for it. And as to playing the fool, why, *nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit*—not even Norton Bellamy. You'll admit that ! ”

Bellamy has no education, and nothing irritates him quicker than a quotation in a foreign language, though any other quotation he's more than a match for. He scowled and meant mischief from the moment the laugh went with me. He ignored the Latin, but stuck to the English of my remark.

“Bad as well as good,” he answered. “Just what I say. Only you assert ‘more good than bad,’ and I declare ‘more bad than good,’ which means that the more advice I refuse the better for me in the long run.”

“You judge human nature from an intimate knowledge of your own lack of judgment, my dear fellow,” I said in a bantering voice.

“Well, I'll back my judgment all the same,” he answered, hotly, “which is a good deal more than you will. You talk of common sense, and lay down vague, not to say inane rules for other people to follow, and pose as a sort of Book of Wisdom thrown open to the public every afternoon in this smoking-room ; but anybody can talk. Now, I'll bet you a thousand pounds that you'll not take the advice of your fellow-man for twelve consecutive hours. And, what is more, I'll bet you another thousand that I'll do the other thing and go distinctly contrary to every request, suggestion, or scrap of advice offered me in the same space of time. And then we'll see about your knowledge of human nature, and who looks the biggest fool at the end of the day.”

I repeat it was after luncheon, and no man unfamiliar with Norton Bellamy can have any idea of the studied insolence, the offence, the diabolic sneer with which he accompanied this preposterous suggestion. I was, however, silent for the space of three seconds ; then he made another remark to Mathers, and that settled it.

“Some of us are like the chap who took his dying oath the cat was grey. Then they asked him to bet a halfpenny that it was, and he wouldn't. So bang goes another wind-bag ! ”

He was marching out with all the honours when I lost my temper and took the brute at his word.

“Done ! ” I said.

Think of it ! A man of five-and-fifty, with some reputation

for general mental stability, and a member of the Committee of the Stock Exchange!

"You'll take me?" he asked, and there was an evil light in the man's hard blue eyes, while his red whiskers actually bristled as he spoke. "You'll back yourself to follow every scrap of advice given you throughout one whole day for a thousand pounds?"

In my madness I answered, only intent upon arranging miseries for him.

"Yes, if you'll back yourself to act in an exactly contrary manner."

"Most certainly. It's my ordinary rule of life," he replied. "I never do take advice. I'm not a congenital idiot. Let us say to-morrow."

Now upon the Stock Exchange we have a universal system by which honour stands for security. In our peculiar business relations this principle is absolutely necessary. And it seldom fails. There is a simple, pathetic trust amongst us unknown in other walks of life. It can only be compared to that universal spirit said to have existed in King Alfred's days, when we are invited to believe that people left their jewellery about on the hedges with impunity, and crime practically ceased out of the land. So when Bellamy and I made this fatuous bet, we trusted each the other. I knew that, with all his faults, the man was absolutely straightforward and honest; and I felt that, having once taken his wager, I should either win it—at personal inconvenience impossible to estimate before the event—or lose and frankly pay.

"To-morrow," said Bellamy. "Let us say to-morrow. You don't want a thing like this hanging over you. We'll meet here and lunch and compare notes—if you're free to do so, which is doubtful, for I see a holy chaos opening out before you."

"To-morrow!" I said. "And, be that as it may, I would not change my position for yours!"

I went home that night under a gathering weight of care. To my wife and daughters I said nothing, though they noticed and commented upon my unusual taciturnity. In truth, the more I thought of the programme in store for me, the less I liked it; while Bellamy, on the contrary, so far as I could see, despite my big words at parting from him, had only to be

slightly more brutal and aggressive than usual to come well out of his ordeal. I slept ill and woke depressed. The weather was ominous in itself. I looked out of my dressing-room window and quoted from the classics :

“ She is not rosy-fingered, but swoll’n black ;  
Her face is like a water turned to blood,  
And her sick head is bound about with clouds,  
As if she threatened night ere noon of day ! ”

which shows, by the by, that Ben Jonson knew a London fog when he saw it, though chemists pretend that the vile phenomenon wasn’t familiar to the Elizabethans.

My breakfast proved a farce, and having wished my dear ones a dreary “ Good morning,” I crept out into a bilious, fuliginous atmosphere, through which black smuts fell in legions upon the numbed desolation of South Kensington. Only the urban cat stalked here and there, rejoicing, as it seemed, in prolonged night. My chronic cough began at the first gulp of this atrocious atmosphere, and, changing my mind about walking to the District Railway Station, I turned, sought my cab-whistle, and summoned a hansom. It came presently, clinking and tinkling out of nothingness—a chariot with watery eyes of flame—a goblin coach to carry me away through the mask of the fog, from home, from wife and children, into the vast unknown of man’s advice.

The cabman began it—a surly, grasping brute who, upon taking my shilling, commented and added something about the weather.

“ Your fare, and you know it very well,” I answered ; whereupon he replied :

“ Oh, all right. Wish I could give you the cab an’ the ’oss in. Don’t you chuck away your money—that’s all. You’re a blimed sight too big-earted—that’s what’s the matter with you.”

I felt cheered. Here was practical advice given by a mere toiler from the ranks. I promised the man that I would not waste my money ; I reciprocated his caution, beamed upon him, ignored his satire, and went downstairs to the trains. A newspaper boy offered me *Punch*. I bought it, and with rising spirits lighted a cigar and got into a city train. It happened to come from Ealing, and contained, amongst other people, my dear old friend Tracy Mainwaring—cheeriest, brightest, and best of

men. The fog deepened, and somewhere about the Temple a violent fit of coughing caused me to fling away my cigar and double up in considerable physical discomfort. Mainwaring, with his universal sympathy, was instantly much concerned for me.

“My dear Honeybun, you’ll kill yourself—you will indeed. It’s suicide for you to come to town on days like this. How often have I expostulated! And nobody will pity you, because you need not do it. Why don’t you go to the South of France? You ought to go for all our sakes.”

“Mainwaring,” I said, “you’re right. You always are. Here’s the Temple. I’ll return home at once and start as soon as I conveniently can—to-morrow at latest.”

The amazement which burst forth upon the face of every man in that carriage was a striking commentary on my original assertion that advice is not taken habitually in this country.

As for Mainwaring himself, I could perceive that he was seriously alarmed. He followed me out of the train and his face was white, his voice much shaken as he took my arm.

“Old chap,” he said, “I’ve annoyed you: I’ve bored you with my irresponsible chatter. You’re trying to escape from me. You mustn’t let a friend influence you against your better judgment. Of course, I only thought of your good, but——”

“My dear fellow,” I answered, “nobody ever gave me better advice, and unless circumstances conspire against it, I mean to do as you suggest.”

“Yes, yes—capital,” he said, with the voice we assume when trying to soothe an intoxicated acquaintance or a lunatic. “You *shall* go, dear old fellow; and I’ll see you home.”

Now here is the effect of taking advice upon the man who gives it! Mainwaring is a genial, uncalculating, kindly soul who is always tendering counsel and exhortation to everybody, from his shoeblack upwards, yet here, in a moment, I had him reduced to a mere bundle of vibrating nerves, simply because I had undertaken to follow one of his suggestions. Of course I knew the thought in his mind; he believed that I had gone out of mine. So I said:

“Yes, old fellow, I see what you think; but, consider; if I was a lunatic to take your advice, what must you be to have given it?”

This conundrum, if possible, increased his uneasiness. He fussed anxiously around me and begged to be allowed to see

me home ; whereupon, being weary of his cowardice, I waved Mainwaring off, left the station to be free of him, and hastily ascended Arundel Street.

My object was now an omnibus which should convey me almost to my own door ; and my heart grew fairly light again, for if by the terms of the wager, I could legitimately get back under my own roof, the worst might be well over. I pictured myself packing quietly all day for the Continent. Then, when morning should come, I had merely to change my mind again and the matter would terminate. Any natural disappointment of my wife and the girls when they heard of my intention to stop in London after all might be relieved with judicious gifts purchased out of Norton Bellamy's thousand pounds.

At a corner in the Strand I waited, and others with me, while the fog increased—noisome veil upon veil—and the lurid street seemed full of dim ghosts wandering in a sulphur hell. My omnibus was long in coming, and just as it did so, I pressed forward with the rest, and had the misfortune to tread upon the foot of a threadbare and foul-mouthed person who had been waiting beside me. Standing there the sorry creature had used the vilest language for fifteen minutes, had scattered his complicated imprecations on the ears of all ; but especially, I think, for the benefit of his wretched wife. She—a lank and hungry creature—had flashed back looks at him once or twice, but no more. Occasionally, as his coarse words lashed her, she had shivered and glanced at the faces about her, to see whether any champion of women stood there waiting for the South Kensington omnibus. Apparently none did, though, for my part, at another time, I had certainly taken it upon me to reprove the wretch, or even call a constable. But upon this day, and moving as it were for that occasion only under a curse, I held silence the better course and maintained the same while much pitying this down-trodden woman. Now, however, Fate chose me for a sort of Nemesis against my will, and leaping forward to the omnibus, I descended with all my fourteen stone upon the foot of the bully. He hopped in agony, lifted up his voice, and added a darkness to the fog. His profanity intensified the ambient gloom, and out of it, I saw the white face of his wife, and her teeth gleamed in a savage smile as he hopped in the gutter, like some evil fowl. People laughed at his discomfort, and a vocabulary naturally rich was lifted above itself into absolute opulence. He loosed upon me

a chaos of sacred and profane expletives, uttered in the accent of south-west London. His words tumbled about my ears like a nest of angered hornets. The man refused to listen to any apology, and, from natural regret, my mood changed to active annoyance, because he insisted upon hopping between me and the omnibus, and a crowd began to collect.

Then his bitter-hearted wife spoke up and bid me take action, little dreaming of the position in which I stood with respect to all advice.

“Don’t let the swine cheek you like that,” she cried. “He’s all gas—that’s what he is—a carwardly ’ound as only bullies women and children. You’re bigger than him! Hit him over the jaw with your rumberella. Hit him hard—then you’ll see.”

It will not, I trust, be necessary for me to say that never before that moment did I strike a fellow-creature—either in the heat of anger or with calculated intention. Indeed, even a thousand pounds would seem a small price to expend, if for that outlay one might escape such a crime; yet now, dazed by the noise, by the fog, by emotions beyond analysis, by the grinning teeth and eyes of the crowd, shining wolfish out of the gloom around me, by the woman’s weird, tigerish face almost thrust into mine, and by the fact that the man had asked me why the blank, blank I didn’t let my blank self out at so much a blank hour for a blank steam-roller, I let go.

If Bellamy could have seen me then! My umbrella whistled through the fog and appeared to strike the man almost exactly where his wife had suggested. He was gone like a flower, and everybody seemed pleased. There were yells and cat-calls and wild London sounds in my ears; somebody rose out of the pandemonium and patted me on the back, and told me to hook it before the bloke got up again; somebody else whispered earnestly in my ear that I had done the community a good turn; the omnibus proceeded without me, for I was now separated from it by a crowd; the fog thickened, lurid lights flashed in it; my head whirled; the man who had whispered congratulations in my ear endeavoured to take my watch; and I was just going to cry for the police, when my recumbent victim, assisted, to my amazement, by the tigerish woman, arose, clothed in fury and mud as with a garment, and advanced upon me.

There are times and seasons when argument and even frank

apology is useless ; there are very rare occasions when coin of the realm itself is vain to heal a misunderstanding or soothe a wounded spirit. I felt that the man now drawn up in battle array before me was reduced for the moment to a mere pre-Adamite person or cave-dweller—first cousin to, and but slightly removed from, the unreasoning and ferocious dinosaur or vindictive megatherium. This poor, bruised, muddy Londoner, now dancing with clenched fists and uttering a sort of language which rendered him almost incandescent, obviously thirsted to do me physical hurt. No mere wounding of my tenderest feelings, no shaming of me, no touching of my pride or my pocket would suffice for him. Indeed, he explained openly that he was going to break every bone in my body and stamp my remains into London mud, even if it spoilt his boots. Hearing which prophecy, one of those inspirations that repay a studious man for his study came in the nick of time, and I remembered a happy saying of the judicious Hooker, how that many perils can best be conquered by flying from them. I had not run for thirty years, but I ran then, and dashing past a church, a cheap book shop and the Globe Theatre, darted into the friendly shelter of a populous neighbourhood that extends beyond. So sudden was my action and so dense the fog that I escaped without loss and, within three minutes from that moment, all sorrow past, sat in a hansom, had the window lowered, and drove off with joy and thankfulness for my home.

So far I had done or set about doing everything my fellow-man or woman deemed well for me ; as it was now past eleven o'clock, I felt that the day would soon slip away and all might yet be well.

Then the Father of Fog, who is one with the Prince of this world, took arms against me ; there was a crash, a smash, loud words, a breath of cold air, a tingle of broken glass, a stinging lash across my face, an alteration abrupt and painful in my position. My horse had collided with another and come down heavily ; the window was broken ; and my face had a nasty cut across the cheekbone within a fractional distance of my right eye.

The driver was one of that chicken-hearted sort of cabmen rare in London, but common in provincial towns. He had fallen from his box-seat, it is true, and had undoubtedly hurt himself here and there on the outside, yet I doubt if any serious injury had overtaken him ; but now he stood at the

horse's head, and pulled at its muzzle or some such apparatus, and gasped and gurgled and explained how a railway van had run into him, knocked over his horse and then darted off into the fog. I told the man not to cry, and people began collecting as usual like evil gnomes out of the gloom. The air soon hummed with advice, and personally, knowing myself to be worse than useless where a horse in difficulties is concerned, I acted upon the earliest suggestion that called for departure from the scene. Ignoring directions about harness, cutting of straps, backing the vehicle and sitting on the horse's head, I fell in with one thoughtful individual who gave it as his opinion that the beast was dying, and hurried away at my best speed to seek a veterinary surgeon. My face was much injured, my nerves were shaken and I had a violent stitch in my side and a buzzing in the head; but I did my duty, and finding a small corner hostelry that threw beams of red and yellow light across the fog, I entered, gave myself a few moments to recover breath, then asked the young woman behind the bar whether she knew where I might most quickly find a horse doctor.

"There has been an accident," I explained, "and a man on the spot gives it as his opinion that the horse is seriously unwell and should be seen to at once. Personally, I suspect it could get up if it liked, but I am not an expert and may be mistaken."

"'Fraid you've hurted yourself too, sir," answered the girl. "I *am* sorry. Sit down and have something to drink, sir. I'm sure you want it."

I sat down, sighed, wiped my face and ordered a little brandy. This she prepared with kindly solicitude, then advised a second glass, and I, feeling the opinion practical enough, obeyed her gladly.

She knew nothing of a veterinary surgeon, but there chanced to be a person in the bar who said that he did. He evidently felt tempted to proclaim himself such a man, for I could see the idea in his shifty eyes; but he thought better of this, and admitted that he was only a dog-fancier himself, though he knew a colleague in the next street who had wide experience of horses.

Now my idea of a dog-fancier is one who habitually fancies somebody else's dog. I told the man this while I finished my brandy and water, and he admitted that it was a general

weakness in the profession, but explained that he had, so far, fought successfully against it. Then we started to find the veterinary surgeon and soon passed into a region that I suspected to be Seven Dials.

"'Ullo, Jagers! Who's your friend?" said a man in a doorway.

"Gent wants a vet," answered my companion.

"Gent wants a new fice, more like!"

I asked the meaning of this phrase, suspecting that some fragment of homely and perhaps valuable advice lay beneath it, but Jagers thought not.

"Only Barny Boshers' sauce," he said. "He's a fightin' man—pick of the basket at nine stone five—so he thinks he can say what he likes; but he's got a good 'eart."

We pushed on until a small shop appeared, framed in birdcages. Spiritless tropical fowls of different sorts and colours sat and drooped in them—parrots, cockatoos, and other foreigners of a sort unfamiliar to me.

"Come in," said Jagers. "This is Muggridge's shop. And what he don't know about 'osses, an' all livin' things for that matter, ain't worth knowin'."

Mr. Muggridge was at his counter busy with a large wooden crate bored with many holes. From these proceeded strange squeaks and grunts.

"'Alf a mo," he said. "It's a consignment of prize guinea-pigs, and they wants attention particler urgent, for they've been on the What-you-may-call-it Railway in a luggage train pretty near since last Christmas by all accounts, and a luggage train on that line gives you a fair general idea of Eternity I'm told."

Mr. Muggridge was a little, bright, cheerful person who appeared to frame his life on the philosophy of his own canaries. The shop was warm, even stuffy, perhaps—still warm. So I said one or two kind things about the beasts and birds, then took a chair and looked at my watch.

"I can wait," I told him.

"Can the 'oss? That's the question," asked Jagers; and he began to murmur something about being kept away from his work and hard times; so I gave him a shilling, and he thanked me, though not warmly, and instantly vanished into the fog—to go on dog-fancying, no doubt.

Mr. Muggridge complimented me on my love for animals.

He then began to pull strange, rough bundles of white and black and yellow fur from his wooden crate. The things looked like a sort of animated blend between a pen-wiper and a Japanese chrysanthemum. Indeed, I told him so, and he retorted by strongly advising me to take a couple home for my family.

With a sign, I agreed to do so, and Mr. Muggridge, evidently surprised at my ready acquiescence, grew excited, and suggested two more.

“You try a pair o’ them Hangoras, and a pair o’ them tortoiseshells,” he said, “an’ before you can look round you’ll be breedin’ guinea-pigs as’ll take prizes all over Europe. Pedigree pigs—pigs with a European reputation!”

“Very well, two pairs,” I answered, “since you wish it.”

And then I observed that Muggridge was thinking very hard. I fancy he realised that the opportunity of a lifetime lay before him.

“Yes,” he said suddenly, answering his own reflections, “to a gen’leman like you, I *will* part with it, though it’s dead against the grain. But you ought to have it—my last mongoose—a lady’s pet—a little hangel in the ’ouse! Five guineas.”

“There’s a large brown horse fallen down in the next street. That’s what I’m here for,” I cried aloud, ignoring the mongoose.

“Ah, they will go down; and I’ve got a lion-monkey, and while you *are* buying animals, I strongly advise you to have it. Not another in England to my knowledge. Peaceful as a lamb. I wish I could send them, but I’m run off my legs just now. Never remember such a rush or such competition. So if you’ll let me suggest, I’d take your little lot right away with you. My cages are specially commended at the Crystal Palace and elsewhere, and I have a few left by me still. I suppose you couldn’t do with a water-snake or two? Yes? Here, Sam! Come down here. A large horder!”

He shouted to a boy, who appeared, and began putting strange beasts and reptiles into cages with lightning rapidity; while I stood and watched, as a man gripped, tranced, turned to stone by the deadly incubus of a dream. All the time Mr. Muggridge chattered, like the lid of a kettle on the boil, put up canaries and parrots in cages, fastened a string to a poodle, and incarcerated various other specimens of obscure and

unattractive fauna that he wanted to be rid of. Then he made out an account, pressed it into my hand, rushed to the door and whistled for a four-wheeler.

“ You’re a ready-money gen’leman, like me. Seen it in your eye the minutes you come into my shop,” said Mr. Muggridge. “ Twenty guineas and my book, on the *Insect Pests of Household Pets*, thrown in.”

I rallied myself here ; in the last ditch, so to speak, I made my effort, and while the horrible boy was converting a four-wheeler into a menagerie of screaming, snapping curiosities, I explained to Muggridge that I only had five pounds upon me. He put out his hand and said something about a cheque for the balance, but, seeing my advantage, I declared that I had ordered nothing beyond the four guinea-pigs, needed nothing else, and should pay for nothing else.

Then he asserted that I might have the lot for ten pounds, as it was a pity to take them out of the cab again.

Still I refused, and he tried to get sentiment into the argument.

He said :

“ It’s a reg’lar ’appy fam’ly. I should most call it cruelty to animals to separate them things again.”

Still I was firm, and he became desperate. He said :

“ Gimme the fiver, then, and clear out. It’s robbery—that’s what it is, an’ I’m sure the beasts won’t do you no good. But gimme the money an’ I’ll fling in a tortoise, to show there’s no ill-feeling, if you’ll go at once.”

I said :

“ Listen to me. I do not want your tortoise. I’m a married man with two grown-up daughters. We all detest animals of every sort—especially tortoises. I shall send your guinea-pigs to a children’s hospital, where they may or may not be welcomed. For the rest of these features, I have no earthly use, and I refuse to take them.”

“ That’s not good enough for me,” declared Mr. Muggridge. “ I’ve wasted a whole morning upon you ”—I’d been in the shop a bare quarter of an hour—“ and time is money, if birds and animals ain’t. Besides, you hordered ’em.”

He advanced threateningly, and I stepped forward with no less indignation ; but as I did so, my arm knocked over a cage containing two long, black, red-beaked birds, which turned out to be Cornish choughs. These now uttered wild, West-country

exclamations, flapped and fluttered and screamed, knocked over other cages in their downfall, and angered a badger or some kindred beast that dwelt in a box covered with corrugated iron wire.

Then, while I gathered myself from the ruins, ill-luck cast me against a bowl of goldfish, a sea-water aquarium, the guinea-pigs, and a consignment of large green lizards that suddenly appeared without visible reason in the full possession of their liberty. These things fell in an avalanche, and Muggridge's shop instantly resembled the dark scene that preludes a pantomime. It is not strange, therefore, when you consider what I had already been through, that I was among the first of the intelligent animals present to lose my nerve and my temper.

Frankly, I aimed a blow at Muggridge in an un-Christian spirit ; but missed him and fetched down a green parrot.

Suspecting the emporium to be on fire, chance passers-by—always ready to thrust themselves into the misfortunes of other people—now rushed amongst us. A policeman entered also, and Mr. Muggridge, evidently disappointed to find his plans thus shattered and his scheme foiled, endeavoured to give me in charge. I explained the true position, however, or attempted to do so ; but my self-respect deserted me ; I raised my voice as Muggridge raised his ; I even used language that will always be a sorrow to me in moments of retrospection. We raved each at the other and danced round the policeman, while goldfish flapped about our feet and green lizards tried to ascend our trouser-legs. The constable himself turned round and round, licking a pencil and trying to make notes in a little book. Presently I think he began to grow giddy and faint-hearted. At any rate, he realised the futility of working up an effective case. He shut his book, showed anger, and took certain definite measures.

First he swept a few promiscuous spectators out of the shop ; then he thrust the infuriated Muggridge back behind his counter and finally turned to me.

“ I'll have no more of this tommy-rot, or the pair of you'll have to come along to the station,” he said. “ As for you, Muggridge, it's your old game, plantin' your rubbishy, stinkin' varmints on unoffendin' characters before they can open their mouths—I'm up to your hanky-panky ; and you ”—now he addressed me—“ if you're not old enough to know better than come buyin' these 'ere mangy hanimals, an'

loadin' a cab with 'em, just because this man asks you to, you ought to be shut up. If you take my tip, you'll go and 'ang yourself—that's about the best thing you can do. Anyway, you must clear out of this 'ere."

I was deeply agitated, hysterical, not master of my words or actions ; I had reached a physical and mental condition upon which the policeman's words fell as a fitting climax.

"Thank you ! " I said ; " I've had some unequal advice to-day—good, bad, indifferent. But there's no doubt that yours is the best, the soundest, the most suited to my case that I'm likely to get anywhere. I *will* go and hang myself. Nothing shall become my life like the leaving of it. Shake hands, constable ; you, at least, have counselled well."

I pressed his palm and was gone. I forgot wife, children, business, honour, and heaven in that awful moment. I, a member of the Committee of the Stock Exchange, passed through the streets of London like a mere escaped lunatic. My shattered, lacerated nerve-centres cried for peace and oblivion ; I longed to be dead and out of it all. My self-respect was already dead, and what is life without that ? I thought of the future after this nightmare-day, and felt that there could be no future for me. So I vanished into the fog—a palpitating pariah with one frantic, overmastering resolution—to hang myself, and that at once.

## II

BUT a man cannot forget the training of his youth, the practice of his adult years, and the support of his middle age, in one demonian hour. As I passed wildly through dim, bilious abysses of filth-laden atmosphere, though my body was soon lost, and hopelessly lost, in the fog, my mind became a trifle clearer, and steadfast principles of a lifetime reasserted themselves. I determined to go on with my shattered existence ; indeed, I felt tolerably sure that my fellow-man, who had kept me thus busily employed, would presently prevent me from carrying my purpose to its bitter end. I grew a little calmer, recollected the terms of my wager, and so proceeded with the directions delivered by the police constable, doubting nothing but that my next meeting with a human being would divert the catastrophe, and once more set me forward upon a new road.

Presently a little shop loomed alongside me, and I perceived that here might be procured an essential in the matter of destruction by hanging. A mean and humble establishment it was, lighted by one paraffin lamp. The stock-in-trade apparently consisted of ropes and door-pegs—in fact, the complete equipment proper to my undertaking. Time and place agreed; it was, indeed, just such a gloomy, lonesome, and sequestered hole as a suicide might select to make his final purchases. From a door behind the counter there came to me a bald and mournful little man with weak eyes, a subdued manner, and the facial inanity of the rabbit. Hints of a fish dinner followed him from his dwelling-room, and through the door I could catch a glimpse of his family, four in number, partaking of that meal.

“What might you want?” he asked, but in a despondent tone, implying, to my ear, that it was rarely his good fortune to have anything in stock a would-be customer desired to purchase.

“I want a rope to hang a man,” I answered, and waited with some interest to see the result.

The small shopkeeper’s eyes grew round, a mixture of admiration and creeping fear lighted them.

“My gracious! You’re *him*, then! To think as ever I should——”

Here he broke off, and, in a frenzy of excitement, opened the door behind him and spoke to his wife. I overheard, though not intended to do so, but he could not subdue his voice. I think he felt confronted by the supreme event of his life.

“Jane, Jane! Creep in the shop quiet and look at this here man! By ’Eaven! it’s the public executioner! To think as ever I should sell a rope to him! Hush!”

He turned and while he addressed me with dreadful humility, the woman, Jane, crept into the shop and stared morbidly upon my harrowed countenance.

Then she whispered to her husband:

“That’s not him, for I seed his picture in the *Police News* last week. It’s a new one, or else his assistant!”

Meantime I was being served, and it seemed that the little man suddenly awakened to the dignity of his calling before my sensational order. He began handling a wilderness of rope-ends and discoursing upon them with the air of an expert as he rose to this great occasion.

“A nice twisted cordage you’ll be wanting, and if you’ll leave the choice to me, nobody shall be none the worse. I’ve been in rope since I was seventeen. Now Manila hemp won’t do—too stiff and woody, too lacking in suppleness. That’s what you want: suppleness. The sisal hems, from South America, are very pretty things, and the New Zealand hemp is hard to beat; but there’s another still more beautiful cordage. Only it’s very rarely used because it comes rather expensive. Still, when a fellow-creature’s life’s at stake, I suppose you won’t count the cost. Besides, the Government pays, don’t it? That’s a Jubbulpore hemp—best of all—or bowstring hemp, as I’m told they use in the harems of the East, though what for I couldn’t say. I’ve got a very nice piece—ten foot long and supple as silk. Just try it; and any strain up to two hundred pound. Hand-spun, of course—a lovely thing, though I say so. But it’s a terrible thought. Jute’s cheaper, only I won’t guarantee it; I won’t, indeed. You want a reliable article, if only for your own reputation, and one more thing: I suppose there’s no objection to my using this as an advertisement? People in these parts is all so fond of horrors; and as it’s Government I ought to be allowed the lion and unicorn, perhaps?”

I bought the Jubbulpore hemp as the man advised. It cost thirty shillings, and the vendor wrestled between pleasure at the success of his extortion and horror at the future. But I told him he must neither advertise the circumstance, nor dare to assume the lion and unicorn on the strength of it. This discouraged him, and he lost heart and took a gloomy view of the matter.

“A hawful tride, if I may say so without offence,” he ventured. “Would it be the Peckham Rye murderer as you’re buying this rope for, or that poor soul who lost his temper with his wife’s mother down Forest Hill wye?”

“Neither,” I answered. “It is a man called Honeybun.”

“Honeybun! Ah! A ugly, crool nime! What’s he done?”

“Made a fool of himself.”

“Lord! If we was hung for that, there wouldn’t be much more talk of over-population—eh? Well, well, I s’pose he’ll be as ’appy with you and that bit of Jubbulpore as we can hope for him. A iron nerve it must want. Yet Mr. Ketch was quite the Christian at ’ome, I b’lieve. Not your first case, of course?”

I picked up the rope and prepared to depart.

“My very first experience,” I said.

“Pore soul!” exclaimed the feeling tradesman, but he referred to the criminal, not to me.

“For Gord’s sake don’t bungle it!” were the last husky words I heard from him; and then I set forth to hang Arthur Honeybun, who deserved hanging if ever a man did. I told myself this, and made a quotation which I forget.

And now arose one of the most sinister concatenations easily to be conceived in the life of a respectable citizen. Here was I on the brink of self-destruction; I only waited for some fellow-creature to restrain me. *But nobody attempted to do so!* My folly in disguising the truth from the little rope-merchant now appeared. Had he known, he had doubtless shown me my dreadful error in time; now it was too late, for the world pursued its own business wholly regardless of me and my black secret and my hidden rope. Apparently there was really nothing for me to do but to lose my wager or hang myself—an alternative which I well knew would represent for my family a total pecuniary loss considerably greater than the sum involved.

I wandered down a lonely court and found an archway at the bottom. One sickly gas lamp gleamed above this spot, and the silence of death reigned within it. Had I been in sober earnest, no nook hidden away under the huge pall of the fog could have suited me better. Some evil fiend had apparently taken charge of my volition and designed to see the matter through, for I pursued this business of hanging with a callous deliberation that amazed me. I even smiled as I climbed up the arch and made the rope fast upon the lamp above it. Not a soul came to interrupt. The lamp blinked lazily; the fog crowded closer to see the sight; the fiend busied himself with my Jubbulpore rope, and arranged all preliminaries, while I sat and grinned over the sooty desolation. I felt my pulse calmly, critically; I indulged in mental analysis; endeavoured to estimate my frame of mind; and wondered if I could throw the experience into literary form for a scientific journal. I remember being particularly surprised that the attitude of my intellect towards this performance was untinged by any religious feeling whatsoever.

Then came a psychological moment when the fiend had done everything that he possibly could for me. My task was merely to tie the loose end of the Jubbulpore masterpiece

round my neck and cast forth into the void. How strange a thing is memory! For some extraordinary reason Dr. Johnson's definition of fishing flashed into my mind. I could not recall it exactly at that terrible moment, but I remembered how it had to do with a fool at one end of a piece of string.

Still not a footstep—only the rumble and roar of all selfish London some twenty yards off—never a hand to save me from a coward's doom. I grew much annoyed with London; I reminded London of the chief incidents in my own career; I asked myself if this was justice; I also asked myself why I had been weak enough to turn into a blind alley—evidently an unpopular, undesirable spot, habitually ignored. And then I grew melancholy, even maudlin. I saw my faults staring at me—my negligences and ignorances; and chiefly my crass idiocy in not undertaking this matter at Piccadilly Circus, or some main junction of our metropolitan system where such enterprises are not tolerated. It is, of course, a free country, and the rights of the subject are fairly sacred, speaking generally; but we draw the line here and there, and I knew that any attempt to annihilate myself upon some lamp-post amid the busy hum of men must have resulted as I desired. Interference would have prevented complete suspension there; but here the seclusion was absolute, and simply invited crime. The fog had now reached its crowning triumph, and threatened to deprive my trusty Jubbulpore hemp of its prey, for I was suffocating, and asphyxia threatened to overwhelm me at any moment.

“Where the deuce are the police?” I asked myself at this eleventh hour. It was a policeman who had placed me in my present pitiable fix, and—blessed inspiration! why should not another of the tribe extricate me from it? When in danger or imminent peril it is our custom to shout for the help of the law, and surely if ever a poor, overwrought soul stood in personal need of the State's assistance, it was Arthur Honeybun at that moment. So, with nerves strung to concert pitch, I lifted up my voice, and called for a policeman. In these cases, however, one does not specify or limit, so my summons was couched generally to the force at large.

There followed no immediate response; then three boys assembled under my arch, and they formed a nucleus or focus about which a small crowd of the roughest possible persons, male and female, collected. Last of all a policeman came also.

“ Now then ! ” he said, “ what’s all this, then ? ”

The miserable boys took entire credit to themselves for discovering me perched aloft. They pointed me out and called attention to the Jubbulpore rope dangling from the lamp, and elaborated their own theories.

Very properly the constable paid no attention to them, but addressed all his remarks to me.

“ You up there,” he asked, “ what d’you think you’re plyin’ at ? ”

There was no sympathy in his voice. He appeared to be a tall, harsh officer—a mere machine, with none of the milk of human kindness in him. Or perhaps a beat in Seven Dials had long since turned it sour. Moreover, he felt that the crowd was on his side—a circumstance that always renders a constable over-confident and aggressive.

I felt unstrung, as I say—distracted, and more or less hysterical, or I should have approached the situation differently ; but I was not my own master ; I sat there, a mere parcel of throbbing nerves escaped from a hideous death. So, instead of being lucid, which is a vital necessity in all communion with the police, I uttered obscure sayings, went out of my way to be cryptical and even spoke in spasmodic parables, but of course there exists no member of the body politic upon whom a parable is wasted more utterly than your constable.

“ You are surprised, and naturally so, to see me here,” I said. “ There are, however, more things in heaven and earth, policeman, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. I am the creature of circumstances—in fact, of a series of circumstances probably unparalleled. A colleague of your own—it may be a personal friend—is responsible for my position on this arch. Yonder wretched boy has not erred ; I had seriously thought to destroy myself. I was driven to the very threshold of that rash act. *A fronte præcipitium, a tergo lupi*, policeman. I am here perched between the devil and the deep sea—a precipice in front, a pack of wolves in the immediate rear. Now, be frank with me. I place myself entirely in your hands. I desire your honest and dispassionate advice.”

But this is not the way to talk to a policeman ; perhaps it is not the way to talk to anybody.

The deplorable boy had another theory.

He said :

“ The blighter’s off his onion ! ”

Then somebody else, dimly conscious that I had used a foreign language, suspected that I might be an anarchist. The policeman merely told me to come down, and I obeyed without hesitation, and gave myself up to him. I felt that situated thus, at least I was safe enough, if he would only do his duty; but he appeared to believe in the opinion that I was a foreigner.

“Where d’you come from?” he asked; “if you’re not English, it’s a case for your bloomin’ Consul.”

“I come from South Kensington,” I answered, “and I am English to the backbone, and it’s your duty to convey me to the police-station, which I’ll thank you to do.”

Here again I made a mistake. No man likes being told his duty—whether owing to a natural aversion from thinking of it or doing it, or for other reasons connected with pride I know not; but the constable, upon this speech of mine, displayed annoyance, and even some idea of leaving me to my own devices. Seeing that he showed an inclination to let me escape into the fog without a word of advice, and desiring no such thing, I spurred him to his office. I said:

“If you do not arrest me, I shall persuade some other member of the force to do so, and, as I have already made a note of your number, it will be the worse for you.”

Upon this he started as if a serpent had stung him; the crowd cheered me, and my object was attained. He felt his popularity was slipping away and so set about regaining it.

“All right, all right, my bold ’ero!” he said. Then he blew a whistle and summoned two colleagues.

“Dangerous lunatic—wants to be took up,” he explained. “Clean off his chump. Tryin’ to ’ang ’imself.”

Then he turned to me, and adopted a conciliatory tone.

“Now, then, uncle, come along quiet,” he said.

I suggested a cab, and offered to pay for it, but the constable held such a thing unnecessary extravagance.

“Won’t hurt you to walk,” he said. “And we’ll go quicker than a four-wheeler in this fog.”

So, with a large accompaniment of those who win entertainment from the misfortunes of their betters, I started to some sheltering haven where it was my hope that the remainder of the day might be spent in security and seclusion, behind bolts and bars. In this desire lurked no taste of shame or humiliation. I was far past anything of that kind. My sole desire, my unuttered prayer, was to be saved from all further human

counsel whatsoever. If an angel from heaven had fluttered down beside me and uttered celestial opinions to brighten that dark hour, I should have rejected his advice—very likely with rudeness.

I thought of the cynical sagacity of Norton Bellamy. How wise he had been! And what a fool was I. I pictured his face when my story came to be told. I heard his horrid laughter, and my self-respect oozed away, and I almost wished I was back with the Jubbulpore hemp upon the arch.

Then in the moment of my self-abasement, at the supreme climax of my downfall, I looked out through a yellow rift in the accursed fog, and saw Norton Bellamy himself!

At first indeed I did not credit this. The fog had lifted somewhat; livid patches and streaks of daylight relieved the gloom, and a dingy metropolis peeped and blinked through it, fungus-coloured and foul; but suddenly, painted upon the murky air, there took shape and substance a moving concourse of figures—of heads under helmets—and I, remembering the spectre of the Brocken, for a moment suspected that what I saw was but the shadow of myself, my policemen and my crowd projected over against us upon the dusky atmosphere.

Yet as that other company approached, the splendid truth burst upon me. Vagrants, policemen and rioting boys mainly composed it, but in the place of chief dishonour walked Norton Bellamy! He, too, it would seem, had violated the laws of this country; he, too, by devious and probably painful ways, had drifted into Seven Dials and there lost his freedom; an even-handed Nemesis, whose operations yet remained hidden from me, had clearly punished Bellamy for rejecting the advice of his fellow-man, even as she had chastened me for accepting it. And from cursory appearances it looked as though Bellamy had endured even more varied torments than my own. One might have thought that attempts had been made to clean the highway with him. He was dripping with mud; he lacked a hat; his white waistcoat awoke even a passing pity in my heart. And yet the large placidity, the awful calm of a fallen spirit sat on Bellamy. He had doubtless exploded, detonated, boiled over, fumed, foamed, fretted and thundered to his utmost limit. His bolt was shot; his venom was gone; he stood before me reduced to the potency of a mere empty cartridge-case.

We met each other's glance simultaneously, and a sort of

savage and foggy beam of joy flitted across his muddy face; while for my part I doubt not that some passing expression of pleasure, which tact and humanity instantly extinguished, also illuminated my features. Our retinues mingled and for a moment we had speech together.

Needless to say the discovery that we were friends proved a source of much gratification to the crowd.

“Great Scott! You!” gasped out Bellamy. “What have you done?”

“Practically nothing,” I answered; “but what I have suffered no tongue can tell and no human being will ever know. It is sufficient to say that I am here because I was deliberately advised by a fellow-creature to go and hang myself.”

“They told you to do that?” he asked with keen but suppressed excitement.

“They did.”

He was silent for an instant, pondering this thing, while joy and sorrow mingled on his muddy countenance. Then he answered me.

“I’ll write your cheque the first moment I get back to the office. You were right. There *is* more good advice given than bad. I’ve proved it too. If I’d done half what I was told to-day, I——”

Here our respective guardians separated us, and we marched to our destination in silence; but about five or six minutes later we sat side by side in a police-station and were permitted to renew our conversation.

“You’ve had a stirring day, no doubt,” Bellamy began, while he scraped mud off himself. “Tell me your yarn, then I’ll tell you mine. But how is it, if somebody advised you to go and hang yourself, that you are here now? You’ll have to explain that first as a matter of honour.”

I explained, and it must be confessed that my words sounded weak. It is certain, at any rate, that they did not convince Bellamy.

“I withdraw the promise to write a cheque,” he said shortly. “On your own showing you dallied and dawdled and fooled about upon the top of that arch. You temporised. If you had followed that advice with promptitude and like a man, you wouldn’t be here now. This is paltry and dishonest. I certainly sha’n’t pay you a farthing.”

I told him that I felt no desire to take his money, and he

was going into the question of how far he might be said to have won mine, when we were summoned before the Magistrate. Here Fate at last befriended me, for the Justice proved to be Master of my Lodge of Freemasons and an old personal friend. Finding that no high crime was laid at the door of Bellamy, and, very properly, refusing to believe that I had been arrested in an attempt on my own life, he rebuked my policeman and restored to us our liberty. Whereupon we departed in a hansom cab, after putting two guineas apiece into the poor-box. This I need hardly say was my idea.

Then, as we drove to a hatter's at the wish of Norton Bellamy, he threw some light on the sort of morning he himself had spent. The man was reserved and laconic to a ridiculous degree under the circumstances, therefore I shall never know all that he endured; but I gathered enough to guess at the rest and feel more resigned in the contemplation of my own experiences. He hated to utter his confession, yet the experiences of that day rankled so deep within him that he had not the heart to make light of them.

"A foretaste of the hereafter," began Bellamy; "that's what my day has been; and if such a fiendish morning isn't enough to drive a man to good works and a better way of life, I'd like to see what is. You say your trouble began in the railway carriage coming to town. So did mine. But whereas your part was passive, and, by the mere putty-like and plastic virtue of ready obedience to everybody you finally found yourself face to face with death, I reached the same position through a more active and terrible sort of way."

"Nevertheless," said I, "taking into consideration the difference between my character and yours—remembering that by nature you are aggressive, I retiring—nothing you can say will make me believe that you have suffered more than I. Physically perhaps, but not mentally."

"Don't interrupt; I've heard you; now listen to me," said Bellamy. "It began, as I say, in the train. An infernal inspector desired to see my season-ticket. Of course he was within his right, and I had a whole carriage load of fools down on me because I refused to show it. This day has taught me one thing: there's not a man, woman or child in the country who minds their own business for choice if a chance offers of poking their vile noses into any other body's. The people who have interested themselves in me this morning!

Well, that railway chap was nasty, of course, and took my address; but nothing more worth mentioning happened, except a row with a shoeblick, until I got to my office. There the real trouble began. You know Gideon? Who doesn't, for that matter? I had the luck to do him a turn a week ago, and he came in this morning with a tip—actually went out of his way to cross Lombard Street and get out of his cab and look in.

“He said, ‘Good morning. Buy Diamond Jubilees—all you can get.’ And I didn’t look up from my letters, but thought it was Jones, who’s always dropping in to play the fool, and remembered our loathsome bet. So I merely said, ‘Sha’n’t! Clear out!’ Then I lifted my head just in time to see Gideon departing—about as angry as a big man can be with a little one—and my clerks all looking as though they’d suddenly heard the last trump.

“I tore after him, but too late; of course he’d gone. Then I dashed to his place of business, but he’d got an appointment somewhere else and didn’t turn up till after twelve, by which time the tip was useless. And he showed me pretty plainly that I may regard myself as nothing to him henceforward. After that I was too sick to work, so went West to see a man and get some new clothes. Like a fool I never remembered that with this bet on me I couldn’t lie too low. It was all right at the hairdresser’s, as you may imagine; but I’m accustomed to let my tailor advise me a good deal, and you can see the holy fix I was in after he’d measured me. I got out of that by saying that I’d drop in again and see his stuffs and his pictures by daylight; then I had a glass of port at Long’s, and, remembering my youngsters, went to find a shop where I could get masks and wigs and nonsense for them, because they are proposing to do some charades or something to wind up their holidays before they go back to school. Then, in the fog, I got muddled up and lost myself about a quarter of a mile from where we met. First I had a row with a brute from Covent Garden Market, who ran into me with a barrow of brussels sprouts. We exchanged sentiments for a while and then the coster said, ‘I don’t arsk of you to pick ’em up, do I?’

“Well, of course, as he didn’t ask me to pick them up, I immediately began to do it. And the man was so astonished that he stopped swearing and called several of his friends to make an audience. So that was all right as far as it went; but just then a bobby appeared out of the din and clatter of the

street, and ordered me to move on. Of course I wouldn't, and while I was arguing with him, and asking for his reason, a fire-engine dashed out of the bowels of the fog and knocked me down in a heap before I knew who'd hit me.

"Everybody thought I was jolly well killed, and I could just see the air thick with blackguard faces, getting their first bit of real fun for the day, when I suppose I must have become unconscious from shock for the time being. Anyway, on regaining my senses, I found myself in a bed of mud and rotten oranges, with three policemen and about fifty busybodies, all arguing cheerfully over me, as if I was a lost child. Most of them hoped I was dead, and showed their disappointment openly when I recovered again. Two doctors—so they said they were—had also turned up from somewhere, and taken a general survey of me while I was in no condition to prevent them. After that I need hardly tell you I've lost my watch.

"The question appeared to be my destination, and now the policeman who had told me to move on explained, at great length, that depended entirely on whether I was physically shattered or still intact. If I was all right save for the loss of my hat and the gain of an extra coat or two of mud, the man had arranged to take me to a police-station for interfering with a fire-engine in the execution of its duty, or some rot of that sort; but if, on the other hand, I was broken up and perhaps mortally injured, then it struck him as a case for a stretcher and a hospital.

"They were still arguing about this when I came to. Upon which the constable invited my opinion, and explained the two courses open to him. He seemed indifferent and practically left it to me; so, as I felt the police-station would probably represent the simplest and shortest ordeal; and as, moreover, so far as I could judge at the time, I was little the worse in body for the downfall, I decided in that direction. I told him I was all right and had mercifully escaped. Whereupon he congratulated me in a friendly spirit and took me to the police-station."

Thus Bellamy; and when the man had finished we spoke further for the space of about two minutes and a half, then parted, by mutual understanding, to meet no more.

"I'm sorry for you," I said. "We were both wrong and both right. The truth is that there's a golden mean in the matter of advice, as in most things. Probably the proportions

of good and bad are about equal, though I am not prepared to allow that our experiments can be regarded as in any sense conclusive."

"And as to the bet, I suppose we may say it's off?" asked Norton Bellamy. "I imagine you've had enough of this unique tomfoolery, and I know I have. I'm a mass of bruises and may be smashed internally for all I know, not to mention my watch."

"Yes," I replied, "the wager must be regarded as no longer existing. We have both suffered sufficiently, and if we proceeded with it, *quod avertat Deus*, some enduring tribulation would probably overtake one or both of us. And a final word, Bellamy. As you know, we have never been friends; our natures and idiosyncrasies always prevented any mutual regard; and this tragedy of to-day must be said to banish even mutual respect."

"It has," said Norton Bellamy. "I won't disguise it. I feel an all-round contempt for you, Honeybun, that is barely equalled by the contempt I feel for myself. I can't possibly put it more strongly than that."

"Exactly my own case," I answered. "Therefore in future it will be better that we cease even to be acquaintances."

"My own idca," said Bellamy, "only I felt a delicacy about advancing it, which you evidently didn't. But I am quite of your opinion all the same. And, of course, this day's awful work is buried in our own breasts. Consider if it got upon the Stock Exchange! We should be ruined men. Absolute silence must be maintained."

"So be it," I replied. "Henceforth we only meet on the neutral ground of Brighton A's. Indeed, even there, it is not necessary, I think, that we should have any personal intercourse. And one final word: if you will take my advice——"

He had now alighted, but turned upon this utterance and gave me a look of such concentrated bitterness, malice, and detestation that I felt the whole horror of the day was reflected in his eyes. "YOUR advice! Holy angels and Hanwell!"

Those were the last words of Norton Bellamy. He felt this to be the final straw; he turned his back upon me; he tottered away into his hatter's; and, with a characteristic financial pettiness, raised no question about paying for his share of our cab.



WILLIAM CAINE

*Spanish Pride*  
*The Elegant Ethiopium*

After leaving Oxford William Caine studied for the Bar, but soon forsook the law for journalism and literature. His work was distinguished for its versatility and warm human sympathy, and he was at his best in a light vein. He was an enthusiastic fisherman and a comic artist of no little skill.



## SPANISH PRIDE

THE poet is said to be born, not made. I have my doubts about this ; but whatever the truth of it may be, it cannot be said of the artist. He, it is true, has also to be born ; but he has very much to be made, and the process is generally an unpleasant one for him.

While Luiz Mendoza was still a-making and was still under twenty years of age, one day he tried to find a short cut between central Paris and the garret which he then inhabited in Montmartre, lost his direction and came suddenly into a tiny quiet square which he had never seen before. The little place charmed him, and being hot and thirsty, he sat down at a table outside a small café and ordered a beer, for which he paid with his last two coins. Then he opened the portfolio which he carried. In it were ten of those sketches which in those days he used to peddle about for a few francs among the offices of the comic newspapers. Taking out a blank sheet of paper, he began to sketch the square. If to-day you could find one of those same drawings that Mendoza used to carry all over Paris, you would think yourself a lucky man ; for, first, you would be possessed of a very exquisite work of art, and, secondly, you would be worth a great many more pounds than you had been a minute earlier. But those early Mendozas are not easy to get hold of, because all that escaped the waste-paper basket and the *caloriferes* of that period lie nowadays in the drawers of the richer collectors, and whenever they come into the market there is much active competition.

Mendoza's morning had been a thoroughly bad one. He had set out from his garret with ten sketches in his portfolio and twenty centimes in his pocket and one slice of bread in his stomach, and he was now returning with ten sketches in his portfolio, while the twenty centimes that had been in his pocket were spent, and as for the bread, it had long ago ceased to make its presence felt. He had walked six miles, climbed many hundreds of steps, and been told to go to the devil by at least five busy and unsympathetic men. But to-night he would

do a lot more drawings, and to-morrow he would sell one or two of them; he was sure of it. Till that happened, however, there would be nothing to eat and drink save a loaf's end in the cupboard at home and such water, unlimited, to be sure, in quantity, as he might please to draw from the tap in the passage outside his room. Well, so much the more reason for enjoying the beer.

As he sketched he became aware of a stout old gentleman who took a chair at a neighbouring table. This old gentleman wore a big cape, though the day was scorching, and a broad-brimmed hat, and his white hair hung down nearly to his shoulders. In his buttonhole was a decoration that Mendoza knew for a high one. But he knew all about this old gentleman.

"*Caramba!*" he said to himself. "The Père Boyau! A mystery of Paris is solved. So this is where he takes his *apéritif*, the crafty old one! No chance of having to stand treat to anybody here." Monsieur Boyau's parsimony was as notorious in his own world as his pictures were famous both there and elsewhere. A marvellous artist, rolling in money, as stingy as an empty cask, but otherwise an amiable old thing—that was the Père Boyau.

Mendoza raised his hat in homage to Monsieur Boyau's art, and Monsieur Boyau raised his in recognition of the compliment. He gave an order to the café's only waiter, and, having lit a cigarette, leaned upon his stick, and regarded Mendoza benevolently. Presently he got up and stood behind Mendoza. Then he said:

"But it is admirable, Monsieur. For so young a man you have a very considerable talent. But,"—and he took a stick of charcoal from his pocket, "if I might suggest, the lines of the kiosk might be strengthened with advantage to the whole composition. May I indicate my meaning? Your rubber can obliterate what you do not wholly approve."

"I shall be honoured, Monsieur," said Mendoza, who was by no means above taking a free lesson from Theophile Boyau.

"So," said Monsieur Boyau, as he leaned over and made a few marks upon the paper, "and thus. Am I right?"

"It is not," said Mendoza, "for me to pass judgment upon the work of a Boyau. This sketch is finished." He took a small bottle of fixative out of his pocket, sprayed the drawing, and put it away in his portfolio. "I am now," he said,

“possessed of twenty strokes by Theophile Boyau. My morning has turned out a lucky one, after all.”

Monsieur Boyau laughed gaily and pinched Mendoza's cheek.

“Little flatterer !” he said. Then, motioning to the waiter to bring him his *apéritif*, he sat down beside Mendoza. The boy had his beer and, despite that hint of bad luck, Monsieur Boyau felt there was no danger. Besides, he was in a mood to be companionable.

At this very moment they became aware of a poor woman, who stood in front of them, holding out beseechingly a few bunches of wilted flowers. In her other hand was that of a child about six years old, an adorable little girl. Both were thin and very pale.

Monsieur Boyau frowned.

“Thank you ; no,” he said, and his voice was not kindly any more.

The woman sighed and began to move away ; but, even as she moved, she staggered, and caught at the back of a chair to steady herself. Then she sat down suddenly.

At that, with great swiftness, Mendoza jumped up.

“Madame,” he said, “take courage. I will see what I can do,” and he darted into the café.

It was empty save for the waiter, a canary, and a woman of opulent figure who sat at the cash-desk making a piece of embroidery. Mendoza approached her, hat in hand, and opened his portfolio.

“Madame,” he said in his courtly Spanish voice and his perfect, but rather rough-sounding French, “I sell these drawings to editors for five francs apiece. Will you take one or all of them in return for coffee, bread, meat and a bowl of warm milk ? There are a woman and child out there who look as if they might die.”

“No,” said the woman ; “I do not care for pictures. But you are a Spaniard, are you not ? Yes ? My mother was a Spaniard. You shall have the victuals for your friends, my little fellow.” And she gave an order to the waiter.

“Decidedly,” said Mendoza to himself as, having overwhelmed the woman with thanks, he went out of doors again — “decidedly this is my lucky morning.”

“Madame,” he said, addressing the poor woman, “refreshment is on the way. Courage ! And for the little one there will be milk. Is all that as it should be ?”

She smiled wanly at him.

"Monsieur is an angel," she said. "I was finished; but I shall be able to get home now."

Monsieur Boyau, who had hitherto looked very severe, now began again to illuminate his neighbourhood with smiles.

"Heaven," he said piously, "will undoubtedly reward monsieur for his kindness," and he looked with interest, not unmingled with pity, at this shabby youth who flung his money about so recklessly. But that was youth. Appearances were certainly deceptive. He would never have supposed that the boy had the price of a meal for himself, let alone for two others.

Mendoza drew the child up to his knee. She came willingly and at once snuggled down against him, with his arm round her.

"Mademoiselle's milk," said Mendoza, "will be here directly. Meanwhile let us offer mademoiselle such other poor entertainment as is in our power." He opened his portfolio, took out a sheet of paper, and began to draw. "The Jardin des Plantes," he said, "is popular with the very young, but it is far from where we sit. Still, many wonderful things are in the power of the draftsman. Behold, Mademoiselle, I transport us to the Jardin des Plantes. What is this that is coming into view? I swear, it is an elephant!"

As he spoke, a magnificent and most comical elephant appeared upon the paper. The child clapped her hands.

"See, *Maman*," she cried, "the gentleman has made an elephant. And it is droll. Oh! but it is droll!"

"Mademoiselle would perhaps enjoy a promenade upon the creature's back," said Mendoza. "Let her not be afraid. My elephants are very tame. But, that there may be no hesitation on mademoiselle's part, I shall make her very large, so that she will be able to control the animal's movements at her pleasure!" And behold! seated upon the elephant appeared a colossal little girl exactly like mademoiselle.

The portrait was undeniable. Mademoiselle screamed with pleasure. Her mother laughed to see. Monsieur Boyau, sipping from his glass, chuckled his appreciation of the performance. The waiter, who had just brought out the provisions, called upon his Maker to witness that the likeness was extraordinary.

"A lion," cried the child, "draw 'Toinette a lion."

“When Mademoiselle has drunk her milk,” said Mendoza, “a lion shall be produced, and a terrible one, if Mademoiselle pleases.”

“Oh, yes,” she said, “let it be very terrible. ’Toinette is not afraid of Monsieur’s beasts. She is so enormous now.” With admirable docility she began to consume her milk. Her mother fell greedily upon the ham, bread and coffee that the waiter had set before her. Mendoza lit his last cigarette and drank beer.

When the milk was finished, the child pushed the bowl away and asked for ’Toinette’s lion.

Mendoza obliged. Then he drew a tiger, a rhinoceros, a boa constrictor, a giraffe; and all these creatures were so funny that the child and her mother and the waiter, who could not tear himself away, and Monsieur Boyau were convulsed with merriment. At last Madame, the proprietress of the café, made curious by the laughter outside, joined the admiring throng. Although she did not care for pictures, she was so much delighted with Mendoza’s beasts (and perhaps with his Spanish voice) that she ordered more meat and bread and coffee to be brought out; yes, and a pot of confiture for Mademoiselle.

At last Mendoza, who had been observing old Boyau craftily out of the corner of his eye, stopped drawing and said:

“But who am I to be spoiling paper in the presence of a Boyau? Know, Mademoiselle, that this old gentleman is France’s greatest living painter. Ask him to draw something for you. Then you will see beasts indeed.”

“Ah, bah!” said Monsieur Boyau, prodigiously pleased, nevertheless. “Who am I to compete with such a magician? However, if Mademoiselle permits, I will do my humble best to satisfy her.” Ever since the drawing had begun, his fingers had been itching to be at work, and his artist’s soul had been hungering to taste the unalloyed flattery of the child’s ecstatic appreciation.

Almost before he had finished speaking, one of Mendoza’s blank sheets was before him.

“Not in charcoal, Master,” said Mendoza in his ear. “It is too broad for the child’s eye. Take this pencil. It is an excellent one.”

The old man obeyed. He was very much disposed to be good. This wasn’t going to cost him a penny, yet he was

about to do a kindly thing. And he liked to be kind, so long as he didn't have to pay.

"Let me think," he said, as he arranged the paper for his hand. "Monsieur has suggested more beasts for Mademoiselle, but I cannot draw beasts that will compare with those of Monsieur. Suppose—suppose—suppose I make a procession of gladiators."

"What," asked Mademoiselle, "are gladiators? I think I would rather have more beasts."

"Not so," said Mendoza, pressing her with his arm persuasively. "There is nothing more beautiful than gladiators, Mademoiselle will see."

Monsieur Boyau bent himself to his task, and very soon the intention of his design became apparent.

The spectator, Cæsar for the moment, stared down upon the sand of the circus, which in the background towered, tier on tier to meet its vast, striped awning. And there stood the gladiators, their arms raised, shouting, saluting the emperor, under whose eyes they were about to die. What Monsieur Boyau didn't know about gladiators, as about many other things, wasn't worth knowing, and he had placed his knowledge unreservedly at the service of his design. It was a very astonishing crowd of villains when it was done.

"So!" he said at last, leaning back and finishing his drink. "And what does Mademoiselle think of it?"

"But where," asked Mademoiselle, obviously disappointed, "are the gladiators? I see nothing but a lot of ugly men, shouting."

Monsieur Boyau laughed genially and got up.

"My young friend," he said to Mendoza, "I was foolish to compete with you. I have failed. My compliments. You have defeated Theophile Boyau."

He rose, picked up his sketch, and was about to tear it across; but Mendoza's hand shot out.

"No," he said eagerly; "no, Monsieur, that is mine. That is my prize for defeating Theophile Boyau."

"That thing?" said Monsieur Boyau. "Ah, bah! You deserve something better than that."

"It is a memento," said Mendoza, "of a meeting that I shall not forget. I may keep it?"

"Surely, if you value it."

"And you will sign it?"

"Why not?" asked Monsieur Boyau, smiling. "Where I give, I sign." And he signed the sketch. "Between you, you have made me late for my luncheon," he said with mock severity. "The digestion of Theophile Boyau is not lightly to be tampered with. I hope you will appreciate the enormity of your crime. And so good day to you all, Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle."

He raised his hat three times and waddled away.

"And now," said Mendoza, "I will go and interview a gentleman that I know of. Do you, Madame and Mademoiselle, stay here. I will be back within the hour, and I hope to bring you good news. Waiter, my nearest road to the Opera?" The waiter gave directions.

Mendoza placed Monsieur Boyau's drawing carefully between the covers of his portfolio and ran off.

Twenty minutes later he arrived, still running, at Lemaitre's.

He went straight in.

"Monsieur Lemaitre?" he panted to the person who appeared to be in charge of the gallery.

"Monsieur Lemaitre does not see everybody," he was told.

"He will see me," said Mendoza. "I have here"—and he tapped his portfolio—"an authentic Boyau, a pencil sketch of gladiators." He hastily drew out the sketch.

"Yes," said the other, "it is possible that Monsieur Lemaitre would be interested to see that. Follow me, if you please."

Mendoza was shown into Lemaitre's private room.

"Yes," said Lemaitre, who had carried the drawing to the window, "it is a charming little thing. You wish to sell it to me? Yes? I will give you fifty francs for it."

"Monsieur Le Cocq of the Rue Royale would give me a hundred," said Mendoza, "but I am in a hurry, and you may have it for eighty."

"Seventy?" said Lemaitre.

Mendoza put the sketch back into his portfolio and took up his hat.

"Well, well," laughed Lemaitre, "eighty it is." And he gave the money to Mendoza.

Mendoza reopened the portfolio, took out the sketch, and handed it to Lemaitre. Then his fingers slipped, for he was still panting, and not in perfect command of his muscles, and

the portfolio fell to the ground. The carpet was littered with his own drawings.

Lemaitre was a dealer and a hard one, but he was a gentleman. He began to help Mendoza to pick up the drawings. Suddenly he made a little exclamation.

“But,” he said, “this is not without merit. Let me see the others, if I may.”

“I am in a hurry,” said Mendoza, “but you have been more generous than I had expected. Look at them, by all means, but please be quick. I have an appointment with two ladies.”

“Two,” said Lemaitre as he ran his eye over Mendoza’s work. “For one so young you are fortunate. By whom are these sketches?”

“By Mendoza,” said Mendoza.

“And who is Mendoza?”

“I am Mendoza,” said Mendoza.

“You are, are you,” said Lemaitre. “Well, Monsieur Mendoza, I think I like your work. Suppose you leave these things here and come back to-morrow with some more. It is only a suggestion, of course, and I promise nothing; but it may be worth your while.”

“Very good,” said Mendoza. “Then I may go?”

“You may, Monsieur Mendoza; but don’t forget to come back. Tell those two ladies whom you are hastening to meet that Lemaitre will be grateful to them if they will spare you to him to-morrow for half an hour.”

“I shall be careful,” said Mendoza, “to tell them so.” He ran out of the gallery, jumped into a cab, and was driven back to the café. “Decidedly,” he said to the boulevard—“decidedly this is my lucky day.”

Arrived at the café, he descended hastily, changed a ten-franc piece with the waiter, paid the cab, and hurried to the side of Madame and Mademoiselle, who were still seated at their table.

“Madame,” he said, “I told you I might bring you good news. I do. I have sold the picture with which Mademoiselle was pleased to be dissatisfied for eighty francs. Here are seventy-eight of them. The missing two are charged to travelling expenses. Madame, I wish you good-day. Mademoiselle”—and he kissed the child gallantly on the cheek—“I wish you a handsome husband. And so, farewell!” He

swept off his hat and departed, running, deaf to the cries which followed him.

When he was safe from pursuit he fell into a walk, and at the same pace made his way to his lodging.

“Thank Heaven !” he said as he let himself in, “I have that loaf’s end in the cupboard. These exercises have made me peckish.”

## THE ELEGANT ETHIOPIUM

THE King of Quèsaco was the most elegant monarch alive and he was justly proud of the distinction.

One day he had a bad influenza and began to fear that he might not last much longer.

He summoned his Prime Minister to his bedside and said: "We must find a husband for my daughter."

"Certainly, sire," said the Prime Minister, who always tried to agree with the King.

"I am getting on in life," said the King as he snuffed dismally at a bottle of Alkaram. "I may go any day."

"Your Majesty will live for a hundred thousand years," observed the Prime Minister.

"Don't be an idiot," said the King, "and stick to the point. Whom shall we have for the Princess's husband?"

"Why," said the Prime Minister, "there is Prince Matteo of Oustqueçay to whom she is betrothed."

"Yes," replied the King, "and a nice lad too. But stop a bit. Are we sure that he is the best man?"

"The Princess is," observed the Prime Minister.

"That is not the question," said the King. "Now tell me, what is it most necessary for a king to possess?"

"Brains?" suggested the Prime Minister.

"Fiddle," said the King, "have I any brains? You know that you and the Parliament make all the laws. Try again."

"Courage," said the Prime Minister, "is one of your Majesty's strong points."

"Skittles," said the King. "I am a coward. But I have no need of courage, because my generals do all my fighting. What else?"

"Wit?" said the Prime Minister.

"Footle," said the King. "You know I have only to wink and the whole court will expire of laughter if I were to say—Bring me my boots. No," he went on, "you have not guessed right. I will tell you. A king nowadays must be elegant or he is lost. Once a year he has to appear before

his subjects to open Parliament. If he looks imposing, carries his head proudly and walks in a stately manner everyone thinks he is somebody quite different from themselves. But if he were to shamble along and hang his head they would see he was just an ordinary man and they would go home and reflect; and the next thing we should see would be a revolution. Now I may be a fool, but I am elegant."

"True," said the Prime Minister absent-mindedly. "I should say," he added hurriedly, "that your Majesty's thoughts are golden and his words are pearls."

"You do say the silliest things," said the King, "but let it pass. Now the question is this: Is Prince Matteo elegant?"

"Vastly elegant," said the Prime Minister.

"Yes, but is he the most elegant man we can find?"

"Ah," said the Prime Minister profoundly. "That is another matter." He thought himself very much more elegant than Prince Matteo.

"Let us," said the King, "hold a competition of elegance and let the prize be the Princess's hand and the succession to the throne."

"Hah!" shouted the Prime Minister, who immediately began to hope that he would win.

Now we must leave them for the moment.

Far away in the middle of Africa grow the india-rubber trees and in the middle of the india-rubber trees lived an Ethiopium named Zerubbabel. He was six feet eight inches high and as black as your boots (the patent leathers, not the going away tans). He had curly-close hair, large rolling eyes and a smile that went twice round his head, it was so very expansive. He lived entirely on india-rubber (the black gluey kind, not the red soft delicious kind) because nothing else grew in his country. This made him wonderfully agile and elastic.

One day he got terribly tired of india-rubber and set out to see the world.

By and by he came to a large town. Just outside it he found a fellow who was standing firmly on one foot while he held the other above his head. He was counting aloud at top speed, while the tears streamed down his face.

"Why yo' do dat?" said Zerubbabel.

"94, 95—I am practising for the competition," said the other. "96, 97——"

“Which completion?” asked Zerubbabel.

“98—Don’t speak to me,” said the young man. “99—I’m busy. “100!” he shouted, and instantly raising his other foot above his head, began counting once more.

“Say, though,” said Zerubbabel, “which completion?”

“1, 2, 3, 4—Please go away,” said the young man. “5, 6, 7, 8 . . .”

“Dis am a curious business,” thought Zerubbabel, and as the young man really seemed to want him to go, he went.

Soon he came to a whole lot of other young men. They were all lying face downwards on the ground and raising their bodies up and down by straightening and bending their arms. A teacher stood on a platform and played a concertina and it was in time to this instrument that they all moved.

“What dey doin’ dar?” asked Zerubbabel.

“They are in for the competition,” said the teacher, working away at his concertina like mad.

“Sure,” said Zerubbabel, “but which completion am dat?”

“You carry yourself well,” said the teacher. “Let me enroll you in my class.”

“Take a walk, won’t you,” cried Zerubbabel, by which he meant—“I do not care to entertain your proposition.”

“Well, there is no harm,” said the teacher, “in taking my booklet, ‘How to be graceful.’ The scale of fees is on the last page.” And he offered Zerubbabel a small paper with a picture of himself performing a pirouette on the cover.

Now Zerubbabel was unable to read, being very ill-brought up, and he declined it, at which the teacher lost all interest in him and changed the tune on his concertina, whereupon all the young men turned over on their backs, elevated their legs in the air and began to kick out vigorously in time to the music.

Zerubbabel went a little further, and wherever he went he saw nothing but people cutting capers and contorting their bodies into every kind of uncomfortable position. They were all, it appeared, in for the Competition, but none of them seemed to have time to tell him what the Competition was about.

At last he came upon a very old man who was seated gloomily on a stone.

“Ain’t yo’ in fer dish yere completion?” asked Zerubbabel.

“Alas! no,” said the old man. “I am out of the running. I cannot even walk without this stick. But if this only had happened eighty years ago when I was in my prime, I’d have shown them.”

“Den,” said Zerubbabel, “will yo’ ’blige me and just say what de completion am for?”

“Is it possible you don’t know?” cried the old man. “Then you must know that”—and he told him that the Competition was a Competition of Elegance, that the prize was the Princess’s hand and the succession to the throne, and that all the world was in for it, not only the naturally elegant men, but everyone who could walk on two legs. Those who had never done a hand’s turn of work in their lives now spent their entire days practising Swedish exercises and dancing steps like mad to limber up their muscles and acquire something like grace. And the town was full of dancing masters, teachers of deportment, shampooers, exponents of the Del Sarte method, saltimbanques, sellers of embrocations, trainers, professors of gymnastics, professors of calisthenics, Japanese (who taught jiu-jitsu) German acrobats, Greek wrestlers, Hindoo contortionists, dancing dervishes, Spaniards (to impart the malaguena and the habanera), Frenchmen (to teach the carmagnole), Russians, (for the big boot dance) and several Italian première danseuses.

“What,” asked Zerubbabel, “am de name ob dis place?”

“Quèsaco,” said the old man.

Zerubbabel went off into a quiet spot and studied up the situation.

“Guess dis chile’ll hab a go hisself,” he thought. “Dis chile am tol’ble spry on hees legs. Guess it am fine ting to marry one ob dese yer Princessesses an’ dere am no entrance feeses.” And he went and put down his name as a competitor.

Next day the Competition began. It was to last three days. The first day all those whose names began with any of the letters from A to M were to exhibit their elegance against each other, the second day those whose names began with any of the letters from N to Z were to do the same thing, and on the third day the two winners were to fight it out in the final.

The public square was glorious with flags and Venetian masts. The sun shone brightly. The people of Quèsaco thronged the pavements and every window, where enormous

sums were paid for the seats, was full of heads. It cost as much as eightpence to stand on a soap box. Four brass bands, one at each corner of the square, played different pieces of inspiring music, every boy had a *squirt* and every girl a peacock's feather. Gaiety reigned supreme. There were all sorts of side-shows to be seen but nobody had the least use for them. The shooting galleries and the *Maze of Mirrors* might as well have remained shut up, and the Boxing Kangaroo and the Fat Lady were like to starve. At the top end of the square the King and the Princess sat in their private box, which was decorated with scarlet cloth, white paper roses and two large gilt lions.

The trumpets sounded and the procession of competitors entered the public square from beneath a large triumphal arch, which had been built at the private expense of the Mayor, a manufacturer of embrocation, who had used as his building material nothing but bottles of his own product. All round the arch ran the words—"None but the lithe deserve the Fair" and on top was a big banner bearing the legend—"Use Anti-Stiff and Win."

As Prince Matteo passed the royal box the Princess threw him a white paper rose. He kissed it and placed it in his buttonhole, for he was polite as well as elegant.

The procession marched three times round the square, that everybody might be seen, and then the Competition began.

Prince Matteo's turn did not come till just at the end because he began so far down the alphabet, but the moment he began to move there was no doubt in any single person's mind that he must win. His elegance was extraordinary, his grace supreme and his ease miraculous. His dancing was described next day in all the morning papers as "the poetry of motion." He was declared the winner of the first day and everybody said that the Princess was as good as his own. There could not possibly, they declared, be anybody in the N to Z division who could come near him.

Prince Matteo called on the Princess in the evening to receive her congratulations. He found her in the kitchen garden, where she had a little bit of ground all her own, in which she grew nasturtiums, stocks, lettuces and other hardy plants. The pride of this little garden of hers was at the moment a fine water-melon, now almost ripe. The Princess had watched it grow day by day and was immensely proud of it.

She had called it Paul, which is a capital name for a water-melon.

“See,” she said, when she had congratulated the Prince, “see how splendidly Paul is coming on. I am sure he will be ripe for our wedding feast;” for they were both quite certain that Matteo was going to win the Competition.

Matteo stroked Paul lovingly and told him how well he was looking, but Paul made no reply for he was a very taciturn water-melon and attended to nothing but the task of growing large and sweet. It was this attention to business which had made him so huge. I think the Princess loved him, next to Matteo and her father, better than anything in the world, and she could never think of cutting him open without a pang.

Matteo only stayed a short time as he had to be in bed early, being in strict training.

The Princess slept happily all night.

So general was the belief that Matteo was already the winner that the attendance at the second day’s competition was much smaller and you could get two soap boxes, one for each foot, for as much as a penny. As the day wore on and nobody showed the slightest approach to the performance of Prince Matteo of the day before the populace lost all interest in the affair and drifted away to other amusements. The shooting galleries and the Maze of Mirrors did a roaring business, while the Boxing Kangaroo and the Fat Lady were nearly suffocated by the crowds of people who thronged their tents. As for the men with soap boxes, they could not get a customer for love or money.

There was hardly anybody in the square when the last competitor began his exhibition. This was Zerubbabel, the Ethiopium. He wore, for the occasion, the national costume of Ethiopia; that is to say, a high crowned white felt hat with a flat brim, a big stick up collar, a shirt with an immense frill and large cuffs, a white dress waistcoat, a blue, brass-buttoned, swallow-tail coat and white duck trousers striped with scarlet. He had painted one eye white and he carried a pair of bones in either hand.

But the moment he began the people came crowding back into the square in thousands, for the news ran through the side-shows like wildfire that there was something really worth seeing at last. You never saw such movements as he made.

First he curled his right leg three times round his left knee

and uncurled it suddenly, standing at the same time on his left big toe. This caused him to spin round violently like a top while his right leg flew out straight into the air to the level of his nose. Then he brought his right foot to the ground and did the same with his left leg. In this manner he advanced some twenty paces. Then he leaned his body back from his hips parallel to the ground keeping his neck and head erect and throwing out his feet like a park hack and walked in this manner back to his starting place, with his thumbs in his waistcoat and his elbows moving up and down like wings. Then he sunk his head on his chest, raised his shoulders as high as he could, extended his arms out sideways in a bow, and, bending his right leg till the knee nearly touched the ground and putting out his left leg perfectly straight till the heel rested on the earth, he raised his body until it was directly over his left foot, and in this manner made seventeen steps sideways.

While he did this he cried four times "Hyah Heeyah! Hyah Heeyah!"

Then he did the same in the opposite direction, uttering as he did so the sound of a crowing cock. Then springing backwards into the air he whirled his right leg round so that the foot first touched his ear fourteen times before it came to the ground. He looked like a pin wheel. This he did with his left leg, and thirty-three changes brought him backwards just underneath the King's seat.

Then he threw out his left foot about ten yards and came down with his legs perfectly straight along the ground in opposite directions. He dug the toes of his right foot into the earth and pushed hard and lo! he rose from the earth to the full extent of his left leg. In this way he covered the whole length of the public square. Having finished, he cried in a loud voice, "Haow's dat?" grinned horribly and rolled his eyes till it made everybody giddy to look at him.

Then he began to dance.

He did the double shuffle, the treble shuffle, and all the shuffles there are and many that had never been seen before and have never been seen since, the *pas de basque*, the *pas de Calais*, the *pas de tout*, the *pas si mal* and all the French dancing steps, the cross cuts, the vine leaf, the jerboa dance, the June bug, the sweet step, the Boston dip, the sky-scraper, the greenginger flick, the Hominy cellar-flap, the Everglades, the

Memphis mystery, the Edna wallow, the de Funiak spring, the Cape Hatteras slide, Carthage Rags and most of the best-known American examples, the bolero, the fandango, the malaguena, the habanera, and was just beginning the tarantella when the people cried with one voice "Zerubbabel wins. Zerubbabel wins," and the King was obliged to give him the prize of the second day.

Will you try to imagine the King's fury, the Princess's grief and Prince Matteo's despair. He called on the Princess to comfort her and assure her that he would beat the Ethiopium on the morrow or die in the attempt.

He found her again in the garden looking sadly at Paul and pinching him cautiously to see if he was in good condition for eating.

"To-morrow," she said, "Paul will be perfectly ripe. Oh, Matteo, you must beat that fearful Ethiopium or else you will not eat Paul at my wedding feast."

You see it was "my" now, not "our" wedding feast. Even the Princess had lost confidence in Matteo. And so would you if you had seen the elegance of Zerubbabel in the public square.

Poor Matteo choked down a sob and said as bravely as he could that all would be well, but he knew that he could never be as elegant as Zerubbabel. He was dreadfully low in his mind. After a time he went sadly away, for the Princess would do nothing but groan and Matteo could not bear it.

The Princess wept when he had gone. "Oh," she cried, "to-morrow I shall be married to that horrible negro, I know I shall. Whatever am I to do?" And she shed tears all over Paul the water-melon, and then she noticed that he was beginning to grow bigger. "Oh," she sobbed, "Paul is growing bigger, and to think that my poor Matteo will not eat him." And she wept afresh, and the more she wept the bigger and fatter and riper and more enormous grew Paul until he was about as large as a wardrobe and no one had ever seen such a water-melon. Until at last he positively burst with ripeness and from the opening in his skin came a little soft voice which said, "Offer me as second prize."

"Oh," sobbed the Princess, "even Paul knows that my poor dear Matteo is going to be beaten and he wants to console him. But I'm afraid that not even Paul can do that. But he can do it better than anything else so I will take his advice."

The next day the crowd in the public square was simply terrifying. The shooting galleries and the Maze of Mirrors were obliged to shut up for lack of custom, and as for the Boxing Kangaroo and the Fat Lady they were out with the rest pushing and staring to see the elegance of the Ethiopium of which they had heard so much. Soap boxes were let out in halves at half a crown a time.

The King and Princess came into their box, the trumpets blew a blast and the four bands struck up "Bill Bailey," "Stars and Stripes for ever," "The overture from *Tannhäuser*," and the "Blue Danube Waltz" simultaneously. It was a thrilling moment.

Prince Matteo and the elegant Ethiopium stepped out from opposite sides of the square, met in the middle, shook hands and walked together up to the royal box to salaam before the King. All eyes were, of course, riveted on the two heroes, and it was not until they arrived at the box that everyone noticed that an enormous water-melon, bearing a ticket marked "Second Prize" had been lifted up on the parapet of the box by the Princess.

Matteo of course recognised Paul and thought, "How kind of my dear Princess. She knows that I shall not win her and she offers, to console me, that superb vegetable in which we have both taken such interest and pride. Well, I will not eat a morsel of it without thinking first of her."

But Zerubbabel's great eyes rolled nearly out of his head with excitement.

"My sakes," he cried, "dat am a bully water-million. Say, honey," he went on addressing the Princess, "yo gwine give dishyere sure-enough water-million fer de secon' prize?"

The Princess nodded. She would not speak.

"Golly," said Zerubbabel, but his mouth watered so extravagantly at the sight of Paul that he could say no more.

The King gave the signal and Matteo began to exhibit his elegance. Now you must not think that because he was down in the mouth about his chance that he did not mean to do his very best. Not at all. Matteo had plenty of determination and he had made up his mind that he wasn't going to be beaten by an indiarubber Ethiopium without putting up a good fight. So he danced his very finest for an hour and a half while the people applauded and the Princess's eyes shone like stars to see his graceful ease, to say nothing of his easy grace.

But Zerubbabel could do nothing but look at the water-melon.

And the longer he looked the larger Paul seemed to be and the softer and the riper. Little cracks appeared in him and from every one exuded a delicious pink juice, till at last Zerubbabel would have given his right hand for a bite.

Matteo stopped dancing and everyone cheered themselves hoarse, partly in compliment to Matteo and partly because, now that he had done they knew that the Elegant Ethiopium would begin. And they had chiefly come to see him.

But when Zerubbabel stepped out into the middle of the square he was thinking of the water-melon, and when he raised his left foot for his first step he was thinking of the water-melon, and before he could make a single movement he thought, "If I beat the Prince I get the Princess, but I love the water-melon."

And at this awful thought the spring all went out of him and he began to dance worse than a bear on the end of a string. He jumped clumsily around for a few minutes and then stopped.

"That," said the people, nudging each other, "was only his fun. That is to show us how the competitors danced. Now he will begin." And they applauded him to the echo. It was easy to see that he was the popular favourite.

But Zerubbabel made his bow, smiled and said:

"Haow's dat?" And all the time he was ogling the water-melon.

"How's that?" roared the populace. "Rotten! Is that all he's going to do?"

"Yass," said Zerubbabel.

"Down with him," howled some of the populace. "Duck him in the pond. Lynch him. Tear him to pieces."

"Give us back our money," yelled the rest, quite forgetting that the whole thing was free.

"Prince Matteo is the winner," said the King hastily, "and Zerubbabel takes the second prize." With these words he handed the Princess to Matteo with one hand and the water-melon to Zerubbabel with the other.

But as he clutched it Zerubbabel saw the populace rushing upon him from all sides armed with clubs. Even the Fat Lady was trying to get at him and the Boxing Kangaroo was taking off its gloves in a very threatening manner.

“I guess,” he thought, “it’s time Zerubbabel vamoosed de ranche,” which is Ethiopium for escaping.

Then he clutched Paul, the water-melon, to his bosom with one arm and, describing a dozen rapid circles in the air with the other to give himself impetus, he bent his knees and with one tremendous leap sprang completely out of sight.

Everybody stood gaping and wondering where he had gone except the Prince and Princess, who were locked in one another’s arms and didn’t care if it snowed pink.

DENIS MACKAIL

*Starvation Corner*  
*Bradsmith was Right*

Denis Mackail comes of an artistic and literary family, being the son of a former Professor of Poetry at Oxford and grandson of Burne-Jones. His books are noted for their amusing and lifelike delineation of character, and the most popular of them are probably *Bill the Bachelor*, *The Flower Show*, and *Greenery Street*.



## STARVATION CORNER

TO say that the news of Mrs. Gilchrist's remarriage staggered her immense circle of friends and acquaintances would be exaggerating slightly, because although that circle is always ready to throw up its hands and eyes and to exclaim, "My dear! How absolutely *astounding!*" it is, as a matter of fact, actually astounded by little or nothing; being, to speak the plain truth, a circle which has for years so cheapened the art of astonishment that the spectacle of a blue buffalo riding a bicycle down Bond Street would find its vocabulary already exhausted, and its emotions largely atrophied by the number of previous occasions on which they have been simulated in the cause of mere social civility.

Nevertheless—and no one hopes more than we do that we'll never write such a long sentence as that last one again—it was undoubtedly unexpected and unquestionably surprising. For though Mrs. Gilchrist was both rich and hospitable, she was neither young nor exactly beautiful. And though she was good-natured and good-tempered, no one had ever suspected her of being passionate or romantic. And though she was certainly a slight snob—and so are the rest of us, when we're not howling ones—this very fact, you'd have thought, must have precluded all possibility of the man's title having anything to do with it.

Any rich woman, after all, may be excused for marrying an English duke or an English earl. But surely no one can have known better than Mrs. Gilchrist that a foreign nobleman is, if anything, something more to be ashamed of than to be regarded as the very meanest kind of prize. Why, even Americans, in these days, have learnt better than to indulge in such pointless extravagance.

So the circle was reduced to saying that Baron Bollheim—who was known to be hard up, and was patently plain, dull and middle-aged—had married Mrs. Gilchrist for her money.

Yet several of them had tried to perform this feat themselves and they'd failed, and it wasn't very flattering to feel that they'd failed where a foreigner had succeeded. But of course, they said, this had been his object, and Sir John Peppercorn, who had tried three times, said—mark his words—the thing was bound to come to a smash.

It didn't, though. Or at any rate it hasn't, up to the moment of going to press. The Baron and Baroness are still living together in the greatest comfort and happiness, either in the large house in London or the still larger house in the country. They still entertain lavishly, under the direction and with the assistance of Birkin, Mrs. Gilchrist's incomparable butler. Sixteen or eighteen to dinner are still nothing in either of those sumptuous establishments, while, when the Stockbury Race Week comes round, these numbers are still nearly doubled in that immense Palladian mansion with its two thousand acres of park.

The Baron is certainly stouter than he was, the Baroness is—to be quite frank about it—no thinner. But she's still a perfect hostess, and her husband is a most amiable and unobtrusive host. Say, if you like, that he's fallen on his feet; the fact remains that their marriage is a success, that they seem to suit each other, and that even if it was a misunderstanding which first brought them together, and a further misunderstanding which led to the linking of their lives, they still have something so essential in common that nothing now looks like driving them apart.

What's more, we happen to know what it is. What's still more, we happen to be in a position to give you a full account of both these misunderstandings. Shall we give it you, then? Well, of course. We've practically promised it you already, and at this stage you'd hardly have us start a story about somebody else.

The opening scene took place in Mrs. Gilchrist's London drawing-room some three or four years ago and some five or six days before the Stockbury Races. Mrs. Gilchrist, who kept and still keeps a secretary, has always taken a close personal interest in the less sordid details of household management—she likes, for instance, to glance at the luncheon and dinner menus shortly after breakfast, and frequently suggests little additions to them—and this morning, as usual, she was working away at her satinwood writing-bureau, with Miss

Barnforth, her devoted subaltern, hovering in the background, when a slight cough by the doorway caused her to turn her head, and she beheld Birkin, her incomparable butler.

"Yes, Birkin?" she said, turning back again. "Did you want to speak to me?"

"If," said the butler, "you could possibly spare a moment, madam?"

"Go on," said Mrs. Gilchrist, scratching away with her pen. "What is it?"

"I'm afraid, madam," said Birkin, "I have rather bad news for you. I'm very sorry to tell you, madam, that I shall have to leave you for a few days."

"What!" said Mrs. Gilchrist, spinning right round this time. "But you can't, Birkin! What on earth are you talking about?"

It was then that she noticed that her perfect butler was not only pale green in the face, but was actually clinging to the back of a genuine Chippendale chair.

"Birkin!" she cried. "What's happened? Are you ill?"

"I'm afraid so, madam. I appreciate the inconvenience, madam, but I've just been to see my doctor, madam, and he's ordered me to go into hospital at once. It appears, madam, that I am suffering from acute appendicitis. He informs me, madam, that it will be necessary to operate immediately."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Gilchrist. "This is too tiresome, Birkin. Quite right to tell me, of course, and, of course, it's not your fault——"

"Thank you, madam."

". . . but there's this big house-party for the races next week, and really, Birkin, I don't see how I'm going to manage without you. What on earth am I to do?"

"Well, madam," said the butler, writhing slightly in spite of himself, "I've thought of that, naturally, madam. I think if Alfred were to take my place temporarily, and if my nephew, whom I can thoroughly recommend, were to come in as an extra footman, then there need be very little disorganization, madam, during my absence. In fact, madam——"

"Oh, dear! Yes, I suppose you're right, Birkin. I suppose that's the only thing we can do. Can you make the necessary arrangements before leaving?"

"I was about to add, madam, that I've taken the liberty of making them just now. My nephew will be here in time for

luncheon to-day, madam. So if you could excuse me, madam——”

“What? Well, it’s very annoying, Birkin, but, of course, it can’t be helped. I shall miss you very much, but I quite see your little difficulty. I suppose I can count on your being back in about a fortnight?”

“I trust so, madam. Thank you very much, madam. I’m very much obliged to you, madam, indeed.”

And the peerless Birkin released his grip on the Chippendale chair-back, and lurched towards the doorway and vanished from sight; while to spare you any possible anxiety on his behalf, we may add that his operation was completely successful, that he made a swift recovery, that he returned to his duties in the stipulated period, and that to the best of our knowledge he has never been near any kind of doctor since.

But of course Mrs. Gilchrist was upset, and of course she was a little flustered and flurried—who wouldn’t be, with nearly thirty guests arriving to stay next week?—and of course she felt it was just her luck that at this moment Miss Barnforth should return from the telephone to inform her that one of them had failed.

“Really,” she protested, almost petulantly for anyone so good-natured, “it almost seems that Fate’s against me to-day. And a man, too! I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve this, dear Miss Barnforth, but I can’t really remember when I’ve had so much trouble all at once. Now, whom shall we ask? Where’s my address book?”

And Miss Barnforth ran to get it, and Mrs. Gilchrist began relieving her feelings by making hay of all the papers on her satinwood writing-bureau. And, whether Fate were against her or for her, the fact remains that in doing so she came on Baron Boris Bollheim’s visiting-card, and she wondered who he was and how it had got there. And she asked Miss Barnforth, who had again returned, and Miss Barnforth who hadn’t the faintest idea, but was extremely desirous of soothing her kind employer, said: “Oh, I think someone brought him to your musical party last week. I suppose he called afterwards.”

“Very polite of him,” said Mrs. Gilchrist. “People are getting very slack nowadays, Miss Barnforth. Just give me that book.”

But though she began searching for possible names in it,

her mind still lingered on the civility of this very punctilious Baron. An attention like that, and in these days, she felt, certainly deserved something in return. She looked at the card again, and saw that the pencilled address was of a street that she'd never heard of. But then, there must be lots of streets that she'd never heard of, and if he were a stranger, and only here for a short time, one oughtn't to judge him by that. After all, he'd been a guest under her roof, and nobody would bring anyone here who wasn't quite all right.

"I'll ask Birkin," she thought. And then she thought: "Bother! I can't ask him." And then she thought: "I shall wear myself out if I worry any more. After all, he must be a gentleman, and it was particularly polite of him to call like that. I'll try him, anyhow. After all, there aren't any foreigners coming, and I always think that an odd one goes rather well."

So she closed the address book, and she informed Miss Barnforth of her decision, and she picked up her pen again and issued the invitation there and then. And Miss Barnforth stamped it. And Percy, the third footman, took it out and posted it. And it reached West Kensington at six o'clock that very afternoon.

To the great surprise of Baron Bollheim, in his bed-sitting-room, because he had now been in England nearly six weeks, and he had called at a quantity of large houses during that period, and once or twice he'd got as far as the hall before they'd turned him out again; but in the case of Mrs. Gilchrist—whose name and address he remembered distinctly—the butler had not only said "Not to-day, thank you," but had practically slammed the door in his face.

To which act the incomparable Birkin had been prompted, first by having previously observed the Baron ringing a number of other door-bells (a spectacle easily visible from his pantry), and, secondly, by the cardboard box under the Baron's left arm. "I'll teach them to come here a-touting and a-hawking," the incomparable Birkin had muttered. And in a spasm of annoyance, considerably exacerbated by a twinge from his appendix, he'd hurried to the door in place of Alfred, and we've told you what happened there.

A further twinge must have accounted for his overlooking the card which had simultaneously fallen from the visitor's palsied hand, had subsequently been found, and had eventu-

ally reached the satinwood writing-bureau. But if anyone thinks that the experienced Birkin had erred in his diagnosis of the visitor's intentions, then we can only assure them that they are in grave error themselves.

For the Baron, in common with the rest of his vast family, had lost all his money in a succession of political and financial disturbances, and had been virtually penniless now for quite a number of years. He'd come to England partly because of a legend as yet lingering in his own part of Europe that it was still rich and still welcomed distressed and destitute foreigners, and partly with the hope of taking a few orders for the very ugly embroidery emanating from the region of his former family estates.

All of which goes to show that while his heart may conceivably have been pure gold, his head was nothing whatsoever to write home about. Because you know, and we know, that England isn't at all like that, and, as Baron Bollheim could hardly fail to discover, it seems capable of producing all the ugly embroidery that it requires at home.

So that the soles of his shoes wore thinner and thinner, and the meals in his bed-sitting-room became smaller and fewer, and the hopes with which he had landed grew feebler and fainter; and altogether, if he hadn't been the victim of several centuries of in-breeding and slow thinking, he must have realized that this wasn't the way to restore his fortunes, and must have cut his losses, and already have pawned the remains of his wardrobe so as to return whence he came.

But if you knew how many months it had taken him to plan this disastrous campaign, you might understand some of the mental obstacles in the way of abandoning it. And now, when this surprising invitation reached him, it didn't really strike him that anything at all inexplicable had occurred. The English, he had always heard, were phlegmatic on the surface, but warm-hearted below. Perhaps this Mrs. Gilchrist had met some of his relations in the days of their former glory. Or perhaps she was merely a lover of his beloved but unhappy country. Possibly, again, she had been a witness of his expulsion and now wished to apologise in the most gracious and tactful manner. If so, she might be assured that he would never refer to the affair. As for the butler, a Bollheim would never dream of avenging himself on a character like that.

So of course he'd accept, and he did accept—in the third

person, in rather poor English, and on exceedingly cheap note paper. And Miss Barnforth opened his letter and noted its contents and informed Mrs. Gilchrist, who nodded and looked relieved. On the following Monday the Baron packed his shabby suitcase, and put a new bit of string round his cardboard box, and proceeded first by omnibus to St. Pancras and then in a third-class carriage to Great Waddington, and alighted; and as he was the only guest who hadn't come in his or her own car, was then wafted in one of Mrs. Gilchrist's three limousines through some very rich-looking country and presently through an even richer-looking park.

And his soul expanded, and he forgot the chauffeur's look of amazement when he'd said that this was all his luggage and that he hadn't brought a man, and he bounced luxuriantly on the upholstery and sniffed up the air which was so very different from that of West Kensington, and never gave a thought to the butler—and, of course, wasn't reminded of him on his arrival, because, of course, Alfred, the first footman, had temporarily taken his place.

"This way, sir," said Alfred, who was actually far more nervous than the guest. And he led him over some very thick carpets and up a couple of very shallow steps, and bent to ask his name, and then bellowed it at a vast hall full of men and women in exceedingly costly tweeds.

"Baron Bollheim!" bawled Alfred. And some of the men and women looked round, and one or two of them started without looking round, and the majority of them went on talking. But as a stoutish lady on a sofa near the fireplace appeared to be making considerable efforts to rise to her feet and was already waving a fat arm at him, the Baron had little doubt that here was his hostess. He approached her rapidly, he clicked his heels, he bowed from the waist, he brushed the back of her hand with his bristly little moustache.

"Zo 'appy," said Baron Bollheim. "It ees most kind. Very naïs. Zo glad!"

And Mrs. Gilchrist couldn't actually remember having seen him at her musical party, but still had no doubt—and she regarded herself as a bit of an authority on this subject—that he was a gentleman. And of course, she thought, foreigners went to queer tailors (for the Baron's suit was certainly a good deal too large for him) and had different ideas about what one wore in the country (for apart from his green and yellow tie

one would have said that he was in mourning). But, on the other hand, she had obviously made no mistake about his manners, and she had quite taken to him already, and she didn't the least regret having invited him, and she only hoped he'd enjoy himself.

"I'm delighted," she said, "that you could manage it at such short notice. And I'm so sorry I was out when you called the other day. You're having a good time in England, I hope?"

The Baron bowed again, and made a kind of buzzing sound. Three sentences at once had been a little too much for him, but again there was no question that he meant to be polite.

"Well," said Mrs. Gilchrist, "now I must introduce you to the rest of the party, dear Baron Bollheim." And she began doing this, and the Baron kept on clicking and bowing and buzzing, and received a quantity of off-hand nods and phlegmatic glances, but hadn't really expected anything else in Great Britain, and was a long way from feeling any umbrage or pique. No, the only thing that distressed him at all was the sight of a number of footmen removing the tea-things—for he'd had the lightest of continental breakfasts and hardly any lunch, while it had never crossed his mind to make use of the restaurant car on the train.

But of course Mrs. Gilchrist didn't know this, and though even at this late hour Birkin would certainly have appeared with a fresh kettle and more scones, Alfred was too much pre-occupied with his new responsibilities at a really big dinner to give anything else more than a passing thought.

So tea was cleared away, and the Baron was extremely hungry. And when presently he learnt that they weren't dining until half-past eight, his pangs became nearly insupportable, and he almost jumped at his hostess's suggestion that he should be shown his room, because he had a wild hope that there might be a jar of biscuits by his bedside.

But there wasn't. There were six towels in the adjoining bathroom, there were fourteen coat-hangers in the wardrobe, there were flowers, books, bath-salts, railway-guides, sticks of sealing-wax, bags of lavender, and even a bootjack. But with none of these could he possibly allay his hunger, while to add embarrassment to his other sufferings, someone had undone his cardboard box and had laid the samples of embroidery

beside his dress-clothes on the bed as if they formed part of some peculiar regalia.

He folded them up and put them away again, because, although he still hoped to produce them at the right moment, he was pretty certain that this would be later on and not to-night. He had a bath to kill time, and wished he hadn't because for some reason it seemed to have aggravated his symptoms. He dressed, he heard a gong booming, he rushed downstairs and nearly fell over Birkin's nephew bearing an armful of logs.

"That was only the dressing-bell, sir," said Birkin's nephew, a little stiffly. Baron Bollheim hurried quickly upstairs again, and alternately marched round his bedroom and lay exhausted on a *chaise-longue*, until at last the gong boomed again. But if he'd thought this meant food, he still wasn't familiar with the customs of the English upper classes. He spent ten minutes quite alone in the yellow drawing-room before he was joined by one shy girl who seemed to regard him with suspicion and horror. During the next ten minutes hardly more than a handful of guests came to join them. And it wasn't until practically nine o'clock that Mrs. Gilchrist herself descended, and Alfred opened the folding doors and a delicious smell came out and the large house-party trooped in.

The dinner-table, as you may imagine, was a fine sight with all its cutlery and napery and flowers and silver. And the customary confusion took place while the guests searched for their names on bits of gilt-edged pasteboard, and dodged each other at the corners, and hustled to and fro, and so gradually sorted themselves into the pattern which Miss Barnforth had so skilfully devised.

But at last they were seated, and at last Baron Bollheim could draw in his chair, unfurl his napkin, and prepare—for the first time since reaching England, and never had he needed it more—to cram himself with first-class food. On his left was Lady Doldrum, on his right was one of the Trundle twins, and he had certainly spared a moment to bow once more to them both. But it was the elaborate and lengthy menu in front of him that really riveted his attention.

His eyes glittered as they took in course after course. Almost, he thought, this instant had been worth the Spartan hours and weeks which had preceded it. At last that which

had been nothing but a dream during all those nightmare years of poverty was about to come true.

Judge, then, of the shock to his soul when, after some delay, a soup-plate was placed in front of him containing possibly one fluid ounce of soup. A plate which was definitely damp, but from which it was impossible, with the means at his disposal, to extract more than a fraction of even that which was there.

Was this England, he asked himself? He glanced at his neighbours, and saw them both sluicing down spoonful after spoonful. He looked across the table, and saw everyone gulping and gurgitating. It seemed incredible that this slight should have been intentional, but it was none the less painful—nay, it was agonising—to sit here, faint with hunger, while these well-fed guests all dipped and lapped.

His so-called soup was removed, and a warm, flat, virgin plate was substituted. The menu announced *Truite au Bleu*, and, with an eager, sidelong glance, he saw the great dish approaching from the right. Nearer and nearer it came, and more and more anxiously he watched it. It reached the Trundle twin. There was one fish left on it. She helped herself. She helped herself to the accompanying sauce. Baron Bollheim was offered nothing at all, and when he turned again to see how Lady Doldrum was getting on, you may judge once more of his unspeakable emotion as he observed that she was munching and swallowing with gusto.

And so, it seemed, was everyone else wherever he looked. The system, as he gathered—after being offered little more than a few drops of gravy in place of the entrée—was that duplicate dishes set off in a clockwise direction from two given points, until everyone, in theory, had been served. And one of these points appeared to be his left-hand neighbour, who thus got first pick every time, while the other—immediately opposite her—seemed to originate with his hostess herself.

He looked curiously to see if there were a corresponding victim on Mrs. Gilchrist's right, but either there must have been more in one set of dishes than the other, or else there were some particularly voracious guests in his own half-circle, for the gentleman occupying that favoured position was obviously gorging with the rest and the best.

And of course the unfortunate Baron didn't realize (as Birkin would have realized) that one must always allow extra

for any section containing Lord Pudsey. And of course he didn't realize (as Birkin would have realized) that it was a solecism on Alfred's part to be starting either section with the hostess. He assumed, as, to do her justice, Mrs. Gilchrist was also assuming, that the service in a house like this would be conducted in accordance with the traditions of the country. Neither of them had any idea how Alfred's heart was twittering behind his unaccustomed uniform, or of the terrible strain produced by his unexpected promotion.

Mrs. Gilchrist, in short, was talking gaily, getting plenty to eat, and thoroughly enjoying herself. Baron Bollheim, on the other hand, suffering from the torments of Tantalus, found his few words of English rapidly deserting him, and made but a poor companion for either of his more fortunate neighbours.

"Hullo!" said Imogen Trundle, helping herself to the last of the *Bombe Surprise*. "Starvation corner again. Bad luck, Baron!"

In attempting to laugh at this sally, which he hadn't altogether appreciated or understood, the Baron attracted Lady Doldrum's attention, and she repeated the curious phrase.

"Well, you *are* in starvation corner!" she said, ladling up some more chocolate sauce. "Never mind, Baron. Make up for it another time, eh? Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" said Baron Bollheim faintly. Then it was a British joke, he supposed; one of those inexplicable national habits with which these people amused themselves in their terrible climate. Courtesy demanded that he should pretend to join in the fun, but if they thought they were going to catch him the same way again—well, he was on to it now, and he'd marked down the safest and best place at the whole table, and he might be a foreigner but he wasn't a fool, and he mightn't be asked again, but he knew good cooking when he saw it, and if he survived till to-morrow he knew just what he was going to do. Starvation corner, indeed! What a country to have invented a game and a phrase like that! Well, someone else was going to sit in it after to-night. He, Baron Bollheim was going to plant himself right next the hostess who had permitted this abominable outrage.

And not on the risky side, either. On the side where the dishes would be full.

Well, it's just possible that some of this boldness was the

courage of despair, or that some of it may at the moment have been due to the amount of champagne which he had poured into an otherwise empty stomach. Yet if the Baron were dull—and nobody has ever denied it—he was also stubborn and determined. When he went to bed that night the fumes had left him—and he was also a little exasperated to find that his embroidery had again been unpacked and put out with his pyjamas—but he was still quite resolute and fixed in his decision.

At breakfast there was, of course, every opportunity for stuffing himself silly, but there were no grounds that he could see for altering the healthy habits of a lifetime, and rolls, butter and coffee were all that passed his lips. Being no great believer in exercise—apart from shooting at trapped pigeons, of which he knew there was no chance in this sad island—he spent the morning huddled over the fire in the smoking-room, leaving it to the other guests to face the abominably cold wind outside.

But at lunch time he roused himself and was ready. As the party once more streamed into the dining-room, he leapt in front of Lord Pudsey—who had been expressly invited to sit on the hostess's left—seized the back of the chair, and held it at such an angle that his lordship was compelled to find accommodation elsewhere. There were no gilt-edged cards at luncheon, you see, and his action was so swift and unexpected that even Mrs. Gilchrist didn't realise what had happened until she turned from helping herself to the caviare, and found him ensconced.

"Oh!" she said, just a trifle taken aback. "Good morning Baron. I hope you slept well?"

"It ees most kind," said the Baron. "Very naīs, thank you, please. Ach!" he added, as an arm offered him the jar on its bed of cracked ice. "Ze pale Astrachan. Goot!"

"I'm so glad you like it," said Mrs. Gilchrist, warming immediately to this appreciation of her special shipment. "I have it imported direct, you know."

"Goot!" said the Baron. "I laike it zo. It ees deleeshus, yess!"

Well, there they were, and this was the bond that we mentioned at the outset, and Lord Pudsey might puff and snort in the offing: might terrify Mrs. Wallaby on his left and the

other Trundle twin on his right with his baffled and bloodshot appearance; but his hostess, it seemed, had forgotten all about him. She was telling Baron Bollheim—a most sympathetic listener—of the difficulty she'd had in getting asparagus from the South of France. And the Baron was throwing a lot of interesting light on the subject of paprika.

And time flew, and luncheon was over, and the house-party all set off for the races, and the Baron found it a little bleak in the Members' Enclosure, and retired to one of the limousines and slept in it until they all returned for an extremely hearty tea. And at about eight o'clock Miss Barnforth again went round the big dining-room distributing those gilt-edged cards. And twenty minutes later Baron Bollheim entered the same apartment, with a furtive but inflexible air, and examined her handiwork, and made what he considered a very necessary and desirable alteration.

So that again he was on the hostess's left, and Major Hobstock was away between two débutantes, and Mrs. Gilchrist thought: "I must really speak to dear Miss Barnforth about this," and yet again found a strange stimulus in a conversation which never once left the topic of food.

"I must say," she thought, "that the dear Baron's most delightfully easy." And she compared him in her mind with some of her other guests, and thought how nice it was to find a man who was really interested in cooking, and yet was so simple and unaffected, and must obviously rather like her, otherwise why should he have ousted dear Lord Pudsey at luncheon?

She'd have been suspicious if he'd paid her any personal compliments; or if, again, he'd been arch or flirtatious like poor, dear Sir John Peppercorn. She'd had plenty of guests like that, and she'd seen through them quickly enough, and they were after her money—that was all—and they weren't going to get it.

"I've had enough of marriage," thought Mrs. Gilchrist, paying a passing tribute to her late husband, who'd cost her so much and of whom otherwise the less said the better. "And yet," thought Mrs. Gilchrist, "if someone *really* cared for me . . . Well, I'm getting a little silly, perhaps. But, you know, I haven't met anyone like this for years."

She was surprised to find her heart distinctly throbbing—and not, for once, from that tiresome indigestion—when the Baron again rushed to the same place at luncheon next day. Again his manner was staid and respectful, and his conversation confined entirely to victuals and drink; yet surely she was beginning to guess his secret. Surely it was more than mere politeness which had caused him almost to thrust dear Admiral Buzzard out of the way.

She wondered. She wondered all afternoon at the races. She was still wondering in her bedroom before dinner, when there was a soft knock at the door, and Miss Barnforth entered looking a little pink.

“Yes, dear Miss Barnforth?” said Mrs. Gilchrist.

“If I could speak to you a moment——”

“Certainly,” said Mrs. Gilchrist. She waved her maid, Dawlish, into the background. “Yes?” she said.

“Oh, Mrs. Gilchrist—I really think I ought to tell you. I went into the dining-room just now—I thought I’d left a pencil there when I was arranging the places—and—and——”

“Why, what is it, dear Miss Barnforth? Don’t try and alarm me!”

“Oh, Mrs. Gilchrist, Baron Bollheim was in there, and he was changing the cards, and——”

“And why not?” asked Mrs. Gilchrist majestically. “Do you think I employ you to spy on my guests? Do you suppose that continental customs are always the same as ours? Why, I never heard such a ridiculous fuss about a mere trifle!”

Miss Barnforth slunk away. Mrs. Gilchrist came down looking almost radiant for one of her age and weight. Yes, the Baron was next her again, and if people chose to talk—well, let them! One can’t deny that the hostess was a little arch herself that evening. No change was apparent in the Baron, but, of course, she thought, she only admired him the more for his iron self-control.

And so the rest of the Race Week went by, and the Baron put on nearly seven pounds, and Mrs. Gilchrist actually lost five ounces as the comedy continued and the *dénouement* was still delayed. Naturally, she must attend to her other guests between meals—and between meals she sometimes found herself wondering whether she mightn’t be mistaken after all.

But at luncheon and dinner her doubts left her—why, on Thursday night she'd actually crept down to see him changing the cards herself—and surely before he left he must speak, and surely when he spoke she would find peace and contentment at last.

Yet it was Saturday morning now, and the guests were leaving—preparatory to a fresh influx for the week-end—and still he'd said nothing, and Mrs. Gilchrist was for once paler than her powder as suspense gnawed at her deeply buried vitals.

"I must have air," she thought; and she was just on the point of ringing for Alfred to send someone to open the blue boudoir window, when suddenly Baron Bollheim himself appeared on the threshold, bearing a somewhat battered cardboard box.

"Baron!" she cried. "You were looking for me?"

"Excuse it, pleez," said her noble guest. "Somezing I haf here for you important in zis box."

"For me!" cried Mrs. Gilchrist. "Not really? Oh, Baron Bollheim!"

"Zese embroidery," said the Baron imperturbably. "I do not veesh to trouble you too soon, but I hope you shall like him. I bring him from my dear country where ze peasants fabricate him, and it ees my great hope——"

"Oh, Baron, you want me to have it! What, all these beautiful pieces? Oh, Baron, you mustn't really be so generous!"

"It ees not generosity, pleez. Pleez do not misonderstandt. It ees all I haf; but your so great kindness encourage me——"

"Oh, Baron!" murmured Mrs. Gilchrist. "I do understand. I guessed, you see. I couldn't help guessing, when all this week I've felt you trying not to tell me. And don't speak of 'all you have' like that. I live simply enough, as you see, but I've enough for both of us, and I think Fate sent you to me, and—oh, Boris—you won't leave me, will you? You'll stay and look after me, won't you? Oh, Boris—give me just one little, tiny kiss!"

Well, the Baron may have been dull, but he knew which side his bread was buttered, and he was fifty-four and Mrs. Gilchrist admitted to forty-nine, and romance mightn't be quite in his line, but comfort and good cooking were right up

his street. He accepted the situation, and both he and the Baroness—as we told you a long time ago—have been extremely happy ever since.

Of course, Birkin was a bit surprised when he came back from the hospital. But Birkin remained incomparable, and he's still in a very good situation, too.

## BRADSMITH WAS RIGHT

**B**RADSMITH, who is a successful author and therefore a law to himself, had swept across my orbit as I was weighing the risks of crossing Waterloo Place, and, as is his successful and autonomous way, he had made his presence known by slapping me violently on the back—thereby all but precipitating me into the gutter.

“Haven’t seen you for ages,” he shouted. “Which way are you going?”

I had just been dining alone at the Club, and was thinking of going home; but somehow or other one can never tell Bradsmith that one is going home. His vitality makes this impossible.

I hesitated.

“Well, walk up with me to the Corona,” he went on, taking my elbow and urging me forward into the traffic. “And tell me all your news. How’s——”

Here he broke off to nod at a man who was crossing the road from the other side.

“Hullo, Tommy!” he sang out.

“’lo, Braddy, old boy,” replied the stranger.

An omnibus then came thundering down on us. The stranger ran for his life, and Bradsmith dragged me forward on to the pavement.

“That was Tommy Trent,” he informed me. “Used to play in my shows in America. Glad he didn’t stop.”

I have noticed before that successful authors are always glad when actors who have played in their shows do not stop. I have often wondered why this is, but it was no use asking Bradsmith at the moment because—well, I couldn’t very well interrupt him.

“Yes,” he was saying, as we swung up the hill together, “I’ve been meaning to look you up for weeks, but you know what it is. Work. Rehearsals. Running around and seeing fellows. I tell you—— Oh, hullo, Wally! How’s yourself?”

A second stranger had suddenly sprung up in our path. A gaunt man, with a very wide-brimmed hat worn slightly on one side.

"'lo, Braddy, old man," he replied. "I say——"

"Can't stop," shouted Bradsmith, while I panted by his side. "Come and have lunch one day. What? Yes. I'll call you up."

The gaunt man fell back—no one who hadn't got Bradsmith's arm through theirs could possibly have kept pace with him—and was swallowed up in the night.

"Walter Daventry," my companion informed me. "Played lead in one of my tours. Glad we gave him the slip."

And on we went.

Crossing Piccadilly Circus we met Arthur Golden—who had played in the film version of one of Bradsmith's books—and a few yards up Shaftesbury Avenue we fell in with Johnnie Pender—who had done well, so Bradsmith advised me, with one of his plays in Australia. Both these gentlemen, however, as well as a fifth mummer whom we met at the corner of Dean Street, but whose name I have forgotten, were dealt with as summarily as their predecessors. They all called Bradsmith "Braddy," and he was no less punctilious in using their Christian names; but having effected this exchange, his one idea seemed to be to shake them off. And this object he invariably achieved.

"Of course," he confided to me, "one can't offend these fellows. Touchy devils, you know. But if I were to stop and listen to all their stories——"

He sighed. And for perhaps as much as a tenth of a second I felt that being a successful author wasn't all jam—even if it were more fun than being a partially successful actor.

"Yes," said Bradsmith, as though reading my thoughts, "it's a ghastly profession. I sometimes wonder. . . ." And then he must have remembered his royalties, for quite suddenly he cheered up.

"I'm sorry we've had so many interruptions," he said, "but I do want to hear all you've been doing. Look here"—an idea seemed to strike him—"I've got to go and see Corbett—something about a new show for one of his theatres—but if only you could wait. . . ." He frowned, as though considering where he could park me. "I've got it!" he

exclaimed. "Come along and see Freddie Barfield. He'll keep you amused."

Fred Barfield—it was thus that he was billed outside the Corona Theatre, where we were now standing—has spent the last twenty years in keeping people amused, in return for a steadily increasing salary, and I had often laughed at him myself from the front of the house. I had no doubt, either, that if he wanted, he could also keep me amused in his dressing-room, while Bradsmith wrestled with his manager upstairs. But why should he be put to this trouble, when he didn't know me from Adam? It hardly seemed fair.

I put this point of view to my friend.

"But Barfield won't want a stranger in his room," I said. "Hadn't we better have our talk another night? I mean, perhaps you could dine with me?"

This hint of opposition brought all Bradsmith's unconquerable spirit bubbling to the surface.

"No, no," he said. "Freddie'll be tickled to death to have you. And, besides, then I shall know you're all right while I'm busy in the office. Come along, old man. I'll take you right in."

If I were conscious, as I was, that the matter had now degenerated into a contest between our wills, quite unconnected with Bradsmith's alleged desire to "hear all my news," it made no difference to the upshot. If Bradsmith wants a thing, he generally gets it. I heard myself giving way.

"Oh, well," I said, "if you're quite sure——"

"Of course I'm sure," he interrupted. "Why, Freddie'd do anything for me."

The thing might have been put more graciously, but this, again, did not affect the issue. Bradsmith caught me once more by the elbow and propelled me down the dark alley in which the patrons of the Corona Pit spend so much of their patient lives. It was not so dark, though, that I could not see Bradsmith's name staring out at me (in company with those of Reginald Gooch, the lyric-writer, and Otto Klinck, the composer) from the huge posters which advertised *Oh, Angeline!* At the far end of the alley—furtive and seductive—was the Stage Door.

Nothing communicates itself more unmistakably to the atmosphere of a theatre than the achievement of a really

big success. You feel it in the air as soon as you approach the building, it grips you by the throat, it tickles your nostrils; if you are at all sensitive, it will even draw ridiculous tears from your eyes. I needed no press-agent to tell me, as Bradsmith flung his body against the swing-doors, that *Oh, Angeline!* was playing to capacity, or that the advance booking was steady for three months ahead. These facts announced themselves as clearly as though Mr. Corbett had been standing there and shouting them out. And, besides, had Bradsmith ever been associated with a failure?

The commissionaire in the door-keeper's den saluted my guide in a congratulatory manner, and offered him a sheaf of about fifty letters.

"Thanks," said Bradsmith, stuffing them immediately into his pocket. He took a deep breath—savouring once more the success of which no man can really tire—and then he turned back to me.

"Come on," he added. "I'll take you up."

He began mounting the wooden stairs—every sixth step marking a right-angled turn—and at the third turn we were suddenly overwhelmed by a bevy of highly-coloured beauties, with print wrappers over their stage dresses, all rushing down for their next contribution to the audience's delight.

"Oh, Mithter Bradthmith!" they squealed. But Bradsmith passed through them like quicksilver.

"Can't stop, children," he called back. "Now, hurry up, or you'll be late."

This fatherly form of address took all offence from his brusquerie. But as the chorus-ladies melted, with another squeal, round the corner, he added in an explanatory murmur:

"Those girls always want something."

Then he knocked loudly on a wooden door.

A little, rat-faced man put his head out, recognised my companion, and withdrew it again.

"It's Mr. Bradsmith, sir," I heard him reporting.

There was a hoarse yell from inside.

"Braddy, old boy! Come and have a drink!"

The door was flung open, and revealed Fred Barfield himself. In order the more convincingly to assume the role of a prince in exile—for it was thus that he was nightly enchanting his admirers—he had attired himself in a pair of very loud check trousers, a pair of elastic-sided boots with white socks,

a bright blue coat with exaggerated flounces round the hips, a canary-coloured waistcoat, and a collar and tie such as no human being has ever worn or will ever wear—except on the musical comedy stage. His face was painted the colour of a ripe cornfield, with strange dashes of blue and red in unexpected places, and he wore the celebrated Barfield wig—a mass of tight curls, descending in a peak over his forehead. He looked extremely hot.

I had always heard, and it is, indeed, almost a canon of fiction, that clowns and comedians are—except when actually at work—the saddest men on earth. Moody, intellectual creatures, they are commonly supposed to spend their off-hours in studying Schopenhauer or tending the sick-beds of their nearest and dearest. Mr. Barfield, however, was clearly tending no sick-bed, nor was it possible to associate him with Schopenhauer. In his own way he was as full of vitality as Bradsmith himself, and he seemed in extraordinarily good spirits.

“Get the glasses, Harry,” he called to the rat-faced dresser; and then he seized Bradsmith by the opening of his waistcoat.

“Now, look here, Braddy, old man,” he said; “I’ve got an absolute knock-out for my second entrance, if only you’ll speak to Daisy about it and tell her not to be so up-stage. Mind you,” he added, as Bradsmith tried to interrupt, “I’m the last fellow to do anything that hurts her part, but it isn’t all her show. If I’m to get a big laugh there, she *must* feed me.”

His rolling eye made an attempt at this point to attach me as a party to his cause, but compelling and appealing as it was, I hadn’t the slightest idea what he was talking about. His technicalities were sheer Greek where I was concerned.

“Plot-stuff’s all very well,” he continued—again cutting Bradsmith short, “but the audience don’t give a hoot for the plot as long as you make ’em laugh. Now, this is my idea——”

Here, in order to illustrate his idea, he incautiously let go of Bradsmith’s waistcoat, and with this freedom the author’s vitality suddenly came out on top.

“We’ll have a talk about it, Freddie,” he said. “But I’ve got a date with the Boss. I’m late as it is.”

“Yes, but——”

“And I want you to look after my friend here”—a parenthetical introduction was shot at us—“until I’m through. You don’t mind, do you?”

Hesitating there in the doorway, I felt quite as uncomfortable as I had feared that I should. How would I like it, if a complete stranger were thrust into my keeping in this unceremonious way, during my few moments of relaxation from an arduous, if highly-paid, job? But I had reckoned without Mr. Barfield's quite exceptional good nature.

"Come along in," he shouted, darting forward and wringing my hand. "What'll you have? Now, then, Harry; where are those glasses?"

I had some notion of excusing myself from this branch of his hospitality, for I had only just finished my dinner. But it was quite useless. A powerful whisky and soda was forced into my hand, and I let it remain there.

"Cigarette?" said Mr. Barfield.

"Oh, thanks, but——"

He had already struck a match, though. It would be churlish to make a fuss about a cigarette. I leant forward to meet the flame, and simultaneously Mr. Barfield jerked it away.

"Oh, Braddy," he cried. "Just a moment, old man——"

But Bradsmith had slipped off to his appointment. Fred Barfield turned back to me with a really delightful smile.

"These authors!" he said.

Contempt inherited through centuries of tradition was summed up in those two words. But there was another note that I seemed also to detect; an amused pity for a class of being which might be pardoned its notorious weaknesses for the sake of its regretted indispensability in the theatre. In a better world, no doubt, the theatre would do without authors. Meanwhile, if it pleased them to give themselves airs, there was no great harm done. Poor mutts, they could scarcely be blamed for swallowing some of the flattery which their friends flung at them in the newspapers.

These, as I read them, were the thoughts of an actor in a long and successful engagement. But I wondered if the great Fred Barfield had ever waylaid an earlier Bradsmith, as the present Bradsmith had been waylaid on his passage through the West End streets to-night. . . .

I can hardly have put this speculation into words, for I am certainly not as tactless as all that. Perhaps, then, it was telepathy which caused Mr. Barfield to entertain me during

my tenancy of one end of his sofa with a selection of anecdotes from his own past. Or perhaps, again, this was his customary habit with strangers.

Mind you, he didn't give me the feeling that he was conceited. Conceit implies something objectionable, and there was nothing objectionable about Fred Barfield. As Bradsmith had foretold, I liked him and he amused me. He took, it was clear, a passionate interest in himself and every detail connected with this subject, but then which of us doesn't? And which of us could reveal this interest with the charm and simplicity, the utter freedom from pose, which characterised my host at the Corona Theatre? Besides, if a comedian mayn't talk about himself in his own dressing-room, then where may he conduct so necessary a part of his existence?

The stories were liable to frequent interruptions, when the united efforts of the rat-faced dresser and the call-boy drew Mr. Barfield down to his work on the stage. It seemed a point of honour with him—and I have noticed this with other stars, too—to run every entrance as fine as he possibly could; and to counteract this tendency, the call-boy and dresser would begin their attempts with a considerable margin of time.

First there would be a double-knock on the door, to which Mr. Barfield paid not the faintest attention. Then a knock and a shout. Then a frenzied shout and a head thrust in through the crack. Then the dresser would begin shuffling his feet. Then the call-boy would come right into the room. Then the dresser would add his vocal entreaties. And finally a mad rush would take place, in which call-boy, dresser and comedian all left the room like a whirlwind, the second of these characters adding finishing touches to his employer's costume as they all three swept down the stairs.

It was a manner of transacting one's business which must, you would have thought, have led almost immediately to a nervous breakdown; but nothing could have been calmer than the great comedian as he returned each time to my presence. A short, reminiscent chuckle, as he noted in his mind the success of his last scene, and at once he would take up the story that he had been telling me exactly where he had left off. It was the last kind of mental concentration which one would have expected from a man like Fred Barfield, but it came so naturally to him, that I was forced to explain it by regarding him as a kind of Jekyll and Hyde. The individual

who was making that huge, unseen audience split its sides was one person, and the man who was playing host to me during Bradsmith's absence was another. For neither of them did the intervals of his other incarnation exist.

You will understand, therefore, that an accurate reproduction of the talk which I am going to pass on to you would include an almost constant series of startling and violent interruptions. But as I have more consideration for your nerves than Mr. Barfield had either for his own or for mine I prefer to telescope the whole thing into a more or less continuous narrative. More realistic treatment would not be without interest, but it would hardly be worth the strain on us both.

Somehow or other, then, Fred Barfield was telling me about his first engagement.

"It was a panto," he said, "at the old Britannia up in Sheffield—*The Babes in the Wood*. We rehearsed four weeks and played for three—twice daily, of course—and by the time I'd paid for my digs, and the agent's fees, and the fines—they'd think nothing of fining you in those days and, of course, being a beginner, I was always doing something I shouldn't—by the time I'd done all that, I say, I was exactly three and sixpence out on the wrong side. Still, it was all experience, you know. And, after all, one thing leads to another. . . ."

Here Mr. Barfield gazed round on his comfortable, if constricted, quarters, and immediately resumed.

"I wouldn't like to tell you," he said, "what my part had got to do with the story, and they changed the name of the character so often that I never really knew what I was called. But I dressed with the two robbers—Clark and Jackman, regular old-style comics—and it wasn't *their* fault that I came through it all alive.

"I don't know why they'd got such a down on me. Honestly I don't. But they'd got it into their heads right at the beginning that I was giving myself airs—you know how easy it is to make people think that when you're shy—and when they found I was in the same dressing-room, they must have thought the Lord had delivered me into their hands.

"They used to hide my clothes, and pinch my make-up, and imitate the way I talked, and not answer when I spoke

to them—yes, and they borrowed money from me, too, though we all knew I'd never see it again. Oh, they gave me hell all right during those Christmas holidays, and they knew I didn't dare complain, because they were bill-toppers—provincial, of course, but still bill-toppers—and I was a miserable beginner without a friend in the company.

“So I stuck it, though I could have murdered the pair of them with pleasure. The first week I tried to please them, the second week I just sulked, and the third week if anyone had said a kind word to me I'd have burst into tears. Well, they're dead now—both of them—and I dare say they were only putting me through what they'd been given themselves when they started. They were a tough lot up North in those days, I can tell you.

“But ragging in the dressing-rooms is one thing, and ragging on the stage is another. And that's where I find it a bit hard to forgive and forget. Of course most of their stuff was the same cross-talk they did on the halls during the rest of the year—and pretty wheezy old stuff it was too. But every now and then they had to remember they were robbers—just in case people should forget it was a pantomime—and it was then that I was fetched in to sort of link 'em on to the rest of the plot.

“I rather think by this time I was called Little Jack Horner—though it may be news to you that he'd anything to do with the *Babes in the Wood*. But anyway I was always bobbing up to ask stupid questions, so that somebody else should answer them, and the audience would know how the story was getting along. Then they'd hustle me off, and some other character would give a band-cue, and the story would go west for the next three scenes.

“When we started rehearsing, I had a sort of love-affair—only on the stage, I mean—with Little Red Ridinghood. Oh, yes, she came into it too. But they cut so much of this that I never knew after we'd opened whether I was supposed to be in love with her or not. And as she didn't know either, you can guess what a puzzle it must have been to the people in front. She was a nice old lady, though. I believe she'd have taken my side if she'd dared, but Clark and Jackman were top dogs in that company, and I couldn't blame her for keeping out of their way.

“But I was telling you about my actual scenes with the old

brutes. I'd only got two, thank heaven—one in each half—but they got me so rattled that I used to come off dripping all over and hanging on to the scenery so I shouldn't fall down. They never dreamt of giving me a proper cue, or if one of them ever did, then the other would jump in before I could open my mouth. And yet I had to get those words out somehow. There was the stage-manager standing there in the corner with the book, and if I came off without saying every one of my lines, it meant another fine. Clark and Jackman knew it, and that was half the sport to them. Of course the book was nothing in their lives. They were sent on to gag, and as a matter of fact Jackman couldn't even read."

I must have murmured my sympathy here, for Mr. Barfield gave a short laugh.

"Oh, well," he said, "I guess it all taught me something. And even if it taught me nothing else, it left me so I've never cut in on another fellow's lines from that day to this. No, sir. I've had good parts and bad parts, I've had laughs I've earned and laughs the other fellow's earned by my feeding him, but I've always played the game, and I hope I always shall."

Mr. Barfield's eyes glistened as he gave utterance to this noble sentiment, and if I hadn't been alone with him, I might very easily have burst into applause. It was true that the "game" to which he referred was trivial compared with others that I had heard of. Still, on a matter of principle he had taken a stand which reflected nothing but honour on him. He, Fred Barfield, was top dog now; and yet he held by the lesson which Messrs. Clark and Jackman had unwittingly taught him all those years ago.

"It does you credit," I said; and so infectious is the atmosphere of a star's dressing-room, that I heard my voice shaking with what sounded very like emotion.

Fred Barfield, however, waved this suggestion aside.

"It's all in the artist's point of view," he said. "Now, what do the public come to this theatre to see?"

A very short while ago I should instantly and conscientiously have answered, "You"—that is, provided that Bradsmith were still out of the room; but somehow this didn't seem to fit the comedian's present attitude. I hesitated, and Mr. Barfield supplied me with the solution.

"They come to see the show," he added.

Well, of course they did. I tried hard to read some meaning into these words which could justify the earnest solemnity of the comedian's expression, but the task was beyond me. He might have been arguing a point of advanced politics or economics—not that I should have understood that any better—but for the life of me I couldn't see that his statement was anything but a platitude, and a very obvious one at that.

Still, I did my best.

"The show," I repeated, frowning slightly.

"Yes," said Fred Barfield. "And that's why an actor should always consider the show before he considers himself. That," he added, staring me right in the eyes, "is what I have always done."

One simply had to believe him. It didn't matter that I had seen him in a score of plays, every one of which had been twisted out of all semblance of proportion by his own overpowering self. It didn't matter that at the beginning of this very interview I had heard him complaining to the author that the leading lady didn't efface herself at one of his entrances. Truth shone from his slightly glossy countenance.

"Quite," I said. "Oh, absolutely."

"You see," he went on, "I've known what it is to have other fellows killing my laughs. I've been through it, and I haven't forgotten."

We were back from the general to the particular, but I was still hypnotized by his tone and manner. And, besides, how could I possibly judge from the front of the house whether a comedian were being funny in a selfish or an altruistic way? These things were known in the profession, but it was enough for me if a comedian were being funny at all. Oh, yes, I entirely believed him.

And at the next resumption of our dialogue, we returned to the history of Messrs. Clark and Jackman.

"Yes," said Fred Barfield, thoughtfully powdering his face, "I remember that first engagement as though it was yesterday. I wasn't brought up to the stage, you know; my people had a business of their own, and they'd always meant me to go into it. I was at a good school, too—won a lot of prizes, what's more—and it was a shock to me when I saw some of the lines in my part. The rhymed stuff, I mean, that these old-fashioned pantos were full of. You needed a

pretty strong constitution to ram some of those verses into any kind of metre, and they thought nothing of rhyming words like 'bath' and 'laugh,' or 'scheme' and 'Fairy Queen.' I had one couplet that went:—

“‘It’s dark and fearsome here in this wood alone;  
I’m sure I wish I’d never left home.’”

“There’s poetry for you. Eh?”

I joined in Mr. Barfield’s laughter, but he cut me short with that well-known movement of one hand that he uses for the same purpose in his professional work. On the stage it always means that a still better joke is just coming, but here it marked a return to the account of his early days.

“But of course,” he resumed, “there was no poetry when the comics were on. There never is. And it was in the second of those scenes I was telling you about—with Clark and Jackman, I mean—that the authors had accidentally given me one good line. I don’t say it was new, even then, but it was a sure-fire laugh, and as a matter of fact Bradsmith has used practically the same thing in his third act here. That’ll show you there wasn’t much wrong with it. You can trust old Braddy there.

“It went like this, you see. We were talking about my brother—not that he’d got anything to do with the play, but they had to plant the line somehow—and Clark had to say to me, ‘Is your brother a truthful man?’ and I had to say, ‘Yes.’ And then Jackman had to say, ‘How do you know your brother’s a truthful man?’ and I had to say: ‘Because he stood for Parliament and didn’t get in.’ That was a big laugh.”

Here Mr. Barfield stopped, and seemed to be waiting for me to say something.

“But do you mean that the audience laughed?” I asked. It seemed inexplicable, but then I had never actually been in Sheffield.

“Why, of course they did,” said Fred Barfield. “And what’s more, they’ll laugh at it again in the third act here to-night. Of course, Braddy’s changed it to ‘uncle’ instead of ‘brother,’ because it comes into a bit of plot. But when Archie Floyd—he’s a nice boy; he’ll do well one day—when he comes out with it, why, I tell you they fairly yell.”

“You mean the audience yell?” I wanted to get it quite clear.

“Lord, yes,” said Fred Barfield. “They simply scream.”

“With laughter, you mean?”

“Rather. Even at *matinées*.”

There could be no hope that I had misunderstood him.

“I see,” I said. “Go on.”

“Well,” continued my host, “at the dress rehearsal of the *Babes* I got that line over so slick that even the band laughed. And I thought to myself, ‘This may be a dud show, and I may have been given the world’s worst part, but at least I’m going to get away with *that*.’ It carried me right through the evening—yes, even when Jackman put the spirit-gum in my shoes—and I’m not sure I didn’t dream of it when I got back to my digs.

“And the next day, walking round all those dirty streets, I tried to think if I couldn’t get it over better still. Not altering the words, you know, because I didn’t dare do that; but saying it faster, or slower, or changing the emphasis, or putting it across with a different kind of wink. You’d be surprised, I dare say, if you realised what a lot there can be in these little details.”

Mr. Barfield’s manner was now so impressive that I found myself revising that first, shallow judgment which had dissociated him from philosophical research. At this moment he might easily—but for his costume and make-up—have been delivering a lecture on Bergson.

“Oh, I’m sure of it,” I murmured. “And—er—did you find a better way of saying the line?”

The calm vanished abruptly from the lecturer’s face, and a look of passion appeared in its stead.

“A fat lot of use it would have been if I had,” he answered fiercely. “Because do you know what happened on the first night—yes, and at every show right through that three weeks’ run?”

I shook my head. Of course I didn’t know.

“I’ll tell you, then,” said the comedian. “Clark used to say to me, ‘Is your brother a truthful man?’ and I said, ‘Yes,’ and Jackman said, ‘How do you know your brother’s a truthful man?’ and then, if you please, and before I could make a sound, Clark—yes, *Clark*—would yell out: ‘Because he stood for Parliament and didn’t get in.’ Do you understand?”

He pinched the whole speech. He took my one and only laugh right out of my mouth, and I had to stand there and listen to the audience's guffaws. Can you beat it?"

It was impossible to beat it. Though the tragedy had occurred when I myself was still at school, and long before the European War, the horror and injustice of it filled me with indignation and disgust. I might, if I had not been under the direct influence of that compelling personality, have found several facts to console me. I might have reminded myself that Clark and Jackman had both passed away, unhonoured and unsung, and that their victim was now permanently established in a West End theatre, the idol of the masses and the test by which all would-be rivals were appraised. I might have reflected that in the long run Heaven had not let the outrage pass unavenged. But at the moment I considered none of these things. The whole force of an individuality which thought nothing of filling the vast auditorium of the Corona was concentrated on me in a room measuring perhaps ten feet by twelve. I went down before it like a ninepin. I had no earthly chance of doing anything else.

"You don't mean it!" I gasped; and for the first time I took a pull at that staggering whisky and soda—now warm and flat from its long sojourn in my hand. "It's—it's incredible!"

Mr. Barfield looked at me in gloomy appreciation of my sympathy.

"It's true," he said.

"But couldn't you do anything?" I asked. "Wasn't there anyone to take your side?"

The great comedian suddenly smiled.

"You bet there was nobody to take my side," he said. "There never is, when you're up against bill-toppers like that. And yet—well, I did have one shot at getting my own back. One shot . . ."

And he smiled again.

I scented the happy ending for which the story positively shrieked, and hastened to draw it from him.

"What was it?" I asked. "What did you do?"

"It was on the last night," said Fred Barfield. "I knew nothing could make Clark and Jackman hate me more than they did, and I knew the management weren't going to engage me again—or if they were, well, next Christmas seemed a very

long way off. Perhaps that sounds as if I'd thought it out before hand ; but I hadn't. Not consciously, anyhow. No, it came to me on the spur of the moment—like some of my best gags do still. And——”

There was an agonising interruption here, while a young man—I gathered that he was the nice boy, Archie Floyd, of whom I had already heard—put his head in at the door, and discussed something so highly technical that I could get no meaning out of it at all. For a musical comedy actor he struck me as a trifle subdued ; but then anyone might seem subdued who burnt their little candle in the great blaze of Fred Barfield's sun. I waited patiently, and presently, with a brief “Thanks awfully, Freddie,” he withdrew.

I turned back to my host.

“You were telling me,” I reminded him, “about the way you got back at Clark and Jackman.”

“Eh ?” said the comedian vaguely.

“At the last performance of the *Babes in the Wood*.”

“Oh, yes.” He picked up the thread this time, and went on. “Well, you see, it all came to me in a flash. If they could jump in on me, then for once, anyhow, I'd jolly well jump in on them. And so I made up my mind—we'd started the scene by then—that when Clark said, ‘Is your brother a truthful man?’ I'd go right to the laugh, and say: ‘Yes. Because he stood for Parliament, and didn't get in.’ It wasn't nearly so good, of course, but if it got as much as a snigger, the snigger would be all mine. It would do Clark out of his laugh, anyway.”

To me there seemed little to choose between the alternative versions from the point of view of imbecility ; but I waited anxiously for the comedian's next words.

“Well ?” I encouraged him.

He shook his head sadly. The happy ending seemed suddenly to fade into the distance and expire.

“Do you mean,” I asked, “that you never said it ?”

He shook his head again.

“I started in to say it,” he answered. “But I never finished. I tell you, old man, you couldn't get past real old-fashioned comics like them. Clark said, ‘Is your brother a truthful man?’ and I took a deep breath and said, ‘Yes——’ And that was just as far as I got.

“It was Jackman, the fellow who couldn't read, who saved

the team. He must have guessed what I was up to from the way I looked at them, and before you could say 'knife,' he'd jumped right in again.

"'Oh, is he!' he said. 'Then he can't be your brother.'

"Clark was mad, and so was I. But if you'll believe me, it got the biggest laugh of the whole run."

At this moment, as I was still feeling a little disappointment with both the climax and the point of the story, we were again set on by the call-boy and the rat-faced dresser, and the great Fred Barfield was again hustled down on to the stage. A few seconds later my old friend Bradsmith put his head cautiously round the door.

"Alone?" he asked. "Well, come along quickly. I don't want Freddie to catch me."

I felt slightly discourteous towards my absent host, but I realised that I must do as I was told. As Bradsmith preceded me along the mysterious corridors, I heard him humming in a jaunty manner which betokened—or so I imagined—a successful issue to his interview with Mr. Corbett. And then, at a dirty iron door, he suddenly stopped.

"I just want to watch a bit of the show from the front," he said. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not," I said—inevitably.

So Bradsmith pushed the door open, and we emerged into a more luxurious corridor.

"This way," he whispered, bounding up a flight of carpeted stairs. I hurried after him, and we found ourselves at the back of the dress-circle. The big stage, set for the eternal third-act supper scene, was flooded with light, and among those present on it were Fred Barfield and Archie Floyd.

"Sh!" said Bradsmith warningly, though I hadn't made a sound. We stood there side by side, leaning on the wooden partition behind the last row of seats. The house was absolutely packed.

Archie Floyd was talking to a gentleman in a species of uniform, and Fred Barfield, his back turned to us for the moment, was industriously engaged in one of those silent conversations with six chorus-ladies which the drama so often requires. It was too late to catch on to the plot, but I listened as attentively as I could.

“Oh,” said the man in uniform, in a very loud voice. “You learnt that from your uncle, did you?”

“Yes,” said Archie Floyd, while I wondered if my tailor could ever turn me out like that, and how I should feel if he did. “From my uncle.”

“Oh,” said the man in uniform. “And is your uncle a truthful man?”

“Certainly,” said Archie Floyd.

“How do you know,” demanded the man in uniform, “that your uncle’s a truthful man?”

I saw Archie Floyd draw breath for his reply, but before he could utter a sound, Fred Barfield—the great Fred—turned suddenly round, and had taken the centre of the stage.

“How does he know?” he asked, leering at us all. “Why, because he stood for Parliament and didn’t get in.”

The laughter converged in a wild roar from every part of the house. But in the darkness by my side I heard Bradsmith—the successful Bradsmith—grinding his teeth.

“Gosh!” he said, thumping the wooden partition in his baffled rage. “*He’s pinched that line again!*”

Then he crushed his hat over his eyes, and fled from the theatre—and me—like a man possessed.

I have not seen him since, and he has still not heard “all my news.” He is a busy man, of course, and it was only a couple of days later that I read in my newspaper that he had sailed for America. But one saying of his still lurks in my memory, even after all the turmoil and confusion of that extraordinary evening.

“It’s a ghastly profession,” was what Bradsmith had said. And it occurs to me that Bradsmith was right.



## CROSBIE GARSTIN

### *Golden Silence*

After an adventurous life as a horsebreaker on Western ranches, sawyer and miner in British Columbia and ranger in Matabeleland, Crosbie Garstin returned to England at the outbreak of the Great War, and soon afterwards began to contribute to *Punch*. He was the author of *Coasts of Romance* and a number of other books.



## GOLDEN SILENCE

I MET Hepplethwaite two miles west of the river drift. He was homeward bound to his store at Mokala, sitting on a waggon, nursing a large square box on his knees as if it were his only child and uninsured at that.

We passed the time of day, agreed that *veld* was scarce, and water scarcer.

Said I: "Wouldn't you find it less warm if you could persuade that packing-case to get off your lap and sit somewhere else?"

"'Fraid of breaking it, it's a gramophone."

"Where did you get it?"

"Took it over from the railway gauger, Kreige, in part payment for some sheep."

"Any records?"

"Only four, but I'll get some more up from Cape Town. I'm rather glad I've got it now; a fellow gets fed up with the everlasting silence out in the bush and the sound of his own voice talking to nobody, don't he?"

"He do," I agreed.

"This'll be a bit of variety—drop out my way some day and we'll let her rip off a tune or two."

I accepted the invitation and we parted. I didn't envy him his seventy-mile tramp to Mokala cuddling that cornery crate all the way; still, music hath charms, and one has to make some sacrifices. I was out near Mokala buying goats a fortnight later, so I called in on Hepplethwaite. We had supper and sat outside his hut afterwards, smoking our pipes and watching the moon rise over the bush.

He asked if I would care to hear the gramophone, and I said I should.

He bawled to his cook-boy who cranked up the engine and let it get a record off its chest.

"I've taught Mackintyre to work the thing," Hepplethwaite explained, "it saves me having to jump up every

minute or two to put on the brakes and reload, etc.; he's tickled to death with it, calls it the 'Fairy in the box.'"

"Home Sweet Home" finished and "Annie Laurie" commenced.

"Great invention, when you come to think of it," Hepplethwaite observed. "Great invention, the gramophone. Have your potted Caruso after coffee; tired of him, open a tin of Melba; weary of Melba, uncork a jar of Lauder; and so. Great idea."

"Annie Laurie" wailed to a close and the versatile machine rang a chime on the "Blue Bells of Scotland."

"Great idea, when you come to think of it. Nowadays you don't have to dedicate half your life to sawing at a fiddle or plunking a piano, don't have to let your hair grow and all that to get a respectable noise when you want it, you just sell an ox, buy a gramophone, and have the whole boiling lot at your nod—marvellous business, when you come to consider it."

"Half a moment," said I, interrupting his unsolicited testimonial. "That boy of yours is putting on 'Annie Laurie' again; we've just had her."

"I know, can't be helped. I only have three records now. The fourth, 'Mary of Argyle,' fell off a table into a scrap between my bull-terrier and Bob St. John's mastiff. 'Mary' got the worst of it."

"You're going to get some more records though, aren't you?"

"Rather. I've sent down to the coast for a catalogue. I'll get some Gilbert and Sullivan, I think. 'Yeomen of the Guard,' 'Dorothy,' and so forth, also some Gaiety pieces and some rag-time; there are great possibilities in gramophones. You must drop out some day when they arrive, and we'll have a blooming Queen's Hall concert."

He turned and shouted again to Mackintyre, the cook-boy, who obediently slipped the engine into the low gear.

"Told him to play them over again, slowly this time, by way of variety."

Later on in the evening we had the three pieces over again at full speed this time by way of more variety. By permutations and combinations Hepplethwaite had worked out how many varieties there were to be got out of those three pieces.

You, gentle reader, may work it out for yourself, if you are given to combination and permutations ; anyway, there are quite a lot, and we had them all that night before we turned in.

At breakfast next morning Mackintyre, who gloried in his new accomplishment, served us up "Annie Laurie" with the porridge, "Home Sweet Home" with the goat ribs, and "The Blue Bells of Scotland" with the marmalade. I rode away after that.

If anybody had asked me to sing (which they never do) any of these three songs backwards, forwards, sideways, or upside down during the next month I could have done so, yea, even in my sleep. Sometime later I got a letter from Hepplethwaite. He had sundry heifers for sale, would I come out and look at them ?

I reached Mokala in the late afternoon ; Hepplethwaite was in the store, so also was Jopie Ziervogel. Jopie Ziervogel, along with his *wrouw*, a lady built on very much the same lines as a Baltic *galliot*, inhabits a wattle and dab hut in Chaka's Stadt, where he repairs the native ploughs and waggons in return for stock and fair promises.

"Hello," said Hepplethwaite, "that you ? Sit down and make yourself at home, heifers will be in at sundown. Cup of tea ? Jopie, a cup of tea ?"

Jopie squirmed about in his chair, shuffled his *velschoen* (in which he sleeps) over the floor-boards, coughed, smiled, and said he didn't mind if he did. "S'cuse me a moment," said Hepplethwaite. "*Lo batlau ?*"

The two native girls addressed produced black cones of Makalaka tobacco, which they exchanged after much haggling for some beads, brass wire and the inevitable *barsella*, or tip, of two cotton reels.

Mackintyre brought in three cups of tea, grinned a white grin that looked like dawn breaking through pitchy night, and went off to cook the evening's meal.

Jopie squirmed about in his chair, blushed and stammered out an opinion that the weather was hot but that he thought we'd have more rain.

A nude native entered bearing two mangy fowls upside down by the legs, which he sold for some kaffir corn and a *barsella* of a handful of sweets. Jopie laid down his empty cup, shuffled his *velschoen* violently, squirmed on his chair in a

paroxysm of embarrassment, went scarlet in the face, and gasped out :

“ Mis-ter 'Epplethwaite, could I year a chune on the gram-y-phone, please, Mis-ter 'Epplethwaite, please ? ”

Hepplethwaite put down his pen and looked at Jopie as if that gentleman's sudden and immediate demise would make a happy man of him. He picked up a heavy ebony ruler and grasped it, bludgeon-wise in a tense fist ; then his hand relaxed and he sighed. “ Mackintyre, bring the gramophone,” he shouted wearily, and strode out of the store to bargain for an ox that a spindle-shanked ancient had for sale.

To be a successful Kaffir storekeeper one must be equally at home among ploughs, patent medicines, and peppermint drops, beads, blankets and bovines, one must combine the patience of a Job with the commercial acumen of a Scotch Jew of Yankee extraction, one must be all this and then some.

Mackintyre appeared bearing the music-maker, wound it up and set the “ Blue Bells of Scotland ” ringing the old familiar tune.

Jope sat back in his chair, his ears wide open, a smile of æsthetic ecstasy nearly splitting him in half.

We had “ Home Sweet Home ” after that, and the “ Blue Bells ” again after that, after that we had “ Home Sweet Home.” I went out to where Hepplethwaite and the ancient were endeavouring to bluff each other under.

“ Where's ‘ Annie Laurie ’ ? ” I asked.

“ Bust. Bob St. John felt suddenly tired here one night and sat on her.”

Inside the store Jopie had got the “ Blue Bells ” at it again. Hepplethwaite shivered and jerked his head towards the noise.

“ He comes here about once a week and sits playing those two darn tunes over and over, back and forth the whole blessed afternoon, until I'm nearly off my blooming head.”

“ Why do you let him ? ”

“ Oh, well, he's a customer, you know. Buys a tin of coffee and a pound of sugar once in a way, and a packet of sweets on Christmas Days and blue moons. Got to oblige customers, you know.”

At this point the ancient teetered up and said that seeing it was his old college chum Hepplethwaite, he'd take three pounds fifteen shilling for the ox—he had demanded eight pounds earlier in the afternoon. Hepplethwaite burst into

cackles of well-simulated mirth—I forgot to say that to be a successful Kaffir storekeeper one has also to be an actor of no trifling ability.

“Ha, ha! three pounds fifteen for that ox! Why, it was so old it would probably die a natural death before nightfall, and so thin it would do nicely as a hat rack, wheeled into the front hall.” Another cackle of well-simulated mirth. “Ha, ha! M’purru” (M’purru being the ancient) “must be cracking a joke at his” (Hepplethwaite’s) “expense, a humorist, a funny man, what? Three pounds fifteen, ha, ha, very amusing!”

The ancient said there was no joke intended, and in that case he and the ox must go home.

“Go!” said Hepplethwaite, winking at me, and the ancient drove the ox off round the corner of the store. Inside the tin building the gramophone was singing “Home Sweet Home” to the entranced Jopie. Hepplethwaite groaned, “It isn’t only Jope but Bob St. John and his crowd from the ‘Eland’; they stop here on their way back and forth from the mine, tumble whooping off their Cape cart, haul out the gramophone, and keep it grinding away until the last survivor drops flat somewhere in the thin hours of morning—it’s the limit, believe me.”

“Why do you stand for it? Are they customers, too?”

“Yes, pretty good customers, too, confound ’em!”

“Where are those new records you were talking about—‘Dorothy,’ the ‘Yeomen of the Guard,’ and all?”

Hepplethwaite snorted. “My confounded transport nigger drank his back teeth awash on Kaffir beer in at the siding, pulled out at midnight with the case of records on top of a load of grain and lashed the span lickety split down into the Bongola River in flood—being hopelessly drunk he was about the only thing saved.”

The ancient poked his corrugated face round the store corner.

“I am going, Baas.”

“All right.”

“Three pound and a half, Baas?”

“Three pound, I told you.”

“Good-bye, Baas.”

“Good-bye, M’purru.” The face withdrew slowly.

“So you’re still harping along with ‘Home Sweet Home’ and the ‘Blue Bells’—eh?”

"No, I'm not, Bob. Jopie, Mackintyre & Co. are though."

"Going to try again?"

"Sure enough. I've sent for another case, it should be up next week."

Jopie, having played the "Blue Bells of Scotland" to a lingering finish, rolled out of the store, insisted on shaking hands with both of us, took off his hat, mounted a rusty yellow mare, and tripped off home to his *wrouw*.

We turned back to the store, at the door of which we discovered the ancient, squatting on his lean hams.

"Three pound five shillings, Baas," said he.

"*Ociami*," Hepplethwaite graciously agreed, and paid him in goods at the retail value of three pounds five and the wholesale value of one pound ten. There is something in commercial life that appeals to me.

That night after supper Mackintyre attempted to give us "Home Sweet Home," but we choked the machine at the first whoop, and kicked the impresario swiftly in the direction of his hut. Time passed on, and one day I was in Knox's store at the siding buying myself some tea to mix with a little water I had at home.

Knox was reading a letter that a native runner had just brought in; it seemed to annoy Knox, he mumbled sourly from time to time.

"What's rowelling you?" I asked.

"Hepplethwaite, I do his forwarding from the railway, y'know, also for Hergesheimer, up at Nyoriliwe. One's case marks are H.M., t'other's H.N. In the dark the other night I made a mistake and sent some of Heppy's stuff up to Hergesheimer—Heppy's got snotty about it," he wagged that merchant's letter; "don't see why, perfectly reasonable mistake."

"Let me see," said I, "Nyoriliwe is about six hundred miles away, isn't it, across the desert? When will Hergesheimer's waggon be back?"

"In about ten weeks if his spans are fit and he bustles 'em back immediately, which he won't—still, I don't see why Heppy should rear up and paw the air like that, it was only some footling gramophone records, anyhow."

"Some *what*?"

"Gramophone records—what are you laughing at?"

"Nothing," said I. "Gimme my tea and lemme go."

Hepplethwaite was in his little fenced-off patch of a garden when I rode up, drenching his budding pumpkins with his morning's bath water—one learns the economics in our country.

"*Dumela*," said he, jerking the last soapy dregs over up aspiring lettuce, "you've come just in time for scoff; hang an your horse and walk right into the *ky*."

Supper over, we dragged our deck-chairs out of doors and sat smoking our pipes and talking "beef on the heel" as ever.

"Like to hear the gramophone?" he asked.

"Well, if you've got any new records——"

Hepplethwaite chuckled grimly.

"No, I haven't got any new records, half my new records are floating downstream towards the Indian Ocean and t'other half must be getting pretty near the German West African border by now. Moreover, I haven't got any gramophone; you've come just two hours too late, my son."

"What's happened?"

"A whole lot of things; one of them was that I got fed up to busting point with gramophones. The gramophone is a noble invention, but I've been unlucky and determined to get rid of mine."

"Did you sell it to Jope?"

"I tried to; he rose to it like a trout at first but afterwards he thought he'd better talk it over with his *wrouw*. They were closeted in solemn conclave for about a month; at the end he rode over and said he was afraid they couldn't afford it just then, but if the Chief Chaka paid up for the shortening of four waggon tyres, and Intaemer broke his iron plough beam which was already cracked and paid Jopie for welding it, if I would take half a bag of seed oats and some fowls in part payment, and if the old spotted cow had a heifer calf at Christmas then they would go into conclave again and let me know the result sometime about Easter.

"The 'Eland' Cape Cart, homeward bound, rolled up just after Jopie had gone; Bob St. John was abroad with two miners and a case of 'Dop.' They stayed up most of the night. Bob St. John teaching one miner the Argentine Tango to the strains of 'Home Sweet Home,' lugging the poor, half-strangled blighter round and round the hut, smashing into the furniture, while the other miner beat time with two tin plates, kept the engine running and accompanied it with

song and hiccoughs. A kind of tired feeling began to steal over me about dawn.

"When they departed next day, the gramophone was lashed to the cart's rack unbeknown to them.

"Now, thought I, if they want 'Bluebells' and 'Home Sweet Home' all night and day they can have it to their souls' content out on the 'Eland' without troubling me. I don't know the fellow who said 'Silence is golden,' but he spoke the word that time all right; it is not only golden, but strung with pearls, festooned with diamonds and plastered with mitres; anyway, that's how I felt the night after the Cape Cart left."

I laughed. "So that ended the gramophone."

"No it didn't, wait a bit—this afternoon I went out to see if I could hit a buck, and coming home I saw the spoor of a Cape Cart and six mules; there is only one in this district and that's the 'Elands.' When I got to the store I found they had not stopped, but gone on; they meant to camp at the *Bongola* water-holes to-night, my boy said, they had left a parcel for me, however.

"Yes, it was the gramophone, of course, sitting on my table, wrapped up in sacking, come back like a cat, like a bad ha'penny, like a ruddy boomerang. There was also a note thanking me for the *loan* of my instrument which they herewith returned along with one record, 'Home Sweet Home' having unfortunately committed suicide by hurling itself from a shelf.

"What did you do then?"

"What did I do, what did I do?—I took the whole box of tricks and thrust them into Mackintyre's arms. 'Take 'em,' I said, 'miles away from here, miles and miles; take 'em to some desolate corner of the world and smash 'em into little, tiny, small smithereens, smash 'em into powder, into nothing at all.'"

"Finish," said I.

"Finish," echoed Hepplethwaite, lounging contentedly back in his chair and puffing lazy smoke-rings towards the tropic stars.

"And golden silence cometh to her own again."

Hepplethwaite nodded.

Suddenly I jerked upright in my chair both ears pricking, from somewhere out in the dark bush came a faint whirr, a

tinkle and the distant nasal intoning of a familiar, a very familiar tune, the indomitable Bluebells of invincible Scotland.

“*Mackintyre!*”

Hepplethwaite bounced from his seat, poised rigid for the moment like a pointer pointing, whirled on his heel and dashed into the hut.

Another second and he raced past me, brandishing a native battle-axe that ornamented his walls, and the darkness engulfed him.

A minute later a nigger's startled yell pierced the night air, followed by a metallic crash and a whirring as if all the clock-springs on earth were tearing out.

Then silence, golden silence. I lay back in my chair and laughed and laughed—which is a silly way I have.



DERWENT MIALL

*The Grey Underworld*

Derwent Miall will be remembered as a contributor to *Punch* who combined a graceful wit with real powers of observation and character-drawing. The four little sketches which follow have an unexpected twist that is reminiscent of the work of O. Henry.



## THE GREY UNDERWORLD

### I

#### WILLIAM'S OLD DOG

PONKER'S name is not yet among those of the elect in the pages of *Who's Who*, but it will be shortly, because he is collecting material for a really big book—a series of “human documents” dealing with what he is pleased to call “The Grey Underworld” of London. “The Grey Underworld,” so far as I can gather, consists of rather saddening residential streets, where people subsist, if brass plates are anything to go by, chiefly by persuading one another to take out life and fire policies, and where commerce, represented by the oilman, is restricted to corner sites. Ponker says that such places are full of unexploited drama, and I dare say he is right; but the difficulty is to get at it. His methods of research, however, are various and enterprising, but I don't think they are always quite kind to the underworldlings themselves.

There was the case of William B., for example. We first knew of William B. through an advertisement in an evening paper.

“Fine dog; genuine Sussex; very old; what offers? Or would exchange for treadle fret-saw.—Apply William B.,” etc.

Ponker worried all one evening about William B.'s very old sheep-dog. There was a story and a sad one, he said, behind this advertisement.

I suggested that perhaps the dog had bitten a postman; but Ponker would not be put off with anything so probable as that. And, over the last pipe, he told me the story of William B. as it shaped itself in his own mind.

William's father, it appeared, had fallen a victim to agricultural depression. (No, I don't know if even Tariff Reform could have saved him. Perhaps he was a bad farmer. Ponker didn't say.)

After the sale was over, William B. made a manly vow to

go to London, work in an office, and, as a natural sequel, save enough to buy back the old homestead and pay the creditors in full.

So one fine afternoon he shook hands with the station-master, also with an aged retainer of his father's who had come to see him off, and disappeared into the Maelstrom of London; while the aged retainer hobbled sadly back to the village, telling all he met that "t' yoong meäster be a-goän to Lunnon, he be, sewerloi"—for Ponker, I must remark, like many novelists and all playwrights, is fully convinced that that is how people in the country talk.

So a new life began for William B.

You will guess, as easily as I did, that there was a scratching at the door of his lodgings a few days later. The old sheep-dog, the faithful friend of his childhood, had followed him to London. (How? Ah, well! We know these things *do* happen. Surely you read *The Spectator* sometimes?).

Of course William B. vowed he would share his last crust with the dog; but it had not come to that as yet, for he had chops for supper, and the dog had the bones; and on Sundays he would take the fine old fellow to suburban commons, where it barked at the swans on the ponds, and was the terror of all pugs.

But then the story shifted into a minor key. The Maelstrom was too much for William. He lost his job, and one by one his possessions had to go to buy food for him and the dog. At last there was only one hope left. William B., always clever with his hands, thought to earn a pittance by making pipe-racks and things. But how to procure the necessary implements? His eyes fell on the dog, stretched by the fireless hearth . . .

"Grand old dog!" said Ponker huskily at this point. "Fine old fellow! To-morrow I shall go and offer William B. my fret-saw."

"But have you got one?" I asked.

"Heavens! No!" said Ponker drowsily.

"And where will you keep the dog?"

"I shan't have the dog. But there's 'copy' to be made out of William B.," explained Ponker.

He went the following day; but it was some time before I could persuade him to reveal what had passed between himself and William B.

He found, he eventually told me, a young man at the given address playing a pianola. He thought this looked like beastly extravagance on William B.'s part, until he reflected that the pianola might, after all, belong to the rooms. William B. was a grave, square-headed, spectacled young man—the sort of young man who *would* be fond of fret-work—and he rose and eyed Ponker attentively as he entered.

“I think,” said Ponker, “you want a fret-saw—a really good one; ball-bearings and all that sort of thing.”

“Oh, yes,” said William B. with ill-concealed eagerness.

“Well, now, about the dog,” said Ponker; “have you had it long?”

William B. replied that it had been in his family for hundreds of years; but Ponker supposed that was *only* his nonsense—the jest of an aching heart.

“I should like to see it before I decide anything,” continued Ponker, making a careful study of William B.'s face. He thought William B. was masking his emotions bravely.

William B., whatever his emotions may have been, merely pointed to the fender.

Of course, as I had guessed during Ponker's recital of the young man's story, it was a fire dog, but a printer's error had made a “fine dog” of it.

Ponker says that he gaped at the beastly thing, and, muttering something about writing in the morning, hurried away.

I am afraid William B. is still waiting to hear about that fret-saw. Ponker says, “Let him wait. William B. is a ghastly fraud.” And it is certain that he will never figure among Ponker's human documents of *The Grey Underworld*.

## II

### THE WOMAN WHO HAD DONE WITH SMILES

HER name was Mrs. Grumby, and she lived opposite a pickle factory, and had a bed-sitting room to let. Ponker had been trying to improve his acquaintance with the “underworld” of London by going about and beguiling harmless landladies into the belief that he wanted lodgings, tempting them, in this way, to gossip about themselves and their lodgers in a manner that would furnish copy for the all-important book. He liked Mrs. Grumby's face at once, because she looked as though the

iron had entered into her soul ; and he particularly wished to study someone whose soul had been entered by the iron.

Mrs. Grumby showed Ponker her "bed-sit" (as I believe the newspaper advertisements have it), and Ponker looked from the "bed-sit" to her, and felt more certain than ever that the iron *had* entered into her soul. But of that she said nothing, merely asking him if he would want hot dishes for breakfast, because, if so, that would be an extra ; but most of her gentlemen had been content with sardines.

Not wishing to make life seem darker for one in her melancholy state, Ponker said that he too always ate sardines for breakfast ; he was, in fact, a whale for sardines.

Of course, he doesn't generally permit himself to make jokes of this elementary character ; it was simply intended as a test ; and Mrs. Grumby passed the test triumphantly, emerging, in Ponker's estimation, as "the Woman who had Done with Smiles." After that, Ponker sat down in the "bed-sit's" easiest chair, to talk. Mrs. Grumby might possibly be worth a chapter all to herself.

Ponker admitted to me later that she was not very communicative, and he had to fill in a good deal of her story himself. Her face told him more than her lips, he said. It must have been a very speaking face, indeed, because it told him, amongst other things, how she had once been a light-hearted girl in the West Country, breaking the hearts of all the young farmers in her neighbourhood, until handsome Jack Grumby had come a-wooing—Grumby, the smart commercial who put up at the "King's Head." (How could her face give such positive information as to the name of the inn ? Frankly, I don't know. You must ask Ponker.) She had made a runaway match of it with Jack, without her father's blessing, and before she realised that Jack Grumby's heart was very much at the service of any pretty, come-by-chance acquaintance. Ah ! she knew that later, when he fled to America with "the other woman," leaving her stranded opposite a pickle factory, to do the best she could for herself and her child. No wonder she had forgotten how to smile !

When Mrs. Grumby's face had got thus far with her story, Ponker rose, and said that he would write in the morning ; which meant, of course, that the room wouldn't suit him.

He was about half-way down the stairs, preceding Mrs.

Grumby, when he heard, he tells me, a sound behind him, as if Mrs. Grumby had tried to speak, but had been choked by sudden mirth.

He looked round sharply, but her face was in shadow.

“I beg your pardon. Did you speak?” he asked.

Mrs. Grumby made no reply, and, thinking it was not laughter but tears that checked her utterance—perhaps something about his back had suddenly reminded her of Jack Grumby—he delicately hastened from the house—as soon, at least, as he had mastered the very complicated front-door latch.

But that stifled sound that he had heard on the staircase haunted him. Had Mrs. Grumby, in spite of all her face had told him, *laughed*? If so, the mystery of it was great. What was there, for example, to laugh at?

He had not walked very far from the house when a perfect frenzy of curiosity impelled him to return to its doorstep. It would be easy to make some excuse for seeing Mrs. Grumby again, and then perhaps he might be able to deduce from her manner why she had snorted on the staircase—whether in sorrow or in mirth.

As he raised the knocker he heard a muffled sound of laughter within. It rose—it increased in volume—it was a duet! The raised knocker fell from his nerveless hand, and instantly there was silence. After the lapse of a minute the door was opened, not by Mrs. Grumby, but by her daughter. She was a presentable girl so far as Ponker could judge, but she had a handkerchief pressed tightly against her mouth, hiding half her face.

“I forgot to ask your mother,” said Ponker severely, “whether you have a bath—hot *and* cold?”

She swayed, like standing corn in tempest; and then she made three attempts to answer him:—

“Oh yes, we have—— We have a—— We have a——  
ba-ha-ha-ha-hath!”

Ponker left the door sadly. He had lost an illusion. No “Woman who had Done with Smiles” could have had a daughter like that.

After reaching home in a cab, he detached from the back buttons of his coat, to which it had affixed itself as he sat in Mrs. Grumby’s chair, an antimacassar of such revolting hideousness that he stared at it aghast—a thing compact of

crochet-work oyster-shells, and with the hues of some portentous sunset. (Some day, when the church at the end of the street has a sale of work, Ponker is going to send it in as his contribution; and then, he says, the churchwardens or other responsible authorities will bitterly repent of having rung the bells whenever he sat down to write.)

As for Mrs. Grumby, Ponker says he is beginning to wonder if the people of the "Grey Underworld" differ very much from the shallowest of the Smart Set in their notions of what constitutes a joke. At all events Mrs. Grumby has shown herself unworthy of a place in the book of human documents.

### III

#### SETH LATIMER'S WIFE

PONKER tells me that quite a lot of people in the Grey Underworld—nice, intellectual-looking people—spend hours and hours sitting about in public gardens doing nothing (*I think they are composing answers to acrostics; but that by the way*), and it occurred to him that if he could get some of them to tell their life histories it might help them to pass the leaden hours, and would, incidentally, greatly benefit his book.

So he took to haunting disused burial-grounds and other pleasaunces, but found that most of the people there preferred to pass the leaden hours in silent meditation, with occasional intervals for light refreshment; and he was getting very much discouraged when Seth Latimer filled him with hopes of "copy."

Ponker came across Seth in the garden belonging to a dingy square. This garden, he tells me, is governed by a prison warden administering a code of 149 by-laws. (Well, perhaps not a prison warden really; but a bad-tempered person with postman's trousers.) It is hemmed in by vicious-looking spears, and contains a fountain basin—too shallow to serve the turn of the dejected people whom it fills with thoughts of suicide—and a statue of an alderman by some anonymous miscreant.

Into this elysium stepped Seth Latimer one afternoon as the clock over the mausoleum on the north side of the square (a church, I suspect, though Ponker thinks not) struck the hour of one. He came out of a house in the square, carrying

a black hand-bag, and he walked with an air of angry determination to a seat beside the fountain basin, opened the bag, and ate about a pound of ham sandwiches. Then he went back to the house again.

Ponker was only mildly interested at first. He thought it a pity that class feeling should be strong enough, even in such a dingy square, to prevent people from inviting the piano-tuner to share their midday meal with them—especially as Seth, who was a refined-looking old fellow, seemed to take it to heart so much.

But when Seth Latimer (of course the name was merely coined for him by Ponker)—when Seth Latimer (Ponker says the name fitted him to a T) repeated the same performance at one next day, it became evident that he *lived* in the square, and was not a piano-tuner at all. Of course, thought Ponker, it *might* be some new kind of open-air cure; but the chances were against it, because fads are generally confined to the idle rich.

It was not until a little later, when Ponker was contemplating the goldfish in the basin, that the explanation of it flashed across his mind, and he saw that Seth Latimer was the hero of a delightfully sordid little domestic drama.

His shiny frock-coat was sufficient evidence that life had not gone too well with him, and things had, perhaps, been at their very worst when his wife came unexpectedly into a little money. Being a woman of coarse fibre she had taunted him from that time forth with his dependence upon herself, till at last his proud, sensitive nature was goaded beyond endurance, and he cried out in his bitterness of spirit: "Woman, never more will I take bite or sup beneath your roof."

Ponker was so pleased with his discovery that he began prodding at the goldfish, in an absent-minded way, with the point of his umbrella; and the prison warder came and told him that he had made himself liable, under By-law 119, to forty shillings or a month. (I'm not quite sure, but I rather think there was even some hint of corporal punishment.)

But Ponker was not going to be put off the trail of "copy" by a man in postman's trousers; and on the third day he found himself sitting side by side with Seth Latimer, on a seat upon which they were both forbidden to carve their names under a penalty of £5. (This, however, was no hardship, as

crochet-work oyster-shells, and with the hues of some portentous sunset. (Some day, when the church at the end of the street has a sale of work, Ponker is going to send it in as his contribution; and then, he says, the churchwardens or other responsible authorities will bitterly repent of having rung the bells whenever he sat down to write.)

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Ponker designed to send his name and Seth's down to posterity in a far more enduring fashion. The whole world should weep over that attenuated figure with the pathetic black bag.)

Seth opened his bag wearily, ate a mouthful of sandwich, and then—and then such a look of dumb agony came over his face that Ponker's heart ached for him. Suddenly it must have been borne in upon Seth that, though he might eat in the garden, his food was none the less of his wife's providing. (Why hadn't he thought of this before? I don't know; one can't think of everything, I suppose.)

He could not eat it. It choked him. With deft aim he flung the ham sandwiches of dependence in among the goldfish, infringing I know not how many by-laws.

Then his eye met Ponker's.

"Young man," he said, "if ever you marry, you put your foot down, and don't you allow any spring-cleaning. There's my house now, so poisoned with the smell of varnish that I can't eat in it. But when it comes to putting French polish on ham sandwiches——!"

Ponker expressed his sympathy, and I know he would do it in a nice and gentlemanlike way; but he was a little low that evening. Why, oh, why would not people rise to that pitch of misery which home and foreign realists had taught him to believe was the common inheritance of dwellers in mean streets?

#### IV

##### THE PLANTS OF ASIA

WE had been reading in a superior weekly how a certain young novelist, after being dined by the New Réclame Club, had gone forth alone into the slums, "to toil and sorrow and suffer with the people," for six mortal weeks—by way of preparation, of course, for his autumn novel.

This made Ponker jealous, for he wanted to do something equally great for English literature. "Then why don't you toil and sorrow and suffer with the people *you* want to make 'copy' out of?" suggested Ponker's best adviser.

Ponker said he was quite sure that they wouldn't let him do anything of the kind. One of the most tragic things about the Grey Underworld of London was the fact that you might 'ive

all your life next-door to a man, and never even learn his name until the black-plumed horses came for him—when the char-lady would tell you it.

And then the same patient adviser had a masterly idea. Why shouldn't Ponker go from door to door all through the Grey Underworld disguised as a book-cavasser, and so compel these retiring folk to their doorsteps? They might not be very chatty, but Ponker would at any rate see a little way into their houses, and intuition would do the rest.

Ponker brightened at the suggestion; and a few days later a monumental work in forty parts, entitled *The Plants of Asia*, was made, by arrangement with a friendly publisher, his justification for a house-to-house visit.

No photographic weekly told of his exploit; no club *fêted* him as the guest of the evening. He simply had an egg for breakfast, and set out one morning, dressed in a rusty morning coat that he thought proper to his part, and heavily weighted with copies of the monumental work. And in the evening he came home footsore and weary, and said that the whole plan was rotten. He had only learnt that some people had mutton for dinner, and some had fish; some people kept more umbrellas in their hall than any Christian family could possibly have come by honestly, and some people had no umbrellas at all; and there were dark moments, so he told me, when he felt inclined to pitch *The Plants of Asia* into some yawning area, and come home in a hansom.

Nevertheless the next day he set out again—but only to return an hour later, with no *Plants* under his arm, and possessed by a mysterious fit of silence.

It was not until the genial hour of after-dinner that the secret came out.

It appeared that he had selected that morning the dullest, greyest street he could possibly find—Mafeking Street, S.E.—a street in which, he felt sure, nobody could ever be happy by any effort whatever—and had knocked at the door of the first of an endless row of brick boxes, all exactly alike. After waiting for a minute or two he thought he might as well knock again, to find out whether *all* the inmates of the house had made away with themselves in a fit of depression.

Well, one hadn't; she came to the door jingling a little bunch of keys, rather breathless, and wearing a kind of large pink pinafore over her dress. ("Pretty?" said Ponker's

audience, in parenthesis. "Yes," said Ponker, "awfully"; and smoked in silence for two minutes and a half.)

The door being opened, it seemed that Ponker had given *The Plants of Asia* a slap, cleared his throat, and enlarged upon the advantages of Art in the home.

"Oh yes," she said, "I should like to see——"

So Ponker showed her the first coloured plate—a pine-apple in bloom, or something of the sort. (Pine-apples do burst into flower sometimes, don't they? In the spring, you know.) She looked at it with evident admiration, and Ponker took the opportunity of explaining that it was done in fourteen colours by a new process, and was simply being given away at a loss to everyone concerned—except the purchaser.

"It's beautiful," she said. "Only sevenpence for each part?" Then, with a little flutter of self-consequence, she produced a new purse and took out some money. "Charl—— I mean, my husband, is so fond of flowers," she explained rather shyly.

Now Ponker, relying upon the idea that no one would give him an order for the preposterous work, and having found that carrying a dead weight was no joke the previous day, had only brought out with him one number of the thing; and this recklessly extravagant young person proposed to clear out his whole stock-in-trade at once, and upset his plans for the day. He felt he couldn't spare the copy.

"I say, have you thought that it goes on for forty months?" he said anxiously—"nearly for ever?"

"But that will be delightful," she observed, looking actually happy at the idea. (The absurd creature. Forty pleasant surprises for Charley! What?)

The Ponker seems to have fallen away from his role altogether. "Delightful? Do you mean it?" he said. "It would bore me awfully, do you know, to have a thing like that happen every month."

She smiled—(I should think a cat would have laughed at Ponker's notion of doing business)—she smiled; and Ponker gave up *The Plants of Asia* at once, ungrudgingly.

"I'm sure Charl—— I mean, your husband, will be pleased," he said. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she nodded; and the door closed, but the glamour remained.

As Ponker's occupation was gone, he turned homewards for

more copies of the monumental work. But when he got home he changed his mind and stayed there.

And there is a sequel to this. Yesterday, I saw on Ponker's desk a sheet of paper headed "Chap. I.," and "Chap. I." opened like this :—"Although, Heaven wots, my fingers are apter with the sword-haft than with the goose-quill, yet I am minded, now while the matter is fresh in my memory, to set down what wondrous chances have befallen me since I rode from the field of Worcester fight with the rowels of my spurs all blooded——"



FRANK SWINNERTON

*The Celebrity*

Frank Swinnerton is well-known on both sides of the Atlantic as a versatile man of letters and a very able critic. His knowledge of the literary world is clearly revealed in the amusing story of a "best-selling" novelist which follows.



## THE CELEBRITY

### I

THE Windleshams lived in one of those staring seaside towns which are the popular resorts of English holiday-makers. Their house was of red brick, with a slate roof, surmounted with cockscomb tiles and red chimney pots; and it had a square of lawn behind a privet hedge, and in the middle of the lawn a diamond-shaped flower bed. From the wooden gate in the hedge, which always banged when anybody used it (as did all the gates in this select road, so that a postman's progress resembled a miniature bombardment or the London air defences in time of war), there was a pathway in small black and white lozenge tiles. The house had oyster-coloured casement curtains, and the pot in the centre of the drawing-room window contained a magnificent aspidistra.

The house which lay behind this façade was very simply furnished, and a good deal of the furniture was old. It had all been renovated, however, with spruce loose-coverings and a great deal of polish. Antediluvian treasures greatly loved by Mrs. Windlesham had long been banished to the dustbin; and with electric light and a kind of neatness the whole house seemed warm and comfortable. Warm and comfortable, too, was the household. Mr. Windlesham had "retired." He was still a youngish man, and he had been fortunate. But he was not a rich man. He had been richer before the war and now he was comparatively poor. He wore his clothes for years, was very tall and thin and rather round-shouldered, and had lost a good deal of his hair; but he was not despondent. The life of complete leisure suited him. He read a great deal, walked or sat by the sea on warm days (except during the months of July and August, when the house was let to summer visitors), and altogether led a harmless and inoffensive life.

Mrs. Windlesham was equally pleasant. She was a quiet

woman with a puzzled expression, which made her seem to be always wondering where she had left her spectacles. She had a plump and fresh-looking face and a slow smile which came and went amid her bewilderment, and showed that her mind was generally elsewhere. She was a most efficient housewife. It was upon household affairs that her wandering thoughts were always concentrated.

The children, Dot and Wilfred, were in the late teens. Dot was older than Wilfred, but was never sure (according to her behaviour) what the exact distance between them was. Sometimes she was a woman and Wilfred was a mere child; sometimes Wilfred was a mature creature and Dot was unimaginably juvenile. Dot would be a tomboy, a rake, a sober and careworn matron, a shy flower, a bustling tyrant or an acid satirist. Wilfred was always Wilfred. In fact Dot was nearly nineteen, and Wilfred was just turned seventeen. Both were well-grown children, and Dot was pretty. She had several of Wilfred's friends upon her hands, and already was almost experienced in dealing with callow young men. Almost, but not quite; for Dot was an extremely modest and kind girl who hated to hurt the feelings of others, and who was therefore described by young ladies of smaller attractiveness as a flirt. Wilfred was not a flirt. He set high value upon himself, and accordingly (through shyness) was generally very short with any girl who struck him as being prettier than usual. He would look down at such a girl with a supercilious expression, leaning against his motor-bicycle and shifting his large feet; and would then swing his leg across the saddle and make off with loud explosions and a great smelly outburst of smoke from the exhaust pipe. Upon such occasions his face had a constrained expression, and he felt rather pleased with himself until he was out of sight, when doubt would arise in his mind and despair would congeal upon his heart.

This was the family that received sudden glory in a most unexpected manner.

## II

Mr. Windlesham it was who broke the news. He broke it the instant he received it himself. He was sitting at the breakfast table reading his morning paper—the children

being late for the meal—when he suddenly gave an exclamation.

“God bless my soul!” cried Mr. Windlesham.

“Father!” protested his wife, looking in plump horror from behind the breakfast coffee pot and milk jug.

Mr. Windlesham leapt from his seat, carrying his paper, and took it to his wife’s side. Arrived there, he indicated a paragraph with his forefinger, and Mrs. Windlesham solemnly read the paragraph through, as if she were all the time listening for Wilfred’s thunderous descent of the stairs.

“Well!” exclaimed Mrs. Windlesham. “Extraordinary. I shouldn’t have—I should *never* have thought it! Well!”

Mr. Windlesham rose to his feet, went to the bookshelves which filled a recess to the right side of the fireplace, and approached his face close to the shelves. Three of these shelves were filled with modern novels in various cheap editions or second-hand and re-bound styles. There were books by Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, W. J. Locke, W. W. Jacobs, and others. And among these were six or seven very well-worn volumes in a uniform binding. The name of the author in each case was the same. Mr. Windlesham read: *The Trembling Leaf*, by Amos Judd; *Splendour*, by Amos Judd; *Castaways*, by Amos Judd; *Sweet Cargo*, by Amos Judd; *A Roundabout Marriage*, by Amos Judd. . . .

And when Mr. Windlesham had arrived at this point the opening of the dining-room door caused him to turn round. Dot stood within the room—a tall slim girl, with short brown hair, brown eyes, brown dress, and a brown face; also with an extremely mischievous smile. She looked from her mother to her father, still peering at the bookshelves.

“Oh, father. Are you looking for *Defiance*?” she asked. “I’ve lent it to Daphne Swenn. She’s a Judd fan—like we all are; and she’d only read it twice before.”

Mr. Windlesham groaned.

“Oh, dear!” he said. “What would your Aunt say. ‘Like we all are.’ My dear child!”

“Aunt? Why Aunt Polly says it herself!” expostulated Dot. “I’ve heard her!”

“Not *that* Aunt,” murmured Mrs. Windlesham, rousing herself from a stupor of preoccupation. “Another one. Your *father’s* sister. . . .”

“Father’s?” There was amazement in Dot’s voice. She looked round the cheerful room, with its books and its burning fire and shining breakfast table. “I never knew——”

Then she caught sight of the newspaper in her mother’s hand. It was instantly in her own, and she read the paragraph which had so agitated her father and mother. The paragraph was not a large one; but there was a big flare heading across the page:

### SENSATIONAL LITERARY REVELATION

Below, was another heading, which read:

#### FAMOUS AUTHOR’S IDENTITY DISCLOSED

The paragraph itself followed:

“It will come as a surprise to our readers to learn that Amos Judd, one of the most popular novelists of the day, the sale of whose books in this country alone already total over half a million copies, is a woman. Although ‘Amos Judd’ has been a familiar name to novel-readers for the last ten years, and although ‘his’ books are loved by many thousands of devoted admirers, nobody until this moment has been aware that the retiring novelist belongs to what is sometimes erroneously termed ‘the weaker sex.’ We are able to announce exclusively to-day that ‘Mr. Judd’ is in private life Miss Lucy Windlesham. Miss Windlesham resides in Hampstead, where she has for some years occupied the house known as No. 17 Lemon-tree Walk. Inquiries at the house yesterday elicited the fact that Miss Windlesham was away, and the maid interrogated refused to give our representative any information regarding Miss Windlesham’s movements. At the offices of the publishers of ‘Amos Judd’s’ books (Messrs. Raggett and Edge) where Mr. Raggett, the benevolent senior partner in the firm, remained blandly cryptic, we learnt that the new Judd novel *The Sackcloth Coat* will appear towards the end of the month. . . .”

And so on.

“Father!” cried Dot, as soon as she had grasped the facts. “D’you mean that ‘Amos Judd’ is your sister?”

Mr. Windlesham nodded. His face was puckered in a frown that combined displeasure with a struggling complacency.

“Yes. My sister Lucy,” he mumbled.

“How thrilling! How *gorgeous*! But . . . but . . .”

“Hush, dear,” said Mrs. Windlesham, smoothing her dress rather sedately.

Mr. Windlesham cleared his throat.

## III

An hour later, the wooden gate in the hedge was pushed open; a girl darted up the pathway to the house, and the gate banged heavily behind her. She was so excited that she could not wait for Ada, the maidservant, to make her leisurely journey from the kitchen, but pressed her face against the glass door and rang a second time. A pretty girl, of twenty, dressed in blue muslin, with bobbed golden hair and pink cheeks. Her eyes were of a surprised blue. She fled past the smiling but puzzled Ada, and into the sitting-room. Long acquaintance with the family gave her such a privilege. She found Mr. and Mrs. Windlesham with their two children, in the thick of strenuous argument.

“Dot!” cried Daphne Swenn, impetuously, “isn’t it *too* thrilling!”

Mr. Windlesham frowned, but there were strange complacent tucks round the corner of his mouth.

“What I’ve been trying to say for some time,” he remarked, in an extremely grand manner, “is that if—mind, I say ‘*if*’—there is no mistake in this . . . paper, I think your aunt should have told us.”

“Oh, father, you *have* said that,” Wilfred assured him, “not less than seven times.”

“He’s so pertinacious!” cried Dot. “Daph.! This *is* nice of you!”

“I want to know all about it. Tell me at once. *Is* it true? Mother’s just crazy. Everybody will be. It’s so *fascinating*!”

There was another ring at the door bell. Ada answered it, and ushered into the room Mrs. Wedge, of next door.

“I *had* to dash in!” she said. “Is it true? How remarkable!”

Mrs. Wedge was a thin lady of fifty-five who had no children, and who read much in order to keep in check a sourness of temper of which she was herself well aware. She dressed in black, and had smooth hair and sharp black eyes. With these eyes she surveyed the company. It was she who noticed

first that Daphne Swenn's stockings did not match, so great had been the haste with which Daphne, in her excitement, had dressed. "Tell me *all* about her," commanded Mrs. Wedge.

"She's father's sister," vouchsafed Dot, perhaps a little rudely.

"I . . . ah. . . . There's . . ."

Another ring. The neighbourhood was breaking all bounds of decorum. Only, of course, friends of the Windleshams—no stranger, as yet; none of those who frigidly left cards in the ordinary way. But the sitting-room at "Beaconsfield" became crowded. There was a buzz of excited talk. Amos Judd might have been called the favourite novelist of Frampton-on-Sea. All Amos Judd's books were in free circulation at the lending libraries and in cheap editions; and within four hours of breakfast there was no single Judd work left in the bookshops or libraries, while the clerk at the bookstall had telephoned to London for fresh supplies. This happened later, of course. But at the moment all those who by any stretch of courtesy could regard themselves as intimate friends of the Windleshams were collected in the sitting-room. All were waiting for Mr. Windlesham to begin.

"I . . . ah. . . . There is very little," said Mr. Windlesham. "I . . . of course, she was always a remarkable child!" He seemed to recollect one or two things, and a strained smile passed across his face. "Yes, a remarkable child," he repeated, thoughtfully. "Not at all—not at all as *we* are. . . ." He smiled again, more easily. "She and I were great pals," he proceeded. "We were inseparable, though I was older than she. Dear me, I remember that she used to call me 'Snodge.' In those days"—here he smiled broadly, and his audience smiled in sympathy—"we thought she was a bit of a liar." There was a good deal of laughter at this. "She was always very original. . . ."

"I suppose there's no doubt about this being true, Mr. Windlesham," said the sharp voice of Mrs. Wedge.

"Oh, none!" cried Mr. Windlesham. "None whatever."

"It's wonderful!" An ugly and emotional little spinster wiped away a tear of agitation as she spoke. "Just to think we've been coming and going. . . ."

"At any rate, you've got several of her books. . . ."

"I suppose *you* knew, Mr. Windlesham?"

"Well," said Mr. Windlesham, smiling broadly. "Well. . . ."

They all laughed.

“Fancy keeping a secret like that!” There was an admiring murmur.

“Yes, but what’s she like, Father?” demanded Dot, impatiently.

“Like?” wavered Mr. Windlesham, who had not seen his sister for a quarter of a century. “Well, I expect she’s changed a good deal since I——”

Ada was in the room again.

“A lady to see you, sir.”

All brows were raised.

“Me?” ejaculated Mr. Windlesham. “You mean—not a friend?”

“She won’t give no name, sir. Wishes to see you private.”

“It’s *her*,” whispered everybody. A solemn hush fell upon the party. Dot, being nearest the door, peeped out into the hall. And as her father hastily disappeared, Dot raised one hand high in the air in sign of measurement from the ground, and swept it circumferentially about her middle.

“*Enormous*,” she whispered.

There was a general ejaculation.

#### IV

The stranger was taken into the dining-room, and that door was closed. Dot, scouting, could learn nothing more. She gave a compact description.

“Six feet, and so much round. Twenty-stone, I should think.”

“Hush, Dot,” protested Mrs. Windlesham.

They all sat silent, as if trembling. All were creeping with curiosity, and, apart from an occasional spasmodic remark or a nervous laugh, remained tense. Thus they sat for fully ten minutes. It seemed a lifetime. The hands of the clock stole on. At last Daphne Swenn, who had been the first to arrive, jumped to her feet. She could bear it no longer.

“I’m going,” she cried. “It isn’t fair to stick here. And I’ve got odd stockings on.” (All except Wilfred looked at her stockings.) “And besides, mother will want me. But, oh, Mrs. Windlesham,” she said appealingly, in a lower voice, as she passed, “if she *does* stay, *do* ask me to tea one day. . . . I’d never forget it!”

She moved to the door. Wilfred, as if instinctively, followed her. They stood together by the door.

"We'd *all* better go," murmured the ugly and emotional little spinster. And with that she also rose, and prepared to leave. Mrs. Wedge, Mrs. Trumble, Mrs. Harrold, Mrs. Texon, and Mrs. Samuel, were all forced to rise. Their eyelids were wide apart, and their ears were alert. They crowded into the passage upon tiptoe, all watching the door of the dining-room. Mrs. Harrold, who was white-haired, made a gesture implying that she almost irresistibly wished to invade the dining-room, at which everybody tittered.

And as they reached the front door, and as somebody in the general smother opened it, and they all stepped outside into the garden path, a little fierce man with a bristling white moustache and rosy bronzed face and a hard felt hat banged the gate after him and advanced fearlessly, clearing his throat. He stopped dead in front of the bevy.

"Is this Mrs. Windlesham's house?" he demanded, his white moustache twitching.

There was an affirmative chorus.

"I am Mrs. Windlesham," said that lady, in plump helplessness. Her eye wandered, as if her attention was elsewhere. She was thinking of lunch, with something that bordered upon despair.

The little fierce man cleared his throat again.

"Ah . . ." he said. "Can you tell me if *Miss* Windlesham is here?"

The others hung back, waiting for what was to follow. They all stared at Mrs. Windlesham, who flushed and looked more vacant than before. There seemed to be a trembling in the air.

"I . . . we . . . we hardly know," stammered Mrs. Windlesham.

"D'you mean *me*?" asked Dot, impudently.

The little fierce man stared at her.

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed, brusquely. His face flushed darkly, until it seemed to be purple. "*The Miss* Windlesham," he brisked more ferociously than ever. "Surely you know if she's here or not?"

And then, to the amazement of his family and all their visitors, Mr. Windlesham appeared in the front doorway.

"No, sir," said Mr. Windlesham, aggressively, "she is *not* here."

"But I've *followed* her here!" cried the little man.

"You're mistaken," said Mr. Windlesham, with equal fierceness. "Please go away."

And with that, ignoring his wife and children, he went back again into the house, slamming the front door in an extremely peremptory manner.

## V

But the little fierce man was not so easily to be dismissed. He stood his ground. And although the ladies were all very inquisitive they were at the same time very much afraid of being involved in a painful scene; so they bade farewell hastily and almost ran away down the road, leaving Mrs. Windlesham and her children confronting the stranger.

"Was that your husband, madame?" asked the little fierce man.

Mrs. Windlesham agreed.

"And my father," added Wilfred, significantly. He was twice the little man's size.

"Quite," said the little man, looking up at Wilfred. And before the calm gaze of those two greenish-grey eyes, sunburnt and fearless, Wilfred felt his heart beat more quickly, and the strength of his legs evaporate. He looked down at the little man, with an altered regard. Instinctively he knew that he had met a master. Not *his* master, alone, but a master of men.

"I'm sorry," murmured Mrs. Windlesham, who had not been so far away from this momentary scene—and its implications—as might have been supposed.

"Not at all, madame. There is only a misunderstanding. I should like to speak to you alone, if I may."

"My husband has shut us out," said Mrs. Windlesham, laughing.

"No doubt, very excusably," said the little man, also smiling.

"Come along, Dot," Wilfred took his sister's arm. "Back to lunch, Mother. Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, my boy," replied the little man; and actually raised his hard felt hat to Dot as she was led away in a state of bewilderment.

"And now, madame," said the stranger, with a look of interrogation at Mrs. Windlesham.

"We certainly can't stay here," said Mrs. Windlesham. "It's so public. And I expect *everybody's* looking out of their front windows." She hesitated a moment. Then: "We'd better go down the side path into the back-garden," she said. "And we can sit in the summer house."

"That will do excellently," said the little man, following her. "It's just what I should have wished. Thank you."

## VI

It is time to return to Mr. Windlesham and his sister. It will be remembered that Dot, marking the lady's entry, had ascertained her height, circumference, and weight in one single piercing glance. Dot, quite unconsciously, had exaggerated all three. Miss Windlesham was wearing a heavy ulster, quite unsuited to the summery weather which Frampton-on-Sea was enjoying at the end of May; and this considerably augmented her natural girth. With the ulster removed, she was seen to be a reasonably tall, reasonably substantial, spinster of forty-five. She looked very vigorous. Her hair was black, and she had sparkling black eyes and a double row of superb teeth. Every movement showed her to be muscular. Ten years younger, she would have been a very beautiful woman. Beside Mr. Windlesham, she appeared to be an Amazon. Mr. Windlesham shrank a little, both inwardly and outwardly, in the presence of his visitor. He was a very tall, lean man with a baldish head and some teeth which were not his own. His shoulders stooped a little, through long work at a desk and long concentration upon newspapers and books since his retirement. The clothes he wore were shabby. Before this splendid creature, in her plain grey costume, with her raven hair, her healthily coloured cheeks, her clear eyes, and her expanding smile, he felt very much as a crushed male clerk may feel towards an opulent woman employer. He glanced into her face, let his eyes fall, and allowed Miss Windlesham to grasp a limp hand.

"Bless the man! Aren't you going to give me a kiss?"

She hugged him.

"Well, Lucy," panted Mr. Windlesham. "You're . . . er . . . looking fine and well. We've just been reading——"

“Oh, *that!*” cried Miss Windlesham, breezily. “Makes me sick. Of course, you know why it is. You know who’s done that. . . .” She shrugged her shoulders. “It’s like him. It’s like him. The time I’ve had. The time—my goodness, it’s been a purgatory!”

“I . . . I don’t understand,” murmured Mr. Windlesham.

“No,” said his sister, rather brutally. “You never could.”

“Have you come to Frampton to say that?” asked Mr. Windlesham, with dignity. “After twenty-five years.”

“Pathetic. You’re pathetic, Snodge. I’ll tell you. Now, where shall I begin!” She gave a deep sigh. “I knew you were here, because I saw your name in a paper. You’re a ‘well-known resident,’ it seems. Not too well known I hope. You’re no good to me if you’re too well known. Well, you must know that I met him two years ago, in Egypt. He was—he saved my life, I’m afraid. That’s the devil of it. Gave him a kind of claim, d’you see. He’s not the man to neglect a claim. Indeed, no. He’s a very different sort of man.” She laughed in a tone of bravado.

“He?” questioned Mr. Windlesham.

“Pongo.”

“Pongo?” Mr. Windlesham thought that was a monkey’s name, or an elephant’s. He looked uneasily over his shoulder.

“Pongo. Sir Robert William Brentwood-Powys.”

“Him!” cried Mr. Windlesham, distraught.

“Why not?”

“But he’s a great man. He’s a great General. A great . . .”

“I know. That’s the trouble. He’s shot too much big-game. It makes him bloodthirsty.”

Mr. Windlesham had never seen Sir Robert; but he knew that he was famous as a big-game hunter, that half South Kensington Museum was filled with specimens brought home by Sir Robert, that half the Zoological Gardens . . .”

“Whew!!” he whistled. “Pongo!”

“Yes, Pongo. This man——”

“This man?”

“Listen. He—I *admit* he helped me out of a nasty hole. I admit it. He couldn’t have done less——”

“Intrepid. . . .”

“Oh, yes. All that. As plucky as you like. Well, I wanted some stuff about India—some material for a novel. I’d

travelled a bit in India, but not enough. I asked him to help me. He jumped at it. We got very pally. But he was 'inquisitive.' It's my belief that all men are more or less inquisitive; but he's *most*. He somehow wormed out of me about my writing."

"Then it *is* true?" eagerly demanded Mr. Windlesham.

"What?"

"Amos Judd. What the paper says."

"Yes!" Miss Windlesham almost bellowed at her brother. "And that's the point. Where did they get that stuff from? Why, from *him*."

"We're most proud. We have all your books," said Mr. Windlesham. "Or nearly all. . . ."

"He's gone to the papers. He's blown the gaff—let the cat out of the bag. And why? So that I shall have my life made a misery to me. So that wherever I go he'll be able to find me. D'you see? You're my only refuge!"

"Dear me!" cried Mr. Windlesham, greatly concerned. "Is it blackmail?"

"Blackmail? It's worse than blackmail. It's persecution!"

"Tut, tut, tut." Mr. Windlesham's tongue clucked against the roof of his mouth. He was greatly distressed.

"I say, what's that?" suddenly cried the angry visitor. "What's that row?"

Mr. Windlesham listened. He heard a soft swishing sound, such as might be made by a small flock of sheep in the hall outside. For a moment he was perplexed. Then he understood, gave a short laugh, and turned again to his agitated sister.

"To tell the truth," he said, and laughed again, as if he had a slight asthmatic cough.

"Come on!" urged Miss Windlesham, impatiently.

"As you know, the news about you was in the *Daily Mercury* this morning. The *Daily Mercury* is much read in Frampton. Our friends have come to felicitate us. . . ."

"Even here!" groaned the visitor. "Oh, Lord! I must go. It's not safe. If it's all over the place!" She raised her hands to her head, and strode to the dining-room window, which in the Windlesham house looked out upon the front garden, the diamond-shaped flower bed, the hedge, and incidentally, the path by which the callers must all leave. So Miss Windlesham saw all that crowd of ladies which were

being shepherded out of the house by her sister-in-law.

“What sheep! Lord, what sheep! My readers, I suppose.” She gave a mirthless laugh. “The one without the hat is your wife, I take it. I like her. She’s no fool. Oh, no. She’s no fool. I’d like to talk to her.”

“You shall,” agreed Mr. Windlesham, almost gallantly.

“Yes. But why *you*?” The tone was abrupt.

“Her choice was circumscribed,” explained Mr. Windlesham blandly. His sister looked sharply at him.

“Oh, yes. And *you’re* not such a jolly old fool as you pretend to be,” she vouchsafed. She looked at him again. “Except that you shamble. A little discipline—exercise—a little of Pongo’s——”

She broke off. A scream escaped her. She turned wildly to Mr. Windlesham.

“What? For goodness’ sake!” he cried.

His sister was quite white. She trembled.

“Send him away,” she shouted in a hoarse voice, as a sleeper in fear, who cannot cry out, might have done. “Send him away. I won’t see him. I can’t see him now. Tell him——”

Mr. Windlesham followed her hysterical gaze out of the window, and saw coming up the pathway from the gate a little fierce man with a white bristling moustache, a bronzed face, and a hard felt hat.

“Him?” he asked, breathlessly.

“Quick. Away!”

And with that Mr. Windlesham ran hastily out and addressed himself to the stranger in the manner we have seen.

## VII

“And now,” said the fierce little man to Mrs. Windlesham, as they sat in the summer house, “I must first of all say how much obliged I am—how deeply grateful—for your kindness.”

“Well, I’m puzzled,” said Mrs. Windlesham. “And when I’m puzzled I’m always polite. I don’t know who *you* are, or who *she* is, or anything about anything. But I should *like* to know,” she hastened to add.

“About me?” asked the little fierce man.

"Yes. About everything. Why are you so fierce?"

"I? Fierce? Why, I wouldn't hurt a mouse."

"I know—unless you wanted him for dinner," said Mrs. Windlesham innocently.

"My name is Powys, madame—Brentwood-Powys."

"I think I've heard that name," mused Mrs. Windlesham.

"It is possible. Now, two years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Windlesham—not your charming daughter, but, I presume, your sister-in-law. . . ."

Mrs. Windlesham sighed.

"Whom *we've* not seen for twenty-five years!" she murmured.

"Indeed. We became very friendly. I helped her to some slight extent; but I wanted to help her more. She is a very able woman, Mrs. Windlesham, but, like so many able unmarried women, she is a perfect fool. The way that woman goes on is absurd. She takes no care of herself. . . ."

"Mr. . . . Are you 'Mr.?'?" gently asked Mrs. Windlesham.

"Sir Robert," murmured the General.

"I was going to say—she's not a child."

"She is forty-five years old, and a perfect fool, madame. Damn it, I ought to know. . . ."

Mrs. Windlesham smiled. She had no need to do more than smile; for Sir Robert was immediately upon his feet.

"Of course, you're right!" he exclaimed. "I *am* fierce. Perhaps I frighten her!"

Mrs. Windlesham smiled again, and shook her head.

"Not if she's a fool," she said. "Only if she's a wise woman."

There was a little glance between them. They understood each other completely. They had no need to say anything more.

"You'll help me?" asked the General.

Ah! It was one thing to understand—quite another to help. Mrs. Windlesham temporised.

"What to do?" she asked bluntly.

"To see her."

"Haven't you already seen her?"

"Not since yesterday. Not since she ran away."

"Ran? From you?" He nodded. "Oh, dear, that was naughty of her. And I expect you're angry with her."

"I'm in deadly fear of her," said the General.

"You too?" exclaimed Mrs. Windlesham.

"You see, I love her."

"Oh, I knew *that*," said Mrs. Windlesham.

"You did?" His fierceness was all gone. He was pleading now; was anxious. "D'you know anything else?"

"Only that she ran away from you," smiled his companion.

"Well?"

"I don't think you need despair. She wouldn't have run away if she hadn't been frightened of giving in. I wonder if she's still in the house?"

Both rose.

"You're splendid," cried the General, with a little bow. "You've given me new life."

"If I can, I'll send her out to you," promised Mrs. Windlesham; and as she left him she whispered something in his ear.

#### VIII

Mrs. Windlesham found her husband and his sister still in the dining-room. Miss Windlesham, looking now large and helpless and tired, was sitting down as her sister-in-law entered. She was evidently thinking hard.

"Has he gone?" she demanded. "What did he say?"

"Not far," replied Mrs. Windlesham. She ignored the second question.

Miss Windlesham looked almost relieved. She turned that matter over in her mind.

"I don't know what to say to him," she wailed, and the colour came and went in her cheeks. "He's as obstinate as fifteen pigs. I'm terrified of him. Look here, Snodge, you haven't introduced me to your wife."

"How d'you do?" said Mrs. Windlesham.

When the introduction had taken place, Miss Windlesham took Mrs. Windlesham's hand and looked straight down into that pleasant face with the abstracted expression.

"Look here," she cried. "I've never felt like this before in my life. I'm helpless. I'm frightened. And that blessed man . . . He'll kill me as soon as look at me. He's merciless. He thinks I'm big-game. He stalks me all the time. Damn him!"

She looked appealingly at her sister-in-law.

"The fool wants to marry me," she said in a whisper which her brother did not hear. "And I know he'll do it. The thing's absurd. I don't know *what* to do. It's ridiculous to marry at my age. The mere notion of it makes me feel goosey. I want your help. I want your sympathy. Your advice, too."

"My help and sympathy—certainly," said Mrs. Windlesham.

"Not your advice?"

They exchanged glances. They exchanged smiles. It seemed as though, for that day, there could be nothing but understanding here.

"My advice is to go and sit quietly in the summer house for half an hour, until luncheon," said Mrs. Windlesham. "You'll hear the bell."

## IX

Luncheon was rather late that day. It was partaken of by six people. Among them was Miss Windlesham, the writer, celebrated under the pseudonym of "Amos Judd." Another was General Sir Robert William Brentwood-Powys. The little fierce man and the eminent novelist sat opposite to each other. Both looked astonishingly cheerful. The whole party seemed cheerful.

"We've never had such distinguished company before," said Mrs. Windlesham.

"You'll often have it again," replied the General, with a fierce wink.

"Big-game," remarked Miss Windlesham to herself, in a low voice, and groaned.

"Do you *like* writing, Aunt Lucy?" demanded Dot, not understanding the allusions.

"Heavens, no?" cried her aunt.

"There's a friend of mine who's dying to meet you." Dot fixed mournful eyes upon Miss Windlesham senior.

"There's hundreds in this town alone," added Wilfred.

"I've escaped it for years. I've gone everywhere as Miss Windlesham, and had even my proofs sent to my agent. Signed all my agreements Amos Judd. And now——" Aunt Lucy groaned. "It's *awful*."

“There’s no escape,” her brother said, almost with a sort of pleasurable gloating. “No escape now. The *Daily Mercury* spread the news to-day. All the other papers, all over the world, will have it to-morrow. Everybody who has ever read one of your books, everybody who has heard of you, will know this week and for ever—that you are Lucy Windlesham.”

“All the more reason for making haste,” grumbled the General.

“Haste?” Mr. Windlesham had rather lost the thread of the conversation.

“For making haste to change her name,” explained the General, patiently. “While everybody’s looking for Lucy Windlesham, they’re bound to miss Lady Brentwood-Powys. See?”

“Ooh!” ejaculated Mr. Windlesham. “So *that’s* the idea.”

“Yes,” chorused all the others. “*That’s* the idea.”

At which they all laughed; and Wilfred toasted the bride-elect in lemonade. Outside, unknown to the lunchers, a small crowd, headed by several men with cameras, was already gathering. Blissfully, the newly-engaged folk ate and chaffed. They did not know that next day a further instalment of the great Amos Judd romance would be upon every breakfast table in the kingdom. They did not know. It was mercifully hidden from them. The cat once out of the bag, no power upon earth can scramble it in again. Once a celebrity, always a celebrity, until the news value of the celebrity’s doings has evaporated.



SELWYN JEPSON

*“Don Sam Quixote”*

Selwyn Jepson lost no time in following the footsteps of his father, the well-known novelist, Edgar Jepson. His first book was published at the age of twenty-one, and since then he has quickly built up a reputation for thrillers and for his humorous short stories.



## “DON SAM QUIXOTE”

SUSAN CAISTER was sitting in the sun eating peaches, her sleek, black head against the ancient lichenous wall, when she was disturbed by the sight of Pamela and Mr. G. Banks. They came out of the rose pergola with entwined arms and rapt faces. At least, Pamela's was rapt. It was difficult to tell about Gilbert's because of his beard, a yellowish beard which needed trimming.

In Susan's view, if you *must* wear a beard at thirty-two, at any rate keep it pruned. But Gilbert was too irritating altogether even to begin adding up the things that were wrong about him. Besides, nobody was interested. Pamela, of course, flew into a rage if you criticised him at all. He was perfect; Pamela was becoming daily more idiotic about him.

Susan, finishing a peach, wondered vaguely if all elder, grown-up sisters were idiotic about young men. As for herself, being some way from grown-up, possibly it was presumptuous of her to have opinions about this thing called "love," but she could not believe that it required any experience at all to see that Mr. G. Banks, of Rosetown Garden City, was the sort of person to whom a sensible-minded girl would say: "If you were the last men left in the world, Gilbert, I wouldn't marry you."

But of course Pamela was not a sensible-minded girl; never had been, never would be. And were all the inhabitants of Rosetown Garden City cranks? It looked it. Otherwise, surely someone would have noticed Gilbert's beard and urged him to do away with it; would have noticed Gilbert, in fact, and for his own sake explained to him what a dreadful ass he was. But obviously nobody had.

Things looked black against Rosetown Garden City.

She flicked the peach-stone into a dahlia bush, and crouching lower, hoped that the couple crossing the space of lawn in front of her would relax somewhat their lover-like attitudes with thought to spare the feelings of possible spectators. They might have stayed in the pergola, out of sight. She put

the next peach to her delicate nose, and inhaled its sweetness. Gilbert had been staying at Caister Hall a whole fortnight now, fourteen blessed days, ever since Pamela had met him at a Chelsea party.

And instead of getting sick to death of him within twenty-four hours, as one might have reasonably expected, she had become more and more fixed on him. It seemed to be a great deal more serious than a mere flirtation.

Susan bit into the peach with angry white teeth, and juice trickled from the corners of her finely chiselled mouth. She bent forward that it might not reach her frock, and when she looked up again it was at the precise moment that Gilbert impressed an elaborate kiss upon Pamela's maiden lips.

Susan swallowed a fragment of peach at a gulp, which was almost painful, and let forth a long, wailing, lupine howl which echoed dismally across the tranquil gardens. The couple sprang apart and looked this way and that without tracing the sound to its source. Gilbert put a lily-white hand to his noble brow and appeared to have been rudely shaken by the incident. His nerves, likewise his soul, were sensitive. Susan could not hear what he said, but Pamela put a consoling hand on his arm and led him into the Dutch garden.

"Gosh!" said Susan, and because her appetite for peaches had somehow evaporated, she wrapped the remainder in the cool cabbage leaf in which she carried them from the hot-house (at a moment when Angus had been at the far end of the kitchen garden), cached the little bundle in a convenient dahlia root, and betook herself for a stroll in the Home Wood in a mood of considerable but helpless dissatisfaction.

It was all very well for Pamela, but what about herself? She did not see the slightest reason why she should be landed with a brother-in-law like Mr. G. Banks. It wasn't as though Pamela would take him away for good, once she had married him; she wouldn't. Mr. G. Banks wouldn't let her. He would clutter up Caister Hall for the rest of his useless life. After Rosetown Garden City it was the height of luxury; and comfort was necessary to the blossoming of his tender spirit if it was to find its full expression. He had said so quite often with an air of modest pride.

Susan always felt that the Home Wood, for all that it lay within half a mile of the house, was as remote as the forest

of a fairy tale. The birds were always hushed in its twilight depths, and flitted silently; the occasional rocketing flight of a pheasant disturbed the quiet like a stone flung in some sacred pool. Elves and fauns and similar creatures dwelt secretly and invisibly there, and when she walked under the high trees they watched her pass. They were friendly, although she never saw them, and they invariably helped her to put the tiresome world of human beings in its proper perspective when she was made unhappy or perplexed by it. The wood was at the same time a sanctuary and a land of adventure; it sheltered her, and continually and mysteriously promised astonishing discoveries, which lost nothing of their excitement because she never made them. It was an elusive wood.

Into it that fine morning she took her disgust with Mr. G. Banks, and her disappointment with Pamela, who ought to have known better, but didn't. Even poor brother Bill was not as blind, with all his romantic ideas about chorus ladies, and so on; even Bill had shuddered at breakfast yesterday when Gilbert had passionately denounced kidneys and bacon as evidence of man's barbarism, crying:

“The meat of slaughtered animals! Pah! Bring me the nuts of far Brazil—and lettuce. Green lettuce!”

Bill left for an indefinite visit to Town after that. Gilbert, apparently, was more than he could stand.

Something had got to be done to put an end to such a state of affairs, and it was while she was resolutely facing the fact, that she came quietly down the path to Dobble's Dell, in the very middle of the wood, and saw that it was occupied by something which was not an elf and certainly not a faun.

She stopped, and watched the man.

Assuredly, he had no right to be there, in one of her father's most private and preserved woods. No conceivable right. She did not, of course, immediately condemn him on this score, for although she was descended from a long line of land-owning aristocrats, she could never feel the fury of possession which seemed to animate so many of that class. She had a sneaking feeling that the earth belonged to man and not to particular and selected individuals.

She did not, therefore, retire and fetch a bailiff or a gamekeeper, but examined the trespasser with a tolerant and unbiased interest. His appearance puzzled her, although

his occupation at the moment was abundantly clear. He was somewhere between thirty and forty years of age, and dressed in a grey suit which displayed none of the over-worn aspects usually to be noticed in the clothes of those gentlemen of the road who occasionally wandered from the distant highway into Sir Robert Caister's sacred woods, to rest and recuperate after the rigours of the last workhouse. It was not a new grey suit, certainly, but with a little pressing by a valet-service and so forth, it might have become fit to wear in any drawing-room. The hat which lay by his side was of the soft felt kind, and belonged to the same category as the suit. His collar, as best as she could determine at the distance, was clean.

Although these things interested her, she was more engaged by his occupation, which was that of eating. He sat on his heels by a small fire, and with a pocket-knife and fork fed with a certain delicacy, considering the inconvenience of having no table and nothing more than a piece of paper for a plate; he fed, then, from the carcass of a freshly-grilled partridge. One of Sir Robert's very precious partridges. Its feathers, from its recent plucking, lay in a little heap on the other side of the floor.

The sight of this poaching, this enjoyment of the spoil, did not arouse in Susan any great anger; the partridge was not hers, and if her father was too busy at Westminster, and his gamekeepers too lazy to patrol the woods, then the partridges must preserve themselves. This one, it seemed, had failed. It was nothing to do with her.

The man looked up from his feast, and saw her standing motionless above him, on the lip of the dell. A ray of sunshine illuminated her, and the wood was dark behind. Her face was long, and her eyes seemed alight with green fire.

"A witch!" he cried. "I might have expected it!"

His voice, Susan realised without surprise, was as cultured as his table-manners. His face, she observed, was very intelligent, with a certain wariness of expression.

"I'm not a witch," she said, although the thought pleased her. She walked down into the dell.

"You are," he contradicted, "but naturally, having enchanted the wood, you cannot very well admit your real status in it. You couldn't, even in these dreadfully frank and outspoken days."

He shook his head, and stood up. He was tall, and his eyes, which were blue, danced continuously, as though he enjoyed some eternal, but secret joke.

“Have you come to lunch?” he asked casually. “There is some bird——” He mentioned it as though she might not have noticed the partridge. Manifestly, no conscience troubled him.

“I’m afraid,” she said gravely, “I have to go back to my cave for lunch. Spider stew. . . .” It occurred to her suddenly that she had not felt for a moment nervous of him. For such a lawless, trespassing man he had an innocuous air.

“Nobody stopped you, coming into the woods?” she asked.

“Why should they? The world is free to every man.”

“Is it?”

“No. But I always like to assume that it is, until someone proves it isn’t. So far they haven’t to-day. Tell me, are there ogres besides witches in this forest? And shall I find a Sleeping Beauty?”

“There are four ogres,” said Susan gravely. “Two of them are Scotch, and all four wear velveteen and gaiters. Are you really looking for a Sleeping Beauty?”

“I forsook the over-crowded world many years ago that I might find her. I seek her in charming wildernesses. . . .”

He indicated Sir Robert Caister’s carefully preserved woods with a gesture of his hand, and ignored the reference to velveteen and gaiters. He continued:

“I admit I do not answer to the traditional description of Prince Charming, and that my name, for short, is Sam, but these things are purely superficial. Traditionally speaking, however——”

He paused to place the unfinished partridge near the fire to keep hot.

“—however, in the good old days of yore, when there were no bathrooms, and chivalry was the virtue of the day, it was possible to ride about the wicked world—if you felt about things as I do—in a golden armour a-horse a snow-white palfrey and, in a general sort of way, to slay dragons, lift spells, and rescue beautiful maidens from giants, ogres, and other noxious creatures, without being too severely criticised by so-called thinking men and women. And policemen. Things in fact, are not what they were. In those days

we were vastly respected, madam! We were entertained in noble castles, and served with honour wherever we went. The occasions were rare indeed when we had to skulk in bushes, and prepare our own poultry for lunch. No, madam, we did not."

" "Other noxious creatures," " murmured Susan in a distant, thoughtful tone, and turned to this Don Quixote in Modern Dress with an abruptness of movement and an intensity of air which told of sudden inspiration.

" You think it possible, then, that there are still beautiful maidens to be rescued from 'noxious creatures'?"

" I'll stake my life on it! " cried Sam with fervour.

Susan nodded with satisfaction.

" Well, there's Pamela," she said. " You might do worse than begin on her. You wouldn't have to marry her, necessarily, although I believe it was one time expected of Prince Charming."

Sam seemed a trifle startled by this sudden descent to the practical.

" Pamela? " he inquired gingerly.

" Of course," continued Susan quickly, warming to decision, " I'll have to find some luggage for you—some more clothes—dinner-jacket, shoes, socks and shirts. Pamela is one of those girls who go a terrible lot by appearances. My hat! But we'll settle this Banks business!"

" Banks? " said Sam. " I've seen them about. They keep money in them, don't they? "

He licked anticipatory lips.

" Ever been in Rosetown Garden City? " asked Susan.

" Heaven forbid! "

" Then you haven't seen this Banks. It's not exactly an ogre and it certainly isn't a giant. I think it's what you would call a noxious creature. I would, anyway. Its first name is Gilbert, and it's hanging round Pamela's neck, strangling her soul, and what-not. Pamela is my elder sister."

Sam blinked, but to his credit he kept pace.

" Some fellow," he said, " borrowed my sword and forgot to return it. Can you get hold of one with the—ah—luggage? Instead of an umbrella, as it were? "

" Swords are out of date," said Susan regretfully. " Words are what you will have to use. 'Honeyed' words, I believe they're called. Pamela loves them. Good Heavens! You'll

sweep the ground with Gilbert! He's a nut-eater, a poor filleted nut-eater! Pamela won't look at him again, once you've got going!”

A joyous and triumphant light shone in her eyes, and she gazed happily at Sam. Not only would she drive Gilbert back to Rosetown Garden City, but she would also gratify Sam's taste for the good and comfortable things of life; give him a chance to enjoy them after the fashion to which he was accustomed by birth and breeding; enable him to eat unstolen partridges at a proper table in a house which, if it was not a castle, was nothing if it was not noble.

“You'll try?” she asked, and held his eyes by the eagerness of her own. He stroked his chin.

“I have lived about forty years,” he said, “and I've learnt better than to thwart a witch in her own wood.”

Susan sprang up the path, and paused at the top of the dell.

“Wait here. I shan't be long.”

Sam Quixote stared for a moment at the place where she disappeared, and rubbed his eyes as though doubting their evidence.

“Remarkable,” he said finally. “Indeed, remarkable, and a turn of Fortune's Wheel, if I mistake it not.”

He resumed his lunch in a cheerful mood, and he had scarcely finished when the young witch returned to him. She staggered into the dell with a fair-sized suit-case, and dropped it at his feet. She was breathless but satisfied.

“That's the most difficult part done with,” she said, perhaps a little optimistically.

Sam eyed the suit-case, and judged it to be full. He was a man of imagination, if not of parts, and the luck had been dead out for months.

Sir Robert Caister motored to his country place that same afternoon, arriving at Caister Hall at tea-time after a trying morning at the Foreign Office, to find that Gilbert Banks was still staying with him; that his son had gone to Town, and that Susan had brought a stranger home to tea, a Mr. Samuel Meltravers, who was tall and sunburnt, with good-humoured blue eyes.

He had, it seemed, just arrived in England from Central Africa, which he had been exploring, and had come to Biddlington to stay with Colonel Petersen, whose death everybody—except Mr. Meltravers—knew to have occurred early in

the spring. The explorer had been very upset and perplexed, and it was in this state that Susan had met him and asked him to tea. Any friend of the Colonel's . . . etc., etc.

This was what Sir Robert deduced from the few words dropped to him across the tea-table by Susan when she said casually :

"Mr. Meltravers hadn't heard about poor Colonel Petersen. But Central Africa is a long way off, isn't it? And exploring does take you out of the beaten track."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Meltravers, and drank some tea.

"I am glad Susan came to the rescue," said Sir Robert politely, and began to talk about Africa—somewhat to Susan's alarm. But Mr. Meltravers seemed to be resourceful, and knew all about Africa.

She was pleased, also, to observe the immediate interest which Pamela took in him—unnoticed by Mr. Banks who, as usual, was occupied more with himself than anything else.

At the end of tea Susan said :

"I think it would be an awful shame if we let Mr. Meltravers go back to Town. He expected to stay at least a week, so there's nothing to drag him back. And he has got a bag with him, and everything."

If Sir Robert had wanted to withhold an invitation to stay, he might have found it difficult after that. Actually, however, he saw in Meltravers some relief from Gilbert Banks at meal-times (the only occasions when he had to see him), and he said without hesitation :

"Susan, Mr. Meltravers, is young and enthusiastic, so you must not take any notice of her. But I hope that if you feel you can spare a few days you will permit us to entertain you. Colonel Petersen was our neighbour for many years."

Mr. Samuel Meltravers, who had never heard of Colonel Petersen until half an hour ago, adopted a brazenness of which Susan heartily, if perforce secretly, approved.

"The Colonel," he said, "must be a sad loss to us all. I shall be charmed to stay a few days, Sir Robert, indeed charmed."

Sir Robert smiled amiably, and added :

"You will forgive me, I know, if I am rather busy for a day or so, and I am sorry that William—my son—is away at the moment. He would have been very glad to take steps to save

you from boredom. There are my daughters, however; Susan—and Pamela—who must look after you.”

Mr. Meltravers turned upon Pamela a glance of remarkable quality. It seemed to possess within its brief and fleeting moment a complete and slavish admiration; an overflowing and inexpressible gratitude. He said:

“*This*—is nearer Paradise than anything I have experienced for a long time.”

His hearers, with the exception of the startled Pamela, assumed that he was contrasting the environment in which he now found himself with the equatorial wilderness he had recently left. Pamela could not help but understand it as an extension of that surprising glance. She flushed gently, considered him for a moment, and then favoured him with a smile which was both friendly and provocative—if not coy.

Gilbert noticed it. He frowned petulantly, and tried to look the brutish fellow straightly in the eye, but the explorer continued to disregard his very existence in a fashion which would have galled the self-esteem of a tree-stump.

Susan also noticed the smile, and although its principle sickened her, she took it as a good sign. When Pamela looked at a man like that it meant something; in fact, if he did not run immediately, and run fast, she caught him sooner or later.

Sam had thrust his head into the lion’s mouth. Sam was a brick.

The smoothness with which Pamela’s rescue proceeded from that moment was a source of gratification to Susan, and she found that she was required to do little to further it. It was pleasant to discover that the Sam she had come upon in Dobbles’ Dell, with his talk of knights-errant, was no less impressive and effective in action, with a maiden there to rescue. He fairly flung himself into the fray, and by the time Gilbert Banks had gasped once or twice and realised that he actually had a rival, the initial stages of Pamela’s infatuation for the explorer were successfully passed.

After dinner that night, when Sir Robert had gone to his study, Mr. Meltravers kept everybody, even Susan, spell-bound with his stories of dangerous situations happily escaped and dealt with in those fetid jungles. Pamela forgot about Higher Thought, Vegetarianism, Karma, and Rosetown Mysticism while she followed him breathlessly, with shining eyes, from adventure to adventure.

"Oh, how *marvellous!*" she said every now and again, and when Gilbert managed to find an opening in which to whisper: "The moon will not wait for us, Pamela *mie*. And you promised, didn't you . . .?" She shook her head impatiently, and turned again to the explorer with a little fluting cry: "Oh, please go on! *Please. . . .*"

Such an appeal, Mr. Meltravers' eyes assured her, he was powerless to resist, although he loathed to talk about himself so much.

Susan, watching him, accorded him full marks for fascination. In evening clothes he was tremendously distinguished; by the side of him, both in physical bulk and in sheer personality, Mr. Banks was a gnat, a sulky gnat.

The following day produced an unmistakable reluctance in Pamela to allow the new guest to leave her side, even to please Gilbert, who made no effort to hide his irritation. His voice was far less melodious than usual, and his long black hair seemed more dishevelled. Susan, keeping an eye on him, likened him to the spoilt child who has to watch another eat a slice of cake.

Coming down the stairs to lunch, she heard his tones raised in protest. He had got Pamela alone for a moment.

"I am desolate, desolate, Pamela!" he said. "Have you no pity? It is a thousand years since I had you to myself!"

"Poor Gilbert. . . ."

Susan frowned.

"Listen," he went on. "Let us steal away this afternoon; I have so much to say to you. So many dreams . . . meet me in the pavilion in the cypress grove at three. Let no one know . . . just you and I, dear one. . . . Promise?"

Pamela hesitated, and promised. The pavilion, then, at three.

By this time Susan had reached the bottom of the stairs. It wasn't her fault if Gilbert liked to shout his love-trysts all over the house. Pamela was disgusting. It had happened before. She was going to twang two strings on her bow, one against the other, as it were. Matters would drift on for ever, and Gilbert would never be driven away.

And he had got to be.

She sought out Mr. Meltravers immediately after lunch and consulted him.

He said :

“It would be easier for Prince Charming if the Princess recognised the noxious creature as a noxious creature. At present I don’t think she realises she needs rescuing. Awkward, and quite contrary to the best precedents. This brown suit fits me quite well, don’t you think ?”

“Yes,” agreed Susan, and knit her intelligent brows.

“By the way, are there any more shirts ? There were only two in that suit-case, and I always wear two at once. A whim, you understand.”

“I’ll put them in your room. How can I make Pamela see he is noxious ?”

“Thanks. I dare say it would help if you could make her see what a joke Gilbert is. Make her laugh at him. *At him*, not with him,” said Mr. Meltravers, and added sagely if mysteriously : “Humour reduces everything to a common denominator. Get her to laugh at him and it’ll break his nerve—his conceit. He won’t hit her ; he’ll run away.”

“I see,” said Susan. “I nearly forgot ; he’s meeting her in the pavilion—it’s at the end of the cypress grove—at three o’clock.”

“I’ll be around,” said Mr. Meltravers dutifully, and fetched himself another cigar from the humidor in the library. He was fond of cigars.

Make her laugh at Gilbert ? Susan thought she saw what Sam meant. But Pamela was difficult when it came to a joke ; she either had a different sense of humour from other people, or more likely still, none at all. You could never tell what she was going to think was funny. Broadly speaking, she only laughed at the heel-on-the-banana-skin sort of humour.

Make Gilbert ridiculous somehow ?

Susan cudgelled her brains. He was already about as ridiculous as he could be, and Pamela hadn’t noticed it.

Well, one could always try.

At a quarter to three she strolled nonchalantly through the marble colonnade of the Greek pavilion (which a classical-minded but rather exotic ancestor had built in the eighteenth century) and, as she had expected, came upon the waiting Gilbert there, his aching heart having driven him early to the trysting-place. At the sight of her he ground his teeth.

“I am composing a sonnet,” he said coldly, with the distant air of a man who resents a disturbance of his peace.

Susan, however, did not notice. She swung her sun-bonnet by its ribbon and peered intently into the woods beyond with an amused smile. It became cynical.

"She'll never run fast enough to escape him," she remarked casually. "The primordial chase . . ."

"Who—what—what's that?" demanded Gilbert sharply; for he could think of nothing save Pamela, and came quickly to where Susan stood. "Who is it?" he asked anxiously.

"Guess," suggested Susan ironically.

"Pamela, and that clodhopper!" he cried with a conviction she would have been rude to contradict, and he ran out of the pavilion to glower at the regiment of trees. He could perceive no movement in them, but in his anguished imagination he saw Pamela in flight, pursued by a satyr, an African satyr, in the form of Samuel Meltravers. Pamela, waylaid on her way to the pavilion.

"Which way did they go?" he urged of Susan, and was enraged by her composure.

She shrugged her shoulders. All this fuss about a couple of rabbits—if indeed she had not imagined them—gambolling under the trees. They certainly weren't there now.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you," she said accurately.

He groaned, hesitated, and then rushed toward the wood. Susan sighed with gentle triumph and ran after him. She caught him up at the edge of the trees.

"I've got better eyesight than you," she stated, and without waiting for him to accept her leadership she set off into the wood, four or five paces ahead of him. There was only one path at that point, and he followed her down it, although he did not use her hop, skip and jump method of progress, which saved her from the brambles which encroached upon her path.

He was less active, and unaccustomed to exercise; in consequence his legs and trousers suffered somewhat. But his outraged spirit urged him to Pamela's side without regard for wounds and thorns. It irked him to have to trust to her younger eyesight, but she knew the woods. When he asked her if she could see them, she told him to lower his voice; that she always relied on her ears as well as her eyes.

He blundered after her.

It would have been happier for him, however, if he had employed greater caution, or even the hop, skip and jump method. If he had emulated Susan's example, for instance, in leaping in his run the patch of luscious green moss which lay across the rough track along which she led him a few moments later.

However, he did not leap it, but ran on to it before he realised that it lacked the solidity of its appearance. By that time, of course, it was too late. His feet, ankles, shins, knees and thighs slid downward into a soft, slimy ooze of bog. In a moment the path he should have been travelling was level with his waist.

He gave a cry of horror and dismay. Mud gurgled and a smell assailed his nose. A black smell. . . .

Susan stopped, turned and hurried back.

“Idiot!” she said angrily. “Can't you look where you're going?”

“I'm sinking!”

“You're not. You've gone in as far as you'll go,” she said, perhaps a little unsympathetically.

He summoned his failing courage and began to struggle to firmer ground. He slipped forward twice and all but disappeared in slime before he reached the edge. He squirmed and scrambled out and lay for a moment, murmuring unhappily. He stood up and dripped black mud from every inch of his body. He tried to wipe his face and added more mud to that which already clung to it. Susan surveyed him critically.

He whimpered. He had forgotten about Pamela, about the satyr, about everything except his enormous misery and discomfort. Susan put her forefinger and thumb to the end of her nose and pressed her nostrils shut.

“You smell,” she said. “Ozone, it's called. You'd bedder ged back to the house as sood as you can, and do something about a bath—or three baths.”

From a distance of ten yards or more, she led him squelching out of the wood, reaching its edge opposite the pavilion, at the same place where they had entered.

Gilbert was well in the middle of the open space before he realised that Pamela and Meltravers were sitting on the third step of the pavilion, staring at him; then Pamela rose to her feet.

“What—who is it?” she asked.

“Gilbert,” said Susan. “He has been for a run in the woods.”

Pamela’s expression of concern and alarm vanished, and another took its place.

She began to laugh. She laughed for nearly a minute. Then she stopped to put a small lace handkerchief to her nostrils.

Susan nodded.

“I told him he smelt,” she said.

Mr. Meltravers gazed at her with every appearance of unstinted admiration.

Suddenly Gilbert burst into tears, and set off at a totter down the grove toward the house, and Pamela began to laugh again—heartlessly. Nobody would have denied, however, that he made a remarkably amusing figure.

Susan was about to follow him, that she might miss nothing of the excitement should he meet anyone on his way to the house, when she observed a strange look on the face of Sam. Sam was staring down the grove, and his lower jaw seemed to have lost its firmness; it had all but dropped.

Down the middle of the grove there came the somewhat incongruous shape of Sergeant Rogers, the silver spike on his policeman’s helmet catching the rays of the westering sun. He was a stout and upstanding man, and his walk was the relentless if flat-footed march of the Law. He did not, perhaps, exactly harmonise with the cypresses and the Greek pavilion to which they led, but he was not without an imposing air.

The effect of him upon Mr. Meltravers, once he had realised that his eyes were not playing him tricks, was both instantaneous and remarkable.

He leapt to his feet, and bolted at a sharp trot—the kind of trot which a man who is in training can keep up for hours—into the shelter of the wood, and therein vanished.

Susan’s mind leapt to but one conclusion, and because she was grateful to him for his efforts on Pamela’s behalf, she hoped from the bottom of her soul that Sergeant Rogers had not seen him go.

In this there was some chance of fulfilment, for at approximately the same moment, the Sergeant and Mr. Banks passed one another, and the Sergeant, however polite, would never

have resisted a second, if not, indeed, a third glance at that queer mud-distorted travesty of a man.

“Whatever’s the matter with Mr. Meltravers?” inquired Pamela in a puzzled voice. “Has he forgotten something?”

“Or remembered something . . .” murmured Susan, and watched the nearing policeman with cold if anxious eyes.

Sergeant Rogers, however, had not seen Sam’s exit from the social sphere. He lumbered to a standstill in front of Pamela, and saluted her.

“If you’ll excuse me, Miss Caister, and beggin’ your pardon for intrudin’, but Simmons, he told me you wouldn’t mind, secin’ that I wanted to speak to you personally . . .”

“Certainly, Sergeant. . . .” Pamela was gracious.

“Well, it’s this police orphanage sworrey on Saturday—we’d be very grateful, Miss, if you’d sing for us the same as you did last year. . . .”

He paused because Susan sprang so suddenly into movement; it was enough to make anyone jump. She turned and dashed into the wood on the other side of the pavilion at an extraordinary speed, and disappeared, the mystified Pamela noticed, at the same place where the trees had taken Mr. Meltravers.

“Really,” said Pamela, “I think everybody has gone mad this afternoon—first one thing and then another——”

“Just a game, I dessay, Miss,” suggested Sergeant Rogers soothingly, and went on to inquire if she would favour the soir e with her much-liked rendering of “My Little Grey Home in the West.”

Pamela graciously consented. The sergeant thanked her with ardour, and she made her way to the house to find that Gilbert was quite firm—through the bathroom door—that he wanted a car to take him to the station to catch the six-five. He was almost rude to her.

But Susan never caught up with Sam to reassure him about Sergeant Rogers.

Sam must have run like a hare for miles. The Road must have called, and called loudly when he saw Sergeant Rogers. . . . That was all right, and his affair. He knew better than she did why he had been so scared by the sight of that large blue figure.

But he had answered the call of the Road in one of Brother Bill’s favourite suits.

And as soon as Brother Bill heard that Mr. Banks had returned to Rosetown Garden City, he would come back from London and raise the very dickens of a noise about that brown suit.

Susan sighed, and ate a very poor tea.

Perhaps Brother Bill would be reasonable, seeing that Gilbert no longer cluttered up the place.

Thereafter Susan made a habit of visiting Dobbie's Dell nearly every day, but Sam Quixote never came to it again. She had liked Sam; it was a pity about his nervousness of policemen.

F. C. BURNAND

*Dinner Party at Fraser's*

Sir Francis Burnand was one of the most celebrated editors of *Punch*, and a playwright of no little ability. His early burlesque, *Black-eyed Susan*, made a great hit, and he followed it up with a large number of successful farces and comedies.



## DINNER PARTY AT FRASER'S

**A**T dinner. In consequence of having to listen to several whispered observations on the company present from Mrs. Plyte Fraser, who tells me who every one is, and how clever they all are, I find myself left alone, eating fish. I make three picks at my fish and finish. The butler and footman are both in the room, but neither will catch my eye, and I can't get my plate removed. The coachman, who comes in to wait occasionally, and is very hot and uncomfortable all the time, *does* catch my eye, and sees me pointing to my plate. He looks in a frightened manner at me, as though begging me not to ask *him* to do anything on his own account. He is evidently debating within himself whether he oughtn't to tell the butler that I'm making signs. I should say that this coachman is snubbed by the others. His rule for waiting appears to be, when in doubt play the lobster sauce ; which he hands with everything.

Mrs. Fraser whispers to me to draw the American General out. "He was in the war," she says, behind her fan. I say, "Oh, indeed!" and commence the process of drawing out. It's a difficult art. The first question is everything. I ask him, diffidently, "How he liked the war?" Before he can reply, Mrs. Fraser informs the company, as if she were exhibiting the military hero, "Ah! General Duncammon was in all the great engagements——" The General shuts his eyes and nods towards a salt-cellar. "He knew," she continues, still exhibiting him, "all the leading men there——" The General looks round the table cautiously to see, perhaps, if anybody else did—"and he was in the very centre of the battle, where he received a dreadful sabre wound, at—at——" She looks for assistance to the General, who seems rather more staggered than he probably did in the battle, and Plyte Fraser, from the top of the table, supplies, "Bull's Run." "Bull's Run," repeats Mrs. Fraser to the General, as if challenging him to contradict it if he dared. "General Duncammon's property," she goes on, still lecturing on him as a kind of mechanical

waxwork figure, "was all—all—all—dear me, what's the word I want?" She turns to me abruptly. I don't know. The General doesn't know. Perhaps he never had any property. Everybody being appealed to, separately, "has the word on the tip of his tongue!" "You," says Mrs. Fraser to me, "of course have quite a storehouse of words. I never can imagine an author without a perfect magazine of words. It must be *so* delightful *always* to be able to say what you want, you know. Now what is the word I'm waiting for? You know when a man has all his property taken by Government—taken away—not 'compromised'—no—dear me——" All eyes are upon me. Of course I know. Boldly, but with a nervous feeling that I'm not quite right yet, I say, "sequestered," and lean back in my chair, somewhat hot.

*Happy Thought.*—Sequestered.

Mrs. Fraser adopts it. "Sequestered by Government." Miss Harding goes into a fit of laughing. I see the mistake, so does Mrs. Fraser, so does every one. Every one laughs. They all think it's my joke, and Mrs. Fraser taps me on the hand with her fan, and explains to the General "sequestered, you know, for sequestrated." Every one laughs again, except Miss Harding, who, Mrs. Fraser keeps whispering to me, is "such a clever girl, so well read. Draw her out." She won't be drawn out any more than the General. The party, I subsequently find, has been asked expressly to meet *me*, and the Frasers do their best to give everything a literary turn. Odd; I don't feel a bit brilliant this evening. Very disappointing this must be to the guests. I can't even talk to Miss Harding. In consequence of what is expected of me, I can't stoop to talk about the weather, or what any one's "been doing to-day." After the haunch of venison I am going to begin to Miss Harding about "the Human Mind in its several aspects," when she says, "I thought you authors were full of conversation and sparkling wit." It's rather rude of her, but Mrs. Fraser shouldn't lead her to expect so much. I can only say, "Did you?" As an afterthought I ask "Why?"

She replies, "Well, one reads of the meetings of such men as Sheridan, Burke, Grattan, Dr. Johnson, and they seem to have said witty things every moment." I feel that I am called upon to defend the literary character for *esprit* in the present day. I reply, "Well you see," deliberately, "it's so different

now, it's in fact more——” I am interrupted by a gentleman on the other side, in a white waistcoat and iron-grey whiskers, “No wits nowadays,” he says; “why, I recollect Coleridge, Count D'Orsay, Scott, Southey, and Tommy Moore, with old Maginn, sir, at one table. Then, sir, there was poor Hook, and Mathews, and Yates. I'm talking of a time before you were born or thought of——” He says this as if he'd done something clever in being born when he was, and as if I'd made an entire mistake in choosing my time for existence. Every one is attending to the gentleman in the white waistcoat, who defies contradiction, because all his stories are of a time before any one at the table “was born or thought of.” It is very annoying that there should ever have been such a period.

*Happy thought.*—In Chap. X, Book IX of *Typical Developments*, “The Vanity of Existence.” From literature he gets to the drama. He seems to remember every actor. According to him, no one ever did anything in literature or art, without asking *his* advice. His name is Brounton, and he speaks of himself in the third person as Harry. I try to speak to Miss Harding, but she is listening to a story from Brounton about “Old Mathews.” “You didn't know old Mathews,” he says to Fraser, who humbly admits he didn't. “Ah, I recollect, before he ever thought of giving his entertainment, his coming to me and saying, ‘Harry, my boy’—he always called me Harry—‘Harry, my boy,’ says he, ‘I'd give a hundred pounds to be able to sing and speak like you.’ ‘I wish I could lend it you, Matty,’ I said to him—I used to call him Matty—‘but Harry Brounton wouldn't part with his musical ear for——’” Here a diversion is created by the entrance of the children. I see the one who made faces at me from the window. Ugly boy. The child who would bother me when I was dressing is between Mrs. Fraser and myself. I give him grapes and fruit, to propitiate him: great point to make friends with juveniles. He whispers to me presently, “You don't know what me and Conny's done.” I say, cheerfully, “No, I can't guess.” He whispers, “We've been playing at going out of town with your box.” I should like to pinch him. He continues, whispering, “I say, it's in your room, you know: we got such a lot of things in it.” I don't like to tell Mrs. Fraser, who says, “There, Dolly, don't be troublesome.” I am distracted. The boy on the side of Mrs. Fraser (he was the

nuisance in the croquet ground), says, pointing at me, "Oh, he's got such a funny hat," and is immediately silenced. I should like to hear more about this hat. I ask Dolly, who whispers, "the nurse took it away from him, 'cos she said he'd hurt himself." The little Frasers have evidently been smashing my *gibus*. The ladies rise, and the children go with them. "You won't stop long," says Mrs. Fraser, persuasively. "No, no," answered Fraser. "Because I've allowed the children to sit up on purpose," continues Mrs. Fraser, looking at me. "All right," returns Fraser; "we'll just have one glass of wine and then we'll come into the drawing-room, and"—smiling upon me—"he'll give us 'The Little Pig Jumped,' with the squeak and all."

I find that all the guests have been asked expressly to hear me sing this: I also find that there are a great many people coming in the evening for the same special purpose. I haven't done it for years. Fraser seems to think that any man who writes is merely a buffoon. I only wonder that he doesn't ask me to dance a saraband for the amusement of his friends. I *am* astonished at Mrs. Fraser. I tell Fraser I've forgotten the song. He won't hear of it: he says, "You'll remember it as you go on." I say, I can't get on without a good accompaniment. He returns that the elder Miss Symperson plays admirably. Every one says, "Oh, you must sing." The American General, who speaks for the first time, now says, "He's come ten miles to hear it." Brounton supposes "I don't recollect Old Mathews *at Home*?" I don't, and he has me at a disadvantage.

He goes on to ask me if I accompany myself? No, I don't. "Ah!" says he, "I recollect Theodore Hook sitting down to the piano and dashing off a song and an accompaniment in promptu. You don't improvise?" he asks me. I am obliged to own frankly that I do not, but in the tone of one who could if he liked. "Ah," he goes on, "you should hear the Italian Improvisatori! Ever been to Italy?" No, I haven't: he has, and again I am at a disadvantage. "Ah!" he exclaims, "that is something like improvisation: such fire and humour—more than in the French. Of course you know all Béranger's songs by heart?" Before I have time to say that I know a few, he is off again. "Ah! the French comic songs are so light and sparkling. No English comic song can touch them—and then, where are your singers?" I wish to goodness he'd

not been asked to hear "The Little Pig." Going out of the dining-room, Fraser says to me, "Capital fellow, Brounton, isn't he: so amusing." If I don't admit it Fraser will think me envious and ill-natured; so I say heartily, "Brounton! very amusing fellow—great fun," and we are in the drawing-room.

Here I find all the people who have been invited in the evening. I should like to be taken ill. The children are at me at once. "Ma says you're to sing." Little brutes! The elder Miss Symperson, who will be happy to play for me, is seated near the piano. She is half a head taller than I am, and peculiarly elegant and lady-like. My last chance is trying to frighten her out of accompanying me. I tell her the tune is difficult to catch. Will I hum it to her? I hum it to her. In humming it is difficult to choose any words but "rum tum tum," and *very* difficult to convey a right notion of the tune. Two children standing by the piano give their version of it. I say, "hush" to them, and lose the tune. Miss Symperson does catch it, and chooses a key for me. Fraser, thinking the song is beginning, says, "Silence," and interrupts Brounton in a loud story about his remembering "Old Mathews singing a song about a pig—he was inimitable, Mathews was"—when I have to explain that we're not ready to begin yet. The conversation is resumed: Mrs. Fraser seats herself on an ottoman with her two very youngest children, who are fidgety, near the piano; the two others insist on standing just in front of me by the piano. Miss Harding takes a small chair quite close to me; by her sits a Captain Someone, who has come in the evening with his sister. I feel that she despises buffoonery, but if the Pig-song is to be anything at all, it must be done with a good deal of facial expression. The Captain is evidently joking with her at my expense. Don't know him, but hate him: because it's very ungentlemanly and unfair to laugh at you, just when you're going to sing a comic song. I tell Fraser, apologetically, that I really am afraid I shall break down. Brounton says, "Never mind—improvise." Miss Symperson says, "Shall I begin?" I answer, "If you please," and she plays what she thinks is the air. I am obliged to stop her, and say that it's not quite correct. This makes a hitch to begin with. Brounton says something about a tuning-fork, and every one laughs except the Captain, who is talking in a low tone to Miss Harding. Mrs. Fraser's youngest child on her

lap says, "Ma, why—doo—de——" Hush! Miss Symper-son, in not a particularly good temper, plays it again. More like a march than a comic song, but I don't like to tell her so. I begin :

A little pig lived on the best of straw,  
Straw—hee-haw—and Shandiddlelaw.

And the idea flashes across my mind what an ass I'm making of myself. At the "hee-haw," the pianist has to do six notes up and down, like a donkey braying. This is one of the points of the song. Miss Symperson doesn't do it. I hear, afterwards, that she thought it vulgar, and omitted it purposely. I go on :

Lillibullero, lillibullero, lillibullero,  
Shandiddlelan,  
My daddy's a bonnie wee man.

I feel it is idiotic. Miss Symperson plays a bar too much. She didn't know I finished there. I beg she won't apologise. Next verse :

This little pig's mother she was the old sow,  
Ow, ow, ow, and Shandiddleow.

I feel it's more idiotic than ever. Here I see Miss Harding exchanging glances with the Captain, and Mrs. Fraser with several ladies ; they raise their eyebrows and look grim. I suddenly recollect I've got some rather broad verses coming. The idea also occurs to me for the first time that when Fraser *did* hear me sing it, years ago, it was amongst a party of bachelors after supper. I go on with lillibullero, and have half a mind to give it up altogether :

The farmer's wife went out for a walk,  
Walk, ork, ork, and shandiddle lork.  
"I fancy," says she, "a slice of good pork."

This I used to do, I remember, with a wink and making a face like a clown. I risk it. I feel I don't do it with spirit, and nobody laughs. I see Brounton whisper behind his hand to the American General, and I am sure that he's "seen old Mathews do this very thing," or something of that sort. Getting desperate, I make more hideous faces in the lillibullero chorus. Miss Harding looks down ; the ladies regard one

another curiously—I believe they think I've had too much wine; the ugly boy, by the piano, begins to imitate my faces, and the youngest in arms bursts into a violent fit of tears. Miss Symperson stops. The child won't be comforted. Mrs. Fraser tells the wretched little brat that "the gentleman won't make any more ugly faces, he won't." And turning to me, asks me to sing without the grimaces: "They can't," she argues, "be a necessity"; and Fraser reminds me, reprovingly, that when I sang it before, I didn't make those faces. I have half a mind to ask him (being rather nettled) what faces I *did* make? The result is, however, to set the two boys off making faces at their little sisters, for which they are very nearly being ordered off to bed instantly. Miss Symperson asks me, "Shall I go on!" I say, despondently, "Yes, if you please, we may as well."

The farmer's wife was fond of a freak,  
Eak, eak, eak, and shandiddleleak,  
And she made the little pig squeak, squeak, squeak.

Here used to follow the imitation. I think it better not to do it now, and am proceeding with the next verse, when Fraser says, "Hallo! I say, do the squeak." I tell him I can't, I don't feel up to it. He says, "Oh, *do* try." I hear Miss Harding say, "Oh, do try." The Captain, too, remarks (I see his eye), he hopes I'll try, and Brounton hopes the same thing, and then tells something about Hook (probably) behind his hand to the General. I say, "Very well," and yield. I begin squeaking: I shut my eyes and squeak: I open them and squeak. I try it four times, but am obliged to own publicly "that there is no fun in it unless you're in cue for it." No one seems in cue for it. The children begin squeaking, and are packed off to bed. People begin to resume the conversation. I say to Fraser I don't think there's any use in going on with the song? He answers, "Oh, yes, do—do by all means." But as he is not by any means enthusiastic about it, I thank Miss Symperson, who acknowledges it very stiffly and coldly, and cuts me for the remainder of the evening. Broughton comes up and tells me loudly, "That he remembers old Mathews doing that song, or something exactly like it, years ago; it was admirable." Miss Florelly asks me quietly, if I'd written many songs. I disown the authorship of the pig. The Captain sings a sentimental ballad about "Meet me where the Flow'ret

Droops," to Miss Harding's accompaniment, and every one is charmed.

*Happy Thought.*—Bed-time. I'll never sing again as long as I live.

*In my Room.*—My shirts, brushes, combs, ties, opera-hat, fire-irons, boots, collars, sponges, and everything, have been thrown anyhow into my portmanteau. Who the——

Oh, I recollect : this is what that horrid little wretch meant, when he told me at dessert, that he and his sister had been playing at packing-up in my room.

I wish I was back at Boodels'. I dare say they're dragging the pond, and enjoying themselves. I don't think I shall stop here any longer.

HARRY LEON WILSON

*Ruggles of Red Gap*

Harry Leon Wilson is one of the most popular short story writers in America, and a former editor of the well-known humorous periodical *Puck*. The entertaining character "Ruggles" which he created appears in several of his books in which the scene is laid in "Red Gap."



## RUGGLES OF RED GAP

**T**HERE are times when all Nature seems to smile, yet when to the sensitive mind it will be faintly brought that the possibilities are quite tremendously otherwise if one will consider them pro and con. I mean to say, one often suspects things may happen when it doesn't look so.

The succeeding three days passed with so ordered a calm that little would any but a profound thinker have fancied tragedy to lurk so near their placid surface. Mrs. Effie and Mrs. Belknap-Jackson continued to plan the approaching social campaign at Red Gap. Cousin Egbert and the Mixer continued their card game for the trifling stake of a shilling a game, or "two bits," as it is known in the American monetary system. And our host continued his recreation.

Each morning I turned him out in the smartest of fishing costumes and each evening I assisted him to change. It is true I was now compelled to observe at these times a certain lofty irritability in his character, yet I more than half fancied this to be queerly assumed in order to inform me that he was not unaccustomed to services such as I rendered him. There was that about him. I mean to say, when he sharply rebuked me for clumsiness or cried out "Stupid!" it had a perfunctory languor, as if meant to show me he could address a servant in what he believed to be the grand manner. In this, to be sure, he was so oddly wrong that the pathos of it quite drowned what I might otherwise have felt of resentment.

But I next observed that he was sharp in the same manner with the hairy backwoods person who took him to fish each day, using words to him which I, for one, would have employed, had I thought them merited, only after the gravest hesitation. I have before remarked that I did not like the gleam in this person's eyes: he was very apparently a not quite nice person. Also I more than once observed him to wink at Cousin Egbert in an evil manner.

As I have so truly said, how close may tragedy be to us when life seems most correct! It was Belknap-Jackson's custom to

raise a view-hallo each evening when he returned down the lake, so that we might gather at the dock to oversee his landing. I must admit that he disembarked with somewhat the manner of a visiting royalty, demanding much attention and assistance with his impedimenta. Undoubtedly he liked to be looked at. This was what one rather felt. And I can fancy that this very human trait of his had in a manner worn upon the probably undisciplined nerves of the backwoods jossler—had, in fact, deprived him of his “goat,” as the native people have it.

Be this as it may, we gathered at the dock on the afternoon of the third day of our stay to assist at the return. As the native log craft neared the dock our host daringly arose to a graceful kneeling posture in the bow and saluted us charmingly, the woods person in the stern wielding his single oar in gloomy silence. At the moment a most poetic image occurred to me—that he was like a dull grim figure of Fate that fetches us low at the moment of our highest seeming. I mean to say, it was a silly thought, perhaps, yet I afterwards recalled it most vividly.

Holding his creel aloft our host hailed us :

“Full to-day, thanks to going where I wished and paying no attention to silly guides’ talk.” He beamed upon us in an unquestionably superior manner, and again from the moody figure at the stern I intercepted the flash of a wink to Cousin Egbert. Then as the frail craft had all but touched the dock and our host had half risen, there was a sharp dipping of the thing and he was ejected into the chilling waters, where he almost instantly sank. There were loud cries of alarm from all, including, the woodsman himself, who had kept the craft upright, and in these Mr. Belknap-Jackson heartily joined the moment his head appeared above the surface, calling “Help !” in the quite loudest of tones, which was thoughtless enough, as we were close at hand and could easily have heard his ordinary speaking voice.

The woods person now stepped to the dock, and firmly grasping the collar of the drowning man hauled him out with but little effort, at the same time becoming voluble with apologies and sympathy. The rescued man, however, was quite off his head with rage and bluntly berated the fellow for having tried to assassinate him. Indeed he put forth rather a torrent of execration, but to all of this the fellow merely

repeated his crude protestations of regret and astonishment, seeming to be sincerely grieved that his intentions should have been doubted.

From his friends about him the unfortunate man was receiving the most urgent advice to seek dry garments lest he perish of chill, whereupon he turned abruptly to me and cried : " Well, Stupid, don't you see the state that fellow has put me in ? What are you doing ? Have you lost your wits ? "

Now I had suffered a very proper alarm and solicitude for him, but the injustice of this got a bit on me. I mean to say, I suddenly felt a bit of temper myself, though to be sure retaining my control.

" Yes, sir ; quite so, sir," I replied smoothly. " I'll have you right as rain in no time at all, sir," and started to conduct him off the dock. But now, having gone a little distance he began to utter the most violent threats against the woods person, declaring, in fact, he would pull the fellow's nose. However, I restrained him from rushing back, as I subtly felt I was wished to do, and he at length consented again to be led toward his hut.

But now the woods person called out : " You're forgetting all your pretties ! " By which I saw him to mean the fishing impedimenta he had placed on the dock. And most unreasonably at this Mr. Belknap-Jackson again turned upon me, wishing anew to be told if I had lost my wits and directing me to fetch the stuff. Again I was conscious of that within me which no gentleman's man should confess to. I mean to say, I felt like shaking him. But I hastened back to fetch the rod, the creel, the luncheon hamper, the midge ointment, the camera, and other articles which the woods fellow handed me.

With these somewhat awkwardly carried, I returned to our still turbulent host. More like a volcano he was than a man who has had a narrow squeak from drowning, and before we had gone a dozen feet more he again turned and declared he would " go back and thrash the unspeakable cad within an inch of his life." Their relative sizes rendering an attempt of this sort quite too unwise, I was conscious of renewed irritation toward him ; indeed, the vulgar words, " Oh, stow that piffle ! " swiftly formed in the back of my mind, but again I controlled myself, as the chap was now sneezing violently.

" Best hurry on, sir," I said with exemplary tact. " One might contract a severe head-cold from such a wetting,"

and further endeavoured to soothe him while I started ahead to lead him away from the fellow. Then there happened that which fulfilled my direst premonitions. Looking back from a moment of calm, the psychology of the crisis is of rudimentary simplicity.

Enraged beyond measure at the woods person, Mr. Belknap-Jackson yet retained a fine native caution which counselled him to attempt no violence upon that offender; but his mental tension was such that it could be relieved only by his attacking some one; preferably someone forbidden to retaliate. I walked there temptingly but a pace ahead of him, after my well-meant word of advice.

I make no defence of my own course. I am aware there can be none. I can only plead that I had already been vexed not a little by his unjust accusations of stupidity, and dismiss with as few words as possible an incident that will ever seem quite too indecently criminal. Briefly, then, with my well-intended "Best not lower yourself, sir," Mr. Belknap-Jackson forgot himself, and I forgot myself. It will be recalled that I was in front of him, but I turned rather quickly. (His belongings I had carried were widely disseminated.)

Instantly there were wild outcries from the others, who had started toward the main, or living house.

"He's killed Charles!" I heard Mrs. Belknap-Jackson scream; then came the deep-chested rumble of the Mixer, "Jackson kicked him first!" They ran for us. They had reached us while our host was down, even while my fist was still clenched. Now again the unfortunate man cried "Help!" as his wife assisted him to his feet.

"Send for an officer!" cried she.

"The man's an anarchist!" shouted her husband.

"Nonsense!" boomed the Mixer. "Jackson got what he was looking for. Do it myself if he kicked me!"

"Oh, Maw! Oh, Mater!" cried her daughter tearfully.

"Gee! He done it in one punch!" I heard Cousin Egbert say with what I was aghast to suspect was admiration.

Mrs. Effie, trembling, could but glare at me and gasp. Mercifully she was beyond speech for the moment.

Mr. Belknap-Jackson was now painfully rubbing his right eye, which was not what he should have done, and I said as much.

"Beg pardon, sir, but one does better with a bit of raw beef."

“How dare you, you great hulking brute!” cried his wife, and made as if to shield her husband from another attack from me, which I submit was unjust.

“Bill’s right,” said Cousin Egbert casually. “Put a piece of raw steak on it. Gee! with one wallop!” And then, quite strangely, for a moment we all amiably discussed whether cold compresses might not be better. Presently our host was led off by his wife. Mrs. Effie followed them, moaning: “Oh, oh, oh!” in the keenest distress.

At this I took to my own room in dire confusion, making no doubt I would presently be given in charge and left to languish in gaol, perhaps given six months hard.

Cousin Egbert came to me in a little while and laughed heartily at my fear that anything legal would be done. He also made some ill-timed compliments on the neatness of the blow I had dealt Mr. Belknap-Jackson, but these I found in wretched taste and was begging him to desist, when the Mixer entered and began to speak much in the same strain.

“Don’t you ever dare do a thing like that again,” she warned me, “unless I got a ringside seat,” to which I remained severely silent, for I felt my offence should not be made light of.

“Three rousing cheers!” exclaimed Cousin Egbert, whereat the two most unfeelingly went through a vivid pantomime of cheering.

Our host, I understood, had his dinner in bed that night, and throughout the evening, as I sat solitary in remorse came the mocking strains of another of their American folksongs with the refrain:

“You made me what I am to-day,  
I hope you’re satisfied!”

I conceived it to be the Mixer and Cousin Egbert who did this, and considering the plight of our host, I thought it in the worst possible taste. I had raised my hand against the one American I had met who was at all times vogue. And not only this: For now I recalled a certain phrase I had flung out as I had stood over him, ranting indeed no better than an anarchist, a phrase which showed my poor culture to be the flimsiest veneer.

Late in the night, as I lay looking back on the frightful scene, I recalled with wonder a swift picture of Cousin Egbert

caught as I once looked back to the dock. He had most amazingly shaken the woods person by the hand, quickly but with marked cordiality. And yet I am quite certain he had never been presented to the fellow.

Promptly the next morning came the dreaded summons to meet Mrs. Effie. I was of course prepared to accept instant dismissal without a character, if indeed I were not to be given in charge. I found her wearing an expression of the utmost sternness, erect and formidable by the now silent phonograph. Cousin Egbert, who was present, also wore an expression of sternness, though I perceived him to wink at me.

"I really don't know what we're to do with you, Ruggles," began the stricken woman, and so done out she plainly was that I at once felt the warmest sympathy for her as she continued: "First you lead poor Cousin Egbert into a drunken debauch——"

Cousin Egbert here coughed nervously and eyed me with strong condemnation.

"—then you behave like a murderer. What have you to say for yourself?"

At this I saw there was little I could say, except that I had coarsely given way to the brute in me, and yet I knew I should try to explain.

"I dare say, Madam, it may have been because Mr. Belknap-Jackson was quite sober at the unfortunate moment."

"Of course Charles was sober. The idea! What of it?"

"I was remembering an occasion at Chaynes-Wotten when Lord Ivor Cradleigh behaved toward me somewhat as Mr. Belknap-Jackson did last night and when my own deportment was quite all that could be wished. It occurs to me now that it was because his lordship was, how shall I say?—quite far gone in liquor at the time, so that I could without loss of dignity pass it off as a mere prank. Indeed, he regarded it as such himself, performing the act with a good nature that I found quite irresistible, and I am certain that neither his lordship nor I have ever thought the less of each other because of it. I revert to this merely to show that I have not always acted in a ruffianly manner under these circumstances. It seems rather to depend upon how the thing is done—the mood of the performer—his mental state. Had Mr. Belknap-Jackson been—pardon me—quite drunk, I feel that the outcome would have been happier for us all.

So far as I have thought along these lines, it seems to me that if one is to be kicked at all, one must be kicked good-naturedly. I mean to say, with a certain camaraderie, a lightness, a gaiety, a genuine good-will that for the moment expresses itself uncouthly—an element, I regret to say, that was conspicuously lacking from the brief activities of Mr. Belknap-Jackson."

"I never heard such crazy talk," responded Mrs. Effie, "and really I never saw such a man as you are for wanting people to become disgustingly drunk. You made poor Cousin Egbert and Jeff Tuttle act like beasts, and now nothing will satisfy you but that Charles should roll in the gutter. Such dissipated talk I never did hear, and poor Charles rarely taking anything but a single glass of wine, it upsets him so; even our reception punch he finds too stimulating!"

I mean to say, the woman had cleanly missed my point, for never have I advocated the use of fermented liquors to excess; but I saw it was no good trying to tell her this.

"And the worst of it," she went rapidly on, "Cousin Egbert here is acting stranger than I ever knew him to act. He swears if he can't keep you he'll never have another man, and you know yourself what that means in his case—and Mrs. Pettingill saying she means to employ you herself if we let you go. Heaven knows what the poor woman can be thinking of! Oh, it's awful—and everything was going so beautifully. Of course, Charles would simply never be brought to accept an apology——"

"I am only too anxious to make one," I submitted.

"Here's the poor fellow now," said Cousin Egbert almost gleefully, and our host entered. He carried a patch over his right eye and was not attired for sport on the lake, but in a dark morning suit of quietly beautiful lines that I thought showed a fine sense of the situation. He shot me one superior glance from his left eye, turned to Mrs. Effie.

"I see you still harbour the ruffian?"

"I've just given him a call-down," said Mrs. Effie, plainly ill at ease, "and he says it was all because you were sober; that if you'd been in the state Lord Ivor Cradleigh was the time it happened at Chaynes-Wotten he wouldn't have done anything to you, probably."

"What's this, what's this? Lord Ivor Cradleigh—Chaynes-Wotten?" The man seemed to be curiously interested by

the mere names, in spite of himself. "His lordship was at Chaynes-Wotten for the shooting, I suppose?" This, most amazingly, to me.

"A house party at Whitsuntide, sir," I explained.

"Ah! And you say his lordship was——"

"Oh, quite, quite in his cups, sir. If I might explain, it was that, sir—its being done under circumstances and in a certain entirely genial spirit of irritation to which I could take no offence, sir. His lordship is a very decent sort, sir. I've known him intimately for years."

"Dear, dear!" he replied. "Too bad, too bad! And I dare say you thought me out of temper last night? Nothing of the sort. You should have taken it in quite the same spirit as you did from Lord Ivor Cradleigh."

"It seemed different, sir," I said firmly. "If I may take the liberty of putting it so, I felt quite offended by your manner. I missed from it at the most critical moment, as one might say, a certain urbanity that I found in his lordship, sir."

"Well, well, well! It's too bad, really. I'm quite aware that I show a sort of brusqueness at times, but mind you, it's all on the surface. Had you known me as long as you've known his lordship, I dare say you'd have noticed the same rough urbanity in me as well. I rather fancy some of us over here don't do those things so very differently. A few of us, at least."

"I'm glad, indeed, to hear it, sir. It's only necessary to understand that there is a certain mood in which one really cannot permit one's self to be—you perceive, I trust."

"Perfectly, perfectly," said he, "and I can only express my regret that you should have mistaken my own mood, which, I am confident, was exactly the thing his lordship might have felt."

"I gladly accept your apology, sir," I returned quickly, "as I should have accepted his lordship's had his manner permitted any misapprehension on my part. And in return I wish to apologise most contritely for the phrase I applied to you just after it happened, sir. I rarely use strong language, but——"

"I remember hearing none," said he.

"I regret to say, sir, that I called you a blighted little mug——"

"You needn't have mentioned it," he replied with just a trace of sharpness, "and I trust that in future——"

"I am sure, sir, that in future you will give me no occasion to misunderstand your intentions—no more than would his lordship," I added as he raised his brows.

Thus in a manner wholly unexpected was a frightful situation eased off.

"I'm so glad it's settled!" cried Mrs. Effie, who had listened almost breathlessly to our exchange.

"I fancy I settled it as Cradleigh would have—eh, Ruggles?" And the man actually smiled at me.

"Entirely so, sir," said I.

"If only it doesn't get out," said Mrs. Effie now. "We shouldn't want it known in Red Gap. Think of the talk!"

"Certainly," rejoined Mr. Belknap-Jackson jauntily, "we are all here above gossip about an affair of that sort. I am sure——" He broke off and looked uneasily at Cousin Egbert, who coughed into his hand and looked out over the lake before he spoke.

"What would I want to tell a thing like that for?" he demanded indignantly, as if an accusation had been made against him. But I saw his eyes glitter with an evil light.

An hour later I chanced to be with him in our detached hut, when the Mixer entered.

"What happened?" she demanded.

"What do you reckon happened?" returned Cousin Egbert. "They get to talking about Lord Ivy Craddles, or some guy, and before we know it Mr. Belknap Hyphen Jackson is apologising to Bill here."

"No?" bellowed the Mixer.

"Sure did he!" affirmed Cousin Egbert.

Here they grasped each other's arms and did a rude native dance about the room, nor did they desist when I sought to explain that the name was not at all Ivy Craddles.



WALTER EMANUEL

*The Toy Dogs of War*  
*How to get Yourself Disliked*

Walter Emanuel was well-known as a member of the famous *Punch* round table, and for many years contributed "Charivaria" to that paper. Good examples of his work are the satire on the old volunteers and the amusing hints to practical jokers which are included here.



## THE TOY DOGS OF WAR

BEING THREE EPISODES IN THE MILITARY CAREER OF COLONEL  
BREWER, LATE OF THE VOLUNTEER FORCE

WHEN the War Office decided that officers who were as broad as they were long could only be retained as regimental pets, the Volunteer Service—it was before the days of the Territorials—lost little Colonel Brewer (late of the Prince of Wales's Small Bore Rifles). But the Colonel is fond of fighting his battles over again.

Half a dozen of us were dining with him the other evening, and the talk turned on eatables. Suddenly our host jumped up and raised his hand.

“I won't hear a word against buns !” he cried, “a railway bun once saved my life,” and he ordered his man to bring in the silver-mounted paper-weight from the library.

“That's it,” he said, drawing our attention to a small indentation in the middle.

“Fire away !” we cried.

“Well, it was like this,” said the Colonel. “It was in '88. I was only a captain then. We were out for the Easter Manœuvres. We had just detrained at Brighton, when I received orders to hurry forward at once, with my men, to the Downs. Now, I was an old campaigner—this was my third year—and I knew that these manœuvres were not always child's play. Only the year before, on one occasion, we were two hours without food. So, profiting by experience, I rushed into the refreshment room and bought a bun, and thrust it into my breast-pocket. Then we started for the battlefield. When we got there, we found a scene of unparalleled confusion. An enormous bull, attracted, no doubt, by the red coats, had escaped from a neighbouring field, and was bellowing horribly (*'Horrida bella,'* suggested someone), and charging wildly right and left, and putting our men to rout. All officers and men, seemed to have lost their heads : a complete rot had set in—it happens at times, gentlemen : you will

remember Majuba. The Royal Wide Rangers had shot their colonel, and poor Jenkins, of the Princess Mary's Lambs, was down, and Lieut.-Colonel Bulphy had dropped dead, like a stone. (The Coroner said it was fatty degeneration of the heart : we described it on his monument as 'a stout heart.') Many of the mounted officers, too, were to be seen keeping their horses' necks warm, while several had fallen off, and my friend Major Belcher was rolled upon, and had his shape altered. And that reminds me of a remarkable instance of animal sagacity. Captain Goldberg of the Queen's—now the King's—1st Whitechappers was among those who were unhorsed. His beast at once picked him up in its mouth, and carried him back unhurt to the livery stables. Meanwhile no fewer than six of the London English had been tossed by the bull. One had fallen on a Paddington Green private and killed him. (Never mind, he had a military funeral afterwards, which we don't all get.) Finally, my own men began to show signs of being infected by the general panic, so I faced them, and, to reassure them, explained that artillery had been sent for, and was to be brought to bear on the brute. I was begging them to keep calm, when suddenly I saw a bullet advancing straight at me. (The Devil knows how bullets came to be used that day.) I tried to dodge it, but without success. It hit me, but, by a miracle of Providence (I am a Churchwarden, gentlemen), on the bun. The bullet flattened and fell to the ground, and I escaped with nothing worse than a faint. . . . Gentlemen, don't speak against buns, please—and pass the wine."

We passed the wine.

"Yes, that was an ugly incident," said the Colonel, when he put his glass down again; "but I don't know that it was altogether so unpleasant as the King Street affair."

"Tell us about it," we cried.

"That happened," said the Colonel, "at the outset of my career as a Volunteer Officer, and if I had not had influence, my career might have been wrecked. Thank Heaven, I have lived it down, but no more Lord Mayor's Shows for me!

"The Lord Mayor for the year was a business friend of mine—we did a lot with him at that time—and it was his

suggestion that I and my men should form his Guard of Honour at the Guildhall. I have never been one to care much for tomfoolery of that sort: still, I took it as a compliment. I was a young feller then.

“The morning was foggy and wet, and the day opened for me with a chapter of accidents. Nothing seemed to go right. To start with, I gave myself a couple of ugly gashes, while shaving, which made me look like a page of *Comic Cuts*. Then I dropped a stud, and, in stooping to pick it up, my confounded braces burst. This, coming on top of the other annoyance, threw me into a paroxysm of rage, which really weakened me. It left me with no appetite for my breakfast—indeed, I had no time for it—and I had to run for my train. Fortunately, when I was half-way to the station, I found a boy to carry my sword—for it is difficult to run with a sword. Why they don’t shorten the dem’d things, like they’ve shortened the rifles, I don’t know. The train, owing to the fog, reached London Bridge quite half an hour late. This meant that I had scarcely been able to glance through my letters at the office when I had to jump into a four-wheeler—I could never stand hansoms: they’re dangerous things—and drive to the ronyvoo. While in the cab, a miserable sinking feeling came over me—the result of taking no breakfast—so I got out at the nearest Bodega, and had to take a couple of stiff whiskeys before I felt myself again. Capital cure, gentlemen! The fog had now lifted, and the rain had stopped, but it was beastly wet underfoot. I found my men cheerful in spite of it, and looking very gay in their new scarlet uniforms. There were more of ’em than I expected. And now, to show you how misfortune dogged me that day, I must needs have trouble with the cabman. When I got out, I found that I only had a shilling and a five-pound note. The driver refused to take the shilling, and I objected to giving him the five-pound note. I told the man that if he liked to call at my office on the following day, he would receive another sixpence, at which the fellow became truculent, and, getting down from his box, offered to fight me and my whole regiment. He was a great hulking brute, and things were looking ugly, when fortunately one of the men came forward and volunteered to pay. The scoundrel accepted half a crown and then drove off. (I made a note of his number, and denounced him to Scotland Yard next day.) It was now, of course, very late, but I took my men at a fine swinging

pace from the Bank through the Poultry, and I think we were admired. You see, City people very seldom see soldiers.

“It was when we got to the end of Poultry, just past Benetfink’s—as it was then—that the Incident occurred. Now, it’s a curious thing about me, gentlemen, but ever since I was a child I have had trouble with my right and left hand. I always have to think which is which: it don’t come instinctively. Well, now, I had to get my men down King Street. Of course, I should have thought before I spoke, but I decided to risk it. I remember it all as well as if it only happened yesterday. The windows of the houses on either side were bright with ladies. ‘Left-wheel at the double!’ I cried (for we were late), and, to my horror, I saw the fellers trotting down Queen Street, which is on the other side of the road. ‘No, no, right wheel!’ I cried, perceiving my mistake. The faithful beggars obeyed me, just as a ship answers to her rudder—but, somehow or other, they must have got a bit out of the straight—for my order sent ’em trooping into the Atlas Insurance Company’s Office. ‘No, no,’ I shouted. ‘Yer don’t understand me’—I was getting a bit flustered now—‘About turn!’—and this took ’em into a picture-shop across the street. ‘Halt!’ I cried. Phew! The perspiration was streaming down my face. I took off my helmet, and thought, What should I do to get them right? I had half a mind to march them down to Stoneham’s book-shop, and there get a drill-book which would give me some hints. The deuce of it was that the crowd was pretty thick just here, and was becoming impertinent. Foolish suggestions were made to me. I was told afterwards that I drew my sword on a butcher boy, but I don’t believe it. No, I decided that I would extricate my men unaided. ‘Tenshun!’ I cried. ‘Right wheel—left wheel—right wheel—no, right about turn—OH DEMMIT ALL, GO DOWN KING STREET!’ To judge by the yell of ghoulisn laughter which here arose from the unwashed, their sense of humour was no clearer than their complexions. Why is it that a crowd always set itself against authority? Anyhow, I got my men to the Guildhall—and, when I arrived there, I collapsed, I am told. ‘A surfeit of liquid on an insufficiently nourished stomach,’ was the doctor’s diagnosis.

“But, mind you, the fault of this regrettable affair was not so much mine, as the men’s. I told ’em so afterwards, in a

lecture on the Higher Tactics. The dullards had not the sense to see that I was ill, and that this was just one of the occasions when they would have been justified in disobeying orders: Some officers, as I told 'em, would have sacked 'em for it. . . . Would you have the kindness to pass me the champagne?"

We had the kindness.

The Colonel drank long and deep.

"And did I ever tell you about the Dover affair?" asked the Colonel.

"Never," we answered.

"Ah, that was a terrible business, if you like, gentlemen, a really terrible business. In fact, it's what broke my nerve, and made me send in my papers. You young men are apt to sneer at the manœuvres of former days, but listen to this.

"It was during the autumn manœuvres. It was the last day of 'em. It was an exceptionally hot morning: the heat was really terrific. The previous afternoon had been bad enough, and there had been a number of casualties. Two young officers of the Scilly Buffs, while resting outside an inn, had been stung by a wasp, and I myself had been cruelly punished by gnats, while it was reported that some men of Bryant and May's Fusiliers, who were taking cover behind some furze bushes, actually caught fire. But the following day was worse still. Old Sol was blazing away like a battery of hundred-ton guns, and a rumour got abroad that the Parade would not take place. The Duke, it was said, always considerate, had countermanded it. As a consequence, discipline was relaxed, and the men were all over the shop. Then, suddenly—the intimation came on us like a bomb-shell—it was announced that, after all, the Review was to be held. Bugles sounded on all sides, orderlies rushed about here, there and everywhere, and indescribable confusion reigned, for we were to be on the review-ground within half an hour. I myself had countermanded my horse at the stables, and it was out with a fly, and I couldn't get another. Well, as many men as possible were hurriedly collected, and some strange sights were seen, gentlemen. Some of our brave fellows were paddling: many were having a swim—and not a few of these were rushed up in bathing costumes. A number of the Bermondsey Irresistibles ('The Girl's Own') were found

dallying with females on the beach, and some of them had changed hats. There never was such a queer parade, I suppose. And there was a discreditable scene with the 21st South Londoners, who were watching the Niggers. Their rich Southern blood got the better of 'em, and they mutinied. When my dear friend Colonel Pye-Jones (of Jones, Smith & Jones, St. Paul's Churchyard), who was in command, galloped down to the seashore, and ordered them to fall in, by Jove! the cattle flatly refused, and poor Pye-Jones rode off in a huff to fetch the Police. However, he had the bad luck to be thrown on the Esplanade. I was fortunate enough to get most of my fellows together—the bulk of 'em were from my works, and that gives you the whip-hand—and I was put in charge, not only of them, but of a composite lot, consisting of the Shepherd's Bush Rangers, the Orpington Buffs, the Crouch End Lions, the Roaring Forties, the Penny Royals, and Remington's Typewriters. I wasn't proud of 'em. Their language was awful, and I had to reprimand 'em more than once. I sent my own men to the rear, so as to keep the others up to the mark. Then, suddenly, the order was given to advance at the double, and I placed myself at the head of the motley crew. Well, gentlemen, as I have told you, the 'eat"—here the Colonel looked round, and deliberately picked it up—"the beat, gentlemen," (we cheered him for this) "was terrific, and it had fairly bowled me over—that is the worst of us full-bodied men—and, as soon as I started running, I began to wonder whether I should be able to keep it up. You see, I was used to a horse. My legs seemed curiously weak. Twice I stumbled—once it was a rabbit-hole, and the second time my accursed sword—but recovered myself. Still, every moment I found myself getting more and more distressed, and *gradually I felt my men overtaking me*. They were like thunder behind me. It then became a race—officer *v.* men. I made desperate efforts to outdistance them, but to no effect. Each moment the avalanche threatened to overwhelm me. I tried to run outside the line, but the line was too long. 'Stop, my men, for 'Eaven's sake, stop!' I cried, but my voice, I suppose, was too weak to carry. On—on—they came, with irresistible momentum—I felt the hot breath of the Orpington Buffs on my neck—I made one final spurt—I chucked my sword away—but it was no good—another damned rabbit hole did it—once more I stumbled, and——"

Here the Colonel stopped and held out his glass. We refilled it, and he re-emptied it.

“Well, and what happened then, Colonel?” we asked.

The Colonel put his hand to his forehead and meditated.

“Why, if I remember rightly, I wash killed,” he said.

And then kind hands helped the Colonel to bed.

## HOW TO GET YOURSELF DISLIKED

### SOME HINTS

**A**S the world grows older, it does not get better tempered, and the Practical Joker in this practical age becomes more and more unpopular. In fact, there is little doubt that he will soon be extinct: "Kicked to death," according to the Coroner's verdict. Still, it is sometimes difficult to know how to pass an evening. I propose, therefore, to set forth here some few of the best ways of getting yourself disliked.

Try this. Buy yourself a little box of golden initials gummed at the back. You can procure them of any reputable hatter. One night you will have a convivial meeting at your home. Then, while the guests are busy at cards, sneak into the hall. There, on the rack, you will find a number of hats; into each of those poor dumb hats stick some of those initials, and, when the company comes to depart, I will guarantee you a scene of the prettiest confusion. "Hello," someone will say, "I thought this was my hat, but it seems to belong to some beggar with the initials 'B.F.'!" "Now, that's a curious thing," another will sing out, "but I can't find my tile; I know I brought one." "Well, I'm jiggered," cries a third; "it's *my* initials, but I'll swear it'sh not my tosh!" And a fourth will ejaculate, "—— ———!" And so on. I have even known a man come round to me the next day and say, pointing to his own hat, "Look here, old fellow, in the hurry yesterday evening I took this hat by mistake. It has the initials 'O.W.L.' in it. I wouldn't have minded, of course, only mine was a better one." Of a truth, the prophet was right: it is a wise man that knows his own hat.

Again. Sometimes a young man will pay you a visit which you do not wish repeated. Your object will, perhaps, be best effected in this way. When he leaves, accompany him to the front door and hold him in conversation till a pretty girl passes. Then when he begins to ogle that pretty girl, cry out, "No, sir, I will not give you another penny! Leave my house this instant!" and slam the door on him.

We all of us, I suppose, have our little foibles, and one of the things I dislike intensely is to have someone come and see me off when I start on a railway journey. Yet an officious friend will sometimes insist on it. But the same friend never does it a second time. The principal reason is this: Just as the train is beginning to move I say, "Well, good-bye, old fellow," and extend my hand. He then holds out his, and I grasp it with a grip of iron, and *I don't let go*. The friend that way gets one of the sharpest runs he has ever had; for the speed of the train increases each moment, and I do not relax my hold until the end of the platform is reached.

Once a great big strong fellow, in the foolishness of his heart, resisted; he did not run with the train, but tried to hold his ground. He imagined, perhaps, that would stop the train. I need not say it did not. He succeeded, however, in giving me a nasty shock, from which it took me some minutes to recover, for I suddenly fell back on the floor of the carriage with his arm in my hand. I have not met this person since.

And I have just perfected a capital new game to be played in omnibuses. It goes best, perhaps, in cold weather, as it tends to promote the circulation. The game is really a variation of our dear old friend "Musical Chairs." It is necessary that all the seats on one side of the 'bus should be occupied, and all but one on the other. There is thus only one left free. There then enters an ill-tempered man. He makes his way to the vacant space. Then, when he has just begun to let himself down, at a given signal the person seated next to that space shifts up, and the space is filled. The ill-tempered man will then rush to the new space, and the individual next to that goes through identically the same tactics as those I have just described; no sooner has the ill-tempered man let himself go than he discovers that this seat also is taken. He is thus chivied from place to place until his temper, bad to begin with, gets vile. This game can be carried on for as long as an hour at a time, and I have never known it fail to cause the utmost amusement and hilarity to all except the ill-tempered man.

In the month of November, moreover, it is possible for a dull railway journey to be enlivened by your entering a non-smoking carriage with an unlighted cigar in your mouth. I tried this one foggy day with complete success. At first when I got in the travellers all scowled at me, and seemed disinclined to shift themselves so as to make room for me, but, by

sheer weight, I forced them to. Once seated, I puffed forth a huge volume of breath, which, in the fog, hanging on the air, looked exactly like smoke. At first, I was afraid there was no one present with sufficient public spirit to champion the rights of the non-smokers; but at the second puff, a gentleman in the opposite corner, who wore black shiny leggings, and had a gold locket hanging from his chain, said: "This is not a smoking carriage, sir." "You are very right," I answered, at the same time emitting another puff of breath. "I said this was not a smoking carriage," he repeated. "Ah, I thought that was what you said," I replied. "You are no gentleman, sir," whined a thin, sour-looking lady next to him—apparently his wife. "No more are you, madam," I retorted. Then a female on the other side began to cough. "Oh, dear! oh, dear—that horrid smoke—it always brings on my cough," she moaned. I continued to breathe heavily. Then a gentleman with spectacles, who looked as if he knew lots about finance, took up the cudgels. "Ve vill haf him turn out de nex' station," he said. To which I replied that I did not understand German.

The next station was duly reached, and then the foreign gentleman and two others called for the guard. He came up. "What is it?" "This person insists on smoking." "Morning, guard," I said, "kindly examine this cigar, and tell me if it has been lighted." The guard looked at it, returned it with a "No, sir," and slammed the door, and someone muttered something about its being a silly monkey's trick.

Snobs, you will find, often collect autographs to show to their friends. In a case like this forge a letter to your man from some notorious scamp, couched in the most friendly of terms, and surreptitiously slip it into his book. Then the next person to whom the book is shown, as "One or two nice letters from people I have met," will read something of this sort: "My dear Jim,—Your part of the swindling was done grandly—as it always is. The police are after the wrong man once more. What a sly dog you are! Keep up the church-going—it pays. Please let me have a cheque for my half as soon as possible.—Ever thine, CHARLES PEACE."

Many vain men again—particularly those engaged in politics—are for ever on the look-out for references to their important selves in the newspapers. There is only one thing to do to this kind of individual. It is to drop him a card, saying,

“I am sending you a *Birmingham Daily Post*. It contains something that will interest you.” At the same time you dispatch a copy of that paper—unmarked. The important man who receives it will then be driven wellnigh crazy in his hunt to find a reference to himself. He will ultimately be forced to read every single word in the paper—and that, perhaps, more than once. Well, it always does me a power of good to think of the time that will thus be squandered, and the temper that will be lost, for I need scarcely say there is not a line in that paper that refers to the important man. I would strongly advise that it be the *Birmingham Daily Post*, as that is the largest paper I know.

To annoy a policeman successfully is quite one of the little arts. Try this. Go up to Bobby and say, “Pleeze can you direct me to such-and-such an address?” To which Bobby answers, “Go straight down *there*, take the first turning to the right, the second to the left, and the first to the right again.” You are stupid; you do not comprehend. Bobby complies with your request to repeat it. “Thanks. Then, to start with, I go straight down in *that* direction?” (This with an air of respectful, trembling humility.) “Yessir.” Then walk off bang in the other direction.

Finally, let me conclude with a piece of advice—a warning. Without doubt, the person best adapted for the profession of a Practical Joker is a champion of the racing track. The man who lacks the necessary fleetness of foot, and yet wishes to practical-joke, should wear at least treble-seated trousers.



ARNOLD BENNETT

*The Burglary*

Like many other well-known authors Arnold Bennett abandoned a legal career to devote himself to literature. His early novels dealing with "The Five Towns" soon established his reputation as a brilliant delineator of life and character, with a great sense of humour and a keen eye for dramatic values.



## THE BURGLARY

### I

LADY DAIN said: "Jee, if that portrait stays there much longer, you'll just have to take me off to Pirehill one of these fine mornings."

Pirehill is the seat of the great local hospital; but it is also the seat of the great local lunatic asylum; and when the inhabitants of the Five Towns say merely "Pirehill," they mean the asylum.

"I do declare I can't fancy my food nowadays," said Lady Dain, "and it's all that portrait!" She stared plaintively up at the immense oil-painting which faced her as she sat at the breakfast-table in her spacious and opulent dining-room.

Sir Jehoshaphat made no remark.

Despite Lady Dain's animadversions upon it, despite the undoubted fact that it was generally disliked in the Five Towns, the portrait had cost a thousand pounds (some said guineas), and, though not yet two years old, it was probably worth at least fifteen hundred in the picture market. For it was a Cressage—it was one of the finest Cressages in existence.

It marked the summit of Sir Jehoshaphat's career. Sir Jehoshaphat's career was, perhaps, the most successful and brilliant in the entire social history of the Five Towns. This famous man was the principal partner in Dain Brothers. His brother was dead, but two of Sir Jee's sons were in the firm. Dain Brothers were the largest manufacturers of cheap earthenware in the district, catering chiefly for the American and Colonial buyer. They had an extremely bad reputation for cutting prices. They were hated by every other firm in the Five Towns, and, to hear rival manufacturers talk, one would gather the impression that Sir Jee had acquired a tremendous fortune by systematically selling goods under cost. They were hated also by between eighteen and nineteen hundred employees. But such hatred, however virulent, had not marred the progress of Sir Jee's career.

He had meant to make a name, and he had made it. The Five Towns might laugh at his vulgar snobbishness. The Five Towns might sneer at his calculated philanthropy. But he was, nevertheless, the best-known man in the Five Towns, and it was precisely his snobbishness and his philanthropy which had carried him to the top. Moreover, he had been the first public man in the Five Towns to gain a knighthood. The Five Towns could not deny that it was very proud indeed of this knighthood. The means by which he had won this distinction were neither here nor there—he had won it. And was he not the father of his native borough? Had he not been three times mayor of his native borough? Was not the whole northern half of the county dotted and spangled by his benefactions, his institutions, his endowments?

And it could not be denied that he sometimes tickled the Five Towns as the Five Towns likes being tickled. There was, for example, the notorious Sneyd incident. Sneyd Hall, belonging to the Earl of Chell, lies a few miles south of the Five Towns, and from it the pretty Countess of Chell exercises that condescending meddlesomeness which so frequently exasperates the Five Towns. Sir Jee had got his title by the aid of the Countess—"Interfering Iris," as she is locally dubbed. Shortly afterwards he had contrived to quarrel with the Countess; and the quarrel was conducted by Sir Jee as a quarrel between equals, which delighted the district. Sir Jee's final word in it had been to buy a single tract of land near Sneyd village, just off the Sneyd estate, and to erect thereon a mansion quite as imposing as Sneyd Hall, and far more up to date, and to call the mansion Sneyd Castle. A mighty stroke! Iris was furious; the Earl speechless with fury. But they could do nothing. Naturally the Five Towns was tickled.

It was apropos of the housewarming of Sneyd Castle, also of the completion of his third mayoralty, and of the inauguration of the Dain Technical Institute, that the movement had been started (primarily by a few toadies) for tendering to Sir Jee a popular gift worthy to express the profound esteem in which he was officially held in the Five Towns. It having been generally felt that the gift should take the form of a portrait, a local dilettante had suggested Cressage, and when the Five Towns had enquired into Cressage, and discovered that that genius from the United States was celebrated through-

out the civilised world, and regarded as the equal of Velazquez (whoever Velazquez might be), and that he had painted half the aristocracy, and that his income was regal, the suggestion was accepted and Cressage was approached.

Cressage haughtily consented to paint Sir Jee's portrait on his usual conditions; namely, that the sitter should go to the little village in Bedfordshire where Cressage had his principal studio, and that the painting should be exhibited at the Royal Academy before being shown anywhere else. (Cressage was an R.A., but no one thought of putting R.A. after his name. He was so big that, instead of the Royal Academy conferring distinction on him, he conferred distinction on the Royal Academy.)

Sir Jee went to Bedfordshire and was rapidly painted, and he came back gloomy. The Presentation Committee went to Bedfordshire later to inspect the portrait, and they, too, came back gloomy.

Then the Academy Exhibition opened, and the portrait, showing Sir Jee in his robe and chain and in a chair, was instantly hailed as possibly the most glorious masterpiece of modern times. All the critics were of one accord. The Committee and Sir Jee were reassured, but only partially, and Sir Jee rather less so than the Committee. For there was something in the enthusiastic criticism which gravely disturbed them. An enlightened generation, thoroughly familiar with the dazzling yearly succession of Cressage portraits, need not be told what this something was. One critic wrote that Cressage had displayed even more than "his customary astounding insight into character. . . ." Another critic wrote that Cressage's observation was, as usual, "calmly and coldly hostile." Another referred to the "typical provincial mayor, immortalised for the diversion of future ages.

Inhabitants of the Five Towns went to London to see the work for which they had subscribed, and they saw a mean, little, old man, with thin lips and a straggling grey beard and shifty eyes, and pushful snob written all over him; ridiculous in his gewgaws of office. When you looked at the picture close to, it was a meaningless mass of coloured smudges, but when you stood fifteen feet away from it the portrait was absolutely lifelike, amazing, miraculous. It was so wondrously lifelike that some of the inhabitants of the Five Towns burst out laughing. Many people felt sorry—not for Sir Jee, but

for Lady Dain. Lady Dain was beloved and genuinely respected. She was a simple, homely, sincere woman, her one weakness being that she had never been able to see through Sir Jee.

Of course, at the presentation ceremony the portrait had been ecstatically referred to as a possession precious for ever, and the recipient and his wife pretended to be overflowing with pure joy in the ownership of it.

It had been hanging in the dining-room of Sneyd Castle about sixteen months when Lady Dain told her husband that it would ultimately drive her into the lunatic asylum.

"Don't be silly, wife," said Sir Jee. "I wouldn't part with that portrait for ten times what it cost."

This was, to speak bluntly, a downright lie. Sir Jee secretly hated the portrait more than anyone hated it. He would have been almost ready to burn down Sneyd Castle in order to get rid of the thing. But it happened that on the previous evening, in conversation with the magistrates' clerk, his receptive brain had been visited by a less expensive scheme than burning down the castle.

Lady Dain sighed.

"Are you going to town early?" she enquired.

"Yes," he said. "I'm on the rota to-day."

He was chairman of the borough Bench of Magistrates. As he drove into town he revolved his scheme, and thought it wild and dangerous, but still feasible.

## II

On the Bench that morning Sir Jee shocked Mr. Sheratt, the magistrates' clerk, and he utterly disgusted Mr. Bourne, superintendent of the borough police. (I do not intend to name the name of the borough—whether Bursley, Henbridge, Knype, Longshaw, or Turnhill. The inhabitants of the Five Towns will know without being told; the rest of the world has no right to know.) There had recently occurred a somewhat thrilling series of burglaries in the district, and the burglars (a gang of them was presumed) had escaped the solicitous attentions of the police. But on the previous afternoon an underling of Mr. Bourne's had caught a man who was generally believed to be wholly or partly responsible for the burglaries. The Five Towns breathed with relief, and con-

gratulated Mr. Bourne; and Mr. Bourne was well pleased with himself. The *Staffordshire Signal* headed the item of news, "Smart Capture of a Supposed Burglar." The supposed burglar gave his name as William Smith, and otherwise behaved in an extremely suspicious manner.

Now, Sir Jee, sitting as chief magistrate in the police-court, actually dismissed the charge against the man! Overruling his sole colleague on the Bench that morning, Alderman Easton, he dismissed the charge against William Smith, holding that the evidence for the prosecution was insufficient to justify even a remand. No wonder that that pillar of the law, Mr. Sheratt, was pained and shocked. At the conclusion of the case Sir Jehoshaphat said that he would be glad to speak with William Smith afterwards in the magistrates' room, indicating that he sympathised with William Smith and wished to exercise upon William Smith his renowned philanthropy.

And so, about noon, when the Court majestically rose, Sir Jee retired to the magistrates' room, where the humble Alderman Easton was discreet enough not to follow him, and awaited William Smith. And William Smith came, guided thither by a policeman, to whom, in parting from him, he made a rude, surreptitious gesture.

Sir Jee, seated in the arm-chair which dominates the other chairs round the elm table in the magistrates' room, emitted a preliminary cough.

"Smith," he said sternly, leaning his elbows on the table, "you were very fortunate this morning, you know."

And he gazed at Smith.

Smith stood near the door, cap in hand. He did not resemble a burglar, who surely ought to be big, muscular, and masterful. He resembled an undersized clerk who has been out of work for a long time, but who has nevertheless found the means to eat and drink rather plenteously. He was clothed in a very shabby navy-blue suit, frayed at the wrists and ankles, and greasy in front. His linen collar was brown with dirt, his fingers were dirty, his hair was unkempt and long, and a young and lusty black beard was sprouting on his chin. His boots were not at all pleasant.

"Yes, governor," Smith replied lightly, with Manchester accent. "And what's your game?"

Sir Jee was taken aback. He, the chairman of the borough

Bench, and the leading philanthropist in the county, to be so spoken to! But what could he do? He himself had legally established Smith's innocence. Smith was free as air, and had a perfect right to adopt any tone he chose to any man he chose. And Sir Jee desired a service from William Smith.

"I was hoping I might be of use to you," said Sir Jehoshaphat diplomatically.

"Well," said Smith, "that's all right, that is. But none of your philanthropic dodges, you know. I don't want to turn over a new leaf, and I don't want a helpin' hand, nor none o' those things. And what's more, I don't want a situation. I've got all the situation as I need. But I never refuse money, nor beer neither. Never did, and I'm forty years old next month."

"I suppose burgling doesn't pay very well, does it?" Sir Jee boldly ventured.

William Smith laughed coarsely.

"It pays right enough," said he. "But I don't put my money on my back, governor; I put it into a bit of public-house property when I get the chance."

"It may pay," said Sir Jee. "But it is wrong. It is very anti-social."

"Is it, indeed!" Smith returned drily. "Anti-social, is it? Well, I've heard it called plenty o' things in my time, but never that. Now, I should have called it quite sociable-like—sort of making free with strangers, and so on. However," he added, "I came across a cove once as told me crime was nothing but a disease, and ought to be treated as such. I asked him for a dozen of port, but he never sent it."

"Ever been caught before?" Sir Jee enquired.

"Not much!" Smith exclaimed. "And this'll be a lesson to me, I can tell you. Now, what are you getting at, governor? Because my time's money, my time is."

Sir Jee coughed once more.

"Sir down," said Sir Jee.

And William Smith sat down opposite to him at the table, and put his shiny elbows on the table precisely in the manner of Sir Jee's elbows.

"Well?" he cheerfully encouraged Sir Jee.

"How should you like to commit a burglary that was not a crime?" said Sir Jee, his shifty eyes wandering round the room. "A perfectly lawful burglary?"

“What *are* you getting at?” William Smith was genuinely astonished.

“At my residence, Sneyd Castle,” Sir Jee proceeded, “there’s a large portrait of myself in the dining-room that I want to have stolen. You understand?”

“Stolen?”

“Yes. I want to get rid of it. And I want—er—people to think that it has been stolen.”

“Well, why don’t you stop up one night and steal it yourself, and then burn it?” William Smith suggested.

“That would be deceitful,” said Sir Jee gravely. “I could not tell my friends that the portrait had been stolen if it had not been stolen. The burglary must be entirely genuine.”

“What’s the figure?” said Smith curtly.

“Figure?”

“What are you going to give me for the job?”

“Give you for doing the job?” Sir Jee repeated, his secret and ineradicable meanness aroused. “Give you? Why, I’m giving you the opportunity to honestly steal a picture that’s worth two thousand pounds—I daresay it would be worth two thousand pounds in America—and you want to be paid into the bargain! Do you know, my man, that people come all the way from Manchester, and even London, to see that portrait?” He told Smith about the painting.

“Then why are you in such a stew to be rid of it?” queried the burglar.

“That’s my affair,” said Sir Jee. “I don’t like it. Lady Dain doesn’t like it. But it’s a presentation portrait, and so I can’t—you see, Mr. Smith?”

“And how am I going to dispose of it when I’ve got it?” Smith demanded. “You can’t melt a portrait down as if it was silver. By what you say, governor, it’s known all over the blessed world. Seems to me I might just as well try to sell the Nelson Column.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Sir Jee. “Nonsense! You’ll sell it in America quite easily. It’ll be a fortune to you. Keep it for a year first, and then send it to New York.”

William Smith shook his head and drummed his fingers on the table; and then, quite suddenly, he brightened and said:

“All right, governor. I’ll take it on, just to oblige you.”

“When can you do it?” asked Sir Jee, hardly concealing his joy. “To-night?”

"No," said Smith mysteriously. "I'm engaged to-night."

"Well, to-morrow night?"

"Nor to-morrow. I'm engaged to-morrow too."

"You seem to be very much engaged, my man," Sir Jee observed.

"What do you expect?" Smith retorted. "Business is business. I could do it the night after to-morrow."

"But that's Christmas Eve," Sir Jee protested.

"What if it is Christmas Eve?" said Smith coldly. "Would you prefer Christmas Day? I'm engaged on Boxing Day, *and* the day after."

"Not in the Five Towns, I trust?" Sir Jee remarked.

"No," said Smith shortly. "The Five Towns is about sucked dry." The affair was arranged for Christmas Eve.

"Now," Sir Jee suggested, "shall I draw you a plan of the castle, so that you can——"

William Smith's face expressed terrific scorn. "Do you suppose," he said, "as I haven't had plans o' your castle ever since it was built? What do you take me for? I'm not a blooming excursionist, I'm not. I'm a business man—that's what I am."

Sir Jee was snubbed, and he agreed submissively to all William Smith's arrangements for the innocent burglary. He perceived that in William Smith he had stumbled on a professional of the highest class, and this good fortune pleased him.

"There's only one thing that riles me," said Smith in parting, "and that is that you'll go and say that after you'd done everything you could for me I went and burgled your castle. And you'll talk of the ingratitude of the lower classes. I know you, governor!"

### III

On the afternoon of the 24th of December, Sir Jehoshaphat drove home to Sneyd Castle from the principal of the three Dain manufactories, and found Lady Dain superintending the work of packing up trunks. He and she were to quit the castle that afternoon in order to spend Christmas on the other side of the Five Towns, under the roof of their eldest son, John, who had a new house, a new wife, and a new baby (male). John was a domineering person, and, being rather proud of his

house and all that was his, he had obstinately decided to have his own Christmas at his own hearth. Grandpapa and Grandmamma, drawn by the irresistible attraction of that novelty, a grandson (though Mrs. John *had* declined to have the little thing named Jehoshaphat), had yielded to John's solicitations, and the family gathering, for the first time in history, was not to occur round Sir Jee's mahogany.

Sir Jee, very characteristically, said nothing to Lady Dain immediately. He allowed her to proceed with the packing of the trunks, and then tea was served, and the time was approaching for the carriage to come round to take them to the station when at last he suddenly remarked :

"I shan't be able to go with you to John's this afternoon."

"Oh, Jee!" she exclaimed. "Really, you are tiresome. Why couldn't you tell me before?"

"I will come over to-morrow morning—perhaps in time for church," he proceeded, ignoring her demand for an explanation.

He always did ignore her demand for an explanation. Indeed, she only asked for explanations in a mechanical and perfunctory manner—she had long since ceased to expect them. Sir Jee had been born like that—devious, mysterious, incalculable. And Lady Dain accepted him as he was. She was somewhat surprised, therefore, when he went on :

"I have some minutes of committee meetings that I really must go carefully through and send off to-night, and you know as well as I do that there'll be no chance of doing that at John's. I've telegraphed to John."

He was obviously nervous and self-conscious.

"There's no food in the house," sighed Lady Dain. "And the servants are all going away except Callear, and *he* can't cook your dinner to-night. I think I'd better stay myself and look after you."

"You'll do no such thing," said Sir Jee decisively. "As for my dinner, anything will do for that. The servants have been promised their holiday, to start from this evening, and they must have it. I can manage."

Here spoke the philanthropist, with his unshakable sense of justice.

So Lady Dain departed, anxious and worried, having previously arranged something cold for Sir Jee in the dining-room, and instructed Callear about boiling the water for Sir

Jee's tea on Christmas morning. Callear was the under-coachman and a useful odd man. He it was who would drive Sir Jee to the station on Christmas morning, and then guard the castle and the stables thereof during the absence of the family and the other servants. Callear slept over the stables.

And after Sir Jee had consumed his cold repast in the dining-room the other servants went, and Sir Jee was alone in the castle, facing the portrait.

He had managed the affair fairly well, he thought. Indeed, he had a talent for chicane, and none knew it better than himself. It would have been dangerous if the servants had been left in the castle. They might have suffered from insomnia, and heard William Smith, and interfered with the operations of William Smith. On the other hand, Sir Jee had no intention of leaving the castle, uninhabited, to the mercies of William Smith. He felt that he himself must be on the spot to see that everything went right and that nothing went wrong. Thus the previously arranged scheme for the servants' holiday fitted perfectly into his plans, and all that he had had to do was to refuse to leave the castle till the morrow. It was ideal.

Nevertheless, he was a little afraid of what he had done, and of what he was going to permit William Smith to do. It was certainly dangerous—certainly rather a wild scheme. However, the die was cast. And within twelve hours he would be relieved of the intolerable incubus of the portrait.

And when he thought of the humiliations which that portrait had caused him, when he remembered the remarks of his sons concerning it, especially Johns remarks; when he recalled phrases about it in London newspapers, he squirmed, and told himself that no scheme for getting rid of it could be too wild and perilous. And, after all, the burglary dodge was the only dodge, absolutely the only conceivable practical method of disposing of the portrait—except burning down the castle. And surely it was preferable to a conflagration, to arson! Moreover, in case of fire at the castle some blundering fool would be sure to cry: "The portrait! The portrait must be saved!" And the portrait would be saved.

He gazed at the repulsive, hateful thing. In the centre of the lower part of the massive gold frame was the legend: "Presented to Sir Jehoshaphat Dain, Knight, as a mark of public esteem and gratitude," etc. He wondered if William Smith would steal the frame. It was to be hoped that he would

not steal the frame. In fact, William Smith would find it very difficult to steal that frame unless he had an accomplice or so.

“This is the last time I shall see *you* !” said Sir Jee to the portrait.

Then he unfastened the catch of one of the windows in the dining-room (as per contract with William Smith), turned out the electric light, and went to bed in the deserted castle.

He went to bed, but not to sleep. It was no part of Sir Jee’s programme to sleep. He intended to listen, and he did listen.

And about two o’clock, precisely the hour which William Smith had indicated, he fancied he heard muffled and discreet noises. Then he was sure that he heard them. William Smith had kept his word. Then the noises ceased for a period, and they recommenced. Sir Jee restrained his curiosity as long as he could, and, when he could restrain it no more, he rose and silently opened his bedroom window and put his head out into the nipping night air of Christmas. And by good fortune he saw the vast oblong of the picture, carefully enveloped in sheets, being passed by a couple of dark figures through the dining-room window to the garden outside. William Smith had a colleague, then, and he was taking the frame as well as the canvas. Sir Jee watched the men disappear down the avenue, and they did not reappear. Sir Jee returned to bed.

Yes, he felt himself equal to facing it out with his family and friends. He felt himself equal to pretending that he had no knowledge of the burglary.

Having slept a few hours, he got up early and, half-dressed, descended to the dining-room just to see what sort of a mess William Smith had made.

The canvas of the portrait lay flat on the hearthrug, with the following words written on it in chalk : “This is no use to me.” It was the massive gold frame that had gone.

Further, as was soon discovered, all the silver had gone. Not a spoon was left in the castle.



# STEPHEN LEACOCK

## *Soaked in Seaweed*

In his serious moments Stephen Leacock is a professor of Political Economy at McGill University, Montreal, but he is far better known to the world as a parodist and writer of delightful humorous sketches. Of these he has published *Literary Lapses*, *Nonsense Novels* and many other volumes.



## SOAKED IN SEAWEED

OR

UPSET IN THE OCEAN

(*An Old-fashioned Sea-story*)

**I**T was in August in 1867 that I stepped on board the deck of the *Saucy Sally*, lying in dock at Gravesend, to fill the berth of second mate.

Let me first say a word about myself.

I was a tall, handsome young fellow, squarely and powerfully built, bronzed by the sun and the moon (and even copper-coloured in spots from the effect of the stars), and with a face in which honesty, intelligence, and exceptional brain-power were combined with Christianity, simplicity, and modesty.

As I stepped on the deck, I could not help a slight feeling of triumph as I caught sight of my sailor-like features reflected in a tar-barrel that stood beside the mast, while a little later I could scarcely repress a sense of gratification as I noticed them reflected again in a bucket of bilge-water.

“Welcome on board, Mr. Blowhard,” called out Captain Bilge, stepping out of the binnacle and shaking hands across the taffrail.

I saw before me a fine, sailor-like man from thirty to sixty, clean-shaven except for an enormous pair of whiskers, a heavy beard, and a thick moustache, powerful in build, and carrying his beam well aft, in a pair of broad duck trousers, across the back of which there would have been room to write a history of the British Navy.

Beside him were the first and third mates, both of them being quiet men of poor stature, who looked at Captain Bilge with what seemed to me an apprehensive expression in their eyes.

The vessel was on the eve of departure. Her deck presented that scene of bustle and alacrity dear to the sailor’s heart. Men were busy nailing up the masts, hanging the bowsprit over the

side, varnishing the lee-scuppers, and pouring hot tar down the companion-way.

Captain Bilge, with a megaphone to his lips, kept calling out to the men in his rough sailor fashion :

“Now, then, don’t over-exert yourselves, gentlemen. Remember, please, that we have plenty of time. Keep out of the sun as much as you can. Step carefully in the rigging there, Jones ; I fear it’s a little high for you. Tut, tut, Williams, don’t get yourself so dirty with that tar ; you won’t look fit to be seen.”

I stood leaning over the gaff of the mainsail and thinking—yes, thinking, dear reader, of my mother. I hope that you will think none the less of me for that. Whenever things look dark, I lean up against something and think of mother. If they get positively black, I stand on one leg and think of father. After that I can face anything.

Did I think, too, of another, younger than mother and fairer than father ? Yes, I did. “Bear up, darling,” I had whispered, as she nestled her head beneath my oilskins and kicked out backward with one heel in the agony of her girlish grief ; “in five years the voyage will be over, and, after three more like it, I shall come back with money enough to buy a second-hand fishing-net and settle down on shore.”

Meantime the ship’s preparations were complete. The masts were all in position, the sails nailed up, and men with axes were busy chopping away the gangway.

“All ready ?” called the Captain.

“Aye, aye, sir.”

“Then hoist the anchor on board and send a man down with the key to open the bar.”

Opening the bar ! The last rite of departure. How often in my voyages have I seen it ; the little group of men, soon to be exiled from their home, standing about with saddened faces, waiting to see the man with the key open the bar—held there by some strange fascination.

. . . . .

Next morning, with a fair wind astern, we had buzzed around the corner of England and were running down the Channel.

I know no finer sight, for those who have never seen it, than the English Channel. It is the highway of the world,

Ships of all nations are passing up and down, Dutch, Scotch, Venezuelan, and even American.

Chinese junks rush to and fro. Warships, motor-yachts, icebergs, and lumber-rafts are everywhere. If I add to this fact that so thick a fog hangs over it that it is entirely hidden from sight, my readers can form some idea of the majesty of the scene.

. . . . .

We had now been three days at sea. My first seasickness was wearing off and I thought less of father.

On the third morning Captain Bilge descended to my cabin.

"Mr. Blowhard," he said, "I must ask you to stand double watches."

"What is the matter?" I enquired.

"The two other mates have fallen overboard," he said uneasily, and avoiding my eye.

I contented myself with saying, "Very good, sir," but I could not help thinking it a trifle odd that both the mates should have fallen overboard in the same night.

Surely there was some mystery in this.

Two mornings later the Captain appeared at the breakfast-table with the same shifting and uneasy look in his eyes.

"Anything wrong, sir?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, trying to appear at ease, and twisting a fried egg to and fro between his fingers with such nervous force as almost to break it in two, "I regret to say we have lost the bo'sun."

"The bo'sun?" I cried.

"Yes," said Captain Bilge more quietly, "he is overboard. I blame myself for it, partly. It was early this morning. I was holding him up in my arms to look at an iceberg, and—quite accidentally, I assure you—I dropped him overboard."

"Captain Bilge," I asked, "have you taken any steps to recover him?"

"Not as yet," he replied uneasily.

I looked at him fixedly, but said nothing.

Ten days passed.

The mystery thickened. On Thursday two men of the starboard watch were reported missing. On Friday the carpenter's assistant disappeared. On the night of Saturday a

circumstance occurred which, slight as it was, gave me some clue as to what was happening.

As I stood at the wheel about midnight, I saw the Captain approach in the darkness, carrying the cabin-boy by the hind leg. The lad was a bright little fellow, whose merry disposition had already endeared him to me, and I watched with some interest to see what the Captain would do to him. Arrived at the stern of the vessel, Captain Bilge looked cautiously around for a moment and then dropped the boy into the sea. For a brief moment the lad's head appeared in the phosphorus of the waves. The Captain threw a boot at him, sighed deeply, and went below.

Here, then, was the key to the mystery! The Captain was throwing the crew overboard. Next morning we met at breakfast as usual.

"Poor little William has fallen overboard," said the Captain, seizing a strip of ship's bacon and tearing at it with his teeth as if he almost meant to eat it.

"Captain," I said, greatly excited, and stabbing at a ship's loaf in my agitation with such ferocity as almost to drive my knife into it, "you threw that boy overboard!"

"I did," said Captain Bilge, grown suddenly quiet. "I threw them all over, and intend to throw the rest. Listen, Blowhard; you are young, ambitious, and trustworthy. I will confide in you."

Perfectly calm now, he stepped to a locker, rummaged in it a moment, and drew out a piece of faded yellow parchment, which he spread on the table. It was a map or chart. In the centre of it was a circle. In the middle of the circle was a small dot and the letter T, while at one side of the map was a letter N, and against it on the other side a letter S.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Can you not guess?" queried Captain Bilge. "It is a desert island."

"Ah!" I rejoined, with a sudden flash of intuition, "and N is for north, and S is for south."

"Blowhard," said the Captain, striking the table with such force as to cause a loaf of ship's bread to bounce up and down three or four times, "you've struck it. That part of it had not yet occurred to me."

"And the letter T?" I asked.

"The treasure—the buried treasure," said the Captain, and,

turning the map over, he read from the back of it : " The point T indicates the spot where the treasure is buried under the sand ; it consists of half a million Spanish dollars, and is buried in a brown leather dress-suit case."

" And where is the island ? " I enquired, mad with excitement.

" That I do not know," said the Captain. " I intend to sail up and down the parallels of latitude till I find it."

" And meantime ? "

" Meantime, the first thing to do is to reduce the numbers of the crew, so as to have fewer hands to divide among. Come, come," he added, in a burst of frankness, which made me love the man in spite of his shortcomings, " will you join me in this ? We'll throw them all over, keeping the cook to the last, dig up the treasure, and be rich for the rest of our lives."

Reader, do you blame me if I said yes ? I was young, ardent, ambitious, full of bright hopes and boyish enthusiasm.

" Captain Bilge," I said, putting my hand in his, " I am yours."

" Good," he said. " Now go forward to the forecastle and get an idea what the men are thinking."

I went forward to the men's quarters—a plain room in the front of the ship, with only a rough carpet on the floor, a few simple arm-chairs, writing-desks, spittoons of a plain pattern, and small brass beds with blue-and-green screens. It was Sunday morning, and the men were mostly sitting about in their dressing-gowns.

They rose as I entered, and curtseyed.

" Sir," said Tompkins, the bo'sun's mate, " I think it my duty to tell you there is a great deal of dissatisfaction among the men."

Several of the men nodded.

" They don't like the way the men keep going overboard," he continued, his voice rising to a tone of uncontrolled passion. " It is positively absurd, sir, and, if you will allow me to say so, the men are far from pleased."

" Tompkins," I said sternly, " you must understand that my position will not allow me to listen to mutinous language of this sort."

I returned to the Captain. " I think the men mean mutiny," I said.

" Good," returned Captain Bilge, rubbing his hands ;

“that will get rid of a lot of them, and of course,” he added musingly, looking out of the broad, old-fashioned porthole at the stern of the cabin, at the heaving waves of the South Atlantic, “I am expecting pirates at any time, and that will take off quite a few of them. However”—and here he pressed the bell for a cabin-boy—“kindly ask Mr. Tompkins to step this way.”

“Tompkins,” said the Captain, as the bo’sun’s mate entered, “be good enough to stand on the locker and stick your head through the stern porthole and tell me what you think of the weather.”

Tompkins stood on the locker and put his head and shoulders out of the port.

Taking a leg each, we pushed him through. We heard him plump into the sea.

“Tompkins was easy,” said Captain Bilge. “Excuse me as I enter his death in the log.”

“Yes,” he continued presently, “it will be a great help if they mutiny. I suppose they will, sooner or later. It’s customary to do so. But I shall take no step to precipitate it until we have first fallen in with pirates. I am expecting them in these latitudes at any time. Meanwhile, Mr. Blowhard,” he said, rising, “if you can continue to drop overboard one or two more each week, I shall feel extremely grateful.”

Three days later we rounded the Cape of Good Hope and entered upon the inky waters of the Indian Ocean. Our course lay now in zigzags, and, the weather being favourable, we sailed up and down at a furious rate over a sea as calm as glass.

On the fourth day a pirate ship appeared. Reader, I do not know if you have ever seen a pirate ship. The sight was one to appal the stoutest heart. The entire ship was painted black, a black flag hung at the masthead, the sails were black, and on the deck people dressed all in black walked up and down arm-in-arm. The words “Pirate Ship” were painted in white letters on the bow. At the sight of it our crew were visibly cowed. It was a spectacle that would have cowed a dog.

The two ships were brought side by side. They were then lashed tightly together with bag string and binder twine, and a gang-plank laid between them. In a moment the pirates swarmed upon our deck, rolling their eyes, gnashing their teeth, and filing their nails.

Then the fight began. It lasted two hours—with fifteen

minutes off for lunch. It was awful. The men grappled with one another, kicked one another from behind, slapped one another across the face and in many cases completely lost their temper and tried to bite one another. I noticed one gigantic fellow brandishing a knotted towel, and striking right and left among our men, until Captain Bilge rushed at him and struck him flat across the mouth with a banana skin.

At the end of two hours, by mutual consent, the fight was declared a draw, the points standing at sixty-one and a half against sixty-two.

The ships were unlashd, and, with three cheers from each crew, were headed on their way.

"Now, then," said the Captain to me, aside, "let us see how many of the crew are sufficiently exhausted to be thrown overboard."

He went below. In a few minutes he reappeared, his face deadly pale.

"Blowhard," he said, "the ship is sinking. One of the pirates (sheer accident, of course; I blame no one) has kicked a hole in the side. Let us sound the well."

We put our ear to the ship's well. It sounded like water.

The men were put to the pumps, and worked with the frenzied effort which only those who have been drowned in a sinking ship can understand.

At 6 p.m. the well marked one half an inch of water, at nightfall three-quarters of an inch, and at daybreak, after a night of unremitting toil, seven-eighths of an inch.

By noon of the next day the water had risen to fifteen-sixteenths of an inch, and on the next night the sounding showed thirty-one thirty-seconds of an inch of water in the hold. The situation was desperate. At this rate of increase few, if any, could tell where it would rise to in a few days.

That night the Captain called me to his cabin. He had a book of mathematical tables in front of him, and great sheets of vulgar fractions littered the floor on all sides.

"The ship is bound to sink," he said; "in fact, Blowhard, she is sinking. I can prove it. It may be six months or it may take years, but if she goes on like this, sink she must. There is nothing for it but to abandon her."

That night, in the dead of darkness, while the crew were busy at the pumps, the Captain and I built a raft.

Unobserved, we cut down the masts, chopped them into

suitable lengths, laid them crosswise in a pile, and lashed them tightly together with bootlaces.

Hastily we threw on board a couple of boxes of food and bottles of drinking fluid, a sextant, a chronometer, a gas-meter, a bicycle pump, and a few other scientific instruments. Then, taking advantage of a roll in the motion of the ship, we launched the raft, lowered ourselves upon a line, and, under cover of the heavy dark of a tropical night, we paddled away from the doomed vessel.

The break of day found us a tiny speck on the Indian Ocean. We looked about as big as this (.).

In the morning, after dressing and shaving as best we could, we opened our boxes of food and drink.

Then came the awful horror of our situation.

One by one the Captain took from the box the square blue tins of canned beef which it contained. We counted fifty-two in all. Anxiously and with drawn faces we watched until the last can was lifted from the box. A single thought was in our minds. When the end came the Captain stood up on the raft, with wild eyes staring at the sky.

"The can-opener!" he shrieked. "Just heaven, the can-opener!" He fell prostrate.

Meantime, with trembling hands, I opened the box of bottles. It contained lager-beer bottles, each with a patent tin top. One by one I took them out. There were fifty-two in all. As I withdrew the last one and saw the empty box before me, I shroke out, "The thing! The thing! Oh, merciful heaven! The thing you open them with!"

I fell prostrate upon the Captain.

We awoke to find ourselves still a mere speck upon the ocean. We felt even smaller than before.

Over us was the burnished copper sky of the tropics. The heavy, leaden sea lapped the sides of the raft. All about us was a litter of corned-beef cans and lager-beer bottles. Our sufferings in the ensuing days were indescribable. We beat and thumped on the cans with our fists. Even at the risk of spoiling the tins for ever we hammered them fiercely against the raft. We stamped on them, bit at them, and swore at them. We pulled and clawed at the bottles with our hands, and chipped and knocked them against the cans, regardless even of breaking the glass and ruining the bottles.

It was futile.

Then day after day we sat in moody silence, gnawed with hunger, with nothing to read, nothing to smoke, and practically nothing to talk about.

On the tenth day the Captain broke silence.

"Get ready the lots, Blowhard," he said. "It's got to come to that."

"Yes," I answered drearily, "we're getting thinner every day."

Then, with the awful prospect of cannibalism before us, we drew lots.

I prepared the lots and held them to the Captain. He drew the longer one.

"Which does that mean?" he asked, trembling between hope and despair. "Do I win?"

"No, Bilge," I said sadly, "you lose."

. . . . .

But I mustn't dwell on the days that followed—the long, quiet days of lazy dreaming on the raft, during which I slowly built up my strength, which had been shattered by privation. They were days, dear reader, of deep and quiet peace, and yet I cannot recall them without shedding a tear for the brave man who made them what they were.

It was the fifth day after, that I was awakened from a sound sleep by the bumping of the raft against the shore. I had eaten perhaps over-heartily, and had not observed the vicinity of land.

Before me was an island, the circular shape of which, with its low, sandy shore, recalled at once its identity.

"The treasure island!" I cried. "At last I am rewarded for all my heroism."

In a fever of haste I rushed to the centre of the island. What was the sight that confronted me? A great hollow scooped in the sand, an empty dress-suit case lying beside it, and, on a ship's plank driven deep into the sand, the legend, "*Saucy Sally*, October 1867." So! the miscreants had made good the vessel, headed it for the island of whose existence they must have learned from the chart we so carelessly left upon the cabin table, and had plundered poor Bilge and me of our well-earned treasure!

Sick with the sense of human ingratitude, I sank upon the sand.

The island became my home.

There I eked out a miserable existence, feeding myself on sand and gravel, and dressing myself in cactus plants. Years passed. Eating sand and mud slowly undermined my robust constitution. I fell ill. I died. I buried myself.

Would that others who write sea-stories would do as much.

P. G. WODEHOUSE

*The Exit of Battling Billson*

The creator of Psmith, Ukridge and above all the inimitable Jeeves needs no introduction. The name of P. G. Wodehouse spells loud and prolonged laughter throughout the English-speaking world. Here is one of the most irresistible tales from the great Ukridge saga.



## THE EXIT OF BATTLING BILLSON

**T**HE Theatre Royal, Llundnno, is in the middle of the principal thoroughfare of that repellent town, and immediately opposite its grubby main entrance there is a lamp-post. Under this lamp-post, as I approached, a man was standing. He was a large man, and his air was that of one who had recently passed through some trying experience. There was dust on his person, and he had lost his hat. At the sound of my footsteps he turned, and the rays of the lamp revealed the familiar features of my old friend Stanley Featherstonhaugh Ukridge.

“Great Scott!” I ejaculated. “What are you doing here?”

There was no possibility of hallucination. It was the man himself in the flesh. And what Ukridge, a free agent, could be doing in Llundnno was more than I could imagine. Situated, as its name implies, in Wales, it is a dark, dingy, dishevelled spot, inhabited by tough and sinister men with suspicious eyes and three-day beards; and to me, after a mere forty minutes’ sojourn in the place, it was incredible that anyone should be there except on compulsion.

Ukridge gaped at me incredulously.

“Corky, old horse,” he said, “this is, upon my Sam, without exception the most amazing event in the world’s history. The last bloke I expected to see.”

“Same here. Is anything the matter?” I asked, eyeing his bedraggled appearance.

“Matter? I should say something was the matter!” snorted Ukridge, astonishment giving way to righteous indignation. “They chucked me out!”

“Chucked you out. Who? Where from?”

“This infernal theatre, laddie. After taking my good money, dash it! At least, I got in on my face, but that has nothing to do with the principle of the thing. Corky, my boy, don’t you ever go about this world seeking for justice, because there’s no such thing under the broad vault of heaven. I had

just gone out for a breather after the first act, and when I came back I found some fiend had pinched my seat. And, just because I tried to lift the fellow out by the ears, a dozen hired assassins swooped down and shot me out. Me, I'll trouble you! The injured party! Upon my Sam," he said heatedly, with a longing look at the closed door, "I've a dashed good mind to——"

"I shouldn't," I said soothingly. "After all, what does it matter? It's just one of those things that are bound to happen from time to time. The man of affairs passes them off with a light laugh."

"Yes, but——"

"Come and have a drink."

The suggestion made him waver. The light of battle died down in his eyes. He stood for a moment in thought.

"You wouldn't bung a brick through the window?" he queried doubtfully.

"No, no!"

"Perhaps you're right."

He linked his arm in mine, and we crossed the road to where the lights of a public house shone like heartening beacons. The crisis was over.

"Corky," said Ukridge, warily laying down his mug of beer on the counter a few minutes later, lest emotion should cause him to spill any of its precious contents, "I can't get over—I simply cannot get over the astounding fact of your being in this blighted town."

I explained my position. My presence in Llundnno was due to the fact that the paper which occasionally made use of my services as a special writer had sent me to compose a fuller and more scholarly report than its local correspondent seemed capable of concocting of the activities of one Evan Jones, the latest of those revivalists who periodically convulse the emotions of the Welsh mining population. His last and biggest meeting was to take place next morning at eleven o'clock.

"But what are you doing here?" I asked.

"What am I doing here?" said Ukridge. "Who, me? Why, where else would you expect me to be? Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Haven't you seen the posters?"

"What posters? I only arrived an hour ago."

“My dear old horse! Then naturally you aren’t abreast of local affairs.” He drained his mug, breathed contentedly, and led me out into the street. “Look!”

He was pointing to a poster, boldly lettered in red and black, which decorated the side-wall of the Bon Ton Millinery Emporium. The street-lighting system of Llundnno is defective, but I was able to read what it said:

ODDFELLOWS’ HALL  
Special Ten-Round Contest

LLOYD THOMAS  
(Llundnno)

”.

BATTLING BILLSON  
(Bermondsey)

“Comes off to-morrow night,” said Ukridge. “And I don’t mind telling you, laddie, that I expect to make a colossal fortune.”

“Are you still managing the Battler?” I said, surprised at this dogged perseverance. “I should have thought that after your two last experiences you would have had about enough of it.”

“Oh, he means business this time! I’ve been talking to him like a father.”

“How much does he get?”

“Twenty quid.”

“Twenty quid? Well, where does the colossal fortune come in? Your share will only be a tenner.”

“No, my boy. You haven’t got on to my devilish shrewdness. I’m not in on the purse at all this time. I’m the management.”

“The management?”

“Well, part of it. You remember Isaac O’Brien, the bookie I was partner with till that chump Loonie Coote smashed the business? Izzy Previn is his real name. We’ve gone shares in this thing. Izzy came down a week ago, hired the hall, and looked after the advertising and so on; and I arrived with good old Billson this afternoon. We’re giving him twenty quid, and the other fellow’s getting another twenty; and all the rest of the cash Izzy and I split on a fifty-fifty basis. Affluence, laddie! That’s what it means. Affluence beyond the dreams of a Monte Cristo. Owing to this Jones fellow the

place is crowded, and every sportsman for miles around will be there to-morrow at five bob a head, cheaper seats two-and-six, and standing room one shilling. Add lemonade and fried fish privileges, and you have a proposition almost without parallel in the annals of commerce. I wouldn't be more on the velvet if they gave me a sack and a shovel and let me loose in the Mint."

I congratulated him in suitable terms.

"How is the Battler?" I asked.

"Trained to an ounce. Come and see him to-morrow morning."

"I can't come in the morning. I've got to go to this Jones meeting."

"Oh, yes. Well, make it early in the afternoon, then. Don't come later than three, because he will be resting. We're at No. 7, Caerleon Street. Ask for the 'Cap and Feathers' public house, and turn sharp to the left."

I was in a curiously uplifted mood on the following afternoon as I set out to pay my respects to Mr. Billson. This was the first time I had had occasion to attend one of these revival meetings, and the effect it had had on me was to make me feel as if I had been imbibing large quantities of champagne to the accompaniment of a very large orchestra. Even before the revivalist rose to speak the proceedings had had an effervescent quality singularly unsettling to the sober mind, for the vast gathering had begun to sing hymns directly they took their seats; and, while the opinion I had formed of the inhabitants of Llundnno was not high, there was no denying their vocal powers. There is something about a Welsh voice when raised in song that no other voice seems to possess—a creepy, heart-searching quality that gets right into a man's inner consciousness and stirs it up with a pole. And on top of this had come Evan Jones's address.

It did not take me long to understand why this man had gone through the countryside like a flame. He had magnetism, intense earnestness, and the voice of a prophet crying in the wilderness. His fiery eyes seemed to single out each individual in the hall, and, every time he paused, sighings and wailings went up like the smoke of a furnace. And then, after speaking for what I discovered with amazement, on consulting my watch, was considerably over an hour, he stopped. And I blinked like an aroused somnambulist, shook myself to make

sure I was still there, and came away. And now, as I walked in search of the "Cap and Feathers," I was, as I say, oddly exhilarated; and I was strolling along in a sort of trance when a sudden uproar jerked me from thoughts. I looked about me, and saw the sign of the "Cap and Feathers" suspended over a building across the street.

It was a dubious-looking hostelry in a dubious neighbourhood; and the sounds proceeding from its interior were not reassuring to a peace-loving pedestrian. There was a good deal of shouting going on, and much smashing of glass; and, as I stood there, the door flew open and a familiar figure emerged rather hastily. A moment later there appeared in the doorway a woman.

She was a small woman, but she carried the largest and most intimidating mop I had ever seen. It dripped dirty water as she brandished it; and the man, glancing apprehensively over his shoulder, proceeded rapidly on his way.

"Hullo, Mr. Billson!" I said, as he shot by me.

It was not, perhaps, the best-chosen moment for endeavouring to engage him in light conversation. He showed no disposition whatever to linger. He vanished round the corner, and the woman, with a few winged words, gave her mop a victorious flourish and re-entered the public house. I walked on, and a little later a huge figure stepped cautiously out of an alley-way and fell into step at my side.

"Didn't recognise you, mister," said Mr. Billson apologetically.

"You seemed in rather a hurry," I agreed.

"R!" said Mr. Billson, and a thoughtful silence descended upon him for a space.

"Who," I asked, tactlessly perhaps, "was your lady friend?"

Mr. Billson looked a trifle sheepish. Unnecessarily, in my opinion. Even heroes may legitimately quail before a mop wielded by an angry woman.

"She come out of a back room," he said, with embarrassment. "Started makin' a fuss when she saw what I'd done. So I come away. You can't dot a woman," argued Mr. Billson chivalrously.

"Certainly not," I agreed. "But what was the trouble?"

"I been doin' good," said Mr. Billson virtuously.

"Doing good?"

"Spillin' their beers."

"Whose beers?"

"All of their beers. I went in, and there was a lot of sinful fellers drinkin' beers. So I spilled 'em. All of 'em. Walked round and spilled all of them beers, one after the other. Not 'arf surprised, them pore sinners wasn't," said Mr. Billson, with what sounded to me not unlike a worldly chuckle.

"I can readily imagine it."

"Huh?"

"I say I bet they were."

"R!" said Mr. Billson. He frowned. "Beer," he proceeded, with cold austerity, "ain't right. Sinful, that's what beer is. It stingeth like a serpent and biteth like a ruddy adder."

My mouth watered a little. Beer like that was what I had been scouring the country for for years. I thought it imprudent, however, to say so. For some reason which I could not fathom, my companion, once as fond of his half-pint as the next man, seemed to have conceived a puritanical hostility to the beverage. I decided to change the subject.

"I'm looking forward to seeing you fight to-night," I said.

He eyed me woodenly.

"Me?"

"Yes, at the Oddfellows' Hall, you know."

He shook his head.

"I ain't fighting at no Oddfellows' Hall," he replied. "Not at no Oddfellows' Hall nor nowhere else I'm not fighting, not to-morrow nor no night." He pondered stolidly, and then, as if coming to the conclusion that his last sentence could be improved by the addition of a negative, added "No!"

And, having said this, he suddenly stopped and stiffened like a pointing dog; and, looking up to see what interesting object by the wayside had attracted his notice, I perceived that we were standing beneath another public house sign—that of the "Blue Boar." Its windows were hospitably open, and through them came a musical clinking of glasses. Mr. Billson licked his lips with a quiet relish.

"'Scuse me, mister," he said, and left me abruptly.

My one thought now was to reach Ukridge as quickly as possible, in order to acquaint him with these sinister developments. For I was startled. More, I was alarmed and uneasy.

In one of the star performers at a special ten-round contest, scheduled to take place that evening, Mr. Billson's attitude seemed to me peculiar, not to say disquieting. So, even though a sudden crash and uproar from the interior of the "Blue Boar" called invitingly to me to linger, I hurried on, and neither stopped, looked, nor listened until I stood on the steps of No. 7, Caerleon Street.

And eventually, after my prolonged ringing and knocking had finally induced a female of advanced years to come up and answer the door, I found Ukridge lying on a horsehair sofa in the far corner of the sitting-room.

I unloaded my grave news. It was wasting time to try to break it gently.

"I've just seen Billson," I said, "and he seems to be in rather a strange mood. In fact, I'm sorry to say, old man, he rather gave me the impression——"

"That he wasn't going to fight to-night?" said Ukridge, with a strange calm. "Quite correct. He isn't. He's just been in here to tell me so. What I like about the man is his consideration for all concerned. *He* doesn't want to upset anybody's arrangements."

"But what's the trouble? Is he kicking about only getting twenty pounds?"

"No. He thinks fighting's sinful!"

"What?"

"Nothing more or less, Corky, my boy. Like chumps, we took our eyes off him for half a second this morning, and he sneaked off to that revival meeting. Went out shortly after a light and wholesome breakfast for what he called a bit of a mooch round, and came in half an hour ago a changed man. Full of loving-kindness, curse him! Nasty shifty gleam in his eye. Told us he thought fighting sinful and it was all off, and then buzzed out to spread the Word."

I was shaken to the core. Wilberforce Billson, the peerless but temperamental Battler, had never been an ideal pugilist to manage, but hitherto he had drawn the line at anything like this. Other little problems which he might have brought up for his manager to solve might have been overcome by patience and tact; but not this one. The psychology of Mr. Billson was as an open book to me. He possessed one of those single-track minds, capable of accommodating but one idea at a time, and he had the tenacity of the simple soul.

Argument would leave him unshaken. On that bone-like head Reason would beat in vain. And, these things being so, I was at a loss to account for Ukridge's extraordinary calm. His fortitude in the hour of ruin amazed me.

His next remark, however, offered an explanation.

"We're putting on a substitute," he said.

I was relieved.

"Oh, you've got a substitute? That's a bit of luck. Where did you find him?"

"As a matter of fact, laddie, I've decided to go on myself."

"What! You?"

"Only way out, my boy. No other solution."

I stared at the man. Years of the closest acquaintance with S. F. Ukridge had rendered me almost surprise-proof at anything he might do, but this was too much.

"Do you mean to tell me that you seriously intend to go out there to-night and appear in the ring?" I cried.

"Perfectly straightforward, business-like proposition, old man," said Ukridge stoutly. "I'm in excellent shape. I sparred with Billson every day while he was training."

"Yes, but——"

"The fact is, laddie, you don't realise my potentialities. Recently, it's true, I've allowed myself to become slack, and what you might call enervated, but, damme, when I was on that trip in that tramp-steamer, scarcely a week used to go by without my having a good earnest scrap with somebody. Nothing barred," said Ukridge, musing lovingly on the care-free past, "except biting and bottles."

"Yes, but, hang it—a professional pugilist."

"Well, to be absolutely accurate, laddie," said Ukridge, suddenly dropping the heroic manner and becoming confidential, "the thing's going to be fixed. Izzy Previn has seen the bloke Thomas's manager, and has arranged a gentleman's agreement. The manager, a Class A blood-sucker, insists on us giving his man another twenty pounds after the fight, but that can't be helped. In return, the Thomas bloke consents to play light for three rounds, at the end of which period, laddie, he will tap me on the side of the head and I shall go down and out, a popular loser. What's more, I'm allowed to hit him hard—once—just so long as it isn't on the nose. So, you see, a little tact, a little diplomacy, and the whole thing fixed up as satisfactorily as anyone could wish."

"But suppose the audience demands its money back when they find they're going to see a substitute?"

"My dear old horse," protested Ukridge, "surely you don't imagine that a man with a business head like mine overlooked that? Naturally I'm going to fight as Battling Billson. Nobody knows him in this town. I'm a good big chap, just as much a heavy-weight as he is. No, laddie, pick how you will, you can't pick a flaw in this."

"Why mayn't you hit him on the nose?"

"I don't know. People have these strange whims. And now, Corky, my boy, I think you had better leave me. I ought to relax."

The Oddfellows' Hall was certainly filling up nicely when I arrived that night. Indeed, it seemed as though Llundnno's devotees of sport would cram it to the roof. I took my place in the line before the pay-window, and, having completed the business end of the transaction, went in and enquired my way to the dressing-rooms. And presently, after wandering through divers passages, I came upon Ukridge, clad for the ring and swathed in his familiar yellow mackintosh.

"You're going to have a wonderful house," I said. "The populace is rolling up in shoals."

He received the information with a strange lack of enthusiasm. I looked at him in concern, and was disquieted by his forlorn appearance. That face which had beamed so triumphantly at our last meeting was pale and set. Those eyes, which normally shone with the light of an unquenchable optimism, seemed dull and careworn. And even as I looked at him he seemed to rouse himself from a stupor and, reaching out for his shirt, which hung on a near-by peg, proceeded to pull it over his head.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

His head popped out of the shirt, and he eyed me wanly.

"I'm off," he announced briefly.

"Off? How do you mean, off?" I tried to soothe what I took to be an eleventh-hour attack of stage-fright. "You'll be all right."

Ukridge laughed hollowly.

"Once the gong goes, you'll forget the crowd."

"It isn't the crowd," said Ukridge, in a pale voice, climbing into his trousers. "Corky, old man," he went on earnestly, "if ever you feel your angry passions rising to the point where

you want to swat a stranger in a public place, restrain yourself. There's nothing in it. This bloke Thomas was in here a moment ago with his manager to settle the final details. He's the fellow I had the trouble with at the theatre last night!"

"The man you pulled out of the seat by his ears?" I gasped. Ukridge nodded.

"Recognised me at once, confound him, and it was all his manager, a thoroughly decent cove whom I liked, could do to prevent him getting at me there and then."

"Good Lord!" I said, aghast at this grim development, yet thinking how thoroughly characteristic it was of Ukridge, when he had a whole townful of people to quarrel with, to pick the one professional pugilist. At this moment, when Ukridge was lacing his left shoe, the door opened and a man came in.

The newcomer was stout, dark, and beady-eyed, and from his manner of easy comradeship, and the fact that when he spoke he supplemented words with the language of the waving palm, I deduced that this must be Mr. Izzy Previn, recently trading as Isaac O'Brien. He was cheeriness itself.

"Vell," he said, with ill-timed exuberance, "how'th the boy?" The boy cast a sour look at him.

"The house," proceeded Mr. Previn, with an almost lyrical enthusiasm, "is abtholutely full. Crammed, jammed, and packed. They're hanging from the roof by their eyelids. It'th goin' to be a knock-out."

The expression, considering the circumstances, could hardly have been less happily chosen. Ukridge winced painfully; then spoke in no uncertain voice.

"I'm not going to fight!"

Mr. Previn's exuberance fell from him like a garment. His cigar dropped from his mouth, and his beady eyes glittered with sudden consternation.

"What do you mean?"

"Rather an unfortunate thing has happened," I explained. "It seems that this man Thomas is a fellow Ukridge had trouble with at the theatre last night."

"What do you mean—Ukridge?" broke in Mr. Previn. "This is Battling Billson."

"I've told Corky all about it," said Ukridge over his shoulder as he laced his right shoe. "Old pal of mine."

"Oh!" said Mr. Previn, relieved. "Of course, if Mr.

Corky is a friend of yours, and quite understands that all this is quite private among ourselves and don't want talking about outside, all right. But what were you thaying? I can't make head or tail of it. How do you mean you are not goin' to fight? Of course you're goin' to fight."

"Thomas was in here just now," I said. "Ukridge and he had a row at the theatre last night, and naturally Ukridge is afraid he will go back on the agreement."

"Nonthense," said Mr. Previn, and his manner was that of one soothing a refractory child. "*He* won't go back on the agreement. He promised he'd play light, and he will play light. Gave me his word as a gentleman."

"He isn't a gentleman," Ukridge pointed out moodily.

"But lithen!"

"I'm going to get out of here as quick as I dashed well can."

"Conthider!" pleaded Mr. Previn, clawing great chunks out of the air.

Ukridge began to button his collar.

"Reflect!" moaned Mr. Previn. "There's that lovely audience all sitting out there, jammed like thardines, waiting for the thing to start. Do you expect me to go and tell 'em there ain't goin' to be no fight? I'm thurprised at you," said Mr. Previn, trying an appeal to his pride. "Where's your manly spirit? A big, husky feller like you, that's done all sorts of scrappin' in your time——"

"Not," Ukridge pointed out coldly, "with any damned professional pugilists who've got a grievance against me."

"*He* won't hurt you."

"He won't get the chance."

"You'll be as safe and cosy in that ring with him as if you was playing ball with your little thister."

Ukridge said he hadn't got a little sister.

"But think!" implored Mr. Previn, flapping like a seal. "Think of the money! Do you realise we'll have to return it all, every penny of it?"

A spasm of pain passed over Ukridge's face, but he continued buttoning his collar.

"And not only that," said Mr. Previn, "but, if you ask me, they'll be so mad when they hear there ain't goin' to be no fight, they'll lynch me."

Ukridge seemed to regard this possibility with calm.

"And you, too," added Mr. Previn.

Ukridge started. It was a plausible theory, and one that had not occurred to him before. He paused irresolutely. And at this moment a man came hurrying in.

"What's the matter?" he demanded fussily. "Thomas has been in the ring for five minutes. Isn't your man ready?"

"In one half tick," said Mr. Previn. He turned meaningly to Ukridge. "That is right, ain't it? You'll be ready in half a tick?"

Ukridge nodded wanly. In silence he shed shirt, trousers, shoes, and collar, parting from them as if they were old friends whom he never expected to see again. One wistful glance he cast at his mackintosh, lying forlornly across a chair; and then, with more than a suggestion of a funeral procession, we started down the corridor that led to the main hall. The hum of many voices came to us; there was a sudden blaze of light, and we were there.

I must say, for the sport-loving citizens of Llundnno, that they appeared to be fair-minded men. Stranger in their midst though he was, they gave Ukridge an excellent reception as he climbed into the ring; and for a moment, such is the tonic effect of applause on a large scale, his depression seemed to lift. A faint, gratified smile played about his drawn mouth, and I think it would have developed into a bashful grin had he not at this instant caught sight of the redoubtable Mr. Thomas towering massively across the way. I saw him blink, as one who, thinking absently of this and that, walks suddenly into a lamp-post; and his look of unhappiness returned.

My heart bled for him. If the offer of my little savings in the bank could have transported him then and there to the safety of his London lodgings, I would have made it unreservedly. Mr. Previn had disappeared, leaving me standing at the ring-side, and, as nobody seemed to object, I remained there, thus getting an excellent view of the mass of bone and sinew that made up Lloyd Thomas. And there was certainly plenty of him to see.

Mr. Thomas was, I should imagine, one of those men who do not look their most formidable in mufti—for otherwise I could not conceive how even the fact that he had stolen his seat could have led Ukridge to lay the hand of violence upon him. In the exiguous costume of the ring he looked the sort from whom a sensible man would suffer almost any affront

with meekness. He was about six foot in height, and wherever a man could bulge with muscle he bulged. For a moment my anxiety for Utridge was tinged with a wistful regret that I should never see this sinewy citizen in action with Mr. Billson. It would, I mused, have been a battle worth coming even to Llundaino to see.

The referee, meanwhile, had been introducing the principals in the curt, impressive fashion of referees. He now retired, and with a strange foreboding note a gong sounded on the farther side of the ring. The seconds scuttled under the ropes. The man Thomas, struggling—it seemed to me—with powerful emotions, came ponderously out of his corner.

In these reminiscences of a vivid and varied career, it is as a profound thinker that I have for the most part had occasion to portray Stanley Featherstonhaugh Utridge. I was now to be reminded that he also had it in him to be a doer. Even as Mr. Thomas shuffled towards him, his left fist shot out and thudded against the other's ribs. In short, in a delicate and difficult situation, Utridge was comporting himself with an adequacy that surprised me. However great might have been his reluctance to embark on this contest, once in, he was doing well.

And then, half-way through the first round, the truth dawned upon me.

Injured though Mr. Thomas had been, the gentleman's agreement still held. The word of a Thomas was as good as his bond. Poignant though his dislike of Utridge might be, nevertheless, having pledged himself to mildness and self-restraint for the first three rounds, he meant to abide by the contract. Probably, in the interval between his visit to Utridge's dressing-room and his appearance in the ring, his manager had been talking earnestly to him. At any rate, whether it was managerial authority or his own sheer nobility of character that influenced him, the fact remains that he treated Utridge with a quite remarkable forbearance, and the latter reached his corner at the end of round one practically intact.

And it was this that undid him. No sooner had the gong sounded for round two than out he pranced from his corner, thoroughly above himself. He bounded at Mr. Thomas like a dervish.

I could read his thoughts as if he had spoken them: Nothing

could be clearer than that he had altogether failed to grasp the true position of affairs. Instead of recognising his adversary's forbearance for what it was, and being decently grateful for it, he was filled with a sinful pride. Here, he told himself, was a man who had a solid grievance against him—and, dash it, the fellow couldn't hurt him a bit. What the whole thing boiled down to, he felt, was that he, Ukridge, was better than he had suspected, a man to be reckoned with, and one who could show a distinguished gathering of patrons of sport something worth looking at. The consequence was that, where any sensible person would have grasped the situation at once and endeavoured to show his appreciation by toying with Mr. Thomas in a gingerly fashion, whispering soothing compliments into his ear during the clinches, and generally trying to lay the foundations of a beautiful friendship against the moment when the gentleman's agreement should lapse, Ukridge committed the one unforgivable act. There was a brief moment of fiddling and feinting in the centre of the ring, then a sharp smacking sound, a startled yelp, and Mr. Thomas, with gradually reddening eye, leaning against the ropes and muttering to himself in Welsh.

Ukridge had hit him on the nose !

Once more I must pay a tribute to the fair-mindedness of the sportsmen of Llundnno. The stricken man was one of them—possibly Llundnno's favourite son—yet nothing could have exceeded the heartiness with which they greeted the visitor's achievement. A shout went up as if Ukridge had done each individual present a personal favour. It continued as he advanced buoyantly upon his antagonist, and—to show how entirely Llundnno audiences render themselves impartial and free from any personal bias—it became redoubled as Mr. Thomas, swinging a fist like a ham, knocked Ukridge flat on his back. Whatever happened, so long as it was sufficiently violent, seemed to be all right with that broad-minded audience.

Ukridge heaved himself laboriously to one knee. His sensibilities had been ruffled by this unexpected blow, about fifteen times as hard as the others he had received since the beginning of the affray, but he was a man of mettle and determination. However humbly he might quail before a threatening landlady, or however nimbly he might glide down a side street at the sight of an approaching creditor, there was

nothing wrong with his fighting heart when it came to a straight issue between man and man, untinged by the financial element. He struggled painfully to his feet, while Mr. Thomas, now definitely abandoning the gentleman's agreement, hovered about him with ready fists, only restrained by the fact that one of Ukridge's gloves still touched the floor.

It was at this tensest of moments that a voice spoke in my ear. "'Alf a mo', mister !"

A hand pushed me gently aside. Something large obscured the lights. And Wilberforce Billson, squeezing under the ropes, clambered into the ring.

For the purposes of the historian it was a good thing that for the first few moments after this astounding occurrence a dazed silence held the audience in its grip. Otherwise it might have been difficult to probe motives and explain underlying causes. I think the spectators were either too surprised to shout, or else they entertained for a few brief seconds the idea that Mr. Billson was the forerunner of a posse of plain-clothes police about to raid the place. At any rate, for a space they were silent, and he was enabled to say his say.

"Fightin'," bellowed Mr. Billson, "ain't right !"

There was an uneasy rustle in the audience. The voice of the referee came thinly, saying, "Here ! Hi !"

"Sinful," explained Mr. Billson, in a voice like a fog-horn.

His oration was interrupted by Mr. Thomas, who was endeavouring to get round him and attack Ukridge. The Battler pushed him gently back.

"Gents," he roared, "I, too, have been a man of voylence ! I 'ave struck men in anger. R, yes ! But I 'ave seen the light. Oh, my brothers——"

The rest of his remarks were lost. With a startling suddenness the frozen silence melted. In every part of the hall indignant seatholders were rising to state their views.

But it is doubtful whether, even if he had been granted a continuance of their attention, Mr. Billson would have spoken to much greater length ; for at this moment Lloyd Thomas, who had been gnawing at the strings of his gloves with the air of a man who is able to stand just so much and whose limit has been exceeded, now suddenly shed those obstacles to the freer expression of self, and, advancing barehanded, smote Mr. Billson violently on the jaw.

Mr. Billson turned. He was pained, one could see that, but

more spiritually than physically. For a moment he seemed uncertain how to proceed. Then he turned the other cheek.

The fermenting Mr. Thomas smote that, too.

There was no vacillation or uncertainty now about Wilberforce Billson. He plainly considered that he had done all that could reasonably be expected of any pacifist. A man has only two cheeks. He flung up a mast-like arm to block a third blow, countered with an accuracy and spirit which sent his aggressor reeling to the ropes; and then, swiftly removing his coat, went into action with the unregenerated zeal that had made him the petted hero of a hundred water-fronts. And I, tenderly scooping Ukridge up as he dropped from the ring, hurried him away along the corridor to his dressing-room. I would have given much to remain and witness a mix-up which, if the police did not interfere, promised to be the battle of the ages, but the claims of friendship are paramount.

Ten minutes later, however, when Ukridge, washed, clothed, and restored as near to the normal as a man may be who has received the full weight of a Lloyd Thomas on a vital spot, was reaching for his mackintosh, there filtered through the intervening doors and passage-ways a sudden roar so compelling that my sporting spirit declined to ignore it.

"Back in a minute, old man," I said.

And, urged by that ever-swelling roar, I cantered back to the hall.

In the interval during which I had been ministering to my stricken friend a certain decorum seemed to have been restored to the proceedings. The conflict had lost its riotous abandon. Upholders of the decencies of debate had induced Mr. Thomas to resume his gloves, and a pair had also been thrust upon the Battler. Moreover, it was apparent that the etiquette of the tourney now governed the conflict, for rounds had been introduced, and one had just finished as I came in view of the ring. Mr. Billson was leaning back in a chair in one corner undergoing treatment by his seconds, and in the opposite corner loomed Mr. Thomas; and one sight of the two men was enough to tell me what had caused that sudden tremendous outburst of enthusiasm among the patriots of Llundnno. In the last stages of the round which had just concluded, the native son must have forged ahead in no uncertain manner. Perhaps some chance blow had found its way through the Battler's guard, laying him open and defenceless to the final

attack. For this attitude, as he sagged in his corner, was that of one whose moments are numbered. His eyes were closed, his mouth hung open, and exhaustion was writ large upon him. Mr. Thomas, on the contrary, leaned forward with hands on knees, wearing an impatient look, as if this formality of a rest between the rounds irked his imperious spirit.

The gong sounded, and he sprang from his seat.

“Laddie!” breathed an anguished voice, and a hand clutched my arm.

I was dimly aware of Ukridge standing beside me. I shook him off. This was no moment for conversation. My whole attention was concentrated on what was happening in the ring.

“I say, laddie!”

Matters in there had reached that tense stage when audiences lose their self-control—when strong men stand on seats and weak men cry “Siddown!” The air was full of that electrical thrill that precedes the knock-out.

And the next moment it came. But it was not Lloyd Thomas who delivered it. From some mysterious reservoir of vitality Wilberforce Billson, the pride of Bermondsey, who an instant before had been reeling under his antagonist’s blows like a stricken hulk before a hurricane, produced that one last punch that wins battles. Up it came, whizzing straight to its mark, a stupendous, miraculous upper-cut which caught Mr. Thomas on the angle of the jaw just as he lurched forward to complete his task. It was the last word. Anything milder Llundnno’s favourite son might have borne with fortitude, for his was a teak-like frame, impervious to most things short of dynamite; but this was final. It left no avenue for argument or evasion. Lloyd Thomas spun round once in a complete circle, dropped his hands, and sank slowly to the ground.

There was one wild shout from the audience, and then a solemn hush fell. And in this hush Ukridge’s voice spoke once more in my ear:

“I say, laddie, that blighter Previn has bolted with every penny of the receipts.”

The little sitting-room of No. 7 Caerleon Street was very quiet, and gave the impression of being dark. This was because there was so much of Ukridge, and he takes Fate’s

blows so hardly that, when anything goes wrong, his gloom seems to fill the room like a fog. For some minutes after our return from the Oddfellows' Hall a gruesome silence had prevailed. Ukridge had exhausted his vocabulary on the subject of Mr. Previn; and, as for me, the disaster seemed so tremendous as to render words of sympathy a mere mockery. "And there's another thing I've just remembered," said Ukridge hollowly, stirring on his sofa.

"What's that?" I enquired in a bedside voice.

"The bloke Thomas. He was to have got another twenty pounds."

"He'll hardly claim it, surely?"

"He'll claim it all right," said Ukridge moodily. "Except, by Jove," he went on, a sudden note of optimism in his voice, "that he doesn't know where I am. I was forgetting that. Lucky we legged it away from the hall before he could grab me."

"You don't think that Previn, when he was making the arrangements with Thomas's manager, may have mentioned where you were staying?"

"Not likely! Why should he? What reason would he have?"

"Gentleman to see you, sir," crooned the aged female at the door.

The gentleman walked in. It was the man who had come to the dressing-room to announce that Thomas was in the ring; and though on that occasion we had not been formally introduced, I did not need Ukridge's faint groan to tell me who he was.

"Mr. Previn?" he said. He was a brisk man, direct in manner and speech.

"He's not here," said Ukridge.

"You'll do. You're his partner. I've come for that twenty pounds." There was a painful silence.

"It's gone," said Ukridge.

"What's gone?"

"The money, dash it. And Previn, too. He's bolted."

A hard look came into the other's eyes. Dim as the light was, it was strong enough to show his expression, and that expression was not an agreeable one.

"That won't do," he said, in a metallic voice.

"Now, my dear old horse——"

"It's no good trying anything like that on me. I want my money, or I'm going to call a policeman. Now then!"

"But, laddie, be reasonable."

"Made a mistake in not getting it in advance. But now'll do. Out with it."

"But I keep telling you Previn's bolted!"

"He certainly bolted," I put in, trying to be helpful.

"That's right, mister," said a voice at the door. "I met 'im sneakin' away."

It was Wilberforce Billson. He stood in the doorway diffidently, as one not sure of his welcome. His whole bearing was apologetic. He had a nasty bruise on his left cheek, and one of his eyes was closed, but he bore no other signs of his recent conflict.

Ukridge was gazing upon him with bulging eyes.

"You *met* him!" he moaned. "You actually met him?"

"R," said Mr. Billson. "When I was comin' to the 'all. I seen 'im puttin' all that money into a liddle bag, and then 'e 'urried off."

"Good Lord!" I cried. "Didn't you suspect what he was up to?"

"R!" agreed Mr. Billson. "I always knew 'e was a wrong 'un."

"Then why, you poor wooden-headed fish," bellowed Ukridge, exploding, "why on earth didn't you stop him?"

"I never thought of that," admitted Mr. Billson apologetically.

Ukridge laughed a hideous laugh.

"I just pushed 'im in the face," proceeded Mr. Billson, "and took the liddle bag away from 'im."

He placed on the table a small, weather-worn suit-case, that jingled musically as he moved it; then, with the air of one who dismisses some triviality from his mind, moved to the door.

"'Scuse me, gents," said Battling Billson deprecatingly. "Can't stop. I've got to go and spread the light."



INGLIS ALLEN

“ *The Maternal Instinct* ”

“ *The Whole Truth* ”

*Time and the Barber*

*The Legislators*

Since his Oxford days Inglis Allen has been a prolific writer of stories, sketches and verse in a light vein. He is a regular contributor to *Punch* and many other leading periodicals, and is the author of several successful comedies.



## “THE MATERNAL INSTINCT”

FOR some reason or other—not that it need be regarded as unnatural—people seem to be in a hurry to leave Islington to-night, for the King’s Cross trams are filling up almost as fast as they arrive. I am forced to take a seat inside. There is a thin-legged young man opposite in a collar like a cuff, and exceedingly narrow trousers, and I notice that he is having some difficulty in repelling the advances of his neighbour, an elderly female bearing a strong resemblance to Mr. Dan Leno. He has three times turned a deaf ear to her attempted confidences, and is now rejecting with a somewhat self-conscious hauteur her proffered bribe of peppermints. The tram, which appears to be full inside as well as out, is about to start, when the conductor earns the resentment of half the inside passengers by informing somebody in the road that there is room for one on the left. Forthwith the entrance is darkened by a stout lady in a lop-sided bonnet, unescorted, and joyfully warbling the following *παρόδος* :

“We’ll all be merry,  
Drinkin’ whisky, wine an’ sherry;  
We’ll all be merry  
On Coronyetion Dye.”

I should hitherto have thought that to execute a step-dance inside a crowded tram was a wellnigh impossible feat. The stout lady, however, performs it with confidence, repeats her chorus, and sits down heavily next to me. It is borne to my senses that, whatever may be the stout lady’s proposed menu for Coronation Day, her choice has, for this evening at any rate, fallen upon gin. The occupants of the tram have been for the most part scandalised at the newcomer; in particular the thin-legged young man opposite is staring at her in astonishment. She returns his gaze.

“All right, Bertie,” she remarks defiantly, “yer needn’t look at me so old-fashioned.”

The young man, scared at the sudden publicity thus thrown

upon him, reddens and looks away. But the elderly female next to him champions him immediately.

"And why shouldn't 'e look old-fashioned," she returns sturdily, "if 'e *is* old-fashioned?"

This is a startler for the stout lady. The urbanity of her expression vanishes immediately, and she directs a cold stare at the elderly female.

"I wasn't speakin' to you at all," she observes, with dignity. "I was speakin' to that gentleman."

"An' I answered for 'im," returns the elderly female cheerfully, "because I'm 'is mother."

There is something of a sensation in the tram. Two navvies by the door show a disposition to applaud. As for the young man, he gasps and turns an indignant look upon his neighbour.

"I answered for 'im," repeats the elderly female imperturbably, "because 'e's my son."

The stout lady becomes infinitely scornful.

"'Im?" she says, with feeling. "'E ain't no son o' yours."

To endorse this the young man, who has become the cynosure of all eyes, attempts to assume as unfilial an expression as possible, only succeeding in conveying an impression of acute dyspepsia.

"Yes 'e is," declares the elderly female good-humouredly — "ain't yer, sonny?"

The young man, very flushed, affects to be interested in an advertisement. The stout lady looks towards him compassionately.

"Don't you worry, Bertie," she says; "she don't tike me in. She ain't the mother o' the likes o' you."

"'E's my son, 'e is," maintains the elderly female, cheerily. "'E wouldn't disown 'is ole mother what nursed 'im in 'er arms."

"Chuck it," responds the stout lady with superb contempt; "'e ain't no son o' yours."

The occupants of the tram are patently splitting up into factions. The larger side, dominated by the two navvies by the door, are apparently shocked and disgusted that the young man should deny his own mother because she is poorly dressed and looks like Dan Leno. The other faction, probably drawn towards the stout lady out of sympathy with her Coronation projects, become the confidants of her further arguments.

“’Er son!” she snorts. “She wouldn’t never ’ave a son to look like that, not if she lived to be ninety. Look at ’is gole watch-chine. ’E’s a nob, ’e is. Shave an’ a clean collar ev’ry dye? Not ’arf. One o’ the toffs.”

The elderly female for her part repeats her declaration to her own sympathisers, at the same time looking with astonishing good-humour on the young man’s not very flattering agony. From addressing their respective supporters the two ladies return to each other, and the liveliest of debates ensues over the person of the young man, still reading advertisements with a face the colour of beetroot. Gradually the circle of controversy widens. The stout lady is just engaged in elaborating a statement of her course of action in the contingency of ever possessing a face like that of her opponent (who maintains the utmost cheerfulness throughout), when there is an interruption.

“Fez, pliz.”

The conductor has begun his round. In due course he arrives at the thin-legged young man, who fumbles in his pocket for some time, and at last produces a sovereign and a halfpenny. He tenders the sovereign for a penny fare. The conductor eyes him with weary disgust.

“’Aven’t yer got nothing smaller?” he queries.

The young man has not.

The conductor remarks sourly that he will have to wait till King’s Cross. Does the young man take him for Baring Rosschild?

But the stout lady has a word to say here. She plucks the conductor’s sleeve.

“That’s all right, young man,” she says; “’is mother’ll pye for ’im.”

A flutter of triumph pervades the stout lady’s faction. But they have under-estimated the amount of spirit in the elderly female. She hands the conductor sixpence.

“Two,” she observes genially; “me an’ my son.”

Jubilation of the elderly female’s faction, confusion of their opponents, and scarlet protest on the part of the young man.

“Two,” repeats the elderly female; “to Clerkenwell.”

The conductor lowers his bundle of tickets.

“Where d’ yer wanter go to?” he demands stolidly.

“Me an’ my boy to Clerkenwell,” beams the elderly female.

The conductor forces the coin back into her hand, strides down to the door and jerks the bell.

"Come on," he calls wearily; "you're goin' away from Clerkenwell."

Jubilation of the stout lady and her faction. The elderly female leaves the car in the best of spirits, after an unsuccessful attempt to kiss the thin-legged young man. The conductor stands with his hand on the bell-cord.

"Are yer goin' on!" he calls impatiently to the young man.

"What are you waiting for?" snaps the latter, very red in the face. "Of course I'm——"

Ting!

The stout lady exults loudly. She is interrupted soon by the conductor ringing the bell.

"Cumming Street," he announces impolitely; "come on!"

"Don't you worry, Bertie," she observes protectively. "She never kidded me."

"Come on, if yer comin'!" calls the conductor.

The stout lady makes her way to the door, resuming her monarchical ode on the step:

"On Coronyetion Dye,  
On Coronyetion Dye,  
We'll 'ave a spree an' a jubilee,  
An' we'll——"

Ting!—Clink, clank, clinker, clanker. . . .

The tram moves on. Gradually the thin-legged young man's countenance resumes its natural pastiness. Party spirit dissolves in the absence of leaders. There is peace, save for the clink, clank of the tram, as it forges on down the slope towards King's Cross.

## “THE WHOLE TRUTH”

A SQUALID street of dingy, straggling houses, each fronted by a row of stunted palings, enclosing an oblong asphalt plot, for the existence of which I can find no reason, æsthetic or utilitarian, save, perhaps, that a number of dirty infants can make themselves still dirtier by lying on it. In the doorway of each tenement stands a bareheaded woman of careless coiffure, who has in each case rolled up her sleeves in order to maintain a desultory conversation with the lady next door. For the rest, a dozen or so of knowing-looking cats prowl suspiciously about at various altitudes.

At the far end of the street a crowd of loungers, plentifully interspersed with policemen, has gathered outside a massive building of dirty granite. I make my way towards it, and find the centre of interest to be a stout policeman who, standing at the top of the steps leading into the building, is reading from a blue paper a list of names, and ticking them off with a fat pencil as their owners, an unsavoury crew, answer to them from various points in the crowd, and mount the steps to the entrance. I inquire of a policeman what is going on.

“Answering to bail,” he replies laconically, and I become aware that I am outside the Police Court. It is noticeable that the crowd regard the whole affair as a form of light and amusing entertainment.

“Victoria Stott!” calls the stout policeman, and a bedraggled woman in limp ostrich feathers makes her way towards the steps.

“O-uh g-urls!” cry the crowd in high good-humour, and a man in his shirt-sleeves expresses a wish to be chased and tickled.

“Less o’ the noise there,” observes the stout policeman. “Come along, ducky, come along.—Douglas Alexander Tubbs!”

A roar of laughter goes up from the crowd, and all eyes are turned upon a little white-bearded man in a battered top-hat on the other side of the road. Mr. Tubbs seems to be

somewhat of a celebrity, and obviously knows it, for he waits for the noise to subside, then cocks his hat over one eye, observes "That's me!" and executes a somewhat intricate step-dance across the road and up the stairs.

"That's enough of it," observes the stout policeman, tolerantly rapping Mr. Tubbs on the back of the head with the fat pencil.—"George Spinks!—Come on there, can't wait all night for yer. That'll do, no lip.—Elizabeth Shand!—Come along, you beauty!"

Soon the list is finished, and the prisoners have all disappeared within. The stout policeman folds up his list, replaces it with the pencil in the breast of his tunic, and looks down on the crowd jocosely.

"And a nice lot they are, too!" he observes; then withdraws within the building.

After some silent contemplation of the exterior, I ascend the steps and enter a blank little vestibule. Standing by a small shuttered window like that of a station booking-office, I find the stout policeman in familiar converse with an excessively jocund grey-haired female in a plaid shawl. The lady, in sheer exuberance of spirits, has just administered a nudge to the softest part of his tunic, accompanying it by the intimation that he is a giddy young kipper. I inquire of the policeman whether there is any room inside.

"You're not a witness or anything?" he queries.

I assure him that on this occasion at least I am neither a witness, nor (I am pleased to say) "anything."

"Just want to see what's going on, sir?" he assents with indulgence, then leans towards me confidentially. "You leave it to me, sir, an' I'll try an' get you in. You just wait a minute. I'll do my best to manage it for you."

He brushes out of the way the jocund female, engaged in a squatting position in looking through the keyhole into the Court, and taps mysteriously at the shuttered window. Nothing happens.

"I'll manage it for you all right, sir," he says protectively; "you just stay close to me. That'll do, Polly."

The jocund female is pulling him by the skirts of his tunic.

"When'll they want me, Dickie?" she inquires.

"They won't want *you* at all, I should think," returns the policeman jocosely. "You're a nice sorter witness, *you* are."

"Go hon!" cries the jocund female, digging him in the

ribs in sheer delight. “What d’yer think of ’im, young man—ain’t ’e a ’andsome figger of a man?—’Ave I got time fer a drink, Dickie?”

At this moment there is a shuffling noise inside the Court.

“Now then, sir,” whispers the policeman hurriedly; opening the door; “just squeeze in after me. That’s it. I thought I’d manage it for you.”

I really do not know what it is that he has managed for me, beyond opening the door and allowing me to pass into the public part of the Court, where a number of onlookers in various stages of dirt are already gathered. Being weak, however, I gave him sixpence, and he retires on tip-toe with a vast deal of noise, confidently assured, I suppose, of my perfect idiocy.

A constable with a black eye is in the box giving evidence of the assault committed upon him by the muscular lady in the dock, on his arresting her for maliciously wounding the prosecutor with a beer-glass.

The prosecutor next enters the box with a bandaged head, and gives a clear account of the affair, which is corroborated by four more witnesses, the only person who is not absolutely agreed as to the facts being the prisoner, who, while admitting that she was drunk, emphatically denies that she was incapable (which, needless to say, no one has suggested), and hints at perjury from the constable and the prosecutor with regard to the black eye and the beer-glass, both assaults having been committed by accomplices of their own while she was saying that she was innocent and would go quietly. Furthermore she has a husband and five children, is unaccountable for her actions when drunk—indeed she never remembers anything afterwards,—and hopes the magistrate will deal leniently with her. Moreover, the prosecutor is a dirty ’ahnd, and only got what he deserved.

“Have you any witness to call?” inquires the magistrate.

The policeman by the dock repeats the magistrate’s question with a nudge, and the prisoner suggests “Pollerbunce.”

“Who?” demands the magistrate.

The prisoner repeats “Pollerbunce,” and the policeman interprets to the magistrate as “Polly Buttons.”

“Polly Buttons, then,” says the magistrate wearily with a sideways movement of the head.

“Polly Buttons,” says the usher in a loud voice.

“Polly Buttons!” shouts the policeman by the door, and the mystic word, passing from mouth to mouth, reverberates through the passages, and is heard faintly outside in the street. After a pause the phrase “Hurry up there!” is heard in the street, then in the passage and then at the door, and a grey-haired matron in a shawl enters the Court and takes her place in the box. I recognise her at once as the jocund female whom I have already seen in the vestibule. But the jocund expression has vanished, and she turns to the magistrate a sad, worn face, with a suggestion in it of honest toil and years of trouble.

“It was abaht a quarter past eleven, yer worship,” she begins immediately, “I went aht to get a bit o’ fish fer supper——”

“The book,” interrupts the usher.

The witness kisses the book perfunctorily and begins again.

“It was abaht a quarter past eleven——”

“What is your name?” repeats the clerk in a louder voice.

“Mary Pearce,” returns the witness. “It was abaht——”

“Who?” here inquires the magistrate, “is Polly-er-Buttons?”

Discursive etymology from the witness with regard to Polly, with anecdotal disquisition on the origin of Buttons. She is cut short, and returns once more to the fish expedition, where she shows a disposition to discuss the relative merits of haddocks and kippers, and is at once whisked through space by the unsympathetic clerk to the first meeting with the prisoner. Yes, she saw Vilit at ’alf past eleven. Yes, the prisoner is Vilit, an’ a steadier, soberer, ’arder-workin’—she knows it was ’alf past eleven because she saw the clock at the Crown through the winder. Through the winder only, because she’d only been out to get a bit o’ fish and—Yes, she saw the prisoner speaking to Ted ’Argreaves outside the Crown. Yes, the prosecutor. ’E was molestin’ of ’er. Some-think crool.”

“How did he molest her?” inquires the magistrate.

“Askin’ of ’er t’ave a drink,” returns the witness. “She sez, ‘No, Mr. ’Argreaves,’ she sez, ‘I don’t drink an’ I won’t drink.’ An’ she don’t neither. A steadier, soberer——”

The clerk, more unsympathetic than ever, presses the magistrate’s question.

“She sez to ’im,” continues the witness, “‘No, Mr. ’Argreaves,’ she sez, ‘I don’t drink an’ I——’”

“How—did the prosecutor—molest her?” breaks in the magistrate harshly.

The witness ponders.

“Caught ’old of the sleeve of ’er body,” she replies cheerfully—“the same body what’s on ’er now. There it is. The very body ’e caught ’old of.”

The witness seems elated at the conclusiveness of this proof. The clerk asks if she saw the prisoner throw the glass at the prosecutor.

“She never threw no glass,” declares the witness; “she dropped the glass out of ’er ’and like, an’ ’e slipped an’ fell on it an’ cut ’is ’ead. She sez to i’m——”

“I think the witness can step down now,” remarks the magistrate. The witness seems reluctant to leave the box.

“I shouldn’t never ’ave seen it, yer worship,” she exclaims, “only I ’appened to go aht fer a bit o’ fish fer supper——”

Here, still loudly addressing the Court, she is hustled out of the box by the attendant policeman. The magistrate turns to the prisoner.

“A particularly brutal assault,” he observes. “Four months’ hard labour.”

The muscular lady looks round the Court with amusement.

“Four months without a drink!” she exclaims. “Oh, chase me!”

Then, leaving the dock, she accompanies a constable through a door on the left with considerable good humour.

Polly Buttons, giving the plaid shawl a hitch, leaves the Court with an unclouded brow, the jocund female once more. I turn and follow. In the vestibule I pass her, rallying “Dickie” on the subject of his figure. He salutes me with a protective and indulgent air.

I pass out into the squalid street once more, the voice of the late witness from the steps behind recommending Dickie to have a piece let in at the back of his toonic.

## TIME AND THE BARBER

WITH a hand to my chin I pass through a swinging glass door and climb the staircase. Ascending in front of me is an elderly man in a straw hat, while a few steps above him I notice a white-haired gentleman of a military carriage. Not without annoyance, I recognise that I may have to wait some time before being attended to. It is afternoon, and I know from experience that the dinner of my barber and most of his assistants lasts from 12 a.m. until 3 p.m., and their tea from 3.30 until 7. Indeed, as a class, they would seem to overeat themselves more than any other members of the community, and I wonder that a medical commission has not been appointed to look into the matter.

As the military gentleman reaches the top of the steps, the elderly man behind him suddenly quickens his pace almost to a run, and, pushing past, enters the shop in front of him. I follow the military gentleman inside and find him gazing indignantly at his adversary, emitting at the same time a series of angry snorts.

It is as I surmised. There is but one assistant in the shop, at present engaged in enlarging on the merits of a pink hair-tonic to a defenceless customer with a profusely lathered head. He has suspended operations at this stage, while, bottle in hand, he gives his victim a prolix résumé of the strides made of late in the art of "capillary nutrition." Two customers are seated on an uncomfortable bench, sulkily glaring at illustrated papers.

The assistant glances round.

"Five minutes, sir," he observes.

The military gentleman transfers an angry stare from the elderly man to the assistant.

"What d'you mean by five minutes?" he snaps testily. "How can you be ready in five minutes, when there are several gentlemen waiting already?"

"I'm expecting the other men back every minute," explains the assistant. "They've gone to dinner."

Here the elderly gentleman puts in his word.

"Aren't there any papers?" he asks disagreeably, as he hangs his hat on a peg, disclosing a head with no tresses whatsoever on top, and a computable number round the sides. The military gentleman, remembering his grievance, darts an angry glance at him just in time to see him capture the sole remaining newspaper. With another snort he seats himself beside him on the bench, and finding nothing to read, glares irritably at the slow but voluble progress of the assistant.

In due course the occupant of the chair rises from the hands of the barber a finished article, suggesting an injudicious blend of foreign waiter and cockatoo.

"I'll do you up a bottle of the Vivifier, shall I, sir?" queries the assistant.

"Er—I don't know whether I shall want any—just at present," says the customer weakly.

The assistant plies him reproachfully with a clothes-brush.

"You're surely not going to lose it all, sir, just for want of taking it in time?"

The customer looks wildly towards his hat.

"Make you up a small five-and-sixpenny size, if you *like*, sir," suggests the assistant, capturing the hat and brushing it assiduously.

"Umph! Yes, I daresay I shall have some later on," mumbles the customer with a hunted look. "Er—I'm going away for a day or two. Perhaps, when I come back. . . ."

"Send it anywhere you like for you," returns the assistant implacably.

The customer holds out an imploring hand for his hat.

"Yes, yes, I see," he says humbly; "but—but I don't know yet what my address will be. Perhaps I'll drop you a line if—er—if I find I want it."

The assistant grudgingly surrenders him his hat, and he slinks out, a consciously contemptible object.

"Next gentleman, please," remarks the barber mechanically, as he turns back to the chair. The next gentleman has already seated himself, and is frowning impatiently at the looking-glass. Hereupon the military gentleman, who has been fuming throughout the whole dialogue, breaks out fiercely.

"Get on with your work, sah," he growls to the man. "There *is* the next gentleman. How much longer do you expect to keep us heah!"

Ten long minutes elapse while the two next gentlemen are shaved. Either they are regular customers or the barber has been overawed by our military friend, for no more time is expended on the Vivifier. All this time not a sign of any of the other assistants. The condition of the military gentleman is causing me grave apprehension; his exterior is every minute becoming more fiery, a symptom accompanied at frequent intervals by the sound of ominous internal rumblings.

At last the chair is vacated. The elderly man and the military gentleman rise simultaneously and move towards it. The elderly man reaches it first, and seats himself heavily; the other snorts, opens his mouth wide, thinks better of it, and sits down on the bench again. The internal rumblings become nothing short of alarming.

"Shave?" suggests the assistant with confidence, bustling up to the chair.

The elderly man darts a suspicious look at him in the glass.

"Hair cut," he snaps.

The military gentleman is evidently past appreciating the value of this opportunity. At the same time a step is heard on the stairs. He rises, still rumbling, and prepares to occupy the other chair. Straightway another customer enters.

The assistant turns round from his occupation of lining the elderly man's neck with cotton-wool.

"Ready in a minute, sir," he remarks cheerfully.

The elderly man suddenly sits erect.

"A minute!" he gasps indignantly. "What do you——" But his voice is swallowed up in a greater explosion. The military gentleman has suddenly burst forth into eruption.

"What the devil do you mean, sah?" he explodes. "How can you be ready in a minute when I'm waiting?"

"In a minute!" repeats the elderly man, bristling with indignation.

The assistant explains with nervous suavity that he is expecting the other men back every minute.

"Minute!" mutters the elderly man resentfully.

The military gentleman is still in full eruption.

"Disgraceful mismanagement!" he cries, furiously, attempting to put on my hat. "I've been waiting here for hours. I shall go somewhere else!"

Which, when he has got his own hat, he does precipitately, still in a state of volcanic discharge.

The elderly man in the chair is glaring at his own sullen reflection. The assistant, piteously crushed, selects a pair of scissors. At this point another assistant enters, brushing crumbs from a symmetrical moustache.

"Here," says the elderly man sourly, "send this man away. I want my hair cut."

The newcomer hesitates, glances at his colleague, then goes to the chair.

"Hair cut, sir; yes, sir." I take the other place, and the original assistant lathers my chin with a silence that is far more pathetic than words. The man at the next chair (after one unfortunate attempt to introduce the topic of the Vivifier) has also relapsed into peace.

There is silence in the barber's shop save for the snip and scrape of scissors and razor.

## THE LEGISLATORS

THEY have just entered the compartment at Westminster Bridge, and a hush of awe falls upon us all as we suddenly realise that we are in the presence of public men—legislators in the flesh. The foremost of the three (unmistakably in the flesh) disposes his ample proportions upon the cushions, crosses his short legs, and touches the member opposite him on the knee.

“You see my point?” he remarks resumptively.

“Yes, yes—your point, exactly,” echoes the other, a bearded man with a colourless eye.

“My point,” continues Short Legs volubly, “is this: Any sitting member—I don’t care who he is—can fill a hall. If he can’t, there’s something radically wrong with him.”

“Radically,” murmurs the bearded man, quite innocent, I am sure, of any sinister meaning.

“Any sitting member,” repeats Short Legs—looking rather like a plump fowl himself—“any sitting member” (Short Legs is so pleased with this phrase that he repeats it, rolling it voluptuously in his mouth) “can fill a hall at any time. Unless, as I say, there’s something wrong with him, unless he is an absolutely unpopular man—unpopular for some really good reason.”

The bearded man is of the same opinion. It is noticeable that the third member—a lean, cadaverous-looking man who has seated himself in the corner next to Short Legs—takes no part in the conversation.

“I do not care,” observes Short Legs, obviously conscious of the attention of the rest of the carriage, “whether his constituency be a town one or a sparsely populated country district; he can always fill a hall.”

Short Legs looks towards the third member for corroboration, but, receiving none, pretends to have been glancing at the ventilator.

“Now, I,” he resumes with some pomp, “I am fifteen miles broad and twenty long.”

Sensation among the passengers, who seem to regard this as an exaggeration. The bearded man murmurs "Exactly."

"When I speak," declares Short Legs, "I always find the hall as full as can be desired."

I cannot help thinking that in respect of filling any place, whether it be a hall or a railway carriage, our friend starts with a personal advantage.

"I know," he continues, "that a good many men get a distinguished man down to speak, and fill their halls that way. But my point is that that is not necessary."

Short Legs again glances at the third member with the same effect. The third member does not seem to be in a conversational mood.

"My own experience of the distinguished man," observes Short Legs oracularly, "is that the more distinguished he is the less interesting I have found him."

This, at any rate, cannot be said of our friend, who is in no way distinguished—except by the girth of his waistcoat.

"My point," resumes Short Legs (who at any rate is faithful to it), "is, as I have said, that any sitting member can fill a hall unless he's some unpopular sort of cad. Now you, I am certain, can fill a hall."

The bearded man seems disposed to admit his capacity for serving his country in this way.

"Not that that affects the question," adds Short Legs with patronage.

"You, I am certain—I know nothing about you, but I am certain—are a popular man."

"I don't know I'm sure," smiles the bearded man.

"I am certain you are," declares Short Legs, throwing away his cigarette and laying his hand on the other's knee—"A good speaker too, I have no doubt. I know nothing about you, but I am certain you are a good speaker."

It would seem to me that the bearded man is more of a good listener than anything else. He accepts the tribute.

"Well, well, I don't know, I'm sure," he smiles. "Have a cigar?"

Short Legs accepts the remuneration with a consciousness of its justice.

"But that," he explains, "does not affect the question. My point is that a sitting member who cannot fill a hall, you will be certain to find, is an unpopular man—not even ordinarily

unpopular, but a real, right, low-down cad, with something really—er—fishy about him—an intolerable blackguard, in short.”

The train is entering Sloane Square Station. The lean, cadaverous member has risen, and is taking his hat from the rack. Short Legs turns to him.

“You agree with my point, sir?” he queries.

The third member glares at him.

“At my last meeting,” he observes savagely, “I had twenty-three people.”

Collapse of Short Legs. The third member folds his paper determinedly.

“Umph-ah-umph!” murmurs Short Legs. “Oh, ah—small constituency, I suppose, sir?”

“Nineteen by twenty-two,” says the third member shortly.

Further collapse of Short Legs. Again he emerges from the ruins.

“Oh—ah—scattered constituency—villages?” he ventures.

“Nothing of the kind,” returns the third member, pushing past him and opening the door. “East Spooofshire.”

Departure of the lean, cadaverous member, and total collapse of Short Legs. The train moves on again. He recovers somewhat and relights his cigar.

“That doesn’t really affect the question,” he observes. “My point is——”

With pathetic fidelity he remains impaled upon his point until Gloucester Road, where he and the bearded man depart, leaving us once more to the outer darkness of private life.

OSCAR WILDE

*The Canterville Ghost*

Oscar Wilde, the dramatist and essayist, was Irish by birth, but first became prominent as the founder of an æsthetic cult at Oxford, which is parodied in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*. In spite of his affectations he had a real literary gift, his best work being done in the field of light comedy, the most popular of his plays being *The Importance of Being Earnest*.



## THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

### A HYLO-IDEALISTIC ROMANCE

WHEN Mr. Hiram B. Otis, the American Minister, bought Canterville Chase, every one told him he was doing a very foolish thing, as there was no doubt at all that the place was haunted. Indeed, Lord Canterville himself, who was a man of the most punctilious honour, had felt it his duty to mention the fact to Mr. Otis, when they came to discuss terms.

“We have not cared to live in the place ourselves,” said Lord Canterville, “since my grand-aunt, the Dowager Duchess of Bolton, was frightened into a fit, from which she never really recovered, by two skeleton hands being placed on her shoulders as she was dressing for dinner, and I feel bound to tell you, Mr. Otis, that the ghost has been seen by several living members of my family, as well as by the rector of the parish, the Rev. Augustus Dampier, who is a fellow of King’s College, Cambridge. After the unfortunate accident to the Duchess, none of our younger servants would stay with us, and Lady Canterville often got very little sleep at night, in consequence of the mysterious noises that came from the corridor and the library.”

“My Lord,” answered the Minister, “I will take the furniture and the ghost at a valuation. I come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy; and with all our spry young fellows painting the Old World red, and carrying off your best actresses and prima-donnas, I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we’d have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show.”

“I fear that the ghost exists,” said Lord Canterville, smiling, “thought it may have resisted the overtures of your enterprising impresarios. It has been well known for three centuries, since 1584 in fact, and always makes its appearance before the death of any member of our family.”

“Well, so does the family doctor for that matter, Lord Canterville. But there is no such thing, sir, as a ghost, and I guess the laws of nature are not going to be suspended for the British aristocracy.”

“You are certainly very natural in America,” answered Lord Canterville, who did not quite understand Mr. Otis’s last observation, “and if you don’t mind a ghost in the house, it is all right. Only you must remember I warned you.”

A few weeks after this, the purchase was completed, and at the close of the season the Minister and his family went down to Canterville Chase. Mrs. Otis, who, as Miss Lucretia R. Tappan, of West 53rd Street, had been a celebrated New York belle, was now a very handsome middle-aged woman, with fine eyes, and a superb profile. Many American ladies on leaving their native land adopt an appearance of chronic ill-health, under the impression that it is a form of European refinement, but Mrs. Otis had never fallen into this error. She had a magnificent constitution, and a really wonderful amount of animal spirits. Indeed, in many respects, she was quite English, and was an excellent example of the fact that we have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language. Her eldest son, christened Washington by his parents in a moment of patriotism, which he never ceased to regret, was a fair-haired, rather good-looking young man, who had qualified himself for American diplomacy by leading the German at the Newport Casino for three successive seasons, and even in London was well known as an excellent dancer. Gardenias and the peerage were his only weaknesses. Otherwise he was extremely sensible. Miss Virginia E. Otis was a little girl of fifteen, lithe and lovely as a fawn, and with a fine freedom in her large blue eyes. She was a wonderful amazon, and had once raced old Lord Bilton on her pony twice round the park, winning by a length and a half, just in front of Achilles statue, to the huge delight of the young Duke of Cheshire, who proposed for her on the spot, and was sent back to Eton that very night by his guardians in floods of tears. After Virginia came the twins, who were usually called “The Stars and Stripes” as they were always getting swished. They were delightful boys, and with the exception of the worthy Minister the only true republicans of the family.

As Canterville Chase is seven miles from Ascot, the nearest railway station, Mr. Otis had telegraphed for a waggonette to

meet them, and they started on their drive in high spirits. It was a lovely July evening, and the air was delicate with the scent of the pinewoods. Now and then they heard a wood pigeon brooding over its own sweet voice, or saw, deep in the rustling fern, the burnished breast of the pheasant. Little squirrels peered at them from the beech-trees as they went by, and the rabbits scudded away through the brushwood and over the mossy knolls, with their white tails in the air. As they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase, however, the sky became suddenly overcast with clouds, a curious stillness seemed to hold the atmosphere, a great flight of rooks passed silently over their heads, and, before they reached the house, some big drops of rain had fallen.

Standing on the steps to receive them was an old woman, neatly dressed in black silk, with a white cap and apron. This was Mrs. Umney, the housekeeper, whom Mrs. Otis, at Lady Canterville's earnest request, had consented to keep on in her former position. She made them each a low curtsy as they alighted, and said in a quaint, old-fashioned manner, "I bid you welcome to Canterville Chase." Following her, they passed through the fine Tudor hall into the library, a long, low room, panelled in black oak, at the end of which was a large stained-glass window. Here they found tea laid out for them, and, after taking off their wraps, they sat down and began to look round, while Mrs. Umney waited on them.

Suddenly Mrs. Otis caught sight of a dull red stain on the floor just by the fireplace and, quite unconscious of what it really signified, said to Mrs. Umney, "I am afraid something has been spilt there."

"Yes, madam," replied the old housekeeper in a low voice, "blood has been spilt on that spot."

"How horrid," cried Mrs. Otis; "I don't at all care for blood-stains in a sitting-room. It must be removed at once."

The old woman smiled, and answered in the same low, mysterious voice, "It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot by her own husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. Sir Simon survived her nine years, and disappeared suddenly under very mysterious circumstances. His body has never been discovered, but his guilty spirit still haunts the Chase. The blood-stain has been much admired by tourists and others, and cannot be removed."

“That is all nonsense,” cried Washington Otis; “Pinkerton’s Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent will clean it up in no time,” and before the terrified housekeeper could interfere he had fallen upon his knees, and was rapidly scouring the floor with a small stick of what looked like a black cosmetic. In a few moments no trace of the blood-stain could be seen.

“I knew Pinkerton would do it,” he exclaimed triumphantly, as he looked round at his admiring family; but no sooner had he said these words than a terrible flash of lightning lit up the sombre room, a fearful peal of thunder made them all start to their feet, and Mrs. Umney fainted.

“What a monstrous climate!” said the American Minister calmly, as he lit a long cheroot. “I guess the old country is so overpopulated that they have not enough decent weather for everybody. I have always been of opinion that emigration is the only thing for England.”

“My dear Hiram,” cried Mrs. Otis, “what can we do with a woman who faints?”

“Charge it to her like breakages,” answered the Minister; she won’t faint after that”; and in a few moments Mrs. Umney certainly came to. There was no doubt, however, that she was extremely upset, and she sternly warned Mr. Otis to beware of some trouble coming to the house.

“I have seen things with my own eyes, sir,” she said, “that would make any Christian’s hair stand on end, and many and many a night I have not closed my eyes in sleep for the awful things that are done here.” Mr. Otis, however, and his wife warmly assured the honest soul that they were not afraid of ghosts, and, after invoking the blessings of Providence on her new master and mistress, and making arrangements for an increase of salary, the old housekeeper tottered off to her own room.

## II

THE storm raged fiercely all that night, but nothing of particular note occurred. The next morning, however, when they came down to breakfast, they found the terrible stain of blood once again on the floor. “I don’t think it can be the fault of the Paragon Detergent,” said Washington, “for I have tried it with everything. It must be the ghost.” He accordingly rubbed out the stain a second time, but the second morning

it appeared again. The third morning also it was there, though the library had been locked up at night by Mr. Otis himself, and the key carried upstairs. The whole family were now quite interested; Mr. Otis began to suspect that he had been too dogmatic in his denial of the existence of ghosts, Mrs. Otis expressed her intention of joining the Psychical Society, and Washington prepared a long letter to Messrs. Myers and Podmore on the subject of the Permanence of Sanguineous Stains when connected with crime. That night all doubts about the objective existence of phantasmata were removed for ever.

The day had been warm and sunny; and, in the cool of the evening, the whole family went out for a drive. They did not return home till nine o'clock, when they had a light supper. The conversation in no way turned upon ghosts, so there were not even those primary conditions of receptive expectation which so often precede the presentation of psychical phenomena. The subjects discussed, as I have since learned from Mr. Otis, were merely such as form the ordinary conversation of cultured Americans of the better class, such as the immense superiority of Miss Fanny Davenport over Sarah Bernhardt as an actress; the difficulty of obtaining green corn, buckwheat cakes, and hominy, even in the best English houses; the importance of Boston in the development of the world-soul; the advantages of the baggage check system in railway travelling; and the sweetness of the New York accent as compared to the London drawl. No mention at all was made of the supernatural, nor was Sir Simon de Canterville alluded to in any way. At eleven o'clock the family retired, and by half-past all the lights were out. Some time after, Mr. Otis was awakened by a curious noise in the corridor, outside his room. It sounded like the clank of metal, and seemed to be coming nearer every moment. He got up at once, struck a match, and looked at the time. It was exactly one o'clock. He was quite calm, and felt his pulse, which was not at all feverish. The strange noise still continued, and with it he heard distinctly the sound of footsteps. He put on his slippers, took a small oblong phial out of his dressing-case, and opened the door. Right in front of him he saw, in the wan moonlight, an old man of terrible aspect. His eyes were as red as burning coals; long grey hair fell over his shoulders in matted coils; his garments, which were of antique cut,

were soiled and ragged, and from his wrists and ankles hung heavy manacles and rusty gyves.

“My dear sir,” said Mr. Otis, “I really must insist on your oiling those chains, and have brought you for that purpose a small bottle of the Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator. It is said to be completely efficacious upon one application, and there are several testimonials to that effect on the wrapper from some of our most eminent native divines. I shall leave it here for you by the bedroom candles, and will be happy to supply you with more should you require it.” With these words the United States Minister laid the bottle down on a marble table, and, closing his door, retired to rest.

For a moment the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless in natural indignation; then, dashing the bottle violently upon the polished floor, he fled down the corridor, uttering hollow groans, and emitting a ghastly green light. Just, however, as he reached the top of the great oak staircase, a door was flung open, two little white-robed figures appeared, and a large pillow whizzed past his head! There was evidently no time to be lost, so, hastily adopting the Fourth Dimension of Space as a means of escape, he vanished through the wainscoting, and the house became quite quiet.

On reaching a small secret chamber in the left wing, he leaned up against a moonbeam to recover his breath, and began to try and realise his position. Never, in a brilliant and uninterrupted career of three hundred years, had he been so grossly insulted. He thought of the Dowager Duchess, whom he had frightened into a fit as she stood before the glass in her lace and diamonds; of the four housemaids, who had gone off into hysterics when he merely grinned at them through the curtains of one of the spare bedrooms; of the rector of the parish, whose candle he had blown out as he was coming late one night from the library, and who had been under the care of Sir William Gull ever since, a perfect martyr to nervous disorders; and of old Madame de Tremouillac, who, having wakened up one morning early and seen a skeleton seated in an arm-chair by the fire reading her diary, had been confined to her bed for six weeks with an attack of brain fever, and, on her recovery, had become reconciled to the Church, and had broken off her connection with that notorious sceptic Monsieur de Voltaire. He remembered the terrible night when the wicked Lord Canterville was found choking in his dressing-

room, with the knave of diamonds half-way down his throat, and confessed, just before he died, that he had cheated Charles James Fox out of £50,000 at Crockford's by means of that very card, and swore that the ghost had made him swallow it. All his great achievements came back to him again, from the butler who had shot himself in the pantry because he had seen a green hand tapping at the window pane, to the beautiful Lady Stutfield, who was always obliged to wear a black velvet band round her throat to hide the mark of five fingers burnt upon her white skin, and who drowned herself at last in the carp-pond at the end of the King's Walk. With the enthusiastic egotism of the true artist he went over his most celebrated performances, and smiled bitterly to himself as he recalled to mind his last appearance as "Red Ruben, or the Strangled Babe," his *début* as "Gaunt Gibeon, the Blood-sucker of Bexley Moor," and the *furor* he had excited one lovely June evening by merely playing ninepins with his own bones upon the lawn-tennis ground. And after all this, some wretched modern Americans were to come and offer him the Rising Sun Lubricator, and throw pillows at his head! It was quite unbearable. Besides, no ghosts in history had ever been treated in this manner. Accordingly, he determined to have vengeance, and remained till daylight in an attitude of deep thought.

### III

THE next morning when the Otis family met at breakfast, they discussed the ghost at some length. The United States Minister was naturally a little annoyed to find that his present had not been accepted. "I have no wish," he said, "to do the ghost any personal injury, and I must say that, considering the length of time he has been in the house, I don't think it is at all polite to throw pillows at him"—a very just remark, at which, I am sorry to say, the twins burst into shouts of laughter. "Upon the other hand," he continued, "if he really declines to use the Rising Sun Lubricator, we shall have to take his chains from him. It would be quite impossible to sleep, with such a noise going on outside the bedrooms."

For the rest of the week, however, they were undisturbed, the only thing that excited any attention being the continual renewal of the blood-stain on the library floor. This certainly was very strange, as the door was always locked at night by

Mr. Otis, and the windows kept closely barred. The chameleon-like colour, also, of the stain excited a good deal of comment. Some mornings it was a dull (almost Indian) red, then it would be vermilion, then a rich purple, and once when they came down for family prayers, according to the simple rites of the Free American Reformed Episcopalian Church, they found it a bright emerald-green. These kaleidoscopic changes naturally amused the party very much, and bets on the subject were freely made every evening. The only person who did not enter into the joke was little Virginia, who, for some unexplained reason, was always a good deal distressed at the sight of the blood-stain, and very nearly cried the morning it was emerald-green.

The second appearance of the ghost was on Sunday night. Shortly after they had gone to bed they were suddenly alarmed by a fearful crash in the hall. Rushing downstairs, they found that a large suit of old armour had become detached from its stand, and had fallen on the stone floor, while, seated in a high-backed chair, was the Canterville ghost, rubbing his knees with an expression of acute agony on his face. The twins, having brought their peashooters with them, at once discharged two pellets on him, with that accuracy of aim which can only be attained by long and careful practice on a writing-master, while the United States Minister covered him with his revolver, and called upon him, in accordance with Californian etiquette, to hold up his hands! The ghost started up with a wild shriek of rage, and swept through them like a mist, extinguishing Washington Otis's candle as he passed, and so leaving them all in total darkness. On reaching the top of the staircase he recovered himself, and determined to give his celebrated peal of demoniac laughter. This he had on more than one occasion found extremely useful. It was said to have turned Lord Raker's wig grey in a single night, and had certainly made three of Lady Canterville's French governesses give warning before their month was up. He accordingly laughed his most horrible laugh, till the old vaulted roof rang and rang again, but hardly had the fearful echo died away when a door opened, and Mrs. Otis came out in a light blue dressing-gown. "I am afraid you are far from well," she said, "and have brought you a bottle of Dr. Dobell's tincture. If it is indigestion, you will find it a most excellent remedy." The ghost glared at her in fury, and began at

once to make preparations for turning himself into a large black dog, an accomplishment for which he was justly renowned, and to which the family doctor always attributed the permanent idiocy of Lord Canterville's uncle, the Hon. Thomas Horton. The sound of approaching footsteps, however, made him hesitate in his fell purpose, so he contented himself with becoming faintly phosphorescent, and vanished with a deep church-yard groan, just as the twins had come up to him.

On reaching his room he entirely broke down, and became a prey to the most violent agitation. The vulgarity of the twins, and the gross materialism of Mrs. Otis, were naturally extremely annoying, but what really distressed him most was, that he had been unable to wear the suit of mail. He had hoped that even modern Americans would be thrilled by the sight of a Spectre In Armour, if for no more sensible reason, at least out of respect for their national poet Longfellow, over whose graceful and attractive poetry he himself had whiled away many a weary hour when the Cantervilles were up in town. Besides, it was his own suit. He had worn it with success at the Kenilworth tournament, and had been highly complimented on it by no less a person than the Virgin Queen herself. Yet when he had put it on, he had been completely overpowered by the weight of the huge breastplate and steel casque, and had fallen heavily on the stone pavement, barking both his knees severely, and bruising the knuckles of his right hand.

For some days after this he was extremely ill, and hardly stirred out of his room at all, except to keep the blood-stain in proper repair. However, by taking great care of himself, he recovered, and resolved to make a third attempt to frighten the United States Minister and his family. He selected Friday, the 17th of August, for his appearance, and spent most of that day in looking over his wardrobe, ultimately deciding in favour of a large slouched hat with a red feather, a winding-sheet frilled at the wrists and neck, and a rusty dagger. Towards evening a violent storm of rain came on, and the wind was so high that all the windows and doors in the old house shook and rattled. In fact, it was just such weather as he loved. His plan of action was this. He was to make his way quietly to Washington Otis's room, gibber at him from the foot of the bed, and stab himself three times in the throat to the

sound of slow music. He bore Washington a special grudge, being quite aware that it was he who was in the habit of removing the famous Canterville blood-stain, by means of Pinkerton's Paragon Detergent. Having reduced the reckless and foolhardy youth to a condition of abject terror, he was then to proceed to the room occupied by the United States Minister and his wife, and there to place a clammy hand on Mrs. Otis's forehead, while he hissed into her trembling husband's ear the awful secrets of the charnel-house. With regard to little Virginia, he had not quite made up his mind. She had never insulted him in any way, and was pretty and gentle. A few hollow groans from the wardrobe, he thought, would be more than sufficient, or, if that failed to wake her, he might grabble at the counterpane with palsy-twitching fingers. As for the twins, he was quite determined to teach them a lesson. The first thing to be done was, of course, to sit upon their chests, so as to produce the stifling sensation of nightmare. Then, as their beds were quite close to each other, to stand between them in the form of a green, icy-cold corpse, till they became paralysed with fear, and finally, to throw off the winding-sheet, and crawl round the room, with white bleached bones and one rolling eyeball, in the character of "Dumb Daniel, or the Suicide's Skeleton," a role in which he had on more than one occasion produced a great effect, and which he considered quite equal to his famous part of "Martin the Maniac, or the Masked Mystery."

At half-past ten he heard the family going to bed. For some time he was disturbed by wild shrieks of laughter from the twins, who, with the light-hearted gaiety of schoolboys, were evidently amusing themselves before they retired to rest, but at a quarter past eleven all was still, and, as midnight sounded, he sallied forth. The owl beat against the window panes, the raven croaked from the old yew-tree, and the wind wandered moaning round the house like a lost soul; but the Otis family slept unconscious of their doom, and high above the rain and storm he could hear the steady snoring of the Minister for the United States. He stepped stealthily out of the wainscoting, with an evil smile on his cruel, wrinkled mouth, and the moon hid her face in a cloud as he stole past the great oriel window, where his own arms and those of his murdered wife were blazoned in azure and gold. On and on he glided, like an evil shadow, the very darkness seeming to

loathe him as he passed. Once he thought he heard something call, and stopped ; but it was only the baying of a dog from the Red Farm, and he went on, muttering strange sixteenth-century curses, and ever and anon brandishing the rusty dagger in the midnight air. Finally he reached a corner of the passage that led to luckless Washington's room. For a moment he paused there, the wind blowing his long grey locks about his head, and twisting into grotesque and fantastic folds the nameless horror of the dead man's shroud. Then the clock struck the quarter, and he felt the time was come. He chuckled to himself, and turned the corner ; but no sooner had he done so, than, with a piteous wail of terror, he fell back, and hid his blanched face in his long, bony hands. Right in front of him was standing a horrible spectre, motionless as a carven image, and monstrous as a madman's dream ! Its head was bald and burnished ; its face round, and fat, and white ; and hideous laughter seemed to have writhed its features into an eternal grin. From the eyes streamed rays of scarlet light, the mouth was a wide well of fire, and a hideous garment, like to his own, swathed with its silent snows the Titan form. On its breast was a placard with strange writing in antique characters, some scroll of shame it seemed, some record of wild sins, some awful calendar of crime, and, with its right hand, it bore aloft a falchion of gleaming steel.

Never having seen a ghost before, he naturally was terribly frightened, and, after a second hasty glance at the awful phantom, he fled back to his room, tripping up in his long winding-sheet as he sped down the corridor, and finally dropping the rusty dagger into the Minister's jack-boots, where it was found in the morning by the butler. Once in the privacy of his own apartment, he flung himself down on a small pallet-bed, and hid his face under the clothes. After a time, however, the brave old Canterville spirit asserted itself, and he determined to go and speak to the other ghost as soon as it was daylight. Accordingly, just as the dawn was touching the hills with silver, he returned towards the spot where he had first laid eyes on the grisly phantom, feeling that, after all, two ghosts were better than one, and that, by the aid of his new friend, he might safely grapple with the twins. On reaching the spot, however, a terrible sight met his gaze. Something had evidently happened to the spectre, for the light had entirely faded from its hollow eyes, the gleaming

falcon had fallen from its hand, and it was leaning up against the wall in a strained and uncomfortable attitude. He rushed forward and seized it in his arms, when, to his horror, the head slipped off and rolled on the floor, the body assumed a recumbent posture, and he found himself clasping a white dimity bed-curtain, with a sweeping-brush, a kitchen cleaver, and a hollow turnip lying at his feet! Unable to understand this curious transformation, he clutched the placard with feverish haste, and there, in the grey morning light, he read these fearful words :

**NE CUIS GHOSTE.**  
 Ye Onlie True and Originale Spook.  
 Beware of Ye Imitationes.  
 All others are Counterfeit

The whole thing flashed across him. He had been tricked, foiled, and outwitted! The old Canterville look came into his eyes; he ground his toothless gums together; and, raising his withered hands high above his head, swore, according to the picturesque phraseology of the antique school, that when Canticleer had sounded twice his merry horn, deeds of blood would be wrought, and Murder walk abroad with silent feet.

Hardly had he finished this awful oath when, from the red-tiled roof of a distant homestead, a cock crew. He laughed a long, low, bitter laugh, and waited. Hour after hour he waited, but the cock, for some strange reason, did not crow again. Finally, at half-past seven, the arrival of the housemaids made him give up his fearful vigil, and he stalked back to his room, thinking of his vain hope and baffled purpose. There he consulted several books of ancient chivalry, of which he was exceedingly fond, and found that, on every occasion on which his oath had been used, Chanticleer had always crowed a second time. "Perdition seize the naughty fowl," he muttered, "I have seen the day when, with my stout spear, I would have run him through the gorge, and made him crow for me an 'twere in death!" He then retired to a comfortable lead coffin, and stayed there till evening.

## IV

THE next day the ghost was very weak and tired. The terrible excitement of the last four weeks was beginning to have its effect. His nerves were completely shattered, and he started at the slightest noise. For five days he kept his room, and at last made up his mind to give up the point of the blood-stain on the library floor. If the Otis family did not want it, they clearly did not deserve it. They were evidently people on a low, material plane of existence, and quite incapable of appreciating the symbolic value of sensuous phenomena. The question of phantasmic apparitions, and the development of astral bodies, was of course quite a different matter, and really not under his control. It was his solemn duty to appear in the corridor once a week, and to gibber from the large oriel window on the first and third Wednesday in every month, and he did not see how he could honourably escape from his obligations. It is quite true that his life had been very evil, but, upon the other hand, he was most conscientious in all things connected with the supernatural. For the next three Saturdays, accordingly, he traversed the corridor as usual between midnight and three o'clock, taking every possible precaution against being either heard or seen. He removed his boots, trod as lightly as possible on the old worm-eaten boards, wore a large black velvet cloak, and was careful to use the Rising Sun Lubricator for oiling his chains. I am bound to acknowledge that it was with a good deal of difficulty that he brought himself to adopt this last mode of protection. However, one night, while the family were at dinner, he slipped into Mr. Otis's bedroom and carried off the bottle. He felt a little humiliated at first, but afterwards was sensible enough to see that there was a great deal to be said for the invention, and, to a certain degree, it served his purpose. Still, in spite of everything, he was not left unmolested. Strings were continually being stretched across the corridor, over which he tripped in the dark, and on one occasion, while dressed for the part of "Black Isaac, or the Huntsman of Hogley Woods," he met with a severe fall, through treading on a butter-slide, which the twins had constructed from the entrance of the Tapestry Chamber to the top of the oak staircase. This last insult so enraged him, that he resolved to make one final effort to assert his dignity and social position,

and determined to visit the insolent young Etonians the next night in his celebrated character of "Reckless Rupert, or the Headless Earl."

He had not appeared in this disguise for more than seventy years; in fact, not since he had so frightened pretty Lady Barbara Modish by means of it, that she suddenly broke off her engagement with the present Lord Canterville's grandfather, and ran away to Gretna Green with handsome Jack Castleton, declaring that nothing in the world would induce her to marry into a family that allowed such a horrible phantom to walk up and down the terrace at twilight. Poor Jack was afterwards shot in a duel by Lord Canterville on Wandsworth Common, and Lady Barbara died of a broken heart at Tunbridge Wells before the year was out, so, in every way, it had been a great success. It was, however, an extremely difficult "make-up," if I may use such a theatrical expression in connection with one of the greatest mysteries of the supernatural, or, to employ a more scientific term, the higher-natural world, and it took him fully three hours to make his preparations. At last everything was ready, and he was very pleased with his appearance. The big leather riding-boots that went with the dress were just a little too large for him, and he could only find one of the two horse-pistols, but, on the whole, he was quite satisfied, and at a quarter past one he glided out of the wainscoting and crept down the corridor. On reaching the room occupied by the twins, which I should mention was called the Blue Bed Chamber, on account of the colour of its hangings, he found the door just ajar. Wishing to make an effective entrance, he flung it wide open, when a heavy jug of water fell right down on him, wetting him to the skin, and just missing his left shoulder by a couple of inches. At the same moment he heard stifled shrieks of laughter proceeding from the four-post bed. The shock to his nervous system was so great that he fled back to his room as hard as he could go, and the next day he was laid up with a severe cold. The only thing that at all consoled him in the whole affair was the fact that he had not brought his head with him, for, had he done so, the consequences might have been very serious.

He now gave up all hope of ever frightening this rude American family, and contented himself, as a rule, with creeping about the passages in list slippers, with a thick red

muffler round his throat for fear of draughts, and a small arquebuse, in case he should be attacked by the twins. The final blow he received occurred on the 19th of September. He had gone downstairs to the great entrance-hall, feeling sure that there, at any rate, he would be quite unmolested, and was amusing himself by making satirical remarks on the large Saroni photographs of the United States Minister and his wife, which had now taken the place of the Canterville family pictures. He was simply but neatly clad in a long shroud, spotted with churchyard mould, had tied up his jaw with a strip of yellow linen, and carried a small lantern and a sexton's spade. In fact, he was dressed for the character of "Jonas the Graveless, or the Corpse-Snatcher of Chertsey Barn," one of his most remarkable impersonations, and one which the Cantervilles had every reason to remember, as it was the real origin of their quarrel with their neighbour, Lord Rufford. It was about a quarter past two o'clock in the morning, and, as far as he could ascertain, no one was stirring. As he was strolling towards the library, however, to see if there were any traces left of the blood-stain, suddenly there leaped out on him from a dark corner two figures, who waved their arms wildly above their heads, and shrieked out "Boo!" in his ear.

Seized with a panic, which, under the circumstances, was only natural, he rushed for the staircase, but found Washington Otis waiting for him there with the big garden-syringe; and being thus hemmed in by his enemies on every side, and driven almost to bay, he vanished into the great iron stove, which, fortunately for him, was not lit, and had to make his way home through the flues and chimneys, arriving at his own room in a terrible state of dirt, disorder, and despair.

After this he was not seen again on any nocturnal expedition. The twins lay in wait for him on several occasions, and strewed the passages with nutshells every night to the great annoyance of their parents and the servants, but it was of no avail. It was quite evident that his feelings were so wounded that he would not appear. Mr. Otis consequently resumed his great work on the history of the Democratic Party, on which he had been engaged for some years; Mrs. Otis organised a wonderful clambake, which amazed the whole county; the boys took to lacrosse, euchre, poker, and other American national games; and Virginia rode about the lanes on her

pony, accompanied by the young Duke of Cheshire, who had come to spend the last week of his holidays at Canterville Chase. It was generally assumed that the ghost had gone away, and, in fact, Mr. Otis wrote a letter to that effect to Lord Canterville, who, in reply, expressed his great pleasure at the news, and sent his best congratulations to the Minister's worthy wife.

The Otises, however, were deceived, for the ghost was still in the house, and though now almost an invalid, was by no means ready to let matters rest, particularly as he heard that among the guests was the young Duke of Cheshire, whose grand-uncle, Lord Francis Stilton, had once bet a hundred guineas with Colonel Carbury that he would play dice with the Canterville ghost, and was found the next morning lying on the floor of the card-room in such a helpless paralytic state, that though he lived on to a great age, he was never able to say anything again but "Double Sixes." The story was well known at the time, though, of course, out of respect to the feelings of the two noble families, every attempt was made to hush it up; and a full account of all the circumstances connected with it will be found in the third volume of Lord Tattle's *Recollections of the Prince Regent and his Friends*. The ghost, then, was naturally very anxious to show that he had not lost his influence over the Stiltons, with whom, indeed, he was distantly connected, his own first cousin having been married *en secondes nocés* to the Sieur de Bulkeley, from whom, as every one knows, the Dukes of Cheshire are lineally descended. Accordingly, he made arrangements for appearing to Virginia's little lover in his celebrated impersonation of "The Vampire Monk, or, the Bloodless Benedictine," a performance so horrible that when old Lady Startup saw it, which she did on one fatal New Year's Eve, in the year 1764, she went off into the most piercing shrieks, which culminated in violent apoplexy, and died in three days, after disinheriting the Cantervilles, who were her nearest relations, and leaving all her money to her London apothecary. At the last moment, however, his terror of the twins prevented his leaving his room, and the little Duke slept in peace under the great feathered canopy in the Royal Bedchamber, and dreamed of Virginia.

## V

A FEW days after this, Virginia and her curly-haired cavalier went out riding on Brockley meadows, where she tore her habit so badly in getting through a hedge, that, on her return home, she made up her mind to go up by the back staircase so as not to be seen. As she was running past the Tapestry Chamber, the door of which happened to be open, she fancied she saw some one inside, and thinking it was her mother's maid, who sometimes used to bring her work there, looked in to ask her to mend her habit. To her immense surprise, however, it was the Canterville Ghost himself! He was sitting by the window, watching the ruined gold of the yellow trees fly through the air, and the red leaves dancing madly down the long avenue. His head was leaning on his hand, and his whole attitude was one of extreme depression. Indeed, so forlorn, and so much out of repair did he look, that little Virginia, whose first idea had been to run away and lock herself in her room, was filled with pity, and determined to try and comfort him. So light was her footfall, and so deep his melancholy, that he was not aware of her presence till she spoke to him.

"I am sorry for you," she said, "but my brothers are going back to Eton to-morrow, and then, if you behave yourself, no one will annoy you."

"It is absurd asking me to behave myself," he answered, looking round in astonishment at the pretty little girl who had ventured to address him, "quite absurd. I must rattle my chains, and groan through keyholes, and walk about at night, if that is what you mean. It is my only reason for existing."

"It is no reason at all for existing, and you know you have been very wicked. Mrs. Umney told us, the first day we arrived here, that you had killed your wife."

"Well, I quite admit it," said the Ghost petulantly, "but it was a purely family matter and concerned no one else."

"It is very wrong to kill anyone," said Virginia, who at times had a sweet Puritan gravity, caught from some old New England ancestor.

"Oh, I hate the cheap severity of abstract ethics! My wife was very plain, never had my ruffs properly starched, and knew nothing about cookery. Why, there was a buck

I had shot in Hogley Woods, a magnificent pricket, and do you know how she had it sent up to table? However, it is no matter now, for it is all over, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death, though I did kill her."

"Starve you to death? Oh, Mr. Ghost, I mean Sir Simon, are you hungry? I have a sandwich in my case. Would you like it?"

"No, thank you, I never eat anything now; but it is very kind of you, all the same, and you are much nicer than the rest of your horrid, rude, vulgar, dishonest family."

"Stop!" cried Virginia, stamping her foot, "it is you who are rude, and horrid, and vulgar; and as for dishonesty, you know you stole the paints out of my box to try and furbish up that ridiculous blood-stain in the library. First you took all my reds, including the vermilion, and I couldn't do any more sunsets, then you took the emerald-green and the chrome-yellow, and finally I had nothing left but indigo and Chinese white, and could only do moonlight scenes, which are always depressing to look at, and not at all easy to paint. I never told on you, though I was very much annoyed, and it was most ridiculous, the whole thing; for who ever heard of emerald-green blood?"

"Well, really," said the Ghost, rather meekly, "what was I to do? It is a very difficult thing to get real blood nowadays, and, as your brother began it all with his Paragon Detergent, I certainly saw no reason why I should not have your paints. As for colour, that is always a matter of taste: the Cantervilles have blue blood, for instance, the very bluest in England; but I know you Americans don't care for things of this kind."

"You know nothing about it, and the best thing you can do is to emigrate and improve your mind. My father will be only too happy to give you a free passage, and though there is a heavy duty on spirits of every kind, there will be no difficulty about the Custom House, as the officers are all Democrats. Once in New York, you are sure to be a great success. I know lots of people there who would give a hundred thousand dollars to have a grandfather, and much more than that to have a family Ghost."

"I don't think I should like America."

“I suppose because we have no ruins and no curiosities,” said Virginia satirically.

“No ruins! no curiosities!” answered the Ghost; “you have your navy and your manners.”

“Good evening; I will go and ask papa to get the twins an extra week’s holiday.”

“Please don’t go, Miss Virginia,” he cried; “I am so lonely and so unhappy, and I really don’t know what to do. I want to go to sleep and I cannot.”

“That’s quite absurd! You have merely to go to bed and blow out the candle. It is very difficult sometimes to keep awake, especially at church, but there is no difficulty at all about sleeping. Why, even babies know how to do that, and they are not very clever.”

“I have not slept for three hundred years,” he said sadly, and Virginia’s beautiful blue eyes opened in wonder; “for three hundred years I have not slept, and I am so tired.”

Virginia grew quite grave, and her little lips trembled like rose-leaves. She came towards him, and kneeling down at his side, looked up into his old withered face.

“Poor, poor Ghost,” she murmured: “have you no place where you can sleep?”

“Far away beyond the pine-woods,” he answered, in a low dreamy voice, “there is a little garden. There the grass grows long and deep, there are the great white stars of the hemlock flower, there the nightingale sings all night long. All night long he sings, and the cold, crystal moon looks down, and the yew-tree spreads out its giant arms over the sleepers.”

Virginia’s eyes grew dim with tears, and she hid her face in her hands.

“You mean the Garden of Death,” she whispered.

“Yes, Death. Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth with the grasses waving above one’s head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no to-morrow. To forget time, to forgive life, to be at peace. You can help me. You can open for me the portals of Death’s house, for Love is always with you, and Love is stronger than Death is.”

Virginia trembled, a cold shudder ran through her, and for a few moments there was silence. She felt as if she was in a terrible dream.

Then the Ghost spoke again, and his voice sounded like the sighing of the wind.

“Have you ever read the old prophecy on the library window?”

“Oh, often,” cried the little girl, looking up; “I know it quite well. It is painted in curious black letters, and it is difficult to read. There are only six lines:

When a golden girl can win  
Prayer from out the lips of sin,  
When the barren almond bears,  
And a little child giveth away its tears,  
Then shall all the house be still  
And peace come to Canterville.

But I don't know what they mean.”

“They mean,” he said sadly, “that you must weep for me for my sins, because I have no tears, and pray with me for my soul, because I have no faith, and then, if you have always been sweet, and good, and gentle, the Angel of Death will have mercy on me. You will see fearful shapes in darkness, and wicked voices will whisper in your ear, but they will not harm you, for against the purity of a little child the powers of Hell cannot prevail.”

Virginia made no answer, and the Ghost wrung his hands in wild despair as he looked down at her bowed golden head. Suddenly she stood up, very pale, and with a strange light in her eyes. “I am not afraid,” she said firmly, “and I will ask the Angel to have mercy on you.”

He rose from his seat with a faint cry of joy, and taking her hand bent over it with old-fashioned grace and kissed it. His fingers were as cold as ice, and his lips burned like fire, but Virginia did not falter, as he led her across the dusky room. On the faded green tapestry were brodered little huntsmen. They blew their tasselled horns and with their tiny hands waved to her to go back. “Go back! little Virginia,” they cried, “go back!” but the Ghost clutched her hand more tightly, and she shut her eyes against them. Horrible animals with lizard tails, and goggle eyes, blinked at her from the carven chimney-piece, and murmured “Beware! little Virginia, beware! we may never see you again,” but the Ghost glided on more swiftly, and Virginia

did not listen. When they reached the end of the room he stopped, and muttered some words she could not understand. She opened her eyes, and saw the wall slowly fading away like a mist, and a great black cavern in front of her. A bitter cold wind swept round them, and she felt something pulling at her dress. "Quick, quick," cried the Ghost, "or it will be too late," and, in a moment, the wainscoting had closed behind them, and the Tapestry Chamber was empty.

## VI

ABOUT ten minutes later, the bell rang for tea, and, as Virginia did not come down, Mrs. Otis sent up one of the footmen to tell her. After a little time he returned and said that he could not find Miss Virginia anywhere. As she was in the habit of going out to the garden every evening to get flowers for the dinner-table, Mrs. Otis was not at all alarmed at first, but when six o'clock struck, and Virginia did not appear, she became really agitated, and sent the boys out to look for her, while she herself and Mr. Otis searched every room in the house. At half-past six the boys came back and said that they could find no trace of their sister anywhere. They were all now in the greatest state of excitement, and did not know what to do, when Mr. Otis suddenly remembered that, some few days before, he had given a band of gypsies permission to camp in the park. He accordingly at once set off for Blackfell Hollow, where he knew they were, accompanied by his eldest son and two of the farm-servants. The little Duke of Cheshire, who was perfectly frantic with anxiety, begged hard to be allowed to go too, but Mr. Otis would not allow him, as he was afraid there might be a scuffle. On arriving at the spot, however, he found that the gypsies had gone, and it was evident that their departure had been rather sudden, as the fire was still burning, and some plates were lying on the grass. Having sent off Washington and the two men to scour the district, he ran home, and despatched telegrams to all the police inspectors in the country, telling them to look out for a little girl who had been kidnapped by tramps or gypsies. He then ordered his horse to be brought round, and, after insisting on his wife and the three boys sitting down to dinner, rode off down the Ascot Road with a groom. He had hardly, however, gone a couple of miles when he heard

somebody galloping after him, and, looking round, saw the little Duke coming up on his pony, with his face very flushed and no hat. "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Otis," gasped out the boy, "but I can't eat any dinner as long as Virginia is lost. Please, don't be angry with me; if you had let us be engaged last year, there would never have been all this trouble. You won't send me back, will you? I can't go! I won't go!"

The Minister could not help smiling at the handsome young scapegrace, and was a good deal touched at his devotion to Virginia, so leaning down from his horse, he patted him kindly on the shoulders, and said, "Well, Cecil, if you won't go back I suppose you must come with me, but I must get you a hat at Ascot."

"Oh, bother my hat! I want Virginia!" cried the little Duke, laughing, and they galloped on to the railway station. There Mr. Otis inquired of the station-master if any one answering the description of Virginia had been seen on the platform, but could get no news of her. The station-master, however, wired up and down the line, and assured him that a strict watch would be kept for her, and, after having bought a hat for the little Duke from a linen-draper, who was just putting up his shutters, Mr. Otis rode off to Bexley, a village about four miles away, which he was told was a well-known haunt of the gypsies, as there was a large common next to it. Here they roused up the rural policeman, but could get no information from him, and, after riding all over the common, they turned their horses' heads homewards, and reached the Chase about eleven o'clock, dead-tired and almost heart-broken. They found Washington and the twins waiting for them at the gate-house with lanterns, as the avenue was very dark. Not the slightest trace of Virginia had been discovered. The gypsies had been caught on Broxley meadows, but she was not with them, and they had explained their sudden departure by saying that they had mistaken the date of Chorton Fair, and had gone off in a hurry for fear they might be late. Indeed, they had been quite distressed at hearing of Virginia's disappearance, as they were very grateful to Mr. Otis for having allowed them to camp in his park, and four of their number had stayed behind to help in the search. The carp-pond had been dragged, and the whole Chase thoroughly gone over, but without any result. It was evident that, for that night at any rate, Virginia was lost

to them ; and it was in a state of the deepest depression that Mr. Otis and the boys walked up to the house, the groom following behind with the two horses and the pony. In the hall they found a group of frightened servants, and lying on a sofa in the library was poor Mrs. Otis, almost out of her mind with terror and anxiety, and having her forehead bathed with eau-de-cologne by the old housekeeper. Mr. Otis at once insisted on her having something to eat, and ordered up supper for the whole party. It was a melancholy meal, as hardly anyone spoke, and even the twins were awe-struck and subdued, as they were very fond of their sister. When they had finished, Mr. Otis, in spite of the entreaties of the little Duke, ordered them all to bed, saying that nothing more could be done that night, and that he would telegraph in the morning to Scotland Yard for some detectives to be sent down immediately. Just as they were passing out of the dining-room, midnight began to boom from the clock tower, and when the last stroke sounded they heard a crash and a sudden shrill cry ; a dreadful peal of thunder shook the house, a strain of unearthly music floated through the air, a panel at the top of the staircase flew back with a loud noise, and out on the landing, looking very pale and white, with a little casket in her hand, stepped Virginia. In a moment they had all rushed up to her. Mrs. Otis clasped her passionately in her arms, the Duke smothered her with violent kisses, and the twins executed a wild war-dance round the group.

“Good heavens ! child, where have you been ?” said Mr. Otis, rather angrily, thinking that she had been playing some foolish trick on them. “Cecil and I have been riding all over the country looking for you, and your mother has been frightened to death. You must never play these practical jokes any more.”

“Except on the Ghost ! except on the Ghost !” shrieked the twins, as they capered about.

“My own darling, thank God you are found ; you must never leave my side again,” murmured Mrs. Otis, as she kissed the trembling child, and smoothed the tangled gold of her hair.

“Papa,” said Virginia quietly, “I have been with the Ghost. He is dead, and you must come and see him. He had been very wicked, but he was really sorry for all that he

had done, and he gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died."

The whole family gazed at her in mute amazement, but she was quite grave and serious; and, turning round, she led them through the opening in the wainscoting down a narrow secret corridor, Washington following with a lighted candle, which he had caught up from the table. Finally, they came to a great oak door, studded with rusty nails. When Virginia touched it, it swung back on its heavy hinges, and they found themselves in a little low room, with a vaulted ceiling, and one tiny grated window. Imbedded in the wall was a huge iron ring, and chained to it was a gaunt skeleton, that was stretched out at full length on the stone floor, and seemed to be trying to grasp with its long, fleshless fingers an old-fashioned trencher and ewer that were placed just out of its reach. The jug had evidently been once filled with water, as it was covered inside with green mould. There was nothing on the trencher but a pile of dust. Virginia knelt down beside the skeleton, and, folding her little hands together, began to pray silently, while the rest of the party looked on in wonder at the terrible tragedy whose secret was now disclosed to them.

"Hallo!" suddenly exclaimed one of the twins, who had been looking out of the window to try to discover in what wing of the house the room was situated. "Hallo! the old withered almond-tree has blossomed. I can see the flowers quite plainly in the moonlight."

"God has forgiven him," said Virginia gravely, as she rose to her feet, and a beautiful light seemed to illumine her face.

"What an angel you are!" cried the young Duke, and he put his arm round her neck and kissed her.

## VII

FOUR days after these curious incidents a funeral started from Canterville Chase at about eleven o'clock at night. The hearse was drawn by eight black horses, each of which carried on its head a great tuft of nodding ostrich-plumes, and the leaden coffin was covered by a rich purple pall, on which was embroidered in gold the Canterville coat-of-arms. By the side of the hearse and the coaches walked the servants with lighted torches, and the whole procession was wonderfully

impressive. Lord Canterville was the chief mourner, having come up specially from Wales to attend the funeral, and sat in the first carriage along with little Virginia. Then came the United States Minister and his wife, then Washington and the three boys, and in the last carriage was Mrs. Umney. It was generally felt that, as she had been frightened by the ghost for more than fifty years of her life, she had a right to see the last of him. A deep grave had been dug in the corner of the churchyard, just under the old yew-tree, and the service was read in the most impressive manner by the Rev. Augustus Dampier. When the ceremony was over, the servants, according to an old custom observed in the Canterville family, extinguished their torches, and, as the coffin was being lowered into the grave, Virginia stepped forward and laid on it a large cross made of white and pink almond-blossoms. As she did so, the moon came out from behind a cloud, and flooded with its silent silver the little churchyard, and from a distant copse a nightingale began to sing. She thought of the ghost's description of the Garden of Death, her eyes became dim with tears, and she hardly spoke a word during the drive home.

The next morning, before Lord Canterville went up to town, Mr. Otis had an interview with him on the subject of the jewels the ghost had given to Virginia. They were perfectly magnificent, especially a certain ruby necklace with old Venetian setting, which was really a superb specimen of sixteenth-century work, and their value was so great that Mr. Otis felt considerable scruples about allowing his daughter to accept them.

"My Lord," he said, "I know that in this country mortmain is held to apply to trinkets as well as to land, and it is quite clear to me that these jewels are, or should be, heirlooms in your family. I must beg you, accordingly, to take them to London with you, and to regard them simply as a portion of your property which has been restored to you under certain strange conditions. As for my daughter, she is merely a child and has as yet, I am glad to say, but little interest in such appurtenances of idle luxury. I am also informed by Mrs. Otis, who, I may say, is no mean authority upon Art—having had the privilege of spending several winters in Boston when she was a girl—that these gems are of great monetary worth, and if offered for sale would fetch a tall price. Under these circumstances, Lord Canterville, I feel sure that you

will recognise how impossible it would be for me to allow them to remain in the possession of any member of my family; and, indeed, all such vain gauds and toys, however suitable or necessary to the dignity of the British aristocracy, would be completely out of place among those who have been brought up on the severe, and I believe immortal, principles of republican simplicity. Perhaps I should mention that Virginia is very anxious that you should allow her to retain the box as a memento of your unfortunate but misguided ancestor. As it is extremely old, and consequently a good deal out of repair, you may perhaps think fit to comply with her request. For my own part, I confess I am a good deal surprised to find a child of mine expressing sympathy with mediævalism in any form, and can only account for it by the fact that Virginia was born in one of your London suburbs shortly after Mrs. Otis had returned from a trip to Athens."

Lord Canterville listened very gravely to the worthy Minister's speech, pulling his grey moustache now and then to hide an involuntary smile, and when Mr. Otis had ended, he shook him cordially by the hand, and said, "My dear sir, your charming little daughter rendered my unlucky ancestor, Sir Simon, a very important service, and I and my family are much indebted to her for her marvellous courage and pluck. The jewels are clearly hers, and, egad, I believe that if I were heartless enough to take them from her, the wicked old fellow would be out of his grave in a fortnight, leading me the devil of a life. As for their being heirlooms, nothing is an heirloom that is not so mentioned in a will or legal document, and the existence of these jewels has been quite unknown. I assure you I have no more claim on them than your butler, and when Miss Virginia grows up I dare say she will be pleased to have pretty things to wear. Besides, you forget, Mr. Otis, that you took the furniture and the ghost at a valuation, and anything that belonged to the ghost passed at once into your possession, as, whatever activity Sir Simon may have shown in the corridor at night, in point of law he was really dead, and you acquired his property by purchase."

Mr. Otis was a good deal distressed at Lord Canterville's refusal, and begged him to reconsider his decision, but the good-natured peer was quite firm, and finally induced the Minister to allow his daughter to retain the present

the ghost had given her, and when, in the spring of 1890, the young Duchess of Cheshire was presented at the Queen's first drawing-room on the occasion of her marriage, her jewels were the universal theme of admiration. For Virginia received the coronet, which is the reward of all good little American girls, and was married to her boy-lover as soon as he came of age. They were both so charming, and they love each other so much, that everyone was delighted at the match, except the old Marchioness of Dumbleton, who had tried to catch the Duke for one of her seven unmarried daughters, and had given no less than three expensive dinner-parties for that purpose, and strange to say, Mr. Otis himself. Mr. Otis was extremely fond of the young Duke personally, but, theoretically, he objected to titles, and, to use his own words, "was not without apprehension lest, amid the enervating influences of a pleasure-loving aristocracy, the true principles of republican simplicity should be forgotten." His objections, however, were completely overruled, and I believe that when he walked up the aisle of St. George's, Hanover Square, with his daughter leaning on his arm, there was not a prouder man in the whole length and breadth of England.

The Duke and Duchess, after the honeymoon was over, went down to Canterville Chase, and on the day after their arrival they walked over in the afternoon to the lonely churchyard by the pine-woods. There had been a great deal of difficulty at first about the inscription on Sir Simon's tombstone, but finally it had been decided to engrave on it simply the initials of the old gentleman's name, and the verse from the library window. The Duchess had brought with her some lovely roses, which she strewed upon the grave, and after they had stood by it for some time they strolled into the ruined chapel of the old abbey. There the Duchess sat down on a fallen pillar, while her husband lay at her feet smoking a cigarette and looking up at her beautiful eyes. Suddenly he threw his cigarette away, took hold of her hand, and said to her, "Virginia, a wife should have no secrets from her husband."

"Dear Cecil! I have no secrets from you."

"Yes, you have," he answered, smiling, "you have never told me what happened to you when you were locked up with the Ghost."

"I have never told anyone, Cecil," said Virginia gravely.

"I know that, but you might tell me."

"Please don't ask me, Cecil, I cannot tell you. Poor Sir Simon! I owe him a great deal. Yes, don't laugh, Cecil, I really do. He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies, and why Love is stronger than both."

The Duke rose and kissed his wife lovingly.

"You can have your secret as long as I have your heart," he murmured.

"You have always had that, Cecil."

"And you will tell our children some day, won't you?"

Virginia blushed.

## ERIC BARKER

### *Almost a Hero*

Eric Barker is a clever young novelist of whom more will be heard. His first book, *Sea Breezes*, published under the name of Christopher Bentley, showed that he has a real talent for humorous writing, though his recent *Day Gone By* is in more serious vein. He has had considerable experience on the stage and as a wireless entertainer.



## ALMOST A HERO

HE finally selected the camel. Not one of the alternative methods had escaped him. He had considered each with that zeal and concentration that is possible only to a really great lover . . . the deck-rail in the moon, Naples at sunset when it looks like a vulgar birthday card, a lonely tea in the Casino at Nice, a donkey-ride up the Rock, the swimming-pool before breakfast. He had renounced all these, wisely, he thought, in favour of the camel.

There was something about the desert. A pith helmet alone added fifty per cent to a man's self-esteem, and Henry Viscount Brodick could do with a little more of that, the Lord knew. He fancied his chances were about even, being a somewhat unreasonable optimist.

He shrewdly bided his time until they were jogging along side by side under the deep shade of a palm grove. His father, his sister, and Eddie Wiggins were a good hundred yards in the rear; the Cheops Pyramid a mile, maybe more, directly ahead, rearing its hulk into the harsh turquoise sky, alike a symbol of, and fingerpost to, courage. Henry cleared his throat twice and got the half-nelson on his larynx.

"Will you marry me, Brenda?" he asked. It was the first time he had used her Christian name, save to himself.

"Don't be so silly!" said Brenda. "Of *course* I won't marry you!"

The conversation ended here because the Earl (of Dever-sham), his father, his sister Winifred, and Eddie Wiggins, her fiancé, and even the guide, came literally charging up on their camels to see what all the amusement was about.

"What's the joke?" he caught from his father, also an arch chuckle.

"Oh, nothing," he heard Brenda gurgle in reply. "Only Henry!"

"Oh, Henry!"

“Old Henry !”

“Ha ! Ha ! Ha !”

Henry dropped deliberately behind, his emotions, all of them, seething like pent-up volcanic lava. Only old Henry ! It was always *only* Henry—funny old Henry ! He-he-he !

How he loved her ! She was, perhaps in these queer times when a figure like a length of gas-piping is the insignia of the Woman Beautiful, a trifle on the generous side . . . She was six feet two, and not quite as broad . . . and he was five feet four, and thinner by a good deal. . . . But what did that matter ? Love was the only thing.

She had entered his life at Port Said. He and his father and Winifred and Eddie were on a pleasure cruise, and there she had boarded the boat for home, having just traversed the Dark Continent from Cape Town on a motor-scooter.

He was not surprised to hear she was an explorer. Short of a goddess, with her lovely bronze limbs and ivory teeth, he could not see what else she could possibly be. And she thought him, Henry, silly !

. . . . .

A little more than a month later, the unwitting cause of this tragedy was sitting out on the terrace of Deversham Hall, sipping afternoon tea with one Captain the Hon. “Snappy” Lowndes, late of the Royal Inniskilling Dragoons.

Captain the Hon. Snappy Lowndes was a staggering and unusual personality. On the one hand he was fair game for the weekly illustrated flashlights and the daily gossip writers, who time and again let it be known that the unconventional snapshot herewith was that of the popular, witty, and brilliant Captain Snappy Lowndes, *without whom no cocktail party was complete* ; and then, on the other hand, he was a big-game hunter of such prowess that, wherever he landed, the news seemed to penetrate into almost the innermost jungle, so that when he finally set out with his train of porters and newly primed rifles there was no big game to be found.

This excellent combination of qualities had appealed strangely to Brenda Durain. To her, men had belonged always to one of two species. They were either, flatly, “weeds”, or else rough diamonds, “tough eggs”. She had never even hoped to come across an easy blend of both ; and

now she had found one. The idea of a perfectly manicured hand, which in a twinkling could become a fist of iron, charmed and fascinated her.

Recently they had decided to link forces for a new expedition . . . that of being the first to attain the summit of Fujiyama on push bicycles, one of the few unplumbed possibilities in this direction now left.

"Of course, there is just one small point," the Captain was saying. His clear, far-seeing brain would not permit him to ride slap-dash over these punctilios. "And that is, whether, when all is said and done, it would not really be simpler if we left the bicycles out of it! After all . . ."

Brenda Durain smiled wearily.

"Naturally it would be easier," she conceded. "Whatever happens, we shall have to carry them most of the way, but is *this* to *deter* us from creating a record which has yet not been even *attempted*, let alone *challenged*?"

"True," mumbled Captain Lowndes, a little shamefacedly. "Very true. I didn't look at it that way, I must confess."

Every word, every point settled and added to the preparation for the caravanserai was as so much gall to Henry, intently eavesdropping below the terrace from the privacy of a rhododendron bush. Every day he scurrilously came here to listen to their arrangements. Every day his suit pined a little more in its hope.

When she parted from Captain Lowndes, it was her wont to stroll down to the lake for a little sculling before dinner, to keep her muscles in.

This afternoon Henry summoned up the courage to follow her. He had proposed matrimony in all sixteen times since that ill-fated kick-off at Cairo, a marked decrease in encouragement ensuing upon each attempt.

She was in the skiff and out on the water, travelling strongly in the direction of the swan island in the centre, almost before he had reached the edge.

He launched the only other craft, a cumbersome Indian canoe, and paddled off towards the other side of the island to intercept her as she came round.

"Hi!" he bellowed.

It would be idle to pretend that the expression on the strongly chiselled features of Brenda Durain was anything but amusement, tempered with an unveiled weariness.

"What do you want?" she muttered resignedly. She was about fifteen feet away, the oars trailing motionless from their rowlocks.

"Don't you know?" bleated poor Henry. His face changed piteously as she made a swift grab at the oars. "No, please, don't go away! If you would only just give me a chance to say——"

"You can say what you like," said Brenda Durain firmly. "But, if you talk for a year without stopping, I will never, never marry you. Now, let's get this quite clear, Henry. *Never!* You understand? And now I should be very grateful if you would never refer to the subject again."

Henry dragged his fingers slowly through the still, green water.

"There's just one small thing," he said quietly. "If you mean what you say—that there isn't a chance—I think it's almost my right—yes, it is—to ask one final question."

"Well?"

"Will you m—— no, sorry—I mean, *why won't* you marry me?"

Brenda Durain sighed.

"There are two reasons, Henry. One, I love somebody else."

"Ah, Lowndes!" gulped Henry, with a nod. "Yes?"

"I won't tell you the other."

"Go on," urged Henry manfully. "Be a sport."

She blurted it out before she meant to :

"Well, you're such a *rabbit!*"

Henry took up his paddle, and, fixing his eyes on the house as though the sun (which was behind him and a cloud-bank) was too strong for them, he mooched slowly off shorewards with all the dignity he could muster.

There was a dance that night to which hied the flower of the country. Hand in hand, man and woman (it seemed to Henry that the entire species, with the exception of himself, went in couples), they frolicked, laughed, loved, lived, and were happy.

And Henry looked on with a sneer in his heart. He knew what paste and clay it all was. Then, once more from the seclusion of the rhododendron bush, he received the crown of his sorrow. He heard his love cheerfully, wilfully hand over her heart to the perpetual keeping of Captain Snappy

Lowndes. Moreover, the compact was sealed with a prolonged, glutinous kiss that made his blood run cold, and doubtless many more which he did not wait to hear.

He groped his way blindly through a phalanx of lovers, with kisses popping like champagne corks on every side, back to the house.

From his bedroom window he looked down with a strange calm upon the lawn below, the shirt-fronts that gleamed from the darkness, the subtler hints of white arms and shoulders.

Still, it was not for long. A mirthless laugh escaped him as, quietly closing the casement, and pulling the curtains, he tried to visualize what she would say when he was found. Newspaper reporters and police inspectors would question her . . . How would she like that ?

## DEATH WHILE THE MUSIC PLAYS

YOUNG PEER TAKES HIS LIFE AT THE HEIGHT OF THE DANCE

UNREQUITED LOVE SUSPECTED AS THE CAUSE

From the drawer in his wardrobe he took the bottle of veronal tablets with which he was accustomed to induce sleep, when refractory.

One was sufficient for roughly eight hours' healthy snoring. Twelve ought to make a pretty good job of it. He unscrewed the top and counted them out carefully on the palm of his hand. He put the bottle back in the drawer. Well . . . this was the end.

And of this narrative also, it might have been, but for the timely action of one Chief Warder Smith, at the Hawsley Criminal Lunatic Asylum some four miles away. At the exact instant that Henry raised his hand to his mouth, Chief Warder Smith of the Hawsley Asylum placed his thumb on the control button of the steam siren, and kept it there for four minutes.

Lest there be any doubt that he was an official and not an inmate, it should be mentioned that Chief Warder Smith did this to warn the citizenry that "Big" Jem Blake, their most valuable prisoner, had just succeeded in scaling the outer wall unperceived and was now at large ; and since "Big" Jem Blake had the regrettable bee in his bonnet that he was not "Big" Jem Blake at all, but Attila the Hun, and that at one period of

his career had killed his wife and his wife's parents with a meat hatchet; his father, his grandmother on his mother's side, and his father's aunt, with a corkscrew; and his cousin Ada with his bare hands, Chief Warder Smith deemed it only prudent to blow the siren for twice as long as the regulation two minutes.

Let us now return to . . . *but this is not the Henry we left only a paragraph ago!* It cannot be. Why, he was on the point of Mata Kari! This person is beaming, and has the laughing twinkle of life in his eyes.

And what is the other fellow doing here—what is his name—Eddie Wiggins? And why are they whispering together like Balkan anarchists? Can it be that Chief Warder Smith has in some way unbeknown succeeded in imparting one of those twists in the tail of life that alter its complexion entirely?

"But look here, dashit," Eddie Wiggins was protesting valiantly. "We can't do that sort of thing, you know, I mean!"

"We can," insisted Henry, holding him firmly down in his seat by the lapels, "and you know it. What is more, I mean that we shall. It is *my* only chance, *your* name is a by-word in amateur dramatic circles—upon my word, Eddie, I can't understand you jibbing like this at doing an old friend a good turn!"

"It isn't that, old boy, exactly. You know, there's nothing I'd rather do, in the ordinary way. But supposing I get laid out or—or something dammit?"

"Nonsense," said Henry gently. "Now you toddle up to the Rectory like a good chap, and you'll find all the gear there. Tell the old boy what it's all about if you like. He's a fine old sport. And remember—don't be afraid of over-acting. And *don't* forget about the knuckle-duster and old Snappy! Everything depends on it!"

Five minutes later he was waltzing, with Brenda cradled in his arms (figuratively). Conversation was sparing. She was rather upset by the way in which he had received the news of her engagement.

She had broken it to him as gently and considerately as she could. His answer had been a cackle of mirth and a shower of perfunctory congratulations into which, being of normal intelligence, she could not but fit the meaning that, after all,

one had to have one's Captain Lowndes, or the world would not go round, as the saying is. This, so soon after sixteen passionate proposals, struck her as odd in the extreme.

"I suppose you heard that siren just now from Hawsley?" said Henry chattily. "It means a lunatic has escaped when it keeps on like that."

"Yes. Your father just rang up to make sure, too."

The initial scream was supplied some ten minutes later by Henry's sister Winifred, who was standing by the door. It was promptly taken up by every female throat in the hall, with the exception of Brenda Durain's. However, Henry was overjoyed to perceive that she went pale.

The men contributed their share to the uproar with a cacophony of grunts, hollow roars, and croaks, not unlike Aristophane's frog chorus. And every living soul, with the solitary exception of Henry, who held his ground, stampeded frenziedly to the sanctuary of the stairs, thence to the gallery above that ran along one side of the hall.

Upon Eddie Wiggins, who was standing stockstill on the threshold of the french doors, Henry turned an eye of the deepest respect. He had certainly been pretty slick changing.

His face, what one could see of it beneath a tweed cap pulled well down over his eyes, was a bluey colour and criss-crossed with scars; he had padded his shoulders out until they were almost gorilla-like; he had blacked out some of his teeth and found a reddish wig, whose hair hung over his ears and eyes in festoons.

An awed hush had fallen on the guests. Those who were of the screaming calibre had screamed their scream; those who favoured the swoon had swooned, and were occupied in coming round. Brenda Durain's voice rang out clearly:

"My rifles are in the gun-room, curse it! Give me a pair of scissors, Winifred darling, will you?"

"No," said Captain Snappy Lowndes, whom one could not but admire despite his size and somewhat understandable ashiness about the lips, "leave this to me! Stay where you are, Brenda!"

As casually as though he were strolling into his club, he began to cross the floor towards Eddie Wiggins. Chuckling quietly to himself, but inscrutable of countenance, Henry followed.

"Keep out of this, Brodick!" muttered Captain Lowndes

somewhere at the back of his throat, his eyes never leaving Eddie Wiggins.

Henry strolled on. The arrangement was that Eddie, who was to wear a knuckle-duster, was to knock the Snappy Captain out (assuming, of course, the latter was a participant in the fray), and then, after a tussle with Henry in which he was to be almost vanquished, to run, hotly pursued, out into the garden, and so make his getaway back to the Rectory.

Much to Henry's surprise and admiration, the first part of the programme went off without a hitch, though the blithering fool had gone and forgotten the knuckle-duster. However, he hit the Captain once on the tip of the jaw, after which the Captain measured his length and stayed where he was.

"Good old Eddie!" breathed Henry, under cover of a scream from Brenda as her betrothed went down. "Now me!"

To Henry's dismay, Eddie, instead of turning his attention to him, drew one of his huge boots back, and, with a bellow suggestive of a wounded jaguar, kicked the Captain with all his weight in the ribs. Henry rushed up to him.

"Steady on, old boy," he murmured reprovingly. "Don't kill the chap! That's enough for him. It's my turn now."

Eddie showed that he had not forgotten Henry. Still roaring, he spun round, seized Henry by the throat with both hands, lifted him bodily in the air and hove him. Henry's head hit the floor about five feet away with a sickening crack, and pale-blue stars twinkled momentarily before his eyes. He tottered shakily to his feet.

"Let me hit you once," he panted, "and then you can biff off."

But the second half of the programme seemed to have taken complete leave of Eddie's mind. Instigated doubtless by his overwhelming success with Captain the Hon. Snappy Lowndes, he had lost his head and was behaving like a berserk. Silly fool! He was standing quite still, his chest heaving, while he slowly tautened the muscles in his massive arms.

Despite his aching head, Henry could not prevent a grunt of mirth escaping him.

"Not too much, Eddie, old top!"

This was what he was on the point of saying, but he did not get as far, for at that instant Eddie made a fresh charge at him. Fortunately he slipped on the shiny floor at the outset, robbing

the onslaught of much of its potential ferocity ; but as it was, he succeeded in knocking Henry flying again, this time so that the back of his skull hit the wall instead of the floor. The point of contact so far as his skull was concerned, however, was precisely the same.

It was at this juncture that the onlookers reached the height of enthusiasm, for it was evident to all that at last their man saw red, when aught is possible. They did not err. Henry saw red.

A joke is one thing ; but when a fellow starts behaving like a tipsy lout and messing everything up, it is quite another. With a veritable thunder of encouragement resounding in his righteously burning ears, he advanced, and by instinct dodging Eddie's fists—it gave the illusion of the polish of a professional—rushed in and dealt him a shrewd, unmaning left-arm jab in the pit of the stomach.

It concluded the programme. For a brief moment Eddie clutched the maltreated organ with both hands, the while emitting a noise vaguely reminiscent of water running down a choked plug. The next second he was off like a streak, across the terrace, down the steps and over the lawns towards the lake, with the guests in pursuit like a pack of hell-hounds.

Henry stood where he was like one in a dream ; and of the crowd, Brenda alone remained. She fingered the tumulus on the back of his skull with a touch that was almost tender.

"Henry," she said huskily, "are you all right ?"

"*All right ?*" hissed Henry, who was far from his normal self. Things had still a tendency to be roseate. "I'll kill him !"

"No, Henry !" She had to hold him back forcibly. "You've done your share. It was magnificent!—*magnificent!* I had no idea . . ." Her eyes were shining.

A low moaning close at hand caused them both to spin round like tops, startled. Everyone had forgotten Captain the Hon. Snappy Lowndes. He was sitting up now, holding his side, with the light in his eyes of one who has seen the Valley of the Shadow. Brenda Durain turned her brawny back on him with an irritable shrug.

"He'll be all right," she said callously. "But are you sure *you* are, Henry ?"

Henry whistled a bar of Bela Bartok.

"You had better look after your fiancé," he said quietly.

"But I had no idea . . ."

"How do you expect him to ride a bicycle all that way if you don't?"

She flushed beneath her tan. Henry was strolling out on the terrace, still whistling Bela Bartok. She followed in spurts and starts.

"Henry!" she pleaded. "Henry! Henry!"

He turned. His faintly protruding eyes perceived the phenomenon of a silver tear in the corner of each of her cold sophisticated ones.

"Henry," she said; "tell me, Henry! Were you—have you—has the joke been on me the whole time?"

Arching an eyebrow like Owen Nares in a limousine, Henry flipped his fingers at life in general. He yawned.

"Come here, woman," said he, "if you want to be kissed!"

For him the next dawn was heralded by an anxious-eyed Eddie Wiggins in a shell-pink dressing-gown with beige spots. He sat up in bed amazed. Eddie Wiggins lost no time in tackling the point.

"Henry, old boy, my dear old boy," he said apologetically, "I had to come in and say—I mean, I couldn't get at you last night when I got back, and all that sort of thing—how—how frightfully sorry I am about last night. I mean——"

"Eddie," said Henry, making a popular traffic signal, "that is all forgiven, forgotten. We won't refer to it again. I was pretty sore with you at the time, I don't mind telling you: but now, I am pleased to be able to say, things have taken a turn that quite compensates me for any physical inconvenience of which you may have been the cause. I am engaged——"

"You see, old prune," explained Eddie, "*the gear simply wasn't there!*"

Henry nodded automatically; then gave a sudden start.

"What was that?" he gasped.

Eddie repeated his saw. Henry half scrambled, half tumbled out of bed.

"*Henry!*" croaked Eddie Wiggins in horror, for his old friend's lathy legs were bowed like calipers, and he was tottering as quietly as a silent film comedian hit on the head with a brick-bat.

"What is the matter?"

Henry composed himself with a masterful effort. "Nothing," he said. "Nothing!" He took his dressing-gown

down off the back of the door. "Nothing at all, Eddie, my lad. Poor old Eddie!" He patted him sympathetically on the arm and sallied forth.

Outside he met his father, also in his dressing-gown, a black woollen one with a kind of red flannel collar.

"Henry, my boy," said his father, "they've caught him. Half an hour ago behind the boat-house! But there's some rather serious news."

"Oh?"

"Lowndes has four ribs broken."

"I am not surprised," said Henry.

Brenda, in a pair of white shorts and an open shirt, was skipping on the terrace.

"Henry!" She lowered the rope.

"Come here, Brenda!"

She did humbly as she was bidden. Reaching out his arms, he wrapped them round her neck, and, drawing her face down until it was level with his own, kissed her seventeen times.

"There's just one small point about this cycle expedition up Fujiyama!"

"Yes?" sighed Brenda.

Was it going to be the same old story, after all? He might be able to combat with homicidal maniacs, but when it came to the point of real adventure, was he going to suggest leaving the bicycles behind?

"What is it, Henry?" she demanded fearfully.

Henry yawned.

"I've decided we'll make it Everest," he said.



H. G. WELLS

*The Truth about Pyecraft*

H. G. Wells completed his education at the Royal College of Science and soon afterwards began writing the clever and often humorous stories with a scientific background which made his name. Only less famous than his novels are the *Outline of History* and his ingenious prophecy of the future entitled *The Shape of Things to Come*.



## THE TRUTH ABOUT PYECRAFT

**H**E sits not a dozen yards away. If I glance over my shoulder I can see him. And if I catch his eye—and usually I catch his eye—it meets me with an expression—

It is mainly an imploring look—and yet with suspicion in it.

Confound his suspicion! If I wanted to tell on him I should have told long ago. I don't tell and I don't tell, and he ought to feel at his ease. As if anything so gross and fat as he could feel at ease! Who would believe me if I did tell?

Poor old Pyecraft! Great, uneasy jelly of substance! The fattest clubman in London.

He sits at one of the little club tables in the huge bay by the fire, stuffing. What is he stuffing? I glance judiciously and catch him biting at a round of hot buttered teacake, with his eyes on me. Confound him!—with his eyes on me!

That settles it, Pyecraft! Since you *will* be abject, since you *will* behave as though I was not a man of honour, here, right under your embedded eyes, I write the thing down—the plain truth about Pyecraft. The man I helped, the man I shielded, and who has requited me by making my club unendurable, absolutely unendurable, with his liquid appeal, with the perpetual “don't tell” of his looks.

And, besides, why does he keep on eternally eating?

Well, here goes for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

Pyecraft—I made the acquaintance of Pyecraft in this very smoking-room. I was a young, nervous new member, and he saw it. I was sitting all alone, wishing I knew more of the members, and suddenly he came, a great rolling front of chins and abdomina, towards me, and grunted and sat down in a chair close by me and wheezed for a space, and scraped for a space with a match and lit a cigar, and then addressed me. I forgot what he said—something about the matches not lighting properly, and afterwards as he talked he kept stopping

the waiters one by one as they went by, and telling them about the matches in that thin, fluty voice he has. But, anyhow, it was in some such way we began our talking.

He talked about various things and came round to games. And thence to my figure and complexion. "You ought to be a good cricketer," he said. I suppose I am slender, slender to what some people would call lean, and I suppose I am rather dark, still—I am not ashamed of having a Hindu great-grandmother, but, for all that, I don't want casual strangers to see through me at a glance to *her*. So that I was set against Pycraft from the beginning.

But he only talked about me in order to get to himself.

"I expect," he said, "you take no more exercise than I do, and probably you eat no less." (Like all excessively obese people he fancied he ate nothing.) "Yet"—and he smiled an oblique smile—"we differ."

And then he began to talk about his fatness and his fatness ; all he did for his fatness and all he was going to do for his fatness ; what people had advised him to do for his fatness and what he had heard of people doing for fatness similar to his. "*A priori*," he said, "one would think a question of nutrition could be answered by dietary and a question of assimilation by drugs." It was stifling. It was dumpling talk. It made me feel swelled to hear him.

One stands that sort of thing once in a way at a club, but a time came when I fancied I was standing too much. He took to me altogether too conspicuously. I could never go in the smoking-room but he would come wallowing towards me, and sometimes he came and gormandised round and about me while I had my lunch. He seemed at times almost to be clinging to me. He was a bore, but not so fearful a bore as to be limited to me ; and from the first there was something in his manner—almost as though he knew, almost as though he penetrated to the fact that I *might*—that there was a remote, exceptional chance in me that no one else presented.

"I'd give anything to get it down," he would say—"anything," and peer at me over his vast cheeks and pant.

Poor old Pycraft ! He has just gonged, no doubt to order another buttered teacake !

He came to the actual thing one day. "Our Pharmacopæia," he said, "our Western Pharmacopæia, is anything but the last word of medical science. In the East, I've been told——"

He stopped and stared at me. It was like being at an aquarium.

I was quite suddenly angry with him. "Look here," I said, "who told you about my great-grandmother's recipes?"

"Well," he fenced.

"Every time we've met for a week," I said "—and we've met pretty often—you've given me a broad hint or so about that little secret of mine."

"Well," he said, "now the cat's out of the bag, I'll admit, yes, it is so. I had it——"

"From Pattison?"

"Indirectly," he said, which I believe was lying, "yes."

"Pattison," I said, "took that stuff at his own risk."

He pursed his mouth and bowed.

"My great-grandmother's recipes," I said, "are queer things to handle. My father was near making me promise——"

"He didn't?"

"No. But he warned me. He himself used one—once."

"Ah! . . . But do you think——? Suppose—suppose there did happen to be one——"

"The things are curious documents," I said. "Even the smell of 'em. . . . No!"

But after going so far Pyecraft was resolved I should go farther. I was always a little afraid that if I tried his patience too much he would fall on me suddenly and smother me. I own I was weak. But I was also annoyed with Pyecraft. I had got to that state of feeling for him that disposed me to say: "Well, *take* the risk!" The little affair of Pattison to which I have alluded was a different matter altogether. What it was doesn't concern us now, but I knew, anyhow, that the particular recipe I used then was safe. The rest I didn't know so much about, and, on the whole, I was inclined to doubt their safety pretty completely.

Yet even if Pyecraft got poisoned——

I must confess the poisoning of Pyecraft struck me as an immense undertaking.

That evening I took that queer odd-scented sandal-wood box out of my safe and turned the rustling skins over. The gentleman who wrote the recipes for my great-grandmother evidently had a weakness for skins of a miscellaneous origin, and his handwriting was cramped to the last degree. Some of the things are quite unreadable to me—though my family, with

its Indian Civil Service associations, has kept up a knowledge of Hindustani from generation to generation—and none are absolutely plain sailing. But I found the one that I knew was there soon enough, and sat on the floor by my safe for some time looking at it.

“Look here,” said I to Pycraft next day, and snatched the slip away from his eager grasp.

“So far as I can make it out, this is a recipe for Loss of Weight.” (“Ah!” said Pycraft.) “I’m not absolutely sure, but I think it’s that. And if you take my advice you’ll leave it alone. Because, you know—I blacken my blood in your interest, Pycraft—my ancestors on that side were, so far as I can gather, a jolly queer lot. See?”

“Let me try it,” said Pycraft.

I leant back in my chair. My imagination made one mighty effort and fell flat within me. “What in Heaven’s name, Pycraft,” I asked, “do you think you’ll look like when you get thin?”

He was impervious to reason. I made him promise never to say a word to me about his disgusting fatness again whatever happened—never, and then I handed him that little piece of skin.

“It’s nasty stuff,” I said.

“No matter,” he said, and took it.

He goggled at it. “But—but——” he said.

He had just discovered that it wasn’t English.

“To the best of my ability,” I said, “I will do you a translation.”

I did my best. After that we didn’t speak for a fortnight. Whenever he approached me I frowned and motioned him away, and he respected our compact, but at the end of the fortnight he was as fat as ever. And then he got a word in.

“I must speak,” he said. “It isn’t fair. There’s something wrong. It’s done me no good. You’re not doing your great-grandmother justice.”

“Where’s the recipe?”

He produced it gingerly from his pocket-book.

I ran my eye over the items. “Was the egg addled?” I asked.

“No. Ought it to have been?”

“That,” I said, “goes without saying in all my poor dear great-grandmother’s recipes. When condition or quality is not specified you must get the worst. She was drastic or

nothing. . . . And there's one or two possible alternatives to some of these other things. You got *fresh* rattlesnake venom?"

"I got a rattlesnake from Jamrach's. It cost—it cost——"

"That's your affair, anyhow. This last item——"

"I know a man who——"

"Yes. H'm. Well, I write the alternatives down. So far as I know the language, the spelling of this recipe is particularly atrocious. By the by, dog here probably means pariah dog."

For a month after that I saw Pyecraft constantly at the club, and as fat and anxious as ever. He kept our treaty, but at times he broke the spirit of it by shaking his head despondently. Then one day in the cloakroom he said: "Your great-grandmother——"

"Not a word against her," I said; and he held his peace.

I could have fancied he had desisted, and I saw him one day talking to three new members about his fatness as though he was in search of other recipes. And then, quite unexpectedly his telegram came.

"Mr. Formalyn!" bawled a page-boy under my nose, and I took the telegram and opened it at once.

"*For Heaven's sake come.—Pyecraft.*"

"H'm," said I, and to tell the truth I was so pleased at the rehabilitation of my great-grandmother's reputation this evidently promised that I made a most excellent lunch.

I got Pyecraft's address from the hall porter. Pyecraft inhabited the upper half of a house in Bloomsbury, and I went there as soon as I had done my coffee and Trappistine. I did not wait to finish my cigar.

"Mr. Pyecraft?" said I, at the front door.

They believed he was ill; he hadn't been out for two days.

"He expects me," said I, and they sent me up.

I rang the bell at the lattice-door upon the landing.

"He shouldn't have tried it, anyhow," I said to myself.

"A man who eats like a pig ought to look like a pig."

An obviously worthy woman, with an anxious face and a carelessly placed cap, came and surveyed me through the lattice.

I gave my name and she opened his door for me in a dubious fashion.

"Well?" said I, as we stood together inside Pyecraft's piece of the landing.

"'E said you was to come in if you came," she said, and

regarded me, making no motion to show me anywhere. And then, confidentially : “ ’E’s locked in, sir.”

“Locked in?”

“Locked himself in yesterday morning and ’asn’t let any-one in since, sir. And ever and again *swearing*. Oh, my!”

I stared at the door she indicated by her glances. “In there?” I said.

“Yes, sir.”

“What’s up?”

She shook her head sadly. “ ’E keeps on calling for vittles, sir. ’*Eavy* vittles ’e wants. I get ’im what I can. Pork ’e’s ’ad, sooit puddin’, sossiges, noo bread. Everythink like that. Left outside, if you please, and me go away. ’E’s eatin’, sir, somethink *awful*.”

There came a piping bawl from inside the door : “That Formalyn?”

“That you, Pyecraft?” I shouted, and went and banged the door.

“Tell her to go away.”

I did.

Then I could hear a curious pattering upon the door, almost like someone feeling for the handle in the dark, and Pyecraft’s familiar grunts.

“It’s all right,” I said, “she’s gone.”

But for a long time the door didn’t open.

I heard the key turn. Then Pyecraft’s voice said : “Come in.”

I turned the handle and opened the door. Naturally I expected to see Pyecraft.

Well, you know, he wasn’t there !

I never had such a shock in my life. There was his sitting-room in a state of untidy disorder, plates and dishes among the books and writing things, and several chairs overturned, but Pyecraft——

“It’s all right, o’ man ; shut the door,” he said, and then I discovered him.

There he was right up close to the cornice in the corner by the door, as though someone had glued him to the ceiling. His face was anxious and angry. He panted and gesticulated. “Shut the door,” he said. “If that woman gets hold of it——”

I shut the door, and went and stood away from him and stared.

"If anything gives away and you tumble down," I said, "you'll break your neck, Pyecraft."

"I wish I could," he wheezed.

"A man of your age and weight getting up to kiddish gymnastics——"

"Don't," he said, and looked agonised. "Your damned great-grandmother——"

"Be careful," I warned him.

"I'll tell you," he said, and gesticulated.

"How the deuce," said I, "are you holding on up there?"

And then abruptly I realised that he was not holding on at all, that he was floating up there—just as a gas-filled bladder might have floated in the same position. He began to struggle to thrust himself away from the ceiling, and to clamber down the wall to me. "It's that prescription," he panted, as he did so. "Your great-gran——"

"No!" I cried.

He took hold of a framed engraving rather carelessly as he spoke and it gave way, and he flew back to the ceiling again, while the picture smashed on to the sofa. Bump he went against the ceiling, and I knew then why he was all over white on the more salient curves and angles of his person. He tried again more carefully, coming down by way of the mantel.

It was really a most extraordinary spectacle, that great, fat, apoplectic-looking man upside down and trying to get from the ceiling to the floor. "That prescription," he said. "Too successful."

"How?"

"Loss of weight—almost complete."

And then, of course, I understood.

"By Jove, Pyecraft," said I, "what you wanted was a cure for fatness! But you always called it weight. You would call it weight."

Somehow I was extremely delighted. I quite liked Pyecraft for the time. "Let me help you!" I said, and took his hand and pulled him down. He kicked about, trying to get foothold somewhere. It was very like holding a flag on a windy day.

"That table," he said, pointing, "is solid mahogany and very heavy. If you can put me under that——"

I did, and there he wallowed about like a captive balloon, while I stood on his hearthrug and talked to him.

I lit a cigar. "Tell me," I said, "what happened."

"I took it," he said.

"How did it taste?"

"Oh, *beastly!*"

I should fancy they all did. Whether one regards the ingredients or the probable compound or the possible results, almost all my great-grandmother's remedies appear to me at least to be extraordinarily uninviting. For my own part——

"I took a little sip first."

"Yes?"

"And as I felt lighter and better after an hour, I decided to take the draught."

"My dear Pyecraft!"

"I held my nose," he explained. "And then I kept on getting lighter and lighter—and helpless, you know."

He gave way suddenly to a burst of passion. "What the goodness am I to *do*?" he said.

"There's one thing pretty evident," I said, "that you mustn't do. If you go out of doors you'll go up and up." I waved an arm upward. "They'd have to send Santos-Dumont after you to bring you down again."

"I suppose it will wear off?"

I shook my head. "I don't think you can count on that," I said.

And then there was another burst of passion, and he kicked out at adjacent chairs and banged the floor. He behaved just as I should have expected a great, fat, self-indulgent man to behave under trying circumstances—that is to say, very badly. He spoke of me and of my great-grandmother with an utter want of discretion.

"I never asked you to take the stuff," I said.

And generously disregarding the insults he was putting upon me, I sat down in his armchair and began to talk to him in a sober, friendly fashion.

I pointed out to him that this was a trouble he had brought upon himself, and that it had almost an air of poetical justice. He had eaten too much. This he disputed, and for a time we argued the point.

He became noisy and violent, so I desisted from this aspect of his lesson. "And then," said I, "you committed the sin of euphuism. You call it, not Fat, which is just and glorious, but Weight. You——"

He interrupted to say that he recognised all that. What was he to *do*?

I suggested he should adapt himself to his new conditions. So we came to the really sensible part of the business. I suggested that it would not be difficult for him to learn to walk about on the ceiling with his hands——

“I can’t sleep,” he said.

But that was no great difficulty. It was quite possible, I pointed out, to make a shake-up under a wire mattress, fasten the under things on with tapes, and have a blanket, sheet, and coverlet to button at the side. He would have to confide in his housekeeper, I said; and after some squabbling he agreed to that. (Afterwards it was quite delightful to see the beautiful matter-of-fact way with which the good lady took all these amazing inversions.) He could have a library ladder in his room, and all his meals could be laid on the top of his bookcase. We also hit on an ingenious device by which he could get to the floor whenever he wanted, which was simply to put the *British Encyclopædia* (tenth edition) on the top of his open shelves. He just pulled out a couple of volumes and held on, and down he came. And we agreed there must be iron staples along the skirting, so that he could cling to those whenever he wanted to get about the room on the lower level.

As we got on with the thing I found myself almost keenly interested. It was I who called in the housekeeper and broke matters to her, and it was I chiefly who fixed up the inverted bed. In fact, I spent two whole days at his flat. I am a handy, interfering sort of man with a screwdriver, and I made all sorts of ingenious adaptations for him—ran a wire to bring his bells within reach, turned all his electric lights up instead of down, and so on. The whole affair was extremely curious and interesting to me, and it was delightful to think of Pyecraft like some great, fat blowfly, crawling about on his ceiling and clambering round the lintel of his doors from one room to another, and never, never, never coming to the club any more. . . .

Then, you know, my fatal ingenuity got the better of me. I was sitting by his fire drinking his whisky, and he was up in his favourite corner by the cornice, tacking a Turkey carpet to the ceiling, when the idea struck me. “By Jove, Pyecraft!” I said, “all this is totally unnecessary.”

And before I could calculate the complete consequences of my notion I blurted it out. "Lead underclothing," said I, and the mischief was done.

Pyecraft received the thing almost in tears. "To be right ways up again——" he said.

I gave him the whole secret before I saw where it would take me. "Buy sheet lead," I said, "stamp it into discs. Sew 'em all over your underclothes until you have enough. Have lead-soled boots, carry a bag of solid lead, and the thing is done! Instead of being a prisoner here you may go abroad again, Pyecraft; you may travel——"

A still happier idea came to me. "You need never fear a shipwreck. All you need do is just slip off some or all of your clothes, take the necessary amount of luggage in your hand, and float up in the air——"

In his emotion he dropped the tack-hammer within an ace of my head. "By Jove!" he said, "I shall be able to come back to the club again."

The thing pulled me up short. "By Jove!" I said faintly. "Yes. Of course—you will."

He did. He does. There he sits behind me now, stuffing—as I live!—a third go of buttered tea-cake. And no one in the whole world knows—except his housekeeper and me—that he weighs practically nothing; that he is a mere boring mass of assimilatory matter, mere clouds in clothing, *niente, nefas*, the most inconsiderable of men. There he sits watching until I have done this writing. Then, if he can, he will waylay me. He will come billowing up to me. . . .

He will tell me over again all about it, how it feels, how it doesn't feel, how he sometimes hopes it is passing off a little. And always somewhere in that fat, abundant discourse he will say: "The secret's keeping, eh? If anyone knew of it—I should be so ashamed. . . . Makes a fellow look such a fool, you know. Crawling about on a ceiling and all that. . . ."

And now to elude Pyecraft, occupying, as he does, an admirable strategic position between me and the door.

IAN HAY

*A Sporting College*  
*Youth, Youth, Youth !*

Ian Hay is the pen-name by which Major J. H. Beith, M.C., C.B.E., is known to a very large reading and theatre-going public. Since the success of his first novel more than twenty-five years ago, he has written many books and plays, of which *The Middle Watch* and *The Midshipmaid* are among the most popular.



## A SPORTING COLLEGE

**S**T. ASAPH'S was one of the minor colleges of Cambridge. Its name was unfamiliar to the Man in the Street, and the modest nature of its academic achievements was only equalled by the lowly position of its boat on the river. But its members atoned for the collective shortcomings of their foundation by an individual brilliancy which made the name of St. Asaph's esteemed throughout the University. They were not a large college, they said, but they were a sporting one. They might not be clever, but thank heaven they were not good either.

Consequently, when I one day received a deputation from St. Asaph's, requesting that I would be good enough to coach their College Boat during the ensuing term, I felt that no light compliment had been paid me. It was the first occasion on which I had been asked to coach the crew of another college, and I accepted the charge with an enthusiasm not to be damped by the knowledge that the St. Asaph's boat was the lowest on the river.

I commenced my duties forthwith, and, mounted upon the tallest horse I have ever seen (provided by the St. Asaph's Boat-club), took my crew out that very day. My steed, I soon discovered, laboured under the disadvantage of possessing only one eye, an infirmity which rendered him liable to fall into the river whenever I rode him too near the edge of the towpath. On the other hand, he enjoyed the consolation, denied to his rider, of being unable to see the St. Asaph's crew. They were the worst collection of oarsmen that I had ever set eyes on, and I told them so, at frequent intervals and in different ways, throughout the afternoon. I was particularly direct in my references to the gentleman who was rowing Five. He seemed older than his colleagues, possessed a bald head, and was evidently one having authority. He was not the captain, for that highly inefficient officer was rowing Stroke; but this did not prevent him from shouting out directions as to time,

length, and swing to sundry members of the crew whenever it occurred to him to do so, which was usually at the moment which I had selected for doing the same thing. He seemed to resent my comments on his own style, and answered back more than once—an unpardonable sin in any galley-slave.

At the end of the day's work I told my crew that they were showing improvement already (which was not true), and that all they wanted was plenty of hard work and practice (which was approximately correct). Before I left the boat-house the apologetic captain led me aside, and asked me as a personal favour to be more polite to Five.

"Why?" I asked. "He is easily the worst man in the crew."

"Yes, I know, but he was captain three years ago, and he likes to have his own way."

"I wonder he doesn't stroke the boat," I remarked acidly.

"He would," said the captain simply, "only he weighs nearly fifteen stone; so he rows Five. He says he can manage the crew quite as well from there. He sets the stroke, and I have just to look round over my shoulder, every now and then, to see if I'm keeping time with him."

In grateful consideration of the fact that I had now acquired a story which would bear repetition in rowing circles for years to come, I swallowed my smiles and answered:

"But, my dear man, this is simply idiotic. I think the best plan would be to fire him out of the boat altogether, at once. I'll tell him, if you don't like to."

This altruistic offer caused the captain to turn quite pale; and after a certain amount of natural hesitation he confided to me the fearful tidings that the crew as it stood represented the whole available strength of St. Asaph's College; the only possible substitute, if I "carted" Five, being one of the Dons. "And he's got gout in both legs," added the captain.

I accepted the situation, and Five.

I may as well describe my crew in detail. Nature has framed strange fellows in her time, but it is improbable that such a unique collection of oddities will ever again be seen at once.

Bow was a chubby and diminutive youth with a friendly smile. He was the stylist of the crew, swinging and recovering

with an elegance that was pleasant to behold. Since, however, he rarely if ever put his oar into the water, contenting himself for the most part with mysterious passes over its surface with the blade, he could hardly be regarded as anything more than a neat figurehead.

Two had the longest legs and the shortest body I have ever seen. No ordinary stretcher could contain him, and he only succeeded in flattening his knees when, in excess of zeal, he pushed himself over the back of his sliding seat. The valuable work done on these occasions by Bow in restoring his colleague to his rightful position only goes to illustrate the great truth that the meanest creatures have their uses.

Three's presence in the crew was entirely due to the fact that St. Asaph's College only possessed eight undergraduates. I need say no more.

Four was a Scholar of the college, and, as he once informed me in a burst of confidence, had taken up rowing for his stomach's sake. I trust that organ benefited by his exertions: after all, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

Five, as I have already mentioned, was a man of commanding presence. He was not intended by nature for an oarsman, but would have made an excellent chairman at a parish meeting. He regarded me with undisguised hostility, and received my strictures upon his performances in a purely personal spirit.

Six would have performed with considerably more comfort and credit as Two, or possibly as cox. He occupied his place, as far as I could gather, *ex officio*, by virtue of his office as captain of the St. Asaph's Cricket Club. He suffered much from the handle of Five's oar, which lodged constantly in the small of his back, owing to the fact that his swing back usually coincided with Five's swing forward.

Seven, incredible as it may appear, was a very fair oar. He was not popular with the rest of the crew, who, from a cause which I could never fathom—probably the instinct which prompts the true-born Briton to call a man who likes hard and regular work a "blackleg"—considered him "no sportsman". It was chiefly owing to his unremitting efforts that the boat, overcoming the languid resistance of the Cam, and the more strenuous opposition of Five, was enabled to move at all.

Stroke was handicapped from the outset by having to row

with his chin glued to his left shoulder in an impossible effort to take the time from Five. He was the possessor, at the best of times, of a singularly distorted and ungainly style, and a month spent in endeavouring to stroke the boat with his eyes fixed upon a man sitting three places behind him rapidly developed him into something only witnessed as a rule after a supper of hot lobsters and toasted cheese.

Of Cox it is sufficient to say that he was a Burmese gentleman, exceedingly small, with a knowledge of the English language limited apparently to a few expletives of the most blood-curdling type, such as could only have been acquired from a sailor's parrot. These he lavished on his crew in monotonous rotation, evidently under the impression that they were rowing maxims of the utmost value. He did not know his right hand from his left, which is an awkward defect in a cox, and he always addressed me as "Mr. Coachman".

Our daily journey to Baitsbite was distinguished from those of countless equally bad boats by a certain old-time stateliness and courtesy. No one ever arrived in time, and it was not considered good form on the part of the coach to make his crew paddle for more than about two hundred yards without an "easy". Also, three clear days' notice was required in the event of my desiring to send them over the full course.

The day's proceedings always ended with a sort of informal vote of thanks to Five, proposed by the captain, in tones that conveyed a mute appeal (invariably ignored) to me to second the motion, and carried with feverish acclamation by the rest of the crew. Five usually replied that he very much doubted if he could stand the company of such a set of rotters any longer; but he always turned out with unflinching regularity next afternoon, and took the chair as usual.

The boat made fluctuating progress. Sometimes it went badly, sometimes indifferently, sometimes unspeakably. More than once I found myself wondering whether, after all, a Don with gout in both legs would not be of more use than all my present crew put together. Still, a crew has to be very bad to be the worst on the Cam, and St. Asaph's were confident that the end of the races would see them several places higher on the river than before. Beyond possessing the unique advantage of occupying a position unassailable from the rear, I could see little cause for such hopes; but I mechanically repeated to them the mendacious assurances usual on these

occasions, until presently I found myself sharing the enthusiasm of my crew; and when, the Saturday before the races, they rowed over to the Railway Bridge, accompanied by a whooping octogenarian on horseback, whom I first took to be Five's grandfather, but who ultimately proved to be the college tutor, in 7 min. 40 sec., it was felt that the doom of the boats in front was sealed.

Then came the races.

For the benefit of those who have never made a study of that refinement of torture known as a "bumping" race, it may be explained that at Oxford and Cambridge the college crews, owing to the narrowness of the river, race not abreast but in a long string, each boat being separated from its pursuer and pursued by an equal space. Every crew which succeeds in rowing over the course without being touched (or "bumped") by the boat behind, is said to have "kept its place", and starts in the same position for the next day's racing. But if it contrives to touch the boat in front, it is said to have made a "bump", and both bumper and bumped get under the bank with all speed and allow the rest of the procession to race past. Next day, bumper and bumped change places, and the victors of the day before endeavour to catch the next boat in front of them. The crew at the Head of the River of course have nothing to catch, and can accordingly devote their attention to keeping away from Number Two, which is usually in close attendance owing to the pressing attentions of Number Three. And so on.

The races take place on four successive evenings. It is thus possible for a crew by making a bump each evening to ascend four places. This was the modest programme which St. Asaph's had mapped out for themselves, the alternative of a corresponding descent being mercifully precluded by their geographical position on the river.

Though their actual performance did not quite reach the high standard they had set themselves, it cannot be denied that they had a stirring time of it.

For this they had to thank the Burmese cox, who in four crowded and glorious days made his unpronounceable name a household word in Cambridge.

On the first evening of the races, by dexterously crossing his rudder-lines at the start, he pointed the boat's head in such a direction that the racing for that day terminated, so far as

St. Asaph's were concerned, with considerable violence at a point about fifteen yards from the starting-point, the entire crew having to disembark in order to assist in the extraction of the nose of their vessel from the mass of turf in which it had embedded itself. By the time that this task had been accomplished all the other boats were out of sight, and it was decided to walk home—a precaution which the coxswain was discovered to have taken already.

On the next evening St. Asaph's, full of hope and vigour, once more took their places at the end of the long line of boats, determined to bump St. Bridget's this time, or perish in the attempt. Cox's rudder-lines had been carefully sorted for him; but in some inexplicable manner he became hopelessly entangled with the starting-chain, the end of which the coxswain is supposed to hold in his hand until the starting-gun fires, in order to keep the boat from drifting. Consequently, when the signal was given, that last link with the land still adhered to several points of his person. Now, when it comes to a tug-of-war between a snuff-and-butter miscreant, weighing seven stone, and *terra firma*, the result may be anticipated without much difficulty. Next moment the St. Asaph's crew, swinging out like giants to their task, were horrified to observe their pocket Palinurus, with a terrified grin frozen upon his dusky features and his objurgatory vocabulary dead within him, slide rapidly over the stern of the boat and disappear beneath the turgid waters of the Cam.

Pity and horror, however, turned to rage and indignation when the victim, on rising to the surface, paddled cheerfully to the bank, scrambled out, and started off, with an air of pleased relief, to walk home again. He was sternly ordered to return, the boat was backed into the bank, and, with the dripping Oriental once more at the helm, the St. Asaph's crew commenced a rather belated effort to overtake a boat which had already disappeared round Post Corner. They finished, however, only about a hundred yards behind St. Bridget's, who had encountered numerous obstacles, including Grassy Corner, *en route*.

Next day St. Asaph's made their bump. The fact in itself is so tremendous that any attempt to describe it would of necessity form an anticlimax. Sufficient to say that both boats got safely off, and that St. Asaph's overlapped "Bridget" in the Plough Reach. The actual bump did not take place till

some time after, as the coxswain, in spite of prodigious mental efforts, could not remember which string to pull; but when the bow of the St. Asaph's boat ran over the blade of the St. Bridget's Stroke's oar, the enemy decided that honour was satisfied, and unanimously stopped rowing. Not so St. Asaph's. Having made his bump, the coxswain decided to make the most of it; and the crew, the majority of whom were rowing with their mouths open and eyes shut, backed him up nobly. It was not until Bow found himself sitting amid the St. Bridget's crew, directly over Number Four's rigger; and Seven, surprised by a sudden resistance to his blade, opened his eyes to discover that he was belabouring the Stroke of that unhappy band of pilgrims in the small of the back, that the men of St. Asaph's realized that they had really made a bump, and desisted from their efforts.

Now comes the tragic part of my story.

If St. Asaph's had been content to let well alone, and to row over the course on the last day of the races at a comfortable distance in front of St. Bridget's, all would have been well. But, drunk with victory, they decided to bump the next boat—I think one of lower Trinity crews—and so achieve immortality on two successive occasions.

For the last time I sent them off, with many injunctions to eschew crabs and the bank. Surprising as it may seem, they made an excellent start, and were soon in full cry up Post Reach after the Trinity crew, with St. Bridget's toiling helplessly behind them. So fast did they travel that their followers on the bank, including myself (gingerly grasping an ancient horse pistol that I had been instructed to fire as soon as they should get within a length of their opponents), began to fall behind. The boat swung out of sight into the Gut fifty yards in front of us; and to my undying regret I missed the earlier stages of the catastrophe which must have occurred almost immediately afterwards.

On rounding the corner and coming in sight of Grassy, we observed a considerable commotion on the towpath side of the bend. The centre of the disturbance of course proved to be the St. Asaph's boat, the greater part of which had in some inexplicable manner contrived to mount upon the towpath, together with its crew, who were still sitting gaping vacantly on the delirious mob around them.

The stern end of the boat was resting on the waters of the

Cam, and Stroke, assisted by Five, who had left his seat for the purpose, was making a savage and successful effort to force the resisting form of the Burmese coxswain beneath them. The reason for this drastic procedure was hurriedly explained to us by an hysterical chorus of eyewitnesses. The "Jewel of Asia", as someone had aptly christened that submerged hero, seeing the stern of the Trinity boat dangling temptingly before him as it swung round the sharp Grassy Corner, and impulsively deciding that the time had now arrived for another bump, had abandoned his previous intention of circumnavigating Grassy himself and gone straight for the elusive tail of the retreating boat, in a brilliant but misguided attempt to cut off a corner. He had missed by not less than three yards and had immediately afterwards piled up his vessel upon the towpath. Hence the highly justifiable efforts of Stroke and Five to terminate his miserable existence.

To crown all, at this moment the St. Bridget's boat, remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow, accompanied by a coloured gentleman ringing a dinner bell, and a solitary Don who trotted beside them making encouraging noises, came creaking round the corner. Their coxswain, suddenly beholding his victorious foes of yesterday lying at his mercy, with one wild shriek of joy headed his ship in our direction. Next moment the devastating prow of the St. Bridget's boat skittered gracefully over the half-submerged stern of the helpless wreck that protruded from the bank, just as Stroke and Five of the St. Asaph's crew succeeded in getting their coxswain under for the third time.

How nobody was killed nobody knew. There were no casualties; of course coxes do not count. St. Bridget's claimed their bump, which was allowed, and St. Asaph's returned to their rightful position at the foot of the river. Fortunately they had had their Bump Supper the night before.

Eheu! That was nearly twenty-five years ago. I wonder if such things happen in University rowing to-day. I hope so.

## YOUTH, YOUTH, YOUTH!

“**A** MR. WILKINSON has called, sir.”

Club servants are notoriously imperturbable, but the fact remains that when Christopher, our impeccable night porter, presented himself at my bedside at the unusual hour of 5.30 a.m. in order to make the announcement recorded above, he was visibly rattled. I distinctly saw an eyebrow twitch.

I blinked at the electric light.

“What time is it?” I inquired mechanically.

Christopher told me, in a very distinct voice.

“What did you say the name was?”

“A Mr. Wilkinson, sir.”

I pondered sleepily.

“Did he say what he wanted?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Christopher woodenly, “he did. The English Cup, sir.”

I remembered now—an invitation rashly given and forgotten for weeks.

“Tell him,” I said, “to go away and come back a little later”; and resumed my slumbers forthwith.

But, prompted by an instinct of resigned hospitality, I was dressed and downstairs by a quarter to eight. A charwoman was washing the tiles of the hall floor, and Christopher, within fifteen minutes of the end of his nightly vigil, was nodding in his box. On the bench by the door sat a small, dirty, unkempt, but entirely alert youth of fourteen or so. On the lapel of his coat he wore an enormous blue-and-white rosette.

“Hallo,” he said. “Up at last?”

I ignored the ingratitude of the remark, and asked him where he had come from. He explained that he had travelled up from his home in the north of England through the night in an excursion train.

“It was bung-full,” he added. “There were twelve in our carriage, not including a chap under the seat without ticket. He had the nerve to pass his hat round just before Willesden.”

"How much did he get?"

"Oh—most of his hat back. How are you?"

"Pretty well, thanks. What time did you arrive?"

"About four o'clock this morning, I think."

"You must be hungry," I said.

"I am a bit," replied Dicky Wilkinson wistfully.

My heart smote me, for I was his host, and I had once been young myself. Still, there would be little breakfast available at the club at this hour. We must go further afield.

"Come along," I said, and told Christopher to call a cab.

Propped against the railings outside the club I found a second youth. His matted hair hung down upon his forehead, and he looked as if he had slept in a dustbin for a week. With a sinking heart I noticed that he, too, wore a blue-and-white rosette. At our approach he raised his head and regarded me with what I can only call a wolfish eye.

"Come on, Crump," said Dicky. "This," he explained to me in a luminous aside, "is old Crump."

Mr. Crump, who was evidently far too famished to speak, greeted me with a perfunctory smile, and immediately hurled himself into a cab. Dick followed him with a hungry roar, and I, feeling rather like the prophet Daniel on an historic occasion, clambered in after them.

I have always regarded a fixed charge of four-and-sixpence for an hotel breakfast as a gross imposition; but on this occasion I think the laugh was on my side.

My two guests, on being confronted with the bill of fare—an elaborate and comprehensive document—read it through, smacked their lips in horrible enjoyment, but said nothing. The waiter hovered expectantly over them.

"What are you going to have?" I inquired.

Dicky regarded me with a slightly surprised air.

"Have?" he said. "We're going to have the first thing on the list. We aren't going to miss anything out, you know!"

I said no more. The joke, after all, was on the hotel.

After an *hors-d'œuvre* of porridge and cream, my friends consumed a salmon steak apiece, followed by fillets of sole. Having by this operation exhausted the fish course, they proceeded to kidneys and bacon. Dicky, noticing that one or two items,

such as mutton chops and savoury omelettes, required fifteen minutes' notice, prudently avoided the twin vexations of disappointment and delay by ordering these trifles in advance, and then set to work upon bacon and eggs.

Interrogated as to their choice of beverages, both my friends selected chocolate with whipped cream. Mr. Crump, I may mention, uttered no word. He ate everything that was offered to him and left any ordering that had to be done to his colleague. But the wolfish light was dying out of his eyes, and I began to feel comparatively secure.

I consumed my own breakfast as slowly as possible, and devoted my energies to directing the conversation into congenial and appropriate channels. Old Crump remained utterly unresponsive, but Dicky chattered ceaselessly, without for one moment relaxing the severity of his attack upon the dishes around him. He was madly enthusiastic about the chances of his local team—I need hardly say that they wore blue shorts and white shirts—who had come up to London for the first time in their mud-stained history to do battle for the Cup. He gave me the pet name, age and fighting weight of each gladiator. I think he said that old Crump had once shaken hands with one of them, but the hero of this achievement exhibited no symptom of corroboration. Probably he did not hear us, though we could hear him.

Once more the waiter presented the menu. By this time he had thoroughly entered into the spirit of the game.

"What will you try now, sir?" he asked respectfully.

Dicky ran his finger down the list to his last stopping-place. A slightly puzzled expression appeared upon his face, but he replied without hesitation :

"We'll have some Cold Viands, please."

The waiter departed, and Dicky said to me :

"I say, what are Viands?"

I replied, quoting the slogan of the Liberal Party of a decade ago. Two minutes later the pair were resolutely devouring liberal helpings of cold beef—underdone.

Symptoms of languor set in after the marmalade course, and we adjourned to the lounge. Here I extracted the information that Dicky's father had supplied them with stand tickets for the match, and that the excursion train returned at midnight. Their plans for the rest of the day were extremely vague.

My own happened to be numerous and complicated ; so, having advised them to make an early start for the ground, and presenting them with tickets for the evening performance at the most respectable place of entertainment I could think of, I made my excuses and departed. Neither gentleman made any attempt to see me off the premises ; they reclined in arm-chairs, following my receding form with glazed eyes. As I passed out through the revolving door I looked back. Old Crump had just produced a packet of honeysuckle cigarettes.

“A Mr. Wilkinson has called, sir.”

Once more the words crashed through my slumbers like a stone through a window. This time it was half past five in the afternoon, and I was snatching a brief respite from an arduous day in an armchair in the smoking-room. I sighed resignedly, and went out into the hall. There they stood, more disreputable than ever, but radiant.

“We just looked in to say good-bye,” said Dicky. “We’ve had a ripping day.”

I shook hands with them warmly. Under the stress of parting, Mr. Crump was moved to break the silence (so far as I was concerned) of a lifetime.

“Thanks awfully,” he said, and, catching his heel in the mat, lurched heavily backwards through the glass door and was no more seen.

“Did you enjoy the match?” I inquired of Dicky as I grasped his grubby paw for the last time. “I hope your side won.”

“I don’t know who won,” said Dicky. “We got to the place early as you told us—about twelve, I should say ; but it turned out to be the wrong place. Of course it wasn’t your fault, but we went to the Crystal Palace. They told us there that they don’t play the Cup Final on that ground any more. However, we had quite a good time ; we went out in a boat on the lake for a bit. I think we must have gone to sleep, for we didn’t wake up till about an hour ago. But they’ll tell us the result in the train. So long ! And thanks most awfully for the theatre-tickets. We’re off to find the place now. By Jove, this is a day and a half !”

Altogether an apt summary of the occasion. Ah, me ! Heaven lies about us in our infancy, Dicky.

EDWARD F. BENSON

*Royal Visitors*  
*A College Sunday*

E. F. Benson, youngest of the three brilliant sons of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, scandalized Victorian society by his first novel, *Dodo*. In the forty years since its publication he has been one of the most prolific authors, writing novels, plays, stories, and memoirs with equal success.



## ROYAL VISITORS

**M**R. STEWART, as has been indicated before, had a weakness, and that was an amiable and harmless one. His weakness was for the aristocracy. Compared with this, his feeling for royalty which was of the same order, but vastly intensified, might also be called a total failure of power, a sort of mental general paralysis. So when one day towards the middle of August, the wife of the Heir Apparent of a certain European country caused a telegram to be sent to him, to the effect that her Royal Highness wished to visit Cambridge before leaving the country, and would be graciously pleased to take her luncheon with him, Mr. Stewart was naturally a proud man. He bought a long strip of brilliant red carpet, he ordered a lunch from the kitchen that set the mouth of the cook watering, "and altogether," as the Babe very profanely and improperly said, "made as much fuss as if the Virgin Mary had been expected." He also sent printed cards, "to have the honour of," to the Vice-chancellor, the heads of four colleges and their wives, and also to another Fellow of his college, who only a term before had entertained at tea a regular royal queen, and had asked him to meet her. And remembering that he had once met the Prince of Wales at a dance in London given by the Babe's mother, he also asked the Babe.

At the last moment, however, the Princess sent a telegram saying that she was going to bring her husband with her, which would mean two more places, one for him, and one for his gentleman-in-waiting, and Mr. Stewart, whose table would not hold any more than fifteen conveniently, sent a hurried message and apology to the Babe, saying that all this was very upsetting, and unexpected, and uncomfortable, and inconvenient, but that he was sure the Babe would see his difficulty. He would, however, be delighted and charmed if the Babe would come in afterwards, and at least take a cup of coffee, and a cigarette (for the Princess did not mind smoking, and indeed

once at Aix-les-Bains he had seen her, etc., etc.), and sun himself in the smile of royalty.

The Babe received this message at half past one; he had refused an invitation to lunch at King's on the strength of the previous engagement, and he was rather cross. It was too late to go to King's now, but after a few moments' thought his face suddenly cleared and he sent a note to Reggie saying that he would come round about half past two, adding that he had "got an idea", which they would work out together. He then ordered some lunch from the kitchen, which there was little chance of his receiving for some time, for all the cooks and kitchen boys who were not engaged in serving up Mr. Stewart's lunch were busy making little excursions into the court, where they stood about with trays on their heads, to give the impression that they were going to or from some other rooms, in order to catch a sight of Mr. Stewart's illustrious guests as they crossed the court. However, the Babe went to the kitchen himself as it did not come, and said bitter things to the head cook, who was a Frenchman and asked him whether he had already forgotten about Alsace and Lorraine.

He lunched alone, and half-way through he nearly choked himself with laughing suddenly, apparently at nothing at all, and when he had finished he went round to King's. He and Reggie talked together for about an hour, and then went out shopping.

Later in the day Mr. Stewart called on the Babe, to express his regret at what had happened, but his regret was largely tempered with sober and loyal exultation at the success of his party. Their Royal Highnesses had been the embodiment of royal graciousness and amiability; they had written their names in his birthday book, and promised to send their photographs. The conversation, it appeared, had been carried on chiefly in French, a language with which Mr. Stewart was perfectly acquainted, and which he spoke not only elegantly, but what is better, intelligibly. The Princess was the most beautiful and delightful of women, the Prince the handsomest and most charming of men. Mr. Stewart, in fact, had quite lost his heart to them both, and he had promised to look them up when he next happened to be travelling in their country, which, thought the cynical Babe, would probably be soon. Best of all, Mr. Medingway, the entertainer of queens, could not talk French, though he was the first Arabic scholar

in Europe, a language, however, in which it was not possible for a mixed company to converse, and he had necessarily been quite thrown into the shade.

The Babe received this all with the utmost interest and sympathy. He regretted that he had not been able to come in afterwards, but he hoped Mr. Stewart could come to breakfast next day at nine. Mr. Stewart both could and would, and as soon as he had gone, the Babe danced the *pas-de- quatre* twice round the room.

That evening Reggie and the Babe went to call on Jack Marsden who had come up for a week. Jack was very short, barely five feet high, but he made up for that by being very stout. The Babe also got a fine nib, and employed half an hour in copying something very carefully on to the back of a plain black-edged envelope.

He was up in good time next morning, and he had three letters by the post. One of these was black-edged, and had on the back of the envelope a Royal Crown and *Windsor Castle*. He opened them all, and left this last face downwards on the table.

Mr. Stewart came in, still in the best of spirits, and walked about the room, expatiating on the superiority of royal families, while the Babe made tea.

"It makes a difference," said Stewart, "it must make a difference, if one's fathers and forefathers have been kings. One would have the habit and the right of command. I don't know if I ever told you——"

His eye caught sight of the Royal Crown and Windsor Castle, and he paused a moment.

"I don't know if I ever told you of that very pleasant day I once spent at Sandringham."

"Yes, you told me about it yesterday," said the Babe brutally.

"I suppose they are all up in Scotland now," said Stewart.

"No, the Queen is at Windsor for a day or two," said the Babe. "She goes up early next week. Will you have a sole?"

"Thanks—not a whole one. I asked because I saw you had a letter here from Windsor."

The Babe looked up quickly and just changed colour—he could do it quite naturally—and picked up his letters.

"Yes, it's from my cousin," he said. "She's in waiting, just now."

"Lady Julia?"

"Yes. Apparently they are not going straight up."

The subject dropped, but a few minutes later the Babe said suddenly and in an absent-minded way.

"I don't think she's ever been to Cambridge before."

"Lady Julia?"

Again the Babe started.

"Yes, Lady Julia. She is thinking of coming up to—see me on Monday. Is there anything in the papers?"

"I only read the *Morning Post*," said Mr. Stewart. "There is of course a short account of the Prince's visit here, but I saw nothing else."

For the next day or two the Babe was very busy, too busy to do much work. He went more than once with Reggie and Jack to the A.D.C. where they looked up several dresses, and he had a long interview with the proprietor of the Bull. He took a slip of paper to the printer's, with certain elaborate directions, and on Monday morning there arrived at Trinity a Bath chair. Then he went to Mr. Stewart, who was his tutor, and had a short talk, with the result that at a quarter to two Mr. Stewart was pacing agitatedly up and down his room, stopping always in front of the window, from which he could see the staircase on which were the Babe's rooms, and on which now appeared a long strip of crimson carpet. As luck would have it, Mr. Medingway selected this time for going to Mr. Stewart's rooms to borrow a book and the two looked out of the window together.

The Trinity clock had just struck two, when a smart carriage and pair hired from the Bull stopped at the gate, and the Babe's gyp, who had been waiting at the porter's lodge, wheeled the Bath chair up to it. Out of it stepped first the Babe, next a short stout old lady dressed in black, and last a very tall young woman elegantly dressed. She was quite as tall as the Babe, and seemed the type of the Englishwoman of the upper class, who plays lawn-tennis and rides bicycles. The gyp bowed low as he helped the old lady into the chair, and the Babe—hat in hand until the old lady told him to put it on—and the tall girl walked one on each side of it. The porter, who was just going into the lodge, stopped dead as they passed, and also took off his hat, and the Bath chair passed down an inclined plane of boards which had been arranged over the steps into the court.

Mr. Stewart, standing with Medingway at his bow window, saw them enter, and in a voice trembling with suppressed excitement said to his companion, "Here they are," and though benedictions were not frequent on his lips, added: "God bless her."

He pressed Medingway to stop for lunch, and the two sat down together.

"Was it in the papers this morning?" asked the latter.

Mr. Stewart took the *Morning Post* from the sofa.

"It is only announced that the Court will leave Windsor to-day. They are expected at Balmoral on Wednesday, not Tuesday, you see. It does not give their movements for to-day."

Mr. Medingway was looking out of the window.

"They have got to the staircase," he said. "And she is getting out. Are we—is anyone going in afterwards?"

"I believe not. It is to be absolutely quiet, and strictly incognito. They leave again by the four thirty-five."

"An interesting, a unique occasion," said Medingway.

"Yes; the Babe takes it all so easily. I wish I had been able to have him to lunch last week."

Mr. Medingway smiled, and helped himself to a slice of galantine.

"They wouldn't perhaps take a cup of tea before going——"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Stewart, who, if he was not playing the *beau rôle* to-day, at any rate had been in the confidence of him who was. "The Babe was most urgent that I should not let it get about. Indeed, I have committed a breach of confidence in telling you. Of course I know it will go no further."

Meantime, the Babe having successfully conveyed his party across the court, and having taken the precaution of sporting his door, was having lunch. Opposite to him sat Jack Marsden, dressed in a black silk gown; on his right Reggie, attired in the height of fashion. He wore a blue dress with very full sleeves, and a large picture hat. He was taking a long draught of lager beer.

"Stewart and Medingway both saw," he said, "and they are both at Stewart's window now."

"It was complete," said the Babe solemnly, "wonderfully complete, and the bogus copy of the *Morning Post*, which I

substituted for his, was complete still. It will also puzzle them to know how you got away, for they are sure to wait there on the chance of seeing you again. I shouldn't wonder if Stewart went to the station. And now if you've finished, you can change in my bedroom, and we'll go round and get a fourth to play tennis. Stewart must confess that I have gone one better than either him or Medingway."

## A COLLEGE SUNDAY

REGGIE and Ealing had moved into a set of rooms in Fellows' Buildings, which they shared together. The set consisted of three rooms, two inner and smaller ones, and one large room looking out on to the front court of King's. The two smaller rooms they used as bedrooms; but as they each had folding Eton beds, by half past nine or so every morning, provided that they got up in reasonable time, they were converted for the day into sitting-rooms. The outer room was furnished more with regard to what furniture they had, than what furniture it required. Thus there were two pianos, tuned about a quarter of a tone apart from each other, two grandfather's clocks, and a most deficient supply of chairs. "However," as Reggie said, "one can always sit on the piano."

Ealing's powers of execution on the piano were limited. He could play hymn-tunes, or other compositions, where the next chord to the one he was engaged on followed as a corollary from it; and anything in the world which went so slowly as to enable him to glance from the music to his hands between each chord, however complicated it was, provided it did not contain a double sharp, which he always played wrong. He could also, by dint of long practice, play "Father O'Flynn" and the first verse of "Off to Philadelphia in the Morning"; and there seemed to be no reason why, with industry, he should not be able to acquire the power of playing the other verses, in which he considered the chords to be most irregular and unexpected, deserting the air at the most crucial points. Reggie, however, was far more accomplished. He had got past hymn-tunes. The Intermezzo in *Cavalleria Rusticana*—even the palpitating part—was from force of repetition mere child's play to him, and he aspired to the slow movements out of Beethoven's Sonatas.

The hours in which each might practise, therefore, demanded careful arrangements. College regulations forbade the

use of the pianos altogether between nine in the morning and two in the afternoon, since it was popularly supposed by the authorities who framed this rule—and who shall say them nay?—that all undergraduates worked between these hours, and that the sound of a piano would disturb them. Consequently, Ealing was allowed to play between eight a.m. and nine a.m. every morning, a privilege which he used intermittently during breakfast, and by which he drove Reggie, daily, to the verge of insanity; and Reggie between two p.m. and three p.m. Ealing again might play between three and five, and Reggie from five to seven. During these hours the temporary captain of the pianos, even if he did not wish to play himself, might stop the other from playing except with the soft pedal down. It had been found impossible to regulate the hours after dinner, and they often played simultaneously on their several pianos and produced thereby very curious and interesting effects, which sounded Wagnerian at a sufficient distance. Finally, the use of the piano was totally prohibited by common consent between two a.m. and eight a.m.

The Babe, like mournful CEnone, "hither came at noon" one Sunday morning. Chapel at King's was at half past ten, and that English habit of mind which weds indissolubly together Sunday morning and lying in bed was responsible for the fact that on Sunday Reggie and Ealing always breakfasted after chapel. But the Babe, unlike that young lady, was in the best of spirits, and as Ealing and Reggie were not yet back from chapel, made tea and began breakfast without them. They came in a few minutes later, both rather cross.

"When there is going to be a sermon," said Reggie severely, taking off his surplice, "I consider that I have a right to be told. Morning, Babe."

"Oh, have you had a sermon?" said the Babe sweetly. "Who preached?"

"The Dean. He preached for half an hour."

"More than half an hour," said Ealing. "Totally inaudible, of course, but lengthy to make up for that."

"Pour me out some tea, Babe, if you've had the sense to make it."

"Sermons are trying if one hasn't breakfasted," said the Babe. "They are sermons in stones when one asks for bread."

"What do you mean?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I hoped that perhaps one of you would know. Why should I know what I mean? It's other people's business to find out. And they for the most part neglect it shamefully."

"Shut up, Babe," growled Reggie. "I wish you wouldn't talk when I'm eating."

"Can't you hear yourself eat?" asked the Babe sympathetically.

"Wild horses shall not drag me to chapel this afternoon," said Ealing. "We'll go for a walk, Reggie."

"I dare say: at present I can't think of anything but food. Babe, you greedy hog, give me some fish."

"And very good fish it is," said the Babe genially. "By the way, Sykes is far from well this morning."

"What's the matter with him?"

"He partook too freely of the anchovies of the Chitchat last night. You will find that in French conversation books."

"I saw him indulging as I thought unwisely," said Ealing. "Then it was surely imprudent of him to drink Moselle cup."

"He wished to drown care, but it only gave him a stomach-ache. Stewart impressed him so with the fact that we were all Atlases with the burden of the world on our shoulders, that he had recourse to the cup."

"And the burden of us all was on Stewart."

"Yes. Don't you remember he said that he felt personally responsible for every undergraduate whom he had ever spoken to? His idea is that each don ought to have an unlimited influence, and that the whole future of England in the next generation lay on each of them, particularly himself. No wonder his eyelids were a little weary, as Mr. Pater says. But after you went he took the other side, and said that the undergraduates were the *raison d'être* of the University, and that the dons existed only by their sufferance."

"Did Longridge stop?"

"Yes. He was a little less coherent than usual. I know he took the case of a man at Oxford who threw stones at the deer in Magdalen, though what conclusion he drew from it I can't say."

"Probably that the deer were really responsible for the undergraduates."

The Babe sighed.

"I have to read a paper next week. I think it shall be on some aspects of Longridge. That is sure to give rise to a discussion if he is there. Give me a cigarette, Reggie."

The Babe established himself in a big chair by the fireplace, while the others finished breakfast.

"I am going to found a club," he said, "called the S.C.D., or Society for the Cultivation of Dons. Stewart says he will be vice-president, as he doesn't consider himself a don. We are going to call on obscure dons every afternoon and speak to them of the loveliness of life, for as Stewart says, the majority of them have no conception of it. Their lives are bounded by narrow horizons, and the only glimpse they catch of the great world is their bedmaker as she carries out their slop-pail from their bedrooms. They live like the Niebelungs in dark holes and eat roots, and though they are merely animals, they have no animal spirits. He says he knew a don once who by a sort of process of spontaneous combustion became a dictionary; but all the interesting words, the sort of words one looks out in a Bible dictionary, you know, were missing. So they used him to light fires with, for which he was admirably adapted, being very dry, and in the manner of King Alexander, who, as Stewart asserted, became the bung in a wine cork, other dons now warm themselves at him. Stewart was very entertaining last night, and rather improper. He said that a Don Juan or two was wanted among the dons, by way of compensation, and he enlarged on the subject."

"Give us his enlargements."

"I can't. He enlarged in a way that belongs to the hour after midnight on Saturday, when you know that when you wake up it will be Sunday. He was very Saturday-night. He called it working off the arrears of the week, and complained that he hadn't heard a mouth-filling oath for more than a month. He never swears himself, but he likes to hear other people do it; for he says he is in a morbid terror of the millennium beginning without his knowing it. He skipped about in short-skirted epigrams, and pink-tight phrases. At least that was his account of his own conversation when we parted. Oh yes, and he said he didn't mind saying these things to me because I was a man of the world."

"He knows your weak points, Babe," said Reggie.

"Not at all. He referred to that as my strong point."

"Good old Clytemnestra! I'm better now, thank you,

after my breakfast, and it's 'The Sorrows of Death' this afternoon. I shall go to chapel again."

Reggie lit a pipe, and picked out the first few bars on the piano.

"The watchman was a tiresome sort of man to have about," he said. "When they asked him if it was nearly morning, he only said, 'Though the morning will come, the night will come also.' Of course they knew that already, and besides it wasn't the question. I should have dismissed him on the spot. So the soprano has to tell them, which he does on the top A mainly."

"When I was a child I could sing the upper upper Z," said the Babe fatuously. "Then my voice broke, and the moral is 'Deeper and deeper yet'. Don't rag: I apologize."

Ealing finished breakfast last, and strolled across to the window.

"It's a heavenly morning," he said. "Let's go out. We needn't go far."

"I will walk no further than the King's field," said the Babe.

"Very well, and we can sit outside the pavilion. I'm lunching out at half past one."

"Meals do run together so on Sunday. Sunday is really one long attack of confluent mastication," said the Babe. "It's a pity one can't take them simultaneously."

Though November had already begun, the air was deliciously warm and mild, and had it not been for the fast yellowing trees, one would have guessed it to be May. But there was a shouting wind overhead, which stripped off the leaves by hundreds and blew the rooks about the sky. Already the tops of the trees were bare, and the nests of last spring swung empty and half ruined high up among the forks of the branches. During the last week a good deal of rain had fallen, and the Cam was swirling down, yellow and turbid. The willow by the river was already quite bare, and its thin feathery branches lashed themselves against the stone coping of the bridge.

They went through the Fellows' gardens, for Reggie by some means had got hold of a key; there a few bushes of draggled Michaelmas daisies were making pretence that the summer was not quite dead yet, but they only succeeded in calling attention to the long, desolate beds. The grass was growing rank and matted under the autumn rains, and little

eddies of leaves had drifted up against the wires of the disused croquet-hoops. But the day itself seemed stolen from off the lap of spring, and two thrushes were singing in the bushes after an excellent breakfast of succulent worms.

"We play you to-morrow at Rugger," remarked the Babe as they walked across the field, "and we play on this ground. It's sticky enough, and I shall vex the soul of the half opposite me, because I like a sticky ground, and he is certain not to. In fact," said he confidently, "I purpose to get two tries off my own bat, and generally to sit on this royal and ancient foundation."

"The Babe has never yet been called modest," said Ealing.

"If I have, I am not aware of it," said the Babe.

"We've got three blues," remarked Reggie.

"I am delighted to hear it," said the Babe. "You will need them all. And you may tell our mutual friend Hargreave that if he attempts to collar me round the ankles again, I shall make no efforts whatever to avoid kicking him in the face. He did it last time we played you, and I spoke to him about it more in sorrow than in anger."

"Upon which the referee warned you for using sorrowful language."

"He did take that liberty," conceded the Babe. "Let's sit down outside the pavilion. I wish we could kick about. The Sabbath is made for man and so is Sunday, and so are footballs."

"But on Sunday the pavilion is locked up by man, and the footballs put inside."

"It appears so. English people take Sunday too seriously, just as they take everything else, except me."

"Anyhow, Stewart says you are a man of the world," said Ealing.

"He does, and who are we to contradict him? Good Lord, there's one o'clock striking. I must go home. There's somebody coming to lunch at half past. Reggie, get me a ticket for King's this afternoon, will you?"

GEORGE HORACE LORIMER

*Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to his Son*

G. H. Lorimer has been editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* for more than thirty-five years, and under his control it has grown from insignificance to its present remarkable position, with the largest circulation of any magazine in the world. Besides *Letters from a Self-made Merchant* he has written *Old Gorgon Graham* and other books.



LETTERS FROM A SELF-MADE MERCHANT TO  
HIS SON

Chicago,  
May 4, 18—

DEAR PIERREPONT,

The cashier has just handed me your expense account for the month, and it fairly makes a fellow hump-shouldered to look it over. When I told you that I wished you to get a liberal education, I didn't mean that I wanted to buy Cambridge. Of course, the bills won't break me, but they will break you unless you are very, very careful.

I have noticed for the last two years that your accounts have been growing heavier every month, but I haven't seen any signs of your taking honours to justify the increased operating expenses; and that is bad business—a good deal like feeding his weight in corn to a scalawag steer that won't fat up.

I haven't said anything about this before, as I trusted a good deal to your native common sense to keep you from making a fool of yourself in the way that some of these young fellows who haven't had to work for it do. But because I have sat tight, I don't want you to get it into your head that the old man's rich, and that he can stand it, because he won't stand it after you leave college. The sooner you adjust your spending to what your earning capacity will be, the easier they will find it to live together.

The only sure way that a man can get rich quick is to have it given to him or to inherit it. You are not going to get rich that way—at least, not until after you have proved your ability to hold a pretty important position with the firm; and, of course, there is just one place from which a man can start for that position with Graham & Co. It doesn't make any difference whether he is the son of the old man or of the cellar boss—that place is the bottom. And the bottom in the office

end of this business is a seat at the mailing-desk, with eight dollars every Saturday night.

I can't hand out any ready-made success to you. It would do you no good, and it would do the house harm. There is plenty of room at the top here, but there is no elevator in the building. Starting, as you do, with a good education, you should be able to climb quicker than the fellow who hasn't got it; but there's going to be a time when you begin at the factory when you won't be able to lick stamps as fast as the other boys at the desk. Yet the man who hasn't licked stamps isn't fit to write letters. Naturally, that is the time when knowing whether the pie comes before the ice-cream, and how to run an automobile, isn't going to be of any real use to you.

I simply mention these things because I am afraid your ideas as to the basis on which you are coming with the house have swelled up a little in the East. I can give you a start, but after that you will have to dynamite your way to the front by yourself. It is all with the man. If you gave some fellows a talent wrapped in a napkin to start with in business, they would swap the talent for a gold brick and lose the napkin; and there are others that you could start out with just a napkin, who would set up with it in the dry-goods business in a small way, and then coax the other fellow's talent into it.

I have pride enough to believe that you have the right sort of stuff in you, but I want to see some of it come out. You will never make a good merchant of yourself by reversing the order in which the Lord decreed that we should proceed—learning the spending before the earning end of business. Pay-day is always a month off for the spendthrift, and he is never able to realize more than sixty cents on any dollar that comes to him. But a dollar is worth one hundred and six cents to a good business man, and he never spends the dollar. It's the man who keeps saving up and expenses down that buys an interest in the concern. That is where you are going to find yourself weak if your expense accounts don't lie; and they generally don't lie in that particular way, though Baron Munchausen was the first travelling man, and my drummers' bills still show his influence.

I know that when a lot of young men get off by themselves, some of them think that recklessness with money brands them as good fellows, and that carefulness is meanness. That is the one end of a college education which is pure cussedness;

and that is the one thing which makes nine business men out of ten hesitate to send their boys off to school. But on the other hand, that is the spot where a young man has the chance to show that he is not a lightweight. I know that a good many people say I am a pretty close proposition; that I make every hog which goes through my packing-house give up more lard than the Lord gave him gross weight; that I have improved on Nature to the extent of getting four hams out of an animal which began life with two; but you have lived with me long enough to know that my hand is usually in my pocket at the right time.

Now I want to say right here that the meanest man alive is the one who is generous with money that he has not had to sweat for, and that the boy who is a good fellow at someone else's expense would not work up into first-class fertilizer. That same ambition to be known as a good fellow has crowded my office with second-rate clerks, and they always will be second-rate clerks. If you have it, hold it down until you have worked for a year. Then, if your ambition runs to hunching up all week over a desk, to earn eight dollars to blow on a few rounds of drinks for the boys on Saturday night, there is no objection to your gratifying it; for I will know that the Lord didn't intend you to be your own boss.

You know how I began—I was started off with a kick, but that proved a kick-up, and in the end every one since has lifted me a little bit higher. I got two dollars a week, and slept under the counter, and you can bet I knew just how many pennies there were in each of those dollars, and how hard the floor was. That is what you have got to learn.

I remember when I was on the Lakes, our schooner was passing out through the draw at Buffalo when I saw little Bill Riggs, the butcher, standing up above me on the end of the bridge with a big roast of beef in his basket. They were a little short in the galley on that trip, so I called up to Bill and he threw the roast down to me. I asked him how much, and he yelled back, "About a dollar!" That was mighty good beef, and when we struck Buffalo again on the return trip, I thought I would like a little more of it. So I went up to Bill's shop and asked him for a piece of the same. But this time he gave me a little roast, not near so big as the other, and it was pretty tough and stringy. But when I asked him how much, he answered, "About a dollar." He simply didn't have any sense of values,

and that's the business man's sixth sense. Bill has always been a big, healthy, hard-working man, but to-day he is very, very poor.

The Bills ain't all in the butcher business. I've got some of them right now in my office, but they will never climb over the railing that separates the clerks from the executives. Yet if they would put in half the time thinking for the house that they give up to hatching out reasons why they ought to be allowed to overdraw their salary accounts, I couldn't keep them out of our private offices with a poleaxe, and I wouldn't want to; for they could double their salaries and my profits in a year. But I always lay it down as a safe proposition that the fellow who has to break open the baby's bank toward the last of the week for car-fare isn't going to be any Russell Sage when it comes to trading with the old man's money. He'd punch my bank account as full of holes as a carload of wild Texans would a fool stockman that they'd got in a corner.

Now I know you'll say that I don't understand how it is; that you've got to do as the other fellows do; and that things have changed since I was a boy. There's nothing in it. Adam invented all the different ways in which a young man can make a fool of himself, and the college yell at the end of them is just a frill that doesn't change essentials. The boy who does anything just because the other fellows do it is apt to scratch a poor man's back all his life. He's the chap that's buying wheat at ninety-seven cents the day before the market breaks. They call him "the country" in the market reports, but the city's full of him. It's the fellow who has the spunk to think and act for himself, and sells short when prices hit the high C and the house is standing on its hind legs yelling for more, that sits in the directors' meetings when he gets on toward forty.

We've got an old steer out at the packing-house that stands around at the foot of the runway leading up to the killing-pens, looking for all the world like one of the village fathers sitting on the cracker box before the grocery—sort of sad-eyed, dreamy old cuss—always has two or three straws from his cud sticking out of the corner of his mouth. You never saw a steer that looked as if he took less interest in things. But by and by the boys drive a bunch of steers toward him, or cows maybe, if we're canning, and then you'll see Old Abe move off up that runway, sort of beckoning the bunch after him with that wicked

old stump of a tail of his, as if there was something mighty interesting to steers at the top and something that every Texan and Colorado, raw from the prairies, ought to have a look at to put a metropolitan finish on him. Those steers just naturally follow along up that runway and into the killing-pens. But just as they get to the top, Old Abe, someways, gets lost in the crowd, and he isn't among those present when the gates are closed and the real trouble begins for his new friends.

I never saw a dozen boys together that there wasn't an Old Abe among them. If you find your crowd following him, keep away from it. There are times when it's safest to be lonesome. Use a little common sense, caution and conscience. You can stock a store with those three commodities, when you get enough of them. But you've got to begin getting them young. They ain't catching after you toughen up a bit.

You needn't write me if you feel yourself getting them. The symptoms will show in your expense account. Good-bye ; life's too short to write letters, and New York's calling me on the wire.

Your affectionate father,

JOHN GRAHAM.

Hot Springs,

January 30, 189—

Dear Pierrepont—

I knew right off that I had made a mistake when I opened the enclosed and saw that it was a bill for fifty-two dollars, "for roses sent, as per orders, to Miss Mabel Dashkam". I don't just place Miss Dashkam, but if she's the daughter of old Job Dashkam, on the open Board, I should say, on general principles, that she was a fine girl to let some other fellow marry. The last time I saw her, she inventoried about \$10,000 as she stood—allowing that her diamonds would scratch glass—and that's more capital than any woman

has a right to tie up on her back, I don't care how rich her father is. And Job's fortune is one of that brand which foots up to a million in the newspapers and leaves the heirs in debt to the lawyers who settle the estate.

Of course, I've never had any real experience in this sparking business, except with your Ma ; but I've watched from the other side of the fence while a heap of fellows were getting it, and I should say that marrying a woman like Mabel Dashkam would be the first step toward becoming a grass widower. I'll bet if you'll tell her you're making twelve a week and ain't going to get any more till you earn it, you'll find that you can't push within a mile of her even on a Soo ice-breaker. She's one of those women with a heart like a stock-ticker—it doesn't beat over anything except money.

Of course, you're in no position yet to think of being engaged even, and that's why I'm a little afraid that you may be planning to get married. But a twelve-dollar clerk, who owes fifty-two dollars for roses, needs a keeper more than a wife. I want to say right here that there always comes a time to the fellow who blows fifty-two dollars at a lick on roses when he thinks how many staple groceries he could have bought with the money. After all, there's no fool like a young fool, because in the nature of things he's got a long time to live.

I suppose I'm fanning the air when I ask you to be guided by my judgment in this matter, because, while a young fellow will consult his father about buying a horse, he's cocksure of himself when it comes to picking a wife. Marriages may be made in Heaven, but most engagements are made in the back parlour with the gas so low that a fellow doesn't really get a square look at what he's taking. While a man doesn't see much of a girl's family when he's courting, he's apt to see a good deal of it when he's housekeeping ; and while he doesn't marry his wife's father, there's nothing in the marriage vow to prevent the old man from borrowing money from him, and you can bet if he's old Job Dashkam he'll do it. A man can't pick his own mother, but he can pick his son's mother, and when he chooses a father-in-law who plays the bucket shops, he needn't be surprised if his own son plays the races.

Never marry a poor girl who's been raised like a rich one. She's simply traded the virtues of the poor for the vices of the rich without going long on their good points. To marry for

money or to marry without money is a crime. There's no real objection to marrying a woman with a fortune, but there is to marrying a fortune with a woman. Money makes the mare go, and it makes her cut up too, unless she's used to it and you drive her with a snaffle-bit.

While you are at it, there's nothing like picking out a good-looking wife, because even the handsomest woman looks homely sometimes, and so you get a little variety; but a homely one can only look worse than usual. Beauty is only skin deep, but that's deep enough to satisfy any reasonable man. (I want to say right here that to get any sense out of a proverb I usually find that I have to turn it wrong side out.) Then, too, if a fellow's bound to marry a fool, and a lot of men have to if they're going to hitch up into a well-matched team, there's nothing like picking a good-looking one.

I simply mention these things in a general way, because it seems to me, from the gait at which you're starting off, that you'll likely find yourself roped and branded any day, without quite knowing how it happened, and I want you to understand that the girl who marries you for my money is getting a package of green goods in more ways than one. I think, though, if you really understood what marrying on twelve a week meant, you would have bought a bedroom set instead of roses with that fifty-two you owe.

Speaking of marrying the old man's money by proxy naturally takes me back to my old town in Missouri and the case of Chauncey Witherspoon Hoskins. Chauncey's father was the whole village, barring the railway station and the saloon, and, of course, Chauncey thought that he was something of a pup himself. So he was, but not just the kind that Chauncey thought he was. He stood about five foot three in his pumps, had a nice pinky complexion, pretty wavy hair, and a curly moustache. All he needed was a blue ribbon around his neck to make you call, "Here, Fido," when he came into the room.

Still, I believe he must have been pretty popular with the ladies, because I can't think of him to this day without wanting to punch his head. At the church sociables he used to hop around among them, chipping and chirping like a dicky-bird picking up seed; and he was a great hand to play the piano, and sing saddish, sweetish songs to them. Always said the smooth thing and said it easy. Never had to choke and

swallow to fetch it up. Never stepped through his partner's dress when he began to dance, or got flustered when he brought her refreshments and poured the coffee in her lap to cool instead of in the saucer. We boys who couldn't walk across the floor without feeling that our pants had hiked up till they showed our feet to the knees, and that we were carrying a couple of canvased hams where our hands ought to be, didn't like him; but the girls did. You can trust a woman's taste in everything except men; and it's mighty lucky that she slips up there or we'd pretty nigh all be bachelors. I might add that you can't trust a man's taste in women, either, and that's pretty lucky too, because there are a good many old maids in the world as it is.

One time or another Chauncey lolled in the best room of every house in our town, and we used to wonder how he managed to browse up and down the streets that way without getting into the pound. I never found out till after I married your Ma, and she told me Chauncey's heart secrets. It really wasn't violating any confidence, because he'd told them to every girl in town.

Seems he used to get terribly sad as soon as he was left alone with a girl, and began to hint about a tragedy in his past—something that had blighted his whole life and left him without the power to love again—and lots more slop from the same pail.

Of course, every girl in that town had known Chauncey since he wore short pants, and ought to have known that the nearest to a tragedy he had ever been was when he sat in the top gallery of a Chicago theatre and saw a lot of barnstormers play Othello. But some people, and especially very young people, don't think anything's worth believing unless it's hard to believe.

Chauncey worked along these lines until he was twenty-four, and then he made a mistake. Most of the girls that he had grown up with had married off, and while he was waiting for a new lot to come along, he began to shine up to the widow Sharpless, a powerful, well-preserved woman of forty or thereabouts, who had been born with her eye-teeth cut. He found her uncommon sympathetic. And when Chauncey finally came out of his trance he was the stepfather of the widow's four children.

She was very kind to Chauncey, and treated him like one

of her own sons ; but she was very, very firm. There was no gallivanting off alone, and when they went out in double harness strangers used to annoy him considerable by patting him on the head and saying to his wife : "What a bright-looking chap your son is, Mrs. Hoskins !"

She was almost seventy when Chauncey buried her a while back, and they say that he began to take notice again on the way home from the funeral. Anyway, he crowded his mourning into sixty days—and I reckon there was plenty of room in them to hold all his grief without stretching—and his courting into another sixty. And four months after date he presented his matrimonial papers for acceptance. Said he was tired of this mother-and-son foolishness, and wasn't going to leave any room for doubt this time. Didn't propose to have people sizing his wife up for one of his ancestors any more. So he married Lulu Littlebrown, who was just turned eighteen. Chauncey was over fifty then, and wizened up like a late pippin that has been out overnight in an early frost.

He took Lu to Chicago for the honeymoon, and Mose Greenebaum, who happened to be going up to town for his autumn goods, got into the parlour car with them. By and by the porter came around and stopped beside Chauncey.

"Wouldn't your daughter like a pillow under her head ?" says he.

Chauncey just groaned. Then—"Git, you Senegambian son of darkness !" And the porter just naturally got.

Mose had been taking it all in, and now he went back to the smoking-room and passed the word along to the drummers there. Every little while one of them would lounge up the aisle to Chauncey and ask if he couldn't lend his daughter a magazine, or give her an orange, or bring her a drink. And the language that he gave back in return for these courtesies wasn't at all fitting in a bridegroom. Then Mose had another happy thought, and dropped off at a way station and wired the clerk at the Palmer House.

When they got to the hotel the clerk was on the lookout for them, and Chauncey hadn't more than signed his name before he reached out over his diamond and said : "Ah, Mr. Hoskins, would you like to have your daughter near you ?"

I simply mention Chauncey in passing as an example of the foolishness of thinking you can take any chances with a woman who has really decided that she wants to marry, or that you can

average up matrimonial mistakes. And I want you to remember that marrying the wrong girl is the one mistake that you've got to live with all your life. I think, though, that if you tell Mabel what your assets are, she'll decide she won't be your particular mistake.

Your affectionate father,

JOHN GRAHAM.

## ST. JOHN LUCAS

*Expeditus*

St. John Lucas is a barrister by profession, but his chief interests have always been literary. During the war he was attached to the staff of the British Military Mission to Italy, a country which he knows well and which provides the setting for this entertaining tale of an abbess and a saint.



## EXPEDITUS

### I

CONCERNING the fatness of abbesses ecclesiastical history has much to tell us, and legend has been busy with the same theme. Tertullian, in his melancholy treatise *De Jeuniis*, has a terrible description of the anguish endured by a saintly female of Philadelphia, whose girth was too great to permit her to pass the door of heaven until St. Peter rolled back his sleeves and tugged her in as he would have hauled an overweighted net at Galilee; the learned and severe Aldhelm devotes a page of his *De Laudibus Virginitatis* to the peculiar temptations that beset or are caused by plump persons, with examples that are unquotable; and the strange case of the prioress of the Tor de' Specchi oblates, who flew into a passion and stamped on the floor, which straightway opened (either by act of God or because she was of prodigious bulk) and admitted her with great rapidity to the cellar, is well known to the wise.

That her fall was broken and her death averted by the body of the cellarer, who had observed the feast of St. Martin of Tours by eating the greater part of a goose and drinking much crude wine, has afforded argument to many jolly schoolmen and sophisticated toppers, from the grand Rabelais to the long-winded Redi: and it is rumoured that the curious and erudite author of *The Path to Rome* has written a monograph on the affair. It were, indeed, a nice theme for the speculative, whether fatness in woman has not some eternal co-relation with holiness.

Instances to the contrary are not lacking, such as the wives of some Methodists and Calvinistic men, who are commonly gaunt and bleak, and a certain notable fat nun of Caen, who of pure malice and devilry did immure the present writer for the space of two hours in a nasty and filthy subterranean cell, whither he had descended to gaze on an antique sarcophagus.

And it is true that no one can think of St. Agnes or the Beatrice of Dante as gross in body, and that to the early painters lantern-jaws and attenuated shanks were the very symbols of virtue. Yet the holy women of Raphael were of a type that in middle age attains to an honourable and matronly plumpness, and the prophets and saints of Michelangelo were no bare-bones. But these latter, being for the most part men, are outside the argument, and so for the same reason are the bishops and certain other officers of the Church of England, whose costume is designed to cover that part whereof ample men are most ashamed, namely, the belly, and to display that part wherein they most find glory, namely, the calf of the leg.

## II

Now of all fat women who ever brought honour to a Holy Church and to a profane sex, the abbess of Saint-Ernoul was the most enormous. She moved with the gestures of a hobbled elephant, and her nose and eyes were almost lost behind two vast and rosy cheeks. Yet she was an active woman, observant, and fond of snuff, and she worked with vigour and success amongst the poor. She was greatly beloved by the orthodox and also by many amiable sinners. Of the former, the Archbishop of P—— presented her with a snuff-box, and of the latter, the Bishop of C—— sent her snuff, and Madame la Vicomtesse de N—— kept her supplied with perfumed essence for the bath, which essence all found its way into the house of Master Peter the woodcutter, who had never washed himself in his life.

Pope Leo XIII sent her an extraordinary blessing, and the atheistical and disputatious folk regarded her as a too, too solid pillar of the Church. She had great celebrity. Therefore when the crash came, and all the poor little nuns were driven out of their homes by order of a beneficent and progressive Government, the abbess of Saint-Ernoul was marked down as one of the first victims. She was denounced as a dangerously influential woman, a supporter of ancient ideas, a wily schemer who could extract large sums of money from the rich by methods and for purposes best known to herself. All of which was perfectly true. She had immense influence, for her smile was more persuasive than fifty sermons; she supported the ideas of gentleness and cheerful self-sacrifice, which, as

all the world knows, are terribly rococo ; she was always scheming to make new and nourishing *bouillons* for the sick, and she was a merciless plunderer of the rich for the sake of the poor.

## III

There was a large town near her convent with a lace industry. The mayor of this town called himself an advanced free-thinker, but he was really a very ignorant and vulgar person who was suffering from a surfeit of the ideas of certain people cleverer than himself. He was a meagre man with a double chin (this is always a dangerous combination), and he hated the good abbess with all the capacity of his stupid soul. He accused her before various high officials of obtaining an influence over the girls in the lace factories, and of persuading some of them to enter the convent as lay sisters, and to continue their work within its walls ; which was true. He also accused her of selling the lace which they made to certain establishments in Paris which supplied the less virtuous Parisians with extremely ornamental underclothing, and of thus encouraging immorality and the lusts of the flesh ; which was a lie, as he knew right well.

He succeeded in obtaining a writ of ejection, or some such document, from the Minister of the Interior, and he made a speech in the city which alluded to the rights of man, to liberty, and to several other abstract affairs, concluding it with an impassioned demand that all pure-minded reformers and moral progressivists should help him in the noble task of turning a colony of dangerous women neck and crop out of their lair. The pure-minded reformers obeyed him to a man. There were about three dozen of them. The mayor put on his tricolour scarf, added a few policemen to the band of disciples, and set off for the convent, amid the consternation of the honest market-women and the satirical ululations of many small boys.

When the procession reached the convent gate it found the abbess waiting to receive it. The mayor struck a majestic attitude, inflated his chest, read the lucid prose of the Minister of the Interior, and wound up with some original remarks of a triumphant and hectoring nature. To this the abbess, whose blood was up to a height most dangerous for anyone of her

habit of body, replied that he was a miserable liar, and that she intended to stay in the convent for as long as she chose to do so. The mayor indicated the policemen (who looked remarkably sheepish, for the abbess had known them all ever since they were born), and regretted that he should be compelled to use force.

The abbess, with a magnificent gesture, invited him to do his worst. At the same moment the under-gardener, a poor, fond peasant who cared nothing for the dignity of mayors but worshipped the abbess, directed a powerful jet of water from the convent fire-hose full against the mayor's tricolour scarf. The mayor collapsed abruptly, and lay struggling in the flood like a stranded Leviathan, and when the police advanced to arrest the under-gardener he bowled them over like ninepins, shouting joyously as he performed this horrid act. He then turned his attention to the thirty-odd pure-minded reformers, who withdrew in disorder. Meanwhile the abbess, with an agility that was certainly lent her by Heaven, waded gallantly forth, snatched up the document, which had fallen with the mayor, tore it in half, and sent the fragments sailing down the wind that blew coldly on the saturated moralists. Then she returned to the convent, and the gardener remained on the watch with his hose at the window.

## IV

The infuriated and sodden mayor went back to the city and lay in bed for two days. During this period he was visited by the commandant of the garrison, and when he had recovered from his cold he set out for the convent accompanied by twenty soldiers, half a dozen engineers, and a machine-gun. In justice to the mayor, we must add that the last dreadful item of the expedition was intended for the under-gardener. The soldiers were pelted by little boys with various missiles, both vegetable and mineral, and cheered by a vagrant imbecile, who was arrested. They approached the convent in good order, but when they had prepared the machine-gun for action they discovered that the front door was open and the abbess and nuns had disappeared, taking with them everything of any value. The soldiers smoked cigarettes in the chapel (by request of the mayor), broke a few windows with their bayonets, and marched back to barracks. In this way, after

five hundred years of error, the foundation of Saint-Ernoul was finally abolished by the intrepid pioneers of a new age.

The abbess, knowing well that she would be forcibly driven from the convent after her defiance of the mayor, had contrived to place most of her nuns in various communities which had not yet been dispersed by the Government. She herself was the last to leave the convent, but when she had seen all its few valuable possessions safely packed and sent to a great ecclesiastic in Paris who was an old friend, she departed late one afternoon, accompanied by three sisters whose names were three sweet symphonies. She did not forget the undergardener, but obtained employment for him in a place that was sufficiently distant from the revengeful mayor. Finally, she drove with her three handmaidens to a small station about two miles distant from the convent, and took a slow train to the capital.

The three handmaidens were called Ursula, Margaret, and Veronica. Ursula was plump and cheerful, with pink cheeks and large blue eyes; Margaret was dark, with a pensive and gentle face, although she was really extremely practical and could do book-keeping by double entry. Veronica was the eldest; she was about forty-five, with sandy hair and a small moustache. She was sensible and faithful and slightly sarcastic. They were all intensely devoted to the abbess, and wept copiously when they left the convent. The abbess did not weep, but there was a nervous tremor in her third chin.

It was late in the evening when they reached the capital. The younger nuns were bewildered by the noise of the station, but the abbess remained calm and majestic. When she became engaged in an altercation with a profane cabman who alleged her bulk as the reason for his refusing her offer of employment, she spoke with such dignity and point that the cabman removed his hat and demanded her blessing. It is true that he adhered to his refusal. At length a driver who had an adventurous soul was discovered. The abbess, after a sharp struggle, entered his cab, taking Sister Veronica with her, whilst Ursula and Margaret followed in another vehicle. The latter pair were greatly alarmed by the brilliant streets, the crowds, and the strange exhortations of the driver to his horse; but the abbess waved a reassuring hand to them at every street corner. Eventually they were desposited at the garden-gate of a large orphanage on the outskirts of the city, where they received a

most affectionate welcome from the Mother Superior and the sisters in charge. The three nuns were tired and rather frightened, but the abbess had recovered her good spirits, talked and laughed incessantly, and simulated a keen anxiety as to whether she would be the largest orphan of the community. She *was* the largest orphan.

## V

The orphanage for some reason escaped the attention of the Minister of the Interior, so that the four good women abode there in peace for several weeks. The abbess had many visitors; she was a member of an old aristocratic family, and had several relatives in the capital. Amongst them was a certain Monsignor B——, an old gentleman with beautiful silver hair and a thin face that was always puckered into a humorous smile. He was a great admirer of the abbess, who was his first cousin, and never missed an opportunity of coming to see her. Like the abbess, he had the fatal quality, so sanely detested by Ministers of Interiors, of inspiring affection wherever he went, and all the orphans adored him. He was a monomaniac—obsessed continually with a wish to make everyone that he met as happy as possible, and he succeeded frequently. The anti-clerical papers denounced him every week as a dangerous intriguer; he subscribed secretly to all of them, and read the denunciations with immense delight to the abbess in the orphanage garden.

It did not take this excellent Monsignor B—— very long to discover that the abbess, although she seemed to be in good spirits and was always making bad jokes, was really pining for the convent which she had been compelled to leave. She liked the orphanage, but of course she was only a guest within its walls, and therefore her capacity for wise government was rusting unused. He discovered also that she had a burning ambition—an ambition which she had flung aside whilst she was in her convent, but one which had returned with greater intensity now that she had leisure. She longed to see Rome. She admitted it herself in the course of their many conversations, and she stated frankly that the yearning had its profane side. “Oh, of course I’m dying to see the Holy Father and St. Peter’s and the house of the Blessed Cecilia and the Tre Fontane,” she explained to him. “I’ve a map and

a Murray, and I know all the churches as well as if I'd knelt in every one of them. But I'm not going to pretend that I should pass by all those terrible, beautiful pagan things with my nose in the air. I should climb to the top of the Colosseum" (Monsignor B—— looked ghastly), "and sit in Hadrian's Villa and poke about those wonderful tombs in the Campagna for all the world as if my name was Washington and I came from Chicago. I'd go first to St. Peter's, and then to the Scala Santa and the Ara Coeli and San Clemente and the Catacombs, but I'd keep a whole day for the Palatine, and no one should come with me."

Monsignor B—— shook his head and smiled.

"You would shock them all dreadfully," he said. "You know what the attitude of the Holy Church has been for centuries with regard to all those very interesting relics of the pagans."

"If it had only been an attitude I wouldn't have minded," said the abbess with vigour. "Heaven forgive me! I find it hard to forgive some of us for the things we did. The Holy Fathers, too! Urban the Fifth selling stones from the Colosseum, and the Farnese ruining the Arch of Titus, and Urban the Eighth melting down the Pantheon roof. Don't shake your head; he did!"

"*Quod non fecerunt barbari fecere Barberini,*" quoted Monsignor B——. "It is perfectly true. Also he issued a bull excommunicating those who took snuff in the churches of Seville."

"Ah! In church that becomes serious," said the abbess.

Monsignor B—— took a pinch from her box. "How would you like," he said, very quietly, "how would you like to go to Rome this year?"

The abbess glowed visibly at the suggestion.

"How would I like it?" she repeated with rapture, and then she descended to reality. "My dear good man," she said, "it's about as likely as a flight to the moon."

"You have leisure this year for the first time in your life," said her friend.

She shook her head. "I have leisure but I am not free," she answered. "I have received my orders; I must remain here."

"Hum," remarked Monsignor B——, and he began to talk botany. He took leave of her shortly afterwards. She spent the afternoon making linseed poultices, but in spite of

the engrossing nature of this self-inflicted penance she could not get the thought of Rome out of her head, and this made her almost angry with Monsignor B——.

## VI

He came to see her three days later, and, as usual, they walked together in the garden. The intelligent face of Monsignor B—— wore a mysterious expression, and he smiled frequently at nothing in particular. He seemed pre-occupied, too, for when they met one of the orphans he offered her, instead of his usual pat on the head, a pinch of snuff from the abbess's box, which he happened to be holding. The poor child was terribly scandalized, and retired to report the matter to the Mother Superior. Even the tolerant abbess was surprised, and demanded why he was so oddly absent-minded.

He did not answer, but after a moment he turned to her and asked an extraordinary question.

"Did you ever," he said, "when you were young, think of becoming an ambassadress?"

"Do you mean did I ever contemplate marriage with an ambassador? Certainly not!" replied the abbess with asperity.

Monsignor B—— smiled. "That was not quite what I meant," he explained. "Did you never feel that it might be your task—your duty—to run on errands for the Holy Church?"

The abbess still stared at him.

"I was taught to make myself generally useful," she answered, "but I must confess that I never could run. At least, not since I was twenty-five. It was then that I ran after the burglar who broke into the refectory. But I didn't overtake him. That was the last time I tried, and I hope you don't want me to try now."

Monsignor B—— chuckled. "I don't want you to try, but the Holy Church does," he said.

"The Holy Church!" echoed the abbess.

He nodded slowly. "The Holy Church knows that you are one of the best of her servants, and she doesn't like to see you pining for some good work to do. So she has arranged for you to run on a little errand. The little errand is the organization of a new convent for countrywomen of ours."

"Mercy!" cried the abbess, with an unmistakable thrill of joy in her voice. "And where is it?"

Monsignor B—— held out his hand for the snuff-box, took a large pinch for each nostril, inhaled them slowly, and with equal deliberation wiped away the superfluous grains with a huge red cotton handkerchief. At last he spoke.

"It is—let me see—to the best of my belief—if my memory is not deceiving me, it is in—what's the name of the place?—somewhere in Italy—Rome. Yes, decidedly, it is in Rome."

The abbess stared at him keenly for at least half a minute, and then she threw up her hands and stood in an attitude of ecstasy, murmuring something which he could not hear. Afterwards she beamed at him like a tropic sunset.

"Oh, you delicious man!" she said.

"You'll go?" asked Monsignor B—— with a wicked intonation of astonishment.

"Won't I!" said the abbess. Her voice was the voice of a girl of twenty, but there were tears in her eyes as she spoke.

## VII

Now of the doings of the great and holy abbess in the great and holy city of Rome, the diary kept by Sister Veronica contains the chronicle. For Sister Veronica was chosen to accompany her, being the senior of the three handmaidens, and a wise and practical woman who was not afraid of foreigners and tourists and all such trash.

Arrived (says the first entry in the diary) June the 1st. It is very warm. A long journey; the train went up and down mountains. The R.M. [Reverend Mother] pleased with the milk of Switzerland, and with two English children who conversed with her in her own language. ✠ Mary, Mother of Heaven, have pity on all heretics. ✠ Drove in a carriage through streets to a hill called Aventine. The smell of Rome is strange. The new convent large and very dirty. The garden full of roses and little beasts, with a view over the city that is beautiful.

*June 2.* Very sunny. There are little beasts in my bed, but not the worst kind. The R.M. at work all day with arrangements for the new convent. She regrets that she is ignorant of the Italian language, but it is of no consequence

since all who come here speak our own. His Eminence the Cardinal R—— visited the R.M. He laughs much. Bought six scrubbing-brushes from a man with a cart full of ironware and crockery. Twenty-five beggars slept in the cloister. Fed them in the morning; they had bad manners.

*June 3.* ✠ Went with the R.M. to receive the Holy Father's Blessing. ✠ Almost too nervous to open my eyes. The Holy Father spoke much to the R.M. It is regrettable that on no occasion can she refrain from laughter. ✠ Mary, Mother of Heaven, implant the spirit of charity in my breast, so that, remembering my own weakness, I may not be censorious of the defects of others. ✠ All the bristles came out of all the scrubbing-brushes.

*June 4.* The convent now cleaned and ready. Paid the cleaners, who afterwards made a riot in the cloister. Visit from the Papal Secretary, Cardinal M——. He laughs like a boy when the R.M. talks. His suggestions were practical, and I told him of the drains. The garden is shady, but the flies are a trouble to the R.M. The gardener, when paid, joined the riot in the cloister.

*June 5.* Visited St. Peter's and most of the other churches in Rome. Very tired. The R.M. not tired. Two sisters arrived from Brittany.

*June 6.* ✠ Sunday. ✠

*June 7.* Visited more churches.

*June 8.* More churches. Two sisters from Chambéry.

*June 9.* Churches.

*June 10.* „

*June 11.* Extremely hot. The R.M. visited churches alone. Rebuked by R.M. for curiosity when I asked their names.

*June 12.* Sister Sophia has jaundice. R.M. visiting churches alone.

And so on. There is a gap in the diary between the 12th and 16th of June, when Veronica was probably nursing Sister Sophia. The entries after the latter date are for the most part very brief:

*June 17.* Sophia able to sit in garden, but complained of flies, and afraid of little beasts. Drove with R.M. to the Tre

Fontane. ✠ SS. Paul, Bernard, Vincent, and Anastasius, *orate pro nobis*. ✠

June 18. Much beset by beggars in the streets. R.M. told me to say *avanti* to them, which means "go away, avaunt". When I say it, they march in procession in front of me. Has R.M. mistaken the word?

June 19. Mother Superior arrived. Italian, but speaks our language. R.M. explained everything to her. Seems sensible, but rolls her eyes. Cardinal R—— brought his sister, the Princess V——, to see the convent. A scented woman. Sophia sick again in the evening.

June 20. ✠ Sunday. ✠ High Mass in St. John Lateran. Our last Sunday in Rome. R.M. in low spirits.

June 21. Very hot. Sophia very sick all day. R.M. visited churches. Letter came in the evening from the Princess V—— offering R.M. the use of her villa on the hills for a fortnight. R.M. consulted with me whether it would be good for Sophia to have a change.

June 22. Sophia very weak. R.M. accepted the offer of Princess V——.

June 23. Intensely hot. R.M. out all day. Returned exhausted.

June 24. Left Rome with R.M. and Sophia.

At this point, unfortunately, the diary ceases, but the sojourn made by the three holy women at the Princess V——'s villa is a matter of ecclesiastical history.

### VIII

The villa, which stood on the slopes of the Alban Hills, between Frascati and Marino, was a square white edifice which had no particular pretensions to beauty. It possessed, however, a delightful garden with a fine view of the Campagna and of Rome. The custodian, who lived in a tiny lodge near the gates, was a cheerful personage called Marcantonio Beffi. He wore a red shirt and had princely manners. His wife, Gina, who equalled him in amiability though she was less picturesque, looked after the domestic economy of the villa and cooked simple and excellent meals for the nuns. Both Marcantonio and Gina had learnt French from the Princess's maid. The air of the hills proved beneficial almost instantly

to the suffering Sophia; and the abbess, whom immense excursions into antiquity had greatly exhausted, became exuberant with energy. Veronica wrangled incessantly with Gina, whose culinary methods, though they were immensely successful in the result, were startling in process.

It was a pleasant existence, but after about a week Sophia had recovered completely, and therefore the abbess and Veronica had nothing to do, and found their time began to pass very slowly. The abbess gazed wistfully at Rome, and thought of all the interesting relics of the past which she had omitted to see; Veronica's temper became uncertain, and she made sarcastic allusions to Sophia, who displayed the hearty appetite of convalescence.

One morning, however, something happened which gave a new direction to their activity. The abbess, who by this time knew some Italian, was in the garden talking to Marcantonio when a small and ragged urchin entered. He wore a huge wideawake hat which completely hid his face from the sight of anyone taller than himself, and he carried a flask of wine which was presumably destined for Marcantonio's luncheon.

The abbess spoke to the urchin, and the urchin took off his ridiculous hat with a flourish. At the sight of his face the abbess started; it was scarlet, vividly inflamed, and covered with small protuberances. She examined him closely and found that her first suspicions were correct. The urchin was suffering from a hearty attack of measles. He admitted that his head was aching violently, and that, when he walked, the landscape and all its details danced a mad tarantella in front of him. Then he sat on a flower-pot and wept many self-pitying tears, whereat the ruthless Marcantonio grinned.

"He can walk; he is not so ill as he believes," he said, standing well to windward of the boy, however. "Down there, around Marino, they have all caught it—the *rosolia*—and some of the people have died—even those of mature age. But what can you expect, blessed lady? They herd together like pigs in the slush." And he threw a self-satisfied glance towards his own neat abode, whence the voice of Gina arose in an outburst of unmelodious song.

The abbess looked thoughtfully at the sufferer for a moment; then she took his hand, led him into the villa, and put him to bed. That afternoon she walked with Veronica

to the village whence he had come, and found that Marcantonio had scarcely exaggerated the state of affairs. An epidemic of measles was raging, and also, there was a dangerous low fever which attacked the victims just when they seemed to be convalescent. The two plagues were not confined to the village, but had spread all through the district that lies about the lake of Albano. The inhabitants of this district were for the most part extremely poor, and had notions of hygiene which were worse than rudimentary. Sister Veronica made the acquaintance of several other species of little beasts. The good abbess, undaunted by such drawbacks and by her own scanty knowledge of Italian, at once set to work—alleviating the condition of those who were sick, and teaching those who were well to take the obvious precautions against infection. Sometimes she made Marcantonio come with her as interpreter; Marcantonio hated the office, but nevertheless obeyed. Veronica became active and contented, and Sophia sulked because she was not allowed to share in the work, but might only nurse the small boy at the villa.

“We have only a week,” said the abbess; “but miracles may happen in a week.”

A day or two later something happened which, if not a miracle, seemed at any rate an intervening of Providence on behalf of the good work. A letter came from the Mother Superior of the orphanage where the abbess and nuns had taken shelter after they had left Saint-Ernoul, bringing the news that the Minister of the Interior had swooped upon her domain, and that therefore she was unable to offer any further hospitality to the abbess. The letter was forwarded to Cardinal R——, and by return of post a note came from his sister begging the abbess to regard the villa as her own for so long as she wished.

The abbess rejoiced, and pushed on her work with renewed vigour. The Princess V—— sent her doctor—a brilliant young man, who dressed very smartly and had no particular love for religious orders or squalid peasants. But he promptly fell in love with the abbess, and it is rumoured that he neglected all kinds of rich and fashionable neurotics in Rome for her sake. In spite of this combination of energy and genius, the epidemic increased; there were more deaths, and the poor people grew despondent and gave themselves up for lost as soon as they felt slightly unwell. The abbess

toiled and toiled until she grew perceptibly thinner, curtailing her sleep and tramping from cottage to cottage with food and medicine; Veronica was possessed by a devouring devil of energy, and the young doctor soiled innumerable specimens of exquisite linen in the dirt of plague-stricken hovels. But though the measles abated, the fever assumed a more severe form as the heat increased. At last, one evening when three children and an old woman had died, the doctor, who was in consultation with the abbess at the villa, admitted that he began to share the general despondency.

"We should have an army of workers, Madame," he said, "though, certainly, you have an army in yourself. The poor people are becoming panic-stricken; they believe that the Madonna delle Grazie of Marino has frowned upon them. They are strangely superstitious—I demand pardon—easily depressed. The procession of the Holy Picture has so far failed to reassure them."

"We must send for more quinine," said the abbess.

"All the quinine in the world can't save people who are certain that they are on the brink of death," said the doctor, "and imagine that their patron saints have forsaken them. Apropos, there is one thing that they are always demanding."

"What is it?" asked the abbess.

The doctor laughed quickly and glanced at her with a tiny glint of malice in the full, intensely black eyes. He brushed the sleeve of his smart flannel suit with the back of his hand and twisted his wiry moustache.

"A relic of some holy person," he answered. "Or, better still, several relics. It appears that there are few in the district, and that these have not proved very—efficacious." He smiled at the abbess, who looked solemn and nodded thoughtfully.

"As you know, dear Madame," he said, "I know nothing of such things. I am concerned only with the practical side of the healer's art." And he bowed half-ironically to her.

The abbess regarded him sternly, and then her face puckered into a reluctant smile.

"You may be an infidel," she said gruffly, "but at any rate you're a very kind infidel. I've seen you at work." And when she had spoken the young doctor suddenly lost all his perkiness and ironical swagger and looked like an embarrassed boy.

"I beg your pardon," he said after a moment, "and I advise you to obtain some relics from Rome."

"I shall go there to-morrow," said the abbess.

And on the next day she went. Before departing she warned Veronica to expect a box containing relics and to make inquiries at the post-office if it did not arrive within forty-eight hours. For she had determined to pass two days in Rome in order to enlist the sympathy of certain influential persons on behalf of her poor people.

When she reached the city she drove at once to the Vatican and explained the whole affair to Cardinal R——. His Eminence was extremely sympathetic, and despatched a messenger to some address which the abbess did not overhear. Whilst they were awaiting his return the Princess V—— was announced. This scented but kindly woman was delighted to see the abbess, asked all sorts of questions about the poor *contadini*, and insisted that the holy woman was to sleep for two nights in her palace. The abbess had intended to stay at the convent, but eventually she accepted the princess's invitation. Then the messenger returned, bearing a large wooden box which contained many holy bones, fragments of hair, and something in a bottle which proved to be a toe-nail. The Cardinal expatiated on the origin and the merit of the relics, and even whilst he did so the abbess nailed up the box, corded it, sealed it, and addressed it to Sister Veronica. She intended to send explanations and instructions that evening. The messenger took the box to the post-office, and the abbess departed on her round of visits. She had only paid three when a remarkable event happened. The day was very hot, the abbess was overwrought with nursing and late hours. As she was descending the steps of the Trinità de' Monti she fainted. She recovered consciousness immediately, and was assisted into a carriage by some sympathetic passers-by. But when she reached the palace of Princess V—— she was too ill to do anything but go to bed, and far too ill to write to Veronica.

## IX

At Grottaferrata, half-way between Frascati and Marino, dwelt an aged and very surly man named Angelo Grazioli. He was a professional beggar, and earned a decent income by

making himself a nuisance to all the tourists who visited the district. This venerable rogue existed in extreme squalor, but it was believed by his neighbours that he had a comfortable sum invested in Government securities. He lived with his daughter, a grim lady of some forty-five years ; they quarrelled incessantly.

Shortly before the arrival of the abbess, Angelo Grazioli fell sick of a fever, and took to his bed, where he alternately bemoaned his imminent demise and reviled his daughter, who did not believe that he was really ill, and called him a lazy old fool. He became rapidly worse, and when the abbess and the doctor visited him, they had scarcely the faintest hope of his recovery. Marcantonio shared their forebodings, but was resigned. "The old Angelo has orders to march," he informed everyone whom he met. "He doesn't like it, but it is the will of God, and certainly he was a very great rogue."

On the day after the abbess went to Rome, it seemed that Angelo was about to obey the orders mentioned by Marcantonio. Sister Veronica sat by his bedside all the morning, and his daughter, scared at last, wept copiously in the background. About four o'clock in the afternoon, however, he rallied slightly, and when she had done everything that was possible, Veronica seized the opportunity of returning to the villa for some medicine. When she arrived, she found Sister Sophia drooping in ecstatic contemplation over a large box.

"Dear Veronica," said Sophia, "the holy relics have come. I recognize the handwriting of the Reverend Mother, and already a heavenly fragrance has spread through the house."

Veronica inspected the box. She, too, recognized the handwriting of the abbess on the label. At the other end of the box was another label, and on it was printed in large letters the one word SPEDITO. Veronica's experience of Italian parcels was small. She stared at the word and wondered what it meant.

"We had better open it," she said. They took off the lid. Inside they found the holy bones and the bottle containing a toe-nail. Kneeling, they touched the relics reverently. But though they searched in every corner of the box, they found nothing to tell them the names of the original owner or owners of these glorious fragments. Veronica was much perplexed ; she was convinced that the abbess would not have forgotten

such an important matter. Sophia was nearly sure that the object in the bottle belonged to a certain holy man of the fourth century who was famous for allowing his finger-nails and toe-nails to grow exceedingly long. But Veronica was scornful of her theories, and became, indeed, quite cross.

"It's impossible to go down to the sick people and tell them that these bones belong to so-and-so when really they belong to someone quite different," she said, "and if we say that we don't know whose bones any of them are, they won't have any faith in them. They'll think they belong to some saint who takes no interest in the district."

"Then we must wait until the Reverend Mother returns," said Sophia.

"I don't want to wait," said Veronica. "I want to take them to Angelo Grazioli this very evening. There is a fine chance of a miracle. Oh, there must be a name somewhere!"

She turned over the lid of the box. Then she uttered an exclamation of surprise and joy. "Look!" she cried.

She was pointing to the large label.

"How blind we were!" she said. "That is the name of the saint."

Sophia peered at the label. "Spedito," she spelled slowly. "Is that really the name?"

"No, of course it's not, foolish one," retorted Veronica. "S stands for saint. Pedito is his name. Saint Pedito. It's clear enough."

"I don't seem to remember him," murmured Sophia.

"You are very ignorant young woman, and I am a very ignorant old one," said Veronica. "Who are we that we should presume to remember all the glorious names in the calendar? And Pedito is without doubt the Italian way of pronouncing the name of some saint whom we know well under another title—possibly the blessed Saint Peter himself."

"Ah! I understand," said Sophia, looking hopelessly befogged.

"Whoever he is," continued Veronica triumphantly, "he was very holy, or the Reverend Mother would never have sent his portions. And the wax is sealed with the seal of an Eminence—you can see the hat above the shield. And now pack up the box for Marcantonio to carry. I am going to the dispensary to make medicine for the old Angelo."

Sophia obeyed, and as soon as the medicine was prepared

they summoned Marcantonio. He entered with his hat in his hand, grinning cheerfully.

"The holy relics have arrived," said Veronica.

Marcantonio dropped on one knee and crossed himself. Then he rose and gazed with great reverence at the box.

"Ah!" he said. "And what may be the name of the glorious defunct?"

"Saint Pedito," answered Veronica.

Marcantonio repeated the words thoughtfully. "I cannot recall the name, but I am only a poor ignorant sinner," he confessed. "No doubt Gina will know it. Gina is very wise concerning saints, and is always rebuking me for a fool in such matters." He went to the window, made a trumpet of his hands, and shouted "Gina!" There was an answering cry from the garden, and in another moment Gina appeared. Her bare arms smelt powerfully of onions.

"What do you desire, blessed ladies?" she asked.

"Gina, my beloved one," said Marcantonio, "do you know a saint called Saint Pedito?"

Gina surveyed him scornfully.

"Saint Pedito!" she cried. "If I know him! Only a fool would be ignorant of so holy a man; a healer, a prophet, a martyr, a worker of miracles! Was he not the patron saint of my paternal aunt and of my mother's mother! Know him, indeed!"

Marcantonio beamed with pride.

"You see, blessed ladies, she knows him. She knows them all. There is not a saint in the Calendar of whom she is ignorant. In that box, my Gina," he continued, "you see the bones of the blessed and glorious Saint Pedito. For whom be praise *in sæcula sæculorum*, Amen." Gina crossed herself and contemplated the relics.

"You spoke of him as a healer, Gina," said Veronica; "do you know what diseases he was especially fond of healing?"

"Mumps, measles, toothache, malaria, typhoid, boils, rheumatism, colic, and the itch," answered Gina, enumerating, without a second's hesitation, the ailments with which she was most familiar. Veronica and Sophia rejoiced greatly, and intimated to Marcantonio that they were ready to start. Marcantonio picked up the box, balanced it on his shoulder, and strode out. The liar went back to her onions.

As they walked towards Grottaferrata, Veronica noticed that a cool and healthful wind was blowing across the Campagna, and, later, that the air in the village seemed fresher than she had ever known it.

## X

When they reached the hovel of Angelo Grazioli the daughter met them at the door, and with much wailing informed them that the old man was already *in extremis*. They found him sitting up in bed, gasping for breath and rolling his eyes terribly. Sister Sophia sank to her knees and began to recite the prayers for the dying, but Marcantonio took a less despondent view, addressing the old man cheerfully, and indeed gaily.

“Let us have no more of that groaning, you old rascal,” he said, “for here is a blessed saint come on purpose to give you one more chance of mending your ways and living in decency. Behold the relics of the ever-blessed and glorious San Pedito, prophet and martyr.”

The old man’s gasps ceased. “I never heard of him,” he said sullenly, glaring at the relics.

“Which only shows,” said the irrepressible Marcantonio, “what a besotted old ignoramus you are. Any person of ordinary education and piety knows that he was the patron saint of all holy women; that he was not only a prophet and martyr but a healer, a worker of miracles, when called on to intervene in bad cases of mumps, measles, malaria, toothache, typhoid, boils, colic, and the itch. Am I not right, blessed ladies? So touch the relics and try to repent your long career of roguery.”

And after this eloquent exordium Sister Veronica brought the relics one by one to the bedside.

Now whether the bones and the hair and the toe-nail which were attributed to the late Saint Pedito had really belonged to some person of extraordinary and contagious virtue, or whether the cool wind that blew across the Campagna brought a healing influence—on this vexed question it is not the province of the present historian to decide. The abbess had her opinion and the doctor had his, and they did not agree. It is sufficient to chronicle the hard fact that as soon as Angelo had touched the relics his condition began to improve. He slept, he was

able to take nourishment, he ceased to anticipate death, and he swore more heartily than ever at his daughter. On the next day the doctor pronounced him out of danger, and in a week he was once more annoying travellers on the Appian Way.

He displayed no very marked symptoms of gratitude for the miracle that had been accomplished by the relics ; but his daughter, who was pious though cantankerous, conceived a fervent admiration for Saint Pedito, and at once spread the news of his virtues throughout the district. During the three days when the abbess lay ill in the palace of Princess V—— the relics were borne by Veronica and Sophia to every sick-bed that it was possible for them to reach, and in every case, whether it was one of fever or measles or any other of the unpleasant diseases enumerated by Gina, the patient was soon on the mend. The fame of Saint Pedito spread far and wide over the Campagna ; processions of the devout came from Tivoli, Palestrina, Subiaco, and Segni ; a lame beggar who dwelt on the sea coast was brought on a litter, and subsequently walked all the way back to Ostia, singing and rejoicing. The drivers of oil-carts and wine-carts were voluble in praise of the saint and carried his fame to Rome, and very soon the priests in the churches of Trastevere were harassed with inquiries as to why there were no altars dedicated to so holy a martyr and healer. When the story reached the Vatican is unknown, but the abbess heard in forty-eight hours after the miracle of old Angelo, on the very day when she was packing her carpet bag to return to the villa. She uttered a brief but emphatic exclamation and took the first train to Frascati.

Veronica met her at the gates of the garden. One glance at her was enough to tell the abbess that she was in a state of religious ecstasy that bordered on delirium. The abbess assumed her sternest expression.

“Veronica,” she said, “you have done a dreadful thing.”

Veronica stared at her.

“I, Reverend Mother?” she cried in amazement. Then her voice became inspired, rhapsodical. “I have done a wonderful, wonderful thing,” she chanted, “a thing that shall never be forgotten, a deed of glory. I have brought back a saint to the earth, and he has healed the sick and caused the lame to walk. And I did it, I, poor Veronica ! Not unto me be

the glory." She gathered breath for a new outburst, but the abess cut her short.

"Calm yourself," she said, "don't be hysterical. You know perfectly well that there is no such saint as Saint Pedito. He is an invention, a forgery. You made him up. What on earth possessed you?"

Veronica's face became ghastly. "No such saint!" she cried. "Is that true, Reverend Mother?"

"Perfectly true," said the abess, taking snuff. "And you know it. I'm afraid that you are mad. What made you invent that particular name? Why didn't you call the relics by the name of a real saint?"

"I call Heaven—and Sister Sophia—to witness that the name is the name written by you on the box!" cried Veronica. "We could find nothing inside to tell us whom the holy relics belonged to, but at last we remembered the cover. Ah, Reverend Mother, don't look at me with such eyes! What has happened? What have I done?"

The abess sat down on a garden seat. Her face was seamed with wonderful lines. For a long while she could not speak. "You have done nothing, my dear Veronica, nothing," she said, "except that you have created an active, miraculous saint out of a—a luggage-label." And then she laughed so convulsively that Veronica thought she was about to die.

Veronica did not laugh. She was pallid with dismay. "Then whose were the bones?" she cried.

The abess conquered her laughter and wiped her eyes.

"They were nobody's in particular," she said. "They came from the catacombs, and certainly belonged to some very holy person. Oh dear, oh dear! And now let us think of what has to be done."

## XI

It was a difficult question, for even as they sat there the fame of Saint Pedito was spreading like wildfire and the good people of Marino and Grattaferrata were planning a jollification in his honour. There was a crowd of rejoicing peasants at the villa gate that evening, and Marcantonio, to its huge delight, fired salvos to the glory of the saint from the small brass cannon on the terrace. To explain to all these happy people that Pedito was a fraud—that he had never had any

bones, never existed—seemed impossible ; either they would refuse to believe the explanation or there would be a grand riot and the Holy Church would be discredited. The abess hesitated for several days, during which Saint Pedito accomplished miracles of the utmost splendour—not limiting his attentions to human beings, but including oxen and horses in the fold of his beneficent influence. Votive offerings to him were hung all about the exterior walls of the villa garden, and the local poet composed *strambotti* in his honour which everyone sang. Meanwhile the healthful wind continued to blow and was acclaimed as the *venticello di San Pedito*—a title which it bears to this day.

At last the abess could no longer bear the strain of conscious duplicity and went to Rome, where she poured the whole story into the astonished ears of Cardinal R——. He listened gravely to her, and when she had ceased to speak he remained lost in thought for some moments. Then he looked up at her.

“What do you propose to do, my sister ?” he asked.

The abess made eloquent gestures with her fat hands. “I came to your Eminence for advice,” she said. “I’m at my wits’ end. If we take away their saint we shall take away their faith in the holy relics ; yet we can’t let him go on. He’s not a real saint, and all the honour that the real saints ought to have is bestowed on him. I give it up ; I feel beaten. It’s the first time in my life.”

The Cardinal was again deep in thought.

“After all,” he murmured, “why shouldn’t we let him go on—as you phrase it, my sister ?”

The abess looked scandalized.

“Eminence !” she cried.

He held up a long thin hand.

“Wait a moment,” he said. “Saint Pedito has worked miracles ; how do we know that the invention of his name was not a miracle ; that perhaps there really was some saint of that name—or something very like it—whose existence has unfortunately been forgotten ? Eh, there used to be so many good persons in this bad world, my sister !”

The abess stared at him.

“Your Eminence really thinks it possible . . . ?” she said.

The Cardinal smiled brilliantly. “The whole affair is very wonderful and mysterious,” he said. “If there is no

saint of that name there certainly ought to be. At any rate, it will be worth while to make inquiries. I will give instructions ; meanwhile . . .” He paused.

“Meanwhile ?” echoed the abbess.

“Meanwhile, say nothing,” said the Cardinal. “The whole affair wears too divine an aspect to admit of human interference—for the present.”

So the abbess said nothing.

But how the Cardinal set a scholar to work in various libraries, and how a scholar discovered that a certain Roman soldier called Expeditus, who lived in the third century of our era, became a Christian and died a martyr in the Colosseum, being slain of lions, and how an expert osteologist recognized the marks of lions’ teeth on the bones which have accomplished so many miracles—are not these things written in the official account of the saint’s canonization ?

He was established on such a definitely historical basis that even the abbess ceased to have any doubt that Veronica’s misreading of the label was divinely prompted, and Veronica is quite convinced that mystic fire burnt all about the word when she first beheld it. She gives herself tremendous airs over the whole business. But if the abbess had not been a very fat woman, and therefore, as we proved at the outset of this history, extremely holy and given to charitable works, who shall say if the *contadini* would have ever conquered their epidemic, if the noses of the other saints would have been put so sadly out of joint, or if Saint Pedito or Spedito would have ever been rescued from the limbo of forgotten virtue in order to send prayers to Heaven so expeditiously that they overtook others which had started long before? *Palmam qui meruit ferat.*



## ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

### *Colleagues*

St. John Ervine is an Ulsterman by birth, and many of his best stories deal with the humours of his native land. In addition to six novels, he has written a large number of plays, and he is well known as a dramatic critic and authority on the theatre.



## COLLEAGUES

MR. JUSTICE McBURNIE stepped quickly into the shelter of the little passage, and collided with the man who had already taken refuge there.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "It's very dark. . . ."

"That's all right, sir," the stranger replied in a cheery voice. "Bit awkward comin' in 'ere out of the light, ain't it? Sudden, I mean."

"Yes," replied the judge, turning to look at the rain-drenched street. "A very heavy shower," he added.

"Yes, an' come on so sudden, too. Funny sort of weather we bin 'avin' lately, ain't we? One minute sun shinin', an' the next you get soaked through. No certainty about it. I suppose it's bein' so near the sea, an' the 'ills, an' one thing an' another."

"I suppose so," said Mr. Justice McBurnie in the tone of one who is indifferent to the conversation of his companion. He looked for a moment at him, and saw a small man, seemingly of mild manners, with an odd way of smiling when he spoke, as though beneath his most commonplace phrase there lurked some inscrutably comic meaning known only to him.

"You're a native of this town?" asked the judge.

"Oh, yes. Born an' bred 'ere. I got a shop, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I do a bit of travellin' now an' again. Nothink to speak of. . . . Gummy, ain't it comin' down, eh?"

The storm had grown in severity while they stood in the passage, and the rain came down in sheets.

"Most unfortunate," murmured Mr. Justice McBurnie. "I've come quite a long way from my hotel without an umbrella or a mackintosh. I hope it won't last much longer."

The little man smiled in his odd, superior, knowing way. "You never know," he said, "now the Assizes is on!"

"The Assizes!"

"Yes. Some people say there's bound to be bad weather when the Assizes is on. 'Specially when there's a murder case. Funny the things people do say about Assizes, ain't it?"

The judge did not reply.

"Now, there's my ole mother. She would 'ave it that it was against the law for a butcher to serve on a jury tryin' a man for 'is life. She wouldn't believe it wasn't true. Of course, it ain't true. I ast a gentleman once—'e was a lawyer, you know—an' 'e said 'e'd never 'eard of such a thing."

"What a curious thing for your mother to believe!" said Mr. Justice McBurnie, turning to the garrulous little man.

"Yes, it was, wasn't it? Of course, she don't believe it now, sir. She's dead."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes. She was a good ole soul. Seventy-two she was, an' 'ad 'er senses to the last. But she wouldn't believe it wasn't true about butchers, sir, not if the queen 'erself 'ad swore it on the Bible. She said it stood to reason butchers wouldn't be allowed to try a man for his life. 'Killin' animals all day,' she said, 'made 'em callous, an' they'd 'ang you as soon as look at you!'"

Mr. Justice McBurnie laughed. "Oh," he said, "was that why she objected to butchers on juries?"

"Yes, sir, an' you couldn't shake 'er out of it. Of course, butchers is a bit 'ard. No doubt about it. Stan's to reason, as she said. You can't go on takin' life like they do an' not get a bit 'ardened, can you? On'y wot I used to say to 'er was, it ain't the law. It may be common sense, ses I, but it ain't the law. But she would 'ave it that it was. Stubborn, sir! Seventy-two, she was, but *that* stubborn!"

The judge advanced towards the end of the passage and gazed up at the dark sky, and then up and down the street.

"It doesn't seem to get any better," he said.

"No," said the stranger, "it won't now, I shouldn't think."

"I wonder if I could get a cab or some sort of vehicle?"

The little man thought it was probable that he might. "I'll go up to the 'ead of the street," he said, "when the rain's over a bit, an' see if I can get one for you."

"You're very kind . . ."

"Oh, no, sir, not at all! You're a stranger 'ere, an' if we can't do a thing like that for a stranger, wot's the good of us?"

They stood in silence for a few moments, and then the little man began to speak again.

"You know, 'e must feel a bit queer to-night, I should think."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Mr. Justice McBurnie.

"The chap wot's goin' to be tried to-morrow. Young fella, 'e is. Killed a girl 'e was walkin' out with."

"Oh, yes! Yes, yes!"

"I suppose you 'eard about it. Jealousy!"

The judge nodded his head.

"Now, there's a thing I can't understand, you know. If I was walkin' out with a girl, an' she got up to any tricks, runnin' after other fellas, I wouldn't go an' kill 'er or nothink. I'd simply tell 'er to go to 'ell, or somethink of that sort. Silly to go an' get 'ung for her! Some people's funny-natured, ain't they?"

"That's true."

"We ain't all alike, of course. Wouldn't do if we was. But I mean to say I can't understand a chap goin' an' killin' a girl for a thing like that, I mean to say, there don't seem no sense in it, some'ow."

"There isn't."

"No. An' yet they go an' do it. I've knowed case after case like that. Decent enough young fellas, you know, on'y they go an' do a thing like that. It seems a pity, some'ow."

"Yes . . ."

"Of course, you 'ave to be firm about it. It wouldn't do to go lettin' 'em off or anythink, on'y some'ow . . . Well, there was that young chap Smith—now, 'e wasn't a bad chap, 'e wasn't. A bit 'ot-'eaded. 'E done the same's this chap, an' 'e got 'ung same's this one will . . ."

"How do you know this one will be hanged?"

"Oh, 'e'll be 'ung all right! The judge can't 'elp 'isself. Clear case. Clear as anythink. I dessay the judge won't like doin' it. No one would. On'y it's got to be done. You've got to 'ave judges, an' if people goes about killin' other people, the judges 'ave got to sentence them to death. Can't help theirselves. That's 'ow I look at it."

"I dare say you are right. I think the rain is going off. I believe it'll stop soon."

"Can't help theirselves. It's got to be done, an' if it's got to be done, someone's got to do it. That's wot I told my ole mother about butchers. No good cursin' 'em, an' callin' 'em 'ard-'earted an' all that, if you eat meat. You can't 'ave meat unless there's butchers. I don't s'pose they do it for the fun of the thing!"

"No, I dare say not," said Mr. Justice McBurnie. "Do you think you could do what you so kindly suggested a few moments ago: get a cab for me? I'm sorry to trouble you. . . ."

"No trouble at all, sir." The little man walked to the entrance to the passage and stood there for a moment or two while he turned up the collar of his coat. "You know," he said, turning to the judge, "they'll 'ang 'im all right. Can't help theirselves!"

"Well, well," said the judge impatiently.

"You know," continued the little man, "it's the first case in this town. We got a new gaol 'ere. I'm a bit interested in the case."

"Naturally."

"I knoo 'im well, sir. Often an' often 'e'd come into my shop to 'ave a shave. Very partickler 'e was about bein' shaved. Very partickler. Couldn't bear to 'ave it done *up*. Very tender skin 'e 'ad."

"If you wouldn't mind . . ."

"Don't mind a bit, sir. Not a bit. I never thought 'e would come to this. Come into my shop reg'lar 'e would. I never felt about anyone the way I do about 'im. . . ."

Mr. Justice McBurnie came to the little man's side and peered up the street. "I believe I can hear wheels," he said.

"So you can, sir. I'll just run up and fetch the cab, sir. Shan't be 'alf a sec!"

In a little while the cab came down the street and the judge stepped out of the passage.

"Won't you let me drive you home?" he said to the stranger.

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, sir. I ain't got far to go . . ."

"You've been so very obliging," continued the judge. "I should like to."

"Well, thank you, sir."

They stepped into the cab and the judge told the stranger the name of the hotel at which he was stopping.

"You'd better tell him to drive to your home first, and then he can take me to the hotel."

"Yes, sir." He called the name of his street to the cabman. "That's the name of the 'otel where the judge is stoppin'," he said, as they drove off.

Mr. Justice McBurnie leant back in his seat and smiled. "Yes," he said, "I am the judge."

The stranger sat up and regarded him with curiosity. "Are you, now!" he said. "You know, that's strange, that is! You an' me's in the same line of business, so to speak."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Funny coincidence, I call it, you an' me talkin' the way we was about 'im."

"About whom?"

"'Im as killed the girl. 'E'd be surprised to 'ear about this, 'e would."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Mr. Justice McBurnie.

"Well, it's simple enough, sir. You're the judge an' I'm the 'angman."

Mr. Justice McBurnie sat up in his seat, and the smile disappeared from his lips. He tried to speak, but the words clung to his teeth and would not be uttered.

"Sort of in the same business, you an' me," said the little man. "You begin it, and I end it. Funny coincidence, I call it. Fancy me tellin' you about 'im, an' you the judge and me the 'angman! Used to come into my shop reg'lar 'e did, an' 'ave a shave. Very partickler, 'e was. . . . Wot did you say, sir?"

Mr. Justice McBurnie did not speak.

"I expec' you're tired, sir. Up too late. I get out 'ere. You know, when you come to think of it, it's a funny coincidence. . . . Goo' night, sir! Goo' night!"



## ALBERT SMITH

### *Delightful People*

Albert Smith was trained as a doctor, but soon turned his powers of humorous observation to good use as a contributor to *Punch*, and as a writer of plays and pantomimes. He published a large number of books, including *The Physiology of London Evening Parties*, from which this sketch is taken. He was the originator of the form of entertainment now known as the "travelogue".



## DELIGHTFUL PEOPLE

**T**HERE are two sets of people in society—the amusers and the amused, who are both equally useful in their way although widely different in their attributes. A reunion, to go off well, should contain a proper share of either class ; because notwithstanding the inability of the latter to contribute much to the festivity of the meeting, they make an excellent and patient audience, without which the powers of the amusers are cramped, and they feel they are not sufficiently appreciated.

Why all people, enjoying the same level of intellect, should not be equally sought after in society, we do not pretend to decide ; but we will endeavour to account for it by falling back upon our theatrical analogies. If you study the playbills, you see, year after year, the same names amongst the companies who keep at the same humble standard ; whilst others, whom you recollect as their inferiors, ultimately arrive at big letters and benefits—in fact, that chance, tact, forte, and opportunity come spontaneously to the latter, whilst the former are content to remain servants and peasants. They have been known to embody guests and mobs, and have sometimes arrived at first citizens ; but this is by no means a common occurrence. The same union of circumstances that divides a theatrical commonwealth into stars and supernumeraries produces in our own circles delightful people and nobodies—for so are the listeners and admirers generally and uncourteously termed.

But there are various kinds of delightful people beyond the mere entertainers. If there is a family rather higher in life than yourselves, or moving in a sphere you think more of than your own, notwithstanding they may have formerly *snubbed* you, it is astonishing, when you get introduced to them and at last asked to their house, what delightful people you find them. If you know two young persons

who have tumbled into an engagement with each other under tolerably favourable circumstances, and visit each other's friends for the first time, you will be enchanted with the accounts of what "delightful people" they are; how *very* friendly the mother was, and how well the sisters played, and made coloured-paper dust-collectors. Persons who have large houses, give dinners, and keep carriages and private boxes—gentlemen who have been all along the coast of the Mediterranean, and tell most extraordinary anecdotes until they themselves really believe that their adventures have happened—authors who have written a book which has proved a hit by chance, to the astonishment of everybody, and no one more than the writers—acquaintances who have the happy knack of cordially agreeing with you upon every subject, and applauding everything you do, thinking quite differently all the while—worn-out "bits of quality tumbled into decay", as Miss Lucretia M'Tab says, who honour families of questionable caste with their acquaintance, and join all their parties by the tenor of relating stories of by-gone greatness, and random recollections of defunct high circles; all these, and many more, had we time to enumerate them, are "delightful people". But we proceed to consider the class it is our wish to place more especially under the inspection of the reader.

We called one day upon a lady of our acquaintance, who was about to give a large evening party; and upon being ushered into the drawing-room, found the whole family in high glee at the contents of a note they had just received. Our intimacy prompted us to inquire the purport of the oblong billet that had so much delighted them.

"Oh," said Ellen, the eldest daughter, "the Lawsons have accepted—all of them are coming!"

"And who are the Lawsons?" we ventured to ask.

"My goodness, Albert!" exclaimed everybody at once, with an excitement which nearly caused us, being of a nervous temperament, to tilt backwards off the apology for a chair on which we were seated—one of those slim rickety specimens of upholstery which inspire stout gentlemen with such nervous dread when one is handed to them. "Is it possible you don't know the Lawsons?"

We confessed with shame our ignorance of the parties in question.

"They are such *delightful people*," continued the second female olive-branch, Margaret. "We were so afraid they would not come, because they are almost always engaged; so we sent their invitation nearly a month ago."

"And you have only just received their reply?" we subjoined. "It looks as if they had waited for something else that didn't come."

"Oh, no," said Ellen, almost offended. "Mrs. Lawson is always *so* charmed with everything at our house, and says our parties are always *so* pleasant, and that we manage things *so* well."

"And she told me, the last time she was here," added Margaret, "that she could not have believed the whole of the supper was made at home, if she had not been told. And I am sure she liked it, because she ate so much."

"And what does this family do to make them so delightful?" we inquired.

"Oh, almost everything," said Ellen. "Mr. Lawson plays an admirable rubber, and Mrs. Lawson knows nearly all the great people of the day, and can tell a great deal of their private histories. Bessy is a perfect Mrs. Anderson on the piano, and Cynthia——"

"Who?" we interrupted, somewhat rudely.

"Cynthia—isn't it a pretty name? She is such a delightful girl—sings better than anyone you ever heard in private."

"Then, Tom is such an oddity and such a nice fellow," continued Margaret. "He imitates Macready and Buckstone so that you would not know the difference, and sings the drollest songs! He can whistle just like a bird, play tunes upon a stick, and conjure with rout-cakes at supper."

"And you should hear him do the two cats, where he makes you believe that they talk real words!" chimed in Ellen.

"And what is this wonder?" we asked.

"He's a lawyer," said Ellen; "but I don't think he much likes his profession."

We thought so too. No man who did the two cats, or imitated Macready and Buckstone, ever did like his profession, unless he was an actor at once.

"You will see them here on Friday," said Margaret, "and then you can form your own opinions; but I am certain you will like them. Hark, there's a double knock at the door!"

"Don't peep at the window, Margaret; they will see you," said Ellen to her sister, who was endeavouring to discover who the visitors were by taking a covert observation through the bars of a birdcage.

"It's those horrid Wiltons!" exclaimed Margaret. "Do ring again, Ellen. What a singular thing it is servants are never in the way when a double knock comes at the door."

The newcomers entered the room, and at the same time we left; not, however, before our fair young friends had told "those horrid Wiltons" how angry they were with them for not calling more frequently, and how delighted they felt now they had come at last. We were sorry to find their pretty lips could let out such little falsehoods, and with such excellent grace.

Friday evening arrived, as in the common course of things every Friday evening must do if you wait for it; and about ten o'clock, after a shilling's-worth of shake, rattle, and altercation, we alighted from a cab at our friends' house, and tripped into the library, where tea and coffee was going on, with a lightness that only dress boots and white kids can inspire.

Several visitors were there before us, as well as one of Margaret's brothers, who said in a low voice as we entered:

"My dear friend, let me introduce you to some delightful people. Mrs. Lawson, allow me to present to you, Mr.——"

"Will you take tea or coffee, sir?" said the maid at the same time.

We were so overcome with being thus suddenly confronted with the stars that we think we bowed to the maid, and said we were happy to make her acquaintance; and merely exclaimed, "Coffee, if you please," as Mrs. Lawson inclined her head to ourselves.

We went upstairs and entered the ballroom, where our friends had just received intelligence that "the Lawsons had arrived!"

The first portion of a party is always the same. And it was not until the evening was somewhat advanced, and they had made sure that everybody was arrived, that the powers of the Lawsons came into full play—at least, as regarded the young people: for the governor had been at

whist ever since he first arrived, and Mrs. Lawson's feathers were ubiquitously perceptible, waving and bending apparently in every part of the room at once; talking to all the old ladies in turn, fishing for compliments for her own daughters by admiring theirs, and smiling, with angelic benignity, upon every young man concerning whose expectations she had been agreeably informed.

The junior exhibition commenced by Bessy delighting the company with a rondo by Herz, in the most approved sky-rocket style of that great master; being a Parisian composition, introducing variations upon the popular airs, "*Rien, mes bons enfants, allez toujours*", "*La Pierre de Newgate*", and "*Joli Nez*", from the opera of *Jacque Sheppard*. As it was not above twenty pages in length, everyone was quite charmed—indeed, they could almost have heard it again; and the manner in which Miss Lawson sprang at the keys, and darted up and down the flats and sharps, and twitched her shoulders, and tickled the piano into convulsions, and jerked about upon the music-stool was really astonishing, and thunderstruck everybody; except the young lady and gentleman who were flirting at the end of the room after a waltz, and actually appeared more engaged with their own conversation than they did with the fair Bessy's performance, which at last concluded amidst universal applause.

There was another quadrille, and then we were informed that Miss Cynthia Lawson was going to sing. The young lady was dressed in plain white robes, with her hair smoothed very flat round her head *à la Grisi*, whom she thought she resembled both in style of singing and features, and consequently studied all her attitudes from the clever Italian's impersonation of Norma.

Of course, there was the usual delay attendant upon such displays. The musicians had to be cleared away from the piano, in which process their wine-bottle was knocked over; then the music was in a portfolio in the room downstairs which nobody could find; when found, it was all placed on the music-rest topsy-turvy; and many other annoyances. At last the lady began a bravura, upon such a high note, and so powerful, that some impudent fellows in the square, who were passing at the time, sang out, "*Vari-e-ty!*" in reply.

Presently a young gentleman, who was standing at her side, chanced to turn over too soon, whereupon she gave him

*such* a look that, if he had entertained any thoughts of proposing, would effectually have stopped any such rash proceeding; but her equanimity was soon restored, and she went through the aria in most dashing style until she came to the last note, whose appearance she heralded with a roulade of wonderful execution.

“Now don’t get up,” said the lady of the house, in a most persuasive and winning manner, to Miss Cynthia, when she had really concluded. “*Do* favour us with one more, if you are not too fatigued. Or perhaps you would like a glass of wine first—a very, very little glass.”

The young lady declined any refreshment, and immediately commenced a duet with her brother, whose voice, however, she entirely drowned; nevertheless, the audience were equally delighted, and as soon as she had regularly concluded, and the murmur of approbation had ceased, six young men rushed up to Ellen with the request that they might be introduced to Miss Lawson for the next waltz. But, unfortunately, Miss Lawson did not waltz, or, rather, she did not choose to do so. She was aware of her liability to be called upon to sing after every dance, and she had no notion of sitting down to the instrument with a red face and flustered ensemble.

“Delightful people, those Lawsons!” wheezed out a fat old gentleman in pumps and a white neckcloth, who was leaning against the wall and looking as if he wanted a glass of ale.

“Do you know them, sir?” we asked.

“Never had the pleasure of meeting them before; but they are a charming family. Mother a delightful person, sir—woman of the world—appears to have been thrown early into good society and profited by it. Clever fellow that young Lawson—ha! ha!—look at him!” And the old gentleman chuckled until he was almost choked.

We turned to gaze at the cause of his mirth, and saw Tom doing Pastorale in a most ballet-like style, jumping up and coming down upon one toe, turning round without touching the ground, and making everybody afraid of coming within a yard of him.

There are many worse periods in our existence than the twenty minutes consumed at supper at an evening party. The reserve which prevailed at the commencement of the

evening begins to wear off : you gain courage to make engagements for the first quadrille after supper, and think what a pity it is that the flight of Time cannot be delayed by pleasure, with permission to make up his lost moments by hurrying doubly quick over periods of sorrow or *ennui*. Alas, the hoary old mower generally takes it into his head to act in precisely an opposite manner !

We went down to supper with a pretty specimen of feminine mortality in white poplin on our arm, and assisted her to a cubic inch of blancmange and an homœopathic quantity of Moselle, which she affirmed was quite sufficient ; as well as took the precaution to push the tongue to the other side of the table, opposite a man who had taken off his gloves to eat, and who was immediately “troubled for a slice” fifteen times in rapid succession. By the way, talking of taking off your gloves—what is the reason that, whenever you go out and wish your hands to look more than ordinarily white, they generally resemble raw beefsteaks ?

Our *devoirs* being for the time accomplished, we looked round the room, and the first object that caught our eye between the lines of wax candles and trifle-dishes was Mrs. Lawson’s turban, with herself attached to it, bobbing about at the head of the table in most graceful affability to everybody. Miss Lawson was flirting with a slim young man at the sideboard, where she preferred to sup, on the pretence of being not able to find a seat ; and Miss Cynthia, no doubt much fatigued by her vocal exertions, was concluding the second patty and thinking what she should send her *cavalier servente* for next. Tom was in the centre of the table, in high glee, chirping at a sugar-plum bird in a barley-sugar cage, jerking bonbons into his mouth by slapping his hand, making little men out of raisons and preserved ginger and sending them to different young ladies with his compliments ; playing the cornet-à-piston upon a wafer-cake, “and many other performances too numerous to mention”, as they say outside shows.

“My dear Mrs. Howard,” said Mrs. Lawson to the hostess, “how delicious everything is ! You always do have such very fine lobsters—where *do* you contrive to get them ?”

“I am very happy you admire them,” returned the lady ; “but I really don’t know.” Which affirmation was the more

singular, as she had ordered them herself from a shop in Wigmore Street.

"Lady Mary Abbeville and yourself are the only two of my friends who contrive to get large lobsters," continued Mrs. Lawson. "Lady Mary is a charming creature—do you know her?"

"I have not that pleasure," replied our friend; "and yet I have heard the name somewhere."

"Between Boulogne and Paris," cried Tom as he exploded a cracker bonbon. "The diligence dines there."

"Now, my dear Tom, do not be so foolish," said Mrs. Lawson, in a tone of admiring reproach. "How can a diligence dine?"

"Well, I've seen it *break-fast*, however, when it has been going down a hill overloaded," replied the "talented" son. "A glass of wine, sir?" he continued, pitching upon someone opposite by chance, to make his wit appear offhand.

The challenged individual was an overgrown young gentleman with a very high shirt-collar. He stammered out, "With much pleasure!" and then filling up his half-glass of sherry from the nearest decanter at hand, which contained port, he made a nervous bow and swallowed the wine as if it had been physic.

"Here's you and I, sir, and two more; but we won't tell their names," exclaimed Tom, winking to the young gentleman, whose blushes increased to a fearful pitch of intensity.

The ladies had been gradually leaving the room for the last ten minutes, and when they had all departed we sat down to our own supper. Tom never once flagged in his drolleries. He laughed, took wine with all the old gentlemen, did the two cats, imitated Macready and Buckstone—in fact, opened all his stores of facetiousness. He accompanied us upstairs, and after the ladies had finished the long quadrille they were having with themselves, he sang a song about "Warted" or something, but we do not exactly recollect what, being ourselves engaged in talking delightful absurdities to the belle in the white poplin, and endeavouring to reason down the antediluvian idea she had formed that it was improper to waltz with anyone else but her brother; in which argument we finally succeeded. However, the song was eminently successful, and threw everybody who witnessed the odd

grimaces with which Tom accompanied it into delirious convulsions of laughter.

The "delightful people" left about half past two; Mrs. Lawson declaring her girls went out so much that their health began to suffer from late hours. Tom saw them into their carriage, and then came back, pressing every other young man in the room to come to some tavern where there was a capital comic singer; but finding no one so inclined, he also took his leave. We waited until we saw the man who played the piano hammering away with his eyes shut, and gradually going to sleep over the keys, when we thought it time to depart ourselves; and in all the happiness of a latchkey in our pocket, and the same good hat we left in the hall upon our head, we bent our steps homeward.

Two or three weeks passed away, when one morning we received an application from a young medical friend, to use our interest in obtaining for him some votes for the situation of surgeon to a dispensary in the neighbourhood, accompanied by a list of the governors. We obtained two or three promises, and at last determined to solicit Mr. Lawson, whose name we saw in the list. At the same time, we must confess that we were not a little anxious to see the "delightful people" at home—to track these lions to their own lair, and watch their natural instincts. We accordingly sallied forth one fine day, in all the pride of unexceptionable boots and faultless gloves, and arriving at the family mansion, knocked at the door. A footman in his shirt-sleeves ran out into the area, and having looked at us, ran back again; appearing the next minute at the door with one arm still forcing its way down the sleeve of his coat.

We found the Lawsons were at home, and were shown into the drawing-room, with the assurance from the servant that his mistress would be there directly. After looking over the card-basket to see whom they knew (which is one of our favourite employments when we are left to ourselves in a strange house), we turned over the leaves of some albums that were lying about in company with some theological works, which, being an enemy to religious display, we thought far better suited for the closet than the drawing-room table; and in which occupation we were interrupted by the sound of voices in angry dialogue below. This was suddenly cut

short by the slamming of a door, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Lawson entered the room, looking a little red and excited, but all smiles and condescension; begging we would be seated, and telling us how very happy she was that we had called upon her.

After a few commonplace observations and inquiries about the weather the health of the family, the party we had lately met, and suchlike exciting topics of conversation, Mrs. Lawson informed us her family were at luncheon, and begged we would join them. A strong smell of toast mutton greeted us as we descended to the dining-room, and tempted us to think that it was an early dinner. We expected to have been kept in a state of unceasing laughter throughout the whole meal, but were very much mistaken. We had not anticipated any immense fun from the papa Lawson, who was quietly enough discussing some bread and cheese; but as the facetious Tom was there, and his gifted sisters, we calculated upon a repetition, in a certain degree, of their previous amusing powers. There was, however, nothing of the kind; the whole party was as flat as the jug of beer that has been left out for supper, covered with a cheese-plate, on returning from the play.

Bessy had evidently been quarrelling with her sister; Cynthia contradicted her mother on every point of affirmation that Mrs. Lawson uttered; Tom sat back in his chair with his hands in his pockets and his legs stretched out straight under the table; and the good lady herself kept up such an alternation of smiles to us and black looks to the young people that her command of countenance was perfectly marvellous. At first we thought it probable that they were all recovering from influenza, but they looked so very healthy that we soon relinquished that opinion. They were, however, so very quiet that when they retired, and we had mentioned the object of our visit to Mr. Lawson, who was a sensible man (if the others had let him alone), we summoned up courage to say that we feared we had intruded during some family discussion.

"My dear sir," he replied, "we never have anything else but family discussions here. I dare say that you are surprised to see them so very different from what they are in company; but the more they *show off* when they are out, the more cross they always are at home the next day."

In these few words was contained the whole history of

“delightful people”—the melancholy truth, that those who in society carry all before them by their spirits and acquirements are, at home, the most uncomfortable beings upon the face of the earth, because they cannot there find the very excitement which is almost necessary to their existence.

We have met the Lawsons several times since, and we have begun to find that their attractions sadly want variety. Mrs. Lawson tells the same anecdotes, Bessy plays the same fantasias, Cynthia warbles the identical arias we last heard, and Tom has a certain routine of tricks and absurdities which he plays off in regular order during the evening. We begin to weary of these lions ; although, at every reunion where it is our lot to meet them, there are the same number of guests charmed at their talents, who never hesitate to pronounce them most “delightful people”.



E. V. LUCAS

*The Dinner-Party*

E. V. Lucas is one of the most prolific and delightful essayists of the day, writing with some of the ease, whimsicality and humour of Charles Lamb, whose works he has edited. He is a regular contributor of verse and sketches to *Punch*, and has published many novels.



## THE DINNER-PARTY

[The dinner-party was at Mr. Wynne's, the father of Naomi whom Kent Falconer, the narrator of *Over Bemerton's*, marries. Mr. Dabney was a Radical editor. Lionel is a county cricketer.]

WHEN the evening arrived, it looked as though Grandmamma and Mr. Dabney were going to hit it off perfectly, and I began to feel quite happy about my introduction of this firebrand into the household.

"I hear that you are a writer," Grandmamma began, very graciously. "I always like literary company. Years ago I met both Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray."

I saw the lid of Lionel's left eye droop as he glanced at Naomi. Mrs. Wynne, I gathered, was employing a favourite opening.

Mr. Dabney expressed interest.

"There are no books like theirs now," Grandmamma continued. "I don't know what kind of books you write, but there are no books like those of Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray."

Mr. Dabney began to say something.

"Personally," Grandmamma hurried on, "I prefer those of Mr. Dickens, but that perhaps is because me dear fawther used to read them to us aloud. He was a beautiful reader. There is no reading aloud to-day, Mr. Dabney; and, I fear, very little home life."

Here Grandmamma made a false move and let her companion in, for he could never resist a comparison of the present and the past, to the detriment of the present.

"No," he said, "you are quite right." And such was the tension that Grandmamma's remarks had caused that the whole room was silent for him. "We are losing our hold, on all that is most precious. Take London at this moment—

look at the scores and scores of attractions to induce people to leave home in the evenings and break up the family circle—restaurants, concert rooms, entertainments, theatres. Look at the music-halls. Do you know how many music-halls there are in London and Greater London at this moment?”

“No,” said Grandmamma sternly, “I have no notion. I have never entered one.”

Lionel shot a glance at me which distinctly said, in his own deplorable idiom, “What price Alf Pinto?”

Mr. Dabney, I regret to say, intercepted the tail of it, and suddenly realized that he was straying from the wiser path of the passive listener. So he remarked, “Of course not,” and brought the conversation back to Boz.

“Mr. Dickens,” said Grandmamma, “did me the honour to converse with me in Manchester in the ’sixties. I was there with me dear husband on business, and we stayed in the same hotel as Mr. Dickens, and breakfasted at the same table. The toast was not good, and Mr. Dickens, I remember, compared it in his inimitable way to sawdust. It was a perfect simile. He was very droll. What particularly struck me about him was his eye—so bright and restless—and his quick ways. He seemed all nerves. In the course of our conversation I told him I had met Mr. Thackeray, but he was not interested. I remember another thing he said. In paying his bill he gave the waiter a very generous tip, which was the slang word with which me dear husband always used to describe a *douceur*. ‘There,’ Mr. Dickens said, as he gave it to the waiter, ‘that’s——’ How very stupid! I have forgotten what he said, but it was full of wit. ‘There,’ he said . . . Dear me!”

“Never mind, Grandmamma,” said Naomi, “you will think of it presently.”

“But it was so droll and clever,” said the old lady. “Surely, Alderley dear, I have told you of it?”

“Oh, yes, Mother, many times,” said Alderley; “but I can’t for the life of me think of it at the moment. Strange, isn’t it,” he remarked to us all at large, “how often the loss of memory in one person seems to infect others?—one forgets and all forget. We had a case in Chambers the other day.”

Their father’s stories having no particular sting in them, his children abandoned him to their mother, who listens devotedly, and we again fell into couples.

But it was useless to attempt disregard of old Mrs. Wynne. There was a feeling in the air that trouble lay ahead, and we all reserved one ear for her.

"And Mr. Thackeray?" Mr. Dabney asked, with an appearance of the deepest interest.

"Mr. Thackeray," said Grandmamma, "I had met in London some years before. It was at a *conversazione* at the Royal Society's. Mr. Wynne and I were leaving at the same time as the great man—and however you may consider his writings he was great physically—and there was a little confusion about the cab. Mr. Thackeray thought it was his, and we thought it was ours. Me dear husband, who was the soul of courtesy, pressed him to take it; but Mr. Thackeray gave way, with the most charming bow, to me. It was raining. A very tall man with a broad and kindly face—although capable of showing satire—and gold spectacles. He gave me a charming bow, and said, 'There will be another one for me directly.' I hope there was, for it was raining. Those were, however, his exact words: 'There will be another one for me directly.'"

Mr. Dabney expressed himself in suitable terms, and cast a swift glance at his hostess on his other side, as if seeking for relief. She was talking, as it happened, about a novel of the day, in which little but the marital relation is discussed, and Mr. Dabney, on being drawn into the discussion, remarked sententiously, "The trouble with marriage is that while every woman is at heart a mother, every man is at heart a bachelor."

"What was that?" said Grandmamma, who is not really deaf, but when in a tight place likes to gain time by this harmless imposition. "What did Mr. Dabney say?" she repeated, appealing to Naomi.

Poor Mr. Dabney turned scarlet. To a mind of almost mischievous fearlessness is allied a shrinking sensitiveness and distaste for prominence of any kind, especially among people whom he does not know well.

"Oh, it was nothing, nothing," he said. "Merely a chance remark."

"I don't agree with you," replied Grandmamma severely, thus giving away her little ruse. "There is no trouble with marriage. It is very distressing to me to find this new attitude with regard to that state. When I was a girl we neither

talked about incompatibility and temperament and all the rest of it, nor thought about them. We married. I have had to give up my library subscription entirely because they send me nothing nowadays but nauseous novels about husbands and wives who cannot get on together. I hope," she added, turning swiftly to Mr. Dabney, "that those are not the kind of books that you write."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Dabney; "I don't write books at all."

"Not write books at all?" said Grandmamma. "I understood you were an author."

"No, dear," said Naomi, "not an author. Mr. Dabney is an editor. He edits a very interesting weekly paper, *The Balance*. He stimulates others to write."

"I never heard of the paper," said Grandmamma, who is too old to have any pity.

"I must show it to you," said Naomi. "Frank writes for it."

"Very well," said Grandmamma. "But I am disappointed. I thought that Mr. Dabney wrote books. The papers are growing steadily worse, and more and more unfit for general reading, especially in August. I hope," she said, turning to Mr. Dabney again, "you don't write any of those terrible letters in August about home life?"

Mr. Dabney said that he didn't, and Grandmamma began to soften. "I am very fond of literary society," she said. "It is one of my great griefs that there is so little literary society in Ludlow. You are too young, of course, Mr. Dabney, but I am sure it will interest you to know that I knew personally both Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray."

Here a shudder ran round the table, and Lionel practically disappeared into his plate. I stole a glance at Mr. Dabney's face. Drops of perspiration were beginning to break out on his forehead.

"Mr. Dickens," the old lady continued remorselessly, and all unconscious of the devastation she was causing, even at the sideboard, usually a stronghold of discreet impassivity, "Mr. Dickens I met at an hotel in Manchester in the 'sixties. I was there with me dear husband on business, and we breakfasted at the same table. Mr. Dickens was all nerves and fun. The toast was not good, and I remember he compared it in his inimitable way to sawdust."

Mr. Dabney ate feverishly.

"I remember also that he made a capital joke as he was giving the waiter a tip, as my dear husband always used to call a *douceur*. 'There,' he said——"

Mr. Dabney twisted a silver fork into the shape of a hair-pin.

It was, of course, Naomi who came to the rescue. "Grandmamma," she said, "we have a great surprise for you—the first dish of strawberries."

"So early!" said the old lady. "How very extravagant of you, but how very pleasant." She took one and ate it slowly, while Mr. Dabney laid the ruined fork aside and assumed the expression of a reprieved assassin.

"'Doubtless,'" Grandmamma quoted, "'God could have made a better berry, but doubtless He never did.' Do you know," she asked Mr. Dabney, "who said that? It was a favourite quotation of my father's."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Dabney, who had been cutting it out of articles every June for years, "it was Bishop Butler."

The situation was saved, for Grandmamma talked exclusively of fruit for the rest of the meal. Ludlow, it seems, has some very beautiful gardens, especially Dr. Sworder's, which is famous for its figs. A southern aspect.

At one moment, however, we all went cold again, for Lionel, who is merciless, suddenly asked in a silence, "Didn't you once meet Thackeray, Grandmamma?"

Naomi, however, was too quick for him, and before the old lady could begin she had signalled to her mother to lead the way to the drawing-room.



E. V. KNOX

*The Murder at The Towers*

E. V. Knox is the eldest son of the former Bishop of Manchester, and one of the most accomplished writers of light verse and humorous sketches of the day. For many years his work under the pen-name of "Evoe" has been familiar to readers of *Punch*, which he now edits.



## THE MURDER AT THE TOWERS

THE MOST MARVELLOUS MYSTERY STORY IN THE WORLD

*(Begin Now, so as to Finish Sooner !)*

### I

**M**R. PONDERBY-WILKINS was a man so rich, so ugly, so cross, and so old, that even the studipest reader could not expect him to survive any longer than Chapter I. Vulpine in his secretiveness, he was porcine in his habits, saturnine in his appearance, and ovine in his unconsciousness of doom. He was the kind of man who might easily perish as early as paragraph two.

Little surprise, therefore, was shown by Police-Inspector Blowhard of Nettleby Parva when a message reached him on the telephone :

“You are wanted immediately at The Towers. Mr. Ponderby-Wilkins has been found dead.”

The inspector was met at the gate by the deceased’s secretary, whom he knew and suspected on the spot.

“Where did it happen, Mr. Porlock?” he asked. “The lake, the pigeon-loft, or the shrubbery?”

“The shrubbery,” answered Porlock quietly, and led the way to the scene.

Mr. Ponderby-Wilkins was suspended by means of an enormous woollen muffler to the bough of a tree, which the police-officer’s swift eye noticed at once to be a sycamore.

“How long has that sycamore tree been in the shrubbery?” he inquired suspiciously.

“I don’t know,” answered Porlock, “and I don’t care.”

“Tell me precisely what happened,” went on the inspector.

“Four of us were playing tennis, when a ball was hit out into the bushes. On going to look for it at the end of the

set, I found Mr. Wilkins as you see him, and called the attention of the other players to the circumstances at once. Here they all are."

And pushing aside the boughs of a laurel, he showed the police-officer two young women and a young man. They were standing quietly in the middle of the tennis-court, holding their tennis-racquets soberly in their hands.

"Do you corroborate Mr. Porlock's account of the affair?" inquired Blowhard.

"We do," they answered quietly in one breath.

"Hum!" mused the inspector, stroking his chin. "By the way," he continued, "I wonder whether life is extinct?"

He went and looked at the body. It was.

"A glance showed us that life was extinct when we found it," said the four, speaking together, "and we thought it better to go on playing tennis as reverently as possible until you arrived."

"Quite right," said Blowhard. "I shall now examine the whole household *viva voce*. Kindly summon them to the drawing-room."

They went together into the large, white-fronted mansion, and soon the notes of a gong, reverberating through the house and all over the grounds, had summoned the whole house-party, including the servants, to the Louis-Seize *salon* overlooking the tennis lawn. The gathering consisted, as the inspector had foreseen, of the usual types involved in a country-house murder, namely, a frightened stepsister of the deceased, a young and beautiful niece, a major, a doctor, a chaperon, a friend, Mr. Porlock himself, an old butler with a beard, a middle-aged gardener with whiskers, an Irish cook, and two servants who had only come to the place the week before. Every one of them had a bitter grudge against the deceased. He had been about to dismiss his secretary, had threatened to disinherit his niece, sworn repeatedly at his stepsister, thrown a port decanter at the butler's head, insulted the guests by leaving *Bradshaws* in their bedrooms, pulled up the gardener's antirrhinums, called the cook a good-for-nothing, and terrified the housemaids by making noises at them on the stairs. In addition, he had twice informed the major that his regiment had run away at Balaclava, and had put a toad in the doctor's bed.

Blowhard felt instinctively that this was a case for Bletherby

Marge, the famous amateur, and sent him a telegram at once. Then he ordered the body to be removed, walked round the grounds, ate a few strawberries, and went home.

## II

Bletherby Marge was a man of wide culture and sympathy. In appearance he was fat, red-faced, smiling, and had untidy hair. He looked stupid, and wore spats. In fact, whatever the inexperienced reader supposes to be the ordinary appearance of a detective, to look like that was the very reverse of Bletherby Marge. He was sometimes mistaken for a business man, more often for a billiard-marker or a baboon. But whenever Scotland Yard was unable to deal with a murder case—that is to say, whenever a murder case happened at a country house—Bletherby Marge was called in. The death of an old, rich, and disagreeable man was like a clarion call to him. He packed his pyjamas, his tooth-brush, and a volume of *Who's Who*, and took the earliest train.

As soon as he had seen the familiar newsbill :

HOST OF COUNTRY-HOUSE PARTY  
INEXPLICABLY SLAIN

he had expected his summons to The Towers. Telegraphing to the coroner's jury to return an open verdict at Nettleby Parva, he finished off the case of the Duke of St. Neots, fragments of whom had mysteriously been discovered in a chaff-cutting machine, and made all haste to the scene of the new affair. It was his fiftieth mystery, and in every previous affair he had triumphantly slain his man. A small silver gallows had been presented to him by Scotland Yard as a token of esteem.

"We are in deep waters, Blowhard—very deep," he said, as he closely scrutinized the comforter which had been wrapped round Mr. Ponderby-Wilkins's throat. "Just tell me once more about these alibis."

"Every one of them is perfect," answered the police inspector, "so far as I can see. The butler, the cook, and the two housemaids were all together playing poker in the pantry. Miss Brown, the deceased's stepsister, was giving

instructions to the gardener, and the doctor was with her, carrying her trowel and her pruning scissors. The chaperon and the friend were playing tennis with Mr. Porlock and the major, and the niece was rowing herself about on the lake, picking water-lilies."

A gleam came into Bletherby Marge's eyes.

"Alone?" he queried.

"Alone. But you forget that the lake is in full view of the tennis-court. It almost seems as if it must have been constructed that way on purpose," added the inspector rather crossly. "This girl was seen the whole time during which the murder must have occurred, either by one pair of players or the other."

"Tut, tut," said Bletherby Marge. "Now take me to the scene of the crime."

Arrived at the sycamore tree, he studied the bark with a microscope, and the ground underneath. This was covered with dead leaves. There was no sign of a struggle.

"Show me exactly how the body was hanging," he said to Blowhard.

Police-Inspector Blowhard tied the two ends of the comforter to the bough and wrapped the loop several times round Bletherby Marge's neck, supporting him, as he did so, by the feet.

"Don't let go," said Bletherby Marge.

"I won't," said Blowhard, who was used to the great detective's methods in reconstructing a crime.

"Have you photographed the tree from every angle?" went on Bletherby.

"Yes."

"Were there any finger-prints on it?"

"No," replied Blowhard. "Nothing but leaves."

Then together they wandered round the grounds, eating fruit and discussing possible motives for the murder. No will had been discovered.

From time to time one or other of the house-party would flit by them, humming a song, intent on a game of tennis, or a bathe in the lake. Now and then a face would look haggard and strained, at other times the same face would be merry and wreathed with smiles.

"Do you feel baffled?" asked Blowhard.

Bletherby Marge made no reply.

## III

The house-party were having a motor picnic at Dead Man's Wood, ten miles from The Towers. The festivity had been proposed by Bletherby Marge, who was more and more endearing himself, by his jokes and wide knowledge of the world, to his fellow-guests. Many of them had already begun to feel that a house-party without a detective in it must be regarded as a literary failure.

"Bless my soul!" said Marge suddenly, when the revelry was at its height, turning to Blowhard, who was out of breath, for he had been carrying the champagne across a ploughed field. "I ask you all to excuse me for a moment. I have forgotten my pipe."

They saw him disappear in a two-seater towards The Towers. In little more than an hour he reappeared again and delighted the company by singing one or two popular revue songs in a fruity baritone. But, as the line of cars went homeward in the dusk, Bletherby Marge said to Blowhard, seated beside him, "I want to see you again in the shrubbery to-morrow at ten-thirty prompt. Don't begin playing clock-golf."

Inspector Blowhard made a note of the time in his pocket-book.

## IV

"Perhaps you wonder why I went away in the middle of our little outing?" questioned Marge, as they stood together under the fatal sycamore tree.

"I suspected," answered Blowhard, without moving a muscle of his face, except the ones he used for speaking, "that it was a ruse."

"It was," replied Marge.

Without another word he took a small folding broom from his pocket and brushed aside the dead leaves which strewed the ground of the shrubbery.

The dark mould was covered with foot-prints, large and small.

"What do you deduce from this?" cried Blowhard, his eyes bulging from his head.

"When I returned from the picnic," explained the great detective, "I first swept the ground clear as you see it now. I then hastily collected all the outdoor shoes in the house."

"All?"

"Every one. I brought them to the shrubbery on a wheelbarrow. I locked the servants, as though by accident, in the kitchen and the gardener in the tool-shed. I then compared the shoes with these imprints, and found that every one of them was a fit."

"Which means?"

"That every one of them was here when the murder took place. I have reconstructed the scene exactly. The marks of the shoes stretch in a long line, as you will observe, from a point close to the tree almost to the edge of the tennis-lawn. The heels are very deeply imprinted; the mark of the toes is very light indeed."

He paused and looked at Blowhard.

"I suppose you see now how the murder was done?" he barked loudly.

"No," mewed the inspector quietly.

"Ponderby-Wilkins," said Marge, "had the comforter twisted once round his neck, and one end was tied to the tree. Then—at a signal, I imagine—the whole house-party, including the servants, pulled together on the other end of the comforter until he expired. You see here the imprints of the butler's feet. As the heaviest man, he was at the end of the rope. Porlock was in front, with the second housemaid immediately behind him. Porlock, I fancy, gave the word to pull. Afterwards they tied him up to the tree as you found him when you arrived."

"But the alibis?"

"All false. They were all sworn to by members of the household, by servants or by guests. That was what put me on the scent."

"But how is it there were no finger-prints?"

"The whole party," answered Bletherby, "wore gloves. I collected all the gloves in the house and examined them carefully. Many of them had hairs from the comforter still adhering to them. Having concluded my investigations, I rapidly replaced the boots and gloves, put the leaves back

in their original position, unlocked the kitchen and the tool-house, and came back to the picnic again."

"And sang comic songs!" said Blowhard.

"Yes," replied Marge. "A great load had been taken off my mind by the discovery of the truth. And I felt it necessary to put the murderers off their guard."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Blowhard, examining the foot-prints minutely. "There is now only one difficulty, Mr. Marge, so far as I can see."

"And that is?"

"How am I going to convey all these people to the police-station?"

"How many pairs of manacles have you about you?"

"Only two," confessed Blowhard, feeling in his pocket.

"You had better telephone," said Bletherby, "for a motor-omnibus."

## V

The simultaneous trial of twelve prisoners on a capital charge, followed by their joint condemnation and execution, thrilled England as no sensation had thrilled it since the death of William II. The Sunday papers were never tired of discussing the psychology of the murderers and publishing details of their early life and school careers. Never before, it seemed, had a secretary, a stepsister, a niece, an eminent K.C., a major, a chaperon, a friend, a cook, a butler, two housemaids, and a gardener gone to the gallows on the same day for the murder of a disagreeable old man.

On the morning not long after the excitement had died away, Bletherby Marge and a house-agent went together to The Towers, which for some reason or other was still "To Let". As they looked at the library, Bletherby Marge tapped a panel in the mantelpiece.

"It sounds hollow," he said.

Finding the spring, he pressed it. The wood shot back and revealed a small cavity. From this he drew a dusty bundle of papers, tied together with a small dog-collar.

It was Ponderby-Wilkins's will. On the first page was written :

*I am the most unpopular man in England, and I am about to commit suicide by hanging myself in the shrubbery. If Bletherby Marge can make it a murder I bequeath him all my possessions in honour of his fiftieth success.*

“Extraordinary !” ejaculated the house-agent.  
Mr. Bletherby Marge smiled.

“SAKI” (H. H. MUNRO)

*Tobermory*

*A Matter of Sentiment*

Hector Munro was a prolific contributor to many papers of humorous sketches under the signature of “Saki”, and his brilliant work, according to one critic, contained elements of “the child, the buffoon, the satirist, the eclectic, the aristocrat and the elegant man of the world”. Here are two of his cleverest tales.



## TOBERMORY

IT was a chill, rain-washed afternoon of a late August day, that indefinite season when partridges are still in security or cold storage, and there is nothing to hunt—unless one is bounded on the north by the Bristol Channel, in which case one may lawfully gallop after fat red stags. Lady Blemley's house-party was not bounded on the north by the Bristol Channel, hence there was a full gathering of her guests round the tea-table on this particular afternoon. And, in spite of the blankness of the season and the triteness of the occasion, there was no trace in the company of that fatigued restlessness which means a dread of the pianola and a subdued hankering for auction bridge. The undisguised, open-mouthed attention of the entire party was fixed on the homely negative personality of Mr. Cornelius Appin. Of all her guests, he was the one who had come to Lady Blemley with the vaguest reputation. Someone had said he was "clever", and he had got his invitation in the moderate expectation, on the part of his hostess, that some portion at least of his cleverness would be contributed to the general entertainment. Until tea-time that day she had been unable to discover in what direction, if any, his cleverness lay. He was neither a wit nor a croquet champion, a hypnotic force nor a begetter of amateur theatricals. Neither did his exterior suggest the sort of man in whom women are willing to pardon a generous measure of mental deficiency. He had subsided into mere Mr. Appin, and the Cornelius seemed a piece of transparent baptismal bluff. And now he was claiming to have launched on the world a discovery beside which the invention of gunpowder, of the printing-press, and of steam locomotion were inconsiderable trifles. Science had made bewildering strides in many directions during recent decades, but this thing seemed to belong to the domain of miracle rather than to scientific achievement

"And do you really ask us to believe," Sir Wilfrid was saying, "that you have discovered a means for instructing animals in the art of human speech, and that dear old Tobermory has proved your first successful pupil?"

"It is a problem at which I have worked for the last seventeen years," said Mr. Appin, "but only during the last eight or nine months have I been rewarded with glimmerings of success. Of course, I have experimented with thousands of animals, but latterly only with cats, those wonderful creatures which have assimilated themselves so marvellously with our civilization while retaining all their highly-developed feral instincts. Here and there among cats one comes across an outstanding superior intellect, just as one does among the ruck of human beings, and when I made the acquaintance of Tobermory a week ago I saw at once that I was in contact with a 'Beyond-cat' of extraordinary intelligence. I had gone far along the road to success in recent experiments; with Tobermory, as you call him, I have reached the goal."

Mr. Appin concluded his remarkable statement in a voice which he strove to divest of a triumphant inflexion. No one said "Rats", though Clovis's lips moved in a monosyllabic contortion which probably invoked those rodents of disbelief.

"And do you mean to say," asked Miss Resker, after a slight pause, "that you have taught Tobermory to say and understand easy sentences of one syllable?"

"My dear Miss Resker," said the wonder-worker patiently, "one teaches little children and savages and backward adults in that piecemeal fashion; when one has once solved the problem of making a beginning with an animal of highly developed intelligence one has no need for those halting methods. Tobermory can speak our language with perfect correctness."

This time Clovis very distinctly said, "Beyond-rats!" Sir Wilfrid was more polite, but equally sceptical.

"Hadn't we better have the cat in and judge for ourselves?" suggested Lady Blemley.

Sir Wilfrid went in search of the animal, and the company settled themselves down to the languid expectation of witnessing some more or less adroit drawing-room ventriloquism.

In a minute Sir Wilfrid was back in the room, his face white beneath its tan and his eyes dilated with excitement.

“By Gad, it’s true !”

His agitation was unmistakably genuine, and his hearers started forward in a thrill of awakened interest.

Collapsing into an armchair, he continued breathlessly : “I found him dozing in the smoking-room, and called out to him to come for his tea. He blinked at me in his usual way, and I said, ‘Come on, Toby ; don’t keep us waiting’ ; and, by Gad ! he drawled out in a most horribly natural voice that he’d come when he dashed well pleased ! I nearly jumped out of my skin !”

Appin had preached to absolutely incredulous hearers ; Sir Wilfrid’s statement carried instant conviction. A babel-like chorus of startled exclamation arose, amid which the scientist sat mutely enjoying the first-fruit of his stupendous discovery.

In the midst of the clamour Tobermory entered the room and made his way with velvet tread and studied unconcern across to the group seated round the tea-table.

A sudden hush of awkwardness and constraint fell on the company. Somehow, there seemed an element of embarrassment in addressing on equal terms a domestic cat of acknowledged mental ability.

“Will you have some milk, Tobermory ?” asked Lady Blemley in a rather strained voice.

“I don’t mind if I do,” was the response, couched in a tone of even indifference. A shiver of suppressed excitement went through the listeners, and Lady Blemley might be excused for pouring out the saucerful of milk rather unsteadily.

“I’m afraid I’ve spilt a good deal of it,” she said apologetically.

“After all, it’s not my Axminster,” was Tobermory’s rejoinder.

Another silence fell on the group, and then Miss Resker, in her best district-visitor manner, asked if the human language had been difficult to learn. Tobermory looked squarely at her for a moment and then fixed his gaze serenely on the middle distance. It was obvious that boring questions lay outside his scheme of life.

“What do you think of human intelligence ?” asked Mavis Pellington lamely.

“Of whose intelligence in particular ?” asked Tobermory coldly.

"Oh, well, mine, for instance," said Mavis, with a feeble laugh.

"You put me in an embarrassing position," said Tobermory, whose tone and attitude certainly did not suggest a shred of embarrassment. "When your inclusion in this house-party was suggested, Sir Wilfrid protested that you were the most brainless woman of his acquaintance, and that there was a wide distinction between hospitality and the care of the feeble-minded. Lady Blemley replied that your lack of brain-power was the precise quality which had earned you your invitation, as you were the only person she could think of who might be idiotic enough to buy their old car. You know, the one they call 'The Envy of Sisyphus', because it goes quite nicely up-hill if you push it."

Lady Blemley's protestations would have had greater effect if she had not casually suggested to Mavis only that morning that the car in question would be just the thing for her down at her Devonshire home.

Major Barfield plunged in heavily to effect a diversion.

"How about your carryings-on with the tortoiseshell puss up at the stables, eh?"

The moment he had said it everyone realized the blunder.

"One does not usually discuss these matters in public," said Tobermory frigidly. "From a slight observation of your ways since you've been in this house I should imagine you'd find it inconvenient if I were to shift the conversation on to your own little affairs."

The panic which ensued was not confined to the Major.

"Would you like to go and see if cook has got your dinner ready?" suggested Lady Blemley hurriedly, affecting to ignore the fact that it wanted at least two hours to Tobermory's dinner-time.

"Thanks," said Tobermory, "not quite so soon after my tea. I don't want to die of indigestion."

"Cats have nine lives, you know," said Sir Wilfrid heartily.

"Possibly," answered Tobermory; "but only one liver."

"Adelaide!" said Mrs. Cornett, "do you mean to encourage that cat to go out and gossip about us in the servants' hall?"

The panic had indeed become general. A narrow ornamental balustrade ran in front of most of the bedroom windows at The Towers, and it was recalled with dismay that this had formed a favourite promenade for Tobermory at all hours,

whence he could watch the pigeons—and heaven knew what else besides. If he intended to become reminiscent in his present outspoken strain, the effect would be something more than disconcerting. Mrs. Cornett, who spent much time at her toilet-table, and whose complexion was reputed to be of a nomadic though punctual disposition, looked as ill at ease as the Major. Miss Scrawen, who wrote fiercely sensuous poetry and led a blameless life, merely displayed irritation; if you are methodical and virtuous in private you don't necessarily want everyone to know it. Bertie van Tahn, who was so depraved at seventeen that he had long ago given up trying to be any worse, turned a dull shade of gardenia white, but he did not commit the error of dashing out of the room like Odo Finsberry, a young gentleman who was understood to be reading for the Church and who was possibly disturbed at the thought of scandals he might hear concerning other people. Clovis had the presence of mind to maintain a composed exterior; privately he was calculating how long it would take to procure a box of fancy mice through the agency of the *Exchange and Mart* as a species of hush-money.

Even in a delicate situation like the present, Agnes Resker could not endure to remain too long in the background.

"Why did I ever come down here?" she asked dramatically.

Tobermory immediately accepted the opening.

"Judging by what you said to Mrs. Cornett on the croquet-lawn yesterday, you were out for food. You described the Blemleys as the dullest people to stay with that you knew, but said they were clever enough to employ a first-rate cook; otherwise they'd find it difficult to get anyone to come down a second time."

"There's not a word of truth in it! I appeal to Mrs. Cornett——" exclaimed the discomfited Agnes.

"Mrs. Cornett repeated your remark afterwards to Bertie van Tahn," continued Tobermory, "and said, 'That woman is a regular Hunger Marcher; she'd go anywhere for four square meals a day,' and Bertie van Tahn said——"

At this point the chronicle mercifully ceased. Tobermory had caught a glimpse of the big yellow Tom from the Rectory working his way through the shrubbery towards the stable wing. In a flash he had vanished through the open french window.

With the disappearance of his too brilliant pupil, Cornelius Appin found himself beset by a hurricane of bitter upbraiding, anxious inquiry, and frightened entreaty. The responsibility for the situation lay with him, and he must prevent matters from becoming worse. Could Tobermory impart his dangerous gift to other cats? was the first question he had to answer. It was possible, he replied, that he might have initiated his intimate friend the stable puss into his new accomplishment, but it was unlikely that his teaching could have taken a wider range as yet.

“Then,” said Mrs. Cornett, “Tobermory may be a valuable cat and a great pet; but I’m sure you’ll agree, Adelaide, that both he and the stable cat must be done away with without delay.”

“You don’t suppose I’ve enjoyed the last quarter of an hour, do you?” said Lady Blemley bitterly. “My husband and I are very fond of Tobermory—at least, we were before this horrible accomplishment was infused into him; but now, of course, the only thing is to have him destroyed as soon as possible.”

“We can put some strychnine in the scraps he always gets at dinner-time,” said Sir Wilfrid, “and I will go and drown the stable cat myself. The coachman will be very sore at losing his pet, but I’ll say a very catching form of mange has broken out in both cats and we’re afraid of it spreading to the kennels.”

“But my great discovery!” expostulated Mr. Appin. “After all my years of research and experiment——”

“You can go and experiment on the shorthorns at the farm, who are under proper control,” said Mrs. Cornett, “or the elephants at the Zoological Gardens. They’re said to be highly intelligent, and they have this recommendation, that they don’t come creeping about our bedrooms and under chairs, and so forth.”

An archangel ecstatically proclaiming the Millennium, and then finding that it clashed unpardonably with Henley and would have to be indefinitely postponed, could hardly have felt more crestfallen than Cornelius Appin at the reception of his wonderful achievement. Public opinion, however, was against him—in fact, had the general voice been consulted on the subject, it is probable that a strong minority vote would have been in favour of including him in the strychnine diet.

Defective train arrangements and a nervous desire to see

matters brought to a finish prevented an immediate dispersal of the party, but dinner that evening was not a social success. Sir Wilfrid had had rather a trying time with the stable cat and subsequently with the coachman. Agnes Resker ostentatiously limited her repast to a morsel of dry toast, which she bit as though it were a personal enemy; while Mavis Pellington maintained a vindictive silence throughout the meal. Lady Blemley kept up a flow of what she hoped was conversation, but her attention was fixed on the doorway. A plateful of carefully dosed fish scraps was in readiness on the sideboard, but sweets and savoury and dessert went their way, and no Tobermory appeared either in the dining-room or kitchen.

The sepulchral dinner was cheerful compared with the subsequent vigil in the smoking-room. Eating and drinking had at least supplied a distraction and cloak to the prevailing embarrassment. Bridge was out of the question in the general tension of nerves and tempers, and after Odo Finsberry had given a lugubrious rendering of "Melisande in the Wood" to a frigid audience, music was tacitly avoided. At eleven the servants went to bed, announcing that the small window in the pantry had been left open as usual for Tobermory's private use. The guests read steadily through the current batch of magazines and fell back gradually on the "Badminton Library" and bound volumes of *Punch*. Lady Blemley made periodic visits to the pantry, returning each time with an expression of listless depression which forestalled questioning.

At two o'clock Clovis broke the dominating silence.

"He won't turn up to-night. He's probably in the local newspaper office at the present moment, dictating the first instalment of his reminiscences. Lady What's-Her-Name's book won't be in it. It will be the event of the day."

Having made this contribution to the general cheerfulness, Clovis went to bed. At long intervals the various members of the house-party followed his example.

The servants taking round the early tea made a uniform announcement in reply to a uniform question. Tobermory had not returned.

Breakfast was, if anything, a more unpleasant function than dinner had been, but before its conclusion the situation was relieved. Tobermory's corpse was brought in from the shrubbery, where a gardener had just discovered it. From the

bites on his throat and the yellow fur which coated his claws, it was evident that he had fallen in unequal combat with the big Tom from the Rectory.

By midday most of the guests had quitted The Towers, and after lunch Lady Blemlay had sufficiently recovered her spirits to write an extremely nasty letter to the Rectory about the loss of her valuable pet.

Tobermory had been Appin's one successful pupil, and he was destined to have no successor. A few weeks later an elephant in the Dresden Zoological Garden, which had shown no previous signs of irritability, broke loose and killed an Englishman who had apparently been teasing it. The victim's name was variously reported in the papers as Oppin and Eppelin, but his front name was faithfully rendered Cornelius.

“If he was trying German irregular verbs on the poor beast,” said Clovis, “he deserved all he got.”

## A MATTER OF SENTIMENT

IT was the eve of the great race, and scarcely a member of Lady Susan's house-party had as yet a single bet on. It was one of those unsatisfactory years when one horse held a commanding market position, not by reason of any general belief in its crushing superiority, but because it was extremely difficult to pitch on any other candidate to whom to pin one's faith. Peradventure II was the favourite, not in the sense of being a popular fancy, but by virtue of a lack of confidence in any one of his rather undistinguished rivals. The brains of clubland were much exercised in seeking out possible merit where none was very obvious to the naked intelligence, and the house-party at Lady Susan's was possessed by the same uncertainty and irresolution that infected wider circles.

"It is just the time for bringing off a good coup," said Bertie van Tahn.

"Undoubtedly. But with what?" demanded Clovis for the twentieth time.

The women of the party were just as keenly interested in the matter, and just as helplessly perplexed; even the mother of Clovis, who usually got good racing information from her dressmaker, confessed herself fancy free on this occasion. Colonel Drake, who was professor of military history at a minor cramming establishment, was the only person who had a definite selection for the event, but as his choice varied every three hours he was worse than useless as an inspired guide. The crowning difficulty of the problem was that it could only be fitfully and furtively discussed. Lady Susan disapproved of racing. She disapproved of many things; some people went as far as to say that she disapproved of most things. Disapproval was to her what neuralgia and fancy needlework are to many other women. She disapproved of early morning tea and auction bridge, of ski-ing and the two-step, of the Russian ballet and the Chelsea Arts Club ball, of the French

policy in Morocco and the British policy everywhere. It was not that she was particularly strict or narrow in her views of life, but she had been the eldest sister of a large family of self-indulgent children, and her particular form of indulgence had consisted in openly disapproving of the foibles of the others. Unfortunately, the hobby had grown up with her. As she was rich, influential, and very, very kind, most people were content to count their early tea as well lost on her behalf. Still, the necessity for hurriedly dropping the discussion of an enthralling topic, and suppressing all mention of it during her presence on the scene, was an affliction at a moment like the present, when time was slipping away and indecision was the prevailing note.

After a lunch-time of rather strangled and uneasy conversation, Clovis managed to get most of the party together at the further end of the kitchen gardens, on the pretext of admiring the Himalayan pheasants. He had made an important discovery. Motkin, the butler, who (as Clovis expressed it) had grown prematurely grey in Lady Susan's service, added to his other excellent qualities an intelligent interest in matters connected with the Turf. On the subject of the forthcoming race he was not illuminating, except in so far that he shared the prevailing unwillingness to see a winner in Peradventure II. But where he outshone all the members of the house-party was in the fact that he had a second cousin who was head stable-lad at a neighbouring racing establishment, and usually gifted with much inside information as to private form and possibilities. Only the fact of her ladyship having taken it into her head to invite a house-party for the last week of May had prevented Mr. Motkin from paying a visit of consultation to his relative with respect to the big race; there was still time to cycle over if he could get leave of absence for the afternoon on some specious excuse.

"Let's jolly well hope he does," said Bertie van Tahn; "under the circumstances, a second cousin is almost as useful as second sight."

"That stable ought to know something, if knowledge is to be found anywhere," said Mrs. Packletide hopefully.

"I expect you'll find he'll echo my fancy for Motorboat," said Colonel Drake.

At this moment the subject had to be hastily dropped. Lady Susan bore down upon them, leaning on the arm of

Clovis's mother, to whom she was confiding the fact that she disapproved of the craze for Pekingese spaniels. It was the third thing she had found time to disapprove of since lunch, without counting her silent and permanent disapproval of the way Clovis's mother did her hair.

"We have been admiring the Himalayan pheasants," said Mrs. Packletide suavely.

"They went off to a bird-show at Nottingham early this morning," said Lady Susan, with the air of one who disapproves of hasty and ill-considered lying.

"Their house, I mean; such perfect roosting arrangements, and all so clean," resumed Mrs. Packletide, with an increased glow of enthusiasm. The odious Bertie van Tahn was murmuring audible prayers for Mrs. Packletide's ultimate estrangement from the paths of falsehood.

"I hope you don't mind dinner being a quarter of an hour late to-night," said Lady Susan; "Motkin has had an urgent summons to go and see a sick relative this afternoon. He wanted to bicycle there, but I am sending him in the motor."

"How very kind of you! Of course, we don't mind dinner being put off." The assurances came with unanimous and hearty sincerity.

At the dinner-table that night an undercurrent of furtive curiosity directed itself towards Motkin's impassive countenance. One or two of the guests almost expected to find a slip of paper concealed in their napkins, bearing the name of the second cousin's selection. They had not long to wait. As the butler went round with the murmured question, "Sherry?" he added in an even lower tone the cryptic words, "Better not." Mrs. Packletide gave a start of alarm and refused the sherry; there seemed some sinister suggestion in the butler's warning, as though the hostess had suddenly become addicted to the Borgia habit. A moment later the explanation flashed on her that "Better Not" was the name of one of the runners in the big race. Clovis was already pencilling it on his cuff, and Colonel Drake, in his turn, was signalling to everyone in hoarse whispers and dumb-show the fact that he had all along fancied "B.N."

Early next morning a sheaf of telegrams went Townward, representing the market commands of the house-party and servants' hall.

It was a wet afternoon, and most of Lady Susan's guests

hung about the hall, waiting apparently for the appearance of tea, though it was scarcely yet due. The advent of a telegram quickened everyone into a flutter of expectancy; the page who brought the telegram to Clovis waited with unusual alertness to know if there might be an answer.

Clovis read the message and gave an exclamation of annoyance.

“Not bad news, I hope,” said Lady Susan. Everyone else knew that the news was not good.

“It’s only the result of the Derby,” he blurted out; “Sadowa won; an utter outsider.”

“Sadowa,” exclaimed Lady Susan; “you don’t say so! How remarkable! It’s the first time I’ve ever backed a horse; in fact, I disapprove of horse-racing, but just for once in a way I put money on this horse, and it’s gone and won.”

“May I ask,” said Mrs. Packetide, amid the general silence, “why you put your money on this particular horse? None of the sporting prophets mentioned it as having an outside chance.”

“Well,” said Lady Susan, “you may laugh at me, but it was the name that attracted me. You see, I was always mixed up with the Franco-German war; I was married on the day that the war was declared, and my eldest child was born the day that peace was signed, so anything connected with the war has always interested me. And when I saw there was a horse running in the Derby called after one of the battles in the Franco-German war, I said, I *must* put some money on it, for once in a way, though I disapprove of racing. And it’s actually won.”

There was a general groan. No one groaned more deeply than the professor of military history.

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

*The Prince who Hiccopped*

Anthony Armstrong (the pen-name of Captain A. A. Willis, R.E.) was a regular contributor to *Punch* for several years, and has written five historical romances, a number of humorous novels, and a series of thrillers. His play *Ten Minute Alibi* was recently produced with striking success.



## THE PRINCE WHO HICCUPPED

ONCE upon a time there was a King named Gummelik who annoyed a fairy. In those days this was a pretty hazardous thing to do; indeed, one of the neighbouring kingdoms was already being governed by a very contrite five-toed horse, and another by a thoroughly scared Prince Regent on behalf of an unexpected oak tree growing in the second-best Throne-room. King Gummelik, however, luckily possessed a fairy godmother, and so had not felt any immediate effects from the subsequent violent spell beyond a slight rash on the small of the back. The angry fairy had therefore revengefully bided her time; till one day the Queen gave birth to a son, whom, by the way, she hopefully named Handsome.

At the christening all the local fairies turned up and gave the young Prince presents, and were just sitting round criticizing the catering arrangements and so on, when suddenly there was a flash, and the angry fairy, who naturally had not been invited, materialized in a burst of smoke and an ugly temper.

"Well? Why wasn't *I* asked?" she began, and while the King was feebly muttering something about having mislaid her address, strode over to the cradle.

"I've got a gift for your baby, too," she announced in ominous tones.

"Oh, look here, steady on!" began the poor King, very flurried, and took a great draught of wine to steady his nerves—though he had done himself pretty well at the buffet already.

"A gift," the fairy continued, "that will ensure your not forgetting my existence again."

The King preserved a worried silence and took more wine. Privately he was wondering apprehensively how best to break it to his wife, upstairs, that her offspring had become perhaps a ginger-whiskered rabbit, or even a five-toed foal, or an

acorn. He knew just what she would say: "How like a man! Can't be trusted for a moment to look after a baby without letting it catch a spell!"

"What's its name?" asked the fairy testily, staring at the infant.

"It's not an 'it'. It's a 'he'," objected the King, having drawn a little courage from the beaker. Moreover, he had already had this well rubbed into him, both by the baby's mother and by all the Royal nurses in turn.

"What's *his* name, then?" repeated the fairy even more testily.

"Well, we thought—er—that is, my wife is calling him 'Handsome'."

"Why?" asked the fairy.

The King hadn't thought of that one. "Why?" he asked the Royal Head Nurse in a hurried whisper.

The Royal Head Nurse curtseyed. "Because he's such a pretty darling!"

The fairy snorted incredulously.

"He *is*," retorted the Royal Head Nurse, who wasn't going to let anyone—not even a fairy—disparage her charge. "Wasn't um's a pretty-pretty?" she added to the baby. "It was the sweety-weety-*weetest* ickle wassums."

The fairy looked slightly sick. The King had his beaker refilled.

"Blessums, then, Mannie's own uvey-dovey!" continued the Nurse, getting into her stride. "Wassums uzzy——"

"Stop!" cried the fairy, quite revolted. There was an awed silence of nearly a minute, at the end of which time the King hiccupped.

"What did you say?" asked the fairy ominously.

"Beg pardon, I'm sure," said the King with hasty politeness; and hiccupped again.

It seemed to give the fairy an idea. She looked maliciously at him, then waved her hand. "Here's my gift," she cried. "The young Prince shall *hiccup* all his life!"

Then after a spiteful glance round she vanished.

During the ensuing commotion an aged fairy—the King's godmother—stepped forward from the guests.

"I alone have not yet given my gift," she quavered traditionally; for one fairy always holds back on these occasion to try to set right any little hitch. "And though I'm afraid

I cannot remove that very vulgar spell, I *can* alter it. The Prince shall only hiccup till, by some act of his after he comes to manhood, he shall win the thanks of every person in the kingdom."

She retired into the throng, had a glass of wine, and was patted on the back by the other fairies.

"Gug—hic—gug——" began the baby, trying to say "Goo!" The spell was already at work.

Taking it all round, the Christening Party had not been a success.

. . . . .

It soon became apparent that there was no shoddy workmanship about the wicked fairy's gift, and poor King Gummelik, constrained to wait till the Prince came of age and he could do something about his godmother's modification, tried everything in the meantime to minimize its evil effects. But the Prince's hiccups were devastating, and as they invariably commenced every time he opened his mouth to speak, his conversation was severely handicapped, if not brought to a standstill altogether.

When the boy was twelve, criers were sent round the kingdom proclaiming that whoever could cure the Prince of the stammers (as the proclamation politely put it) should receive half the kingdom, but though several people answered—mostly professors of elocution—the Prince's hiccupping persisted. The professors merely went away with acquired hiccupping stammers themselves, and began to sue for compensation. And when finally a deaf old horse-doctor from an outlying village appeared and attempted to apply hot fomentations, owing, it transpired, to his having misunderstood the herald to say the Prince was suffering from the *staggers*, the King first issued a peevish proclamation reading, "Ref. my R.P. Z/41 of tenth ult., for 'stammers' read 'hiccups'", and when that had no effect, cancelled the whole thing. After that it became the custom to pretend that nothing was wrong, and courtiers just waited carelessly, humming a tune, while the Prince struggled with his sentences. In this way and with a good deal of wasted time in Court affairs, the Prince approached his eighteenth birthday.

The King and Queen, quite excited now about the fairy godmother's prophecy, began to consider plans by which

the Prince could perform some act to win the thanks of every person in the Kingdom. A Council of State daily discussed the problem, but there always seemed some hitch in every proposal, and some people who would not be grateful. The obvious way seemed to be a free distribution of largesse by the Prince, but since no single person could be missed out for fear of subsequent complaint, the first rough estimate was enough to rule this plan out. Moreover, whatever thanks it might win from the populace it certainly would never enlist the gratitude of the harassed Court Treasurer.

Meanwhile, a fresh turn had been given to Court affairs by the Prince's discovery, in common with those afflicted by stuttering of all kinds, that he could sing without hiccupping at all.

The Court Poet's department was instantly expanded to cope with this demand for topical lyrics, and many extra verse-makers (not particularly good ones) were taken on on piece-work. This, of course, cut out much wasted time. Instead of arriving at breakfast with a lengthy "*Gughic—Gughic—Gughic . . .*" which, while originally intended for "*Gughic—Gughic—good morning, all*", generally was changed at the fiftieth "*gughic*" to a fretful "*Gughic—gughic—getonwithit*", the Prince now entered merrily trilling :

“Good morning, Pa !  
 Good morning, Ma !  
 Good morning, all,  
 Both great and small !  
 Hic !”

and no one's bacon got cold.

Or when at a Council giving his opinion on the motion before the House, instead of everybody at once laying off to write up their notes, while Prince Handsome went "*bubhic—bubhic—bubhic . . .*" winding up possibly to say "*bubhic—bubhic—bosh !*" he now merely got up, fished out his music, tried his voice with four high notes and three low tones, and sang :

“The Proposer of that motion  
 Hasn't got a single notion  
 With which I can agree ;  
 Hic !

“And so it seems to me  
 That, as far as I can see,  
 It'll be just what's expected  
 If the motion is rejected.  
 Hic !  
 So *my* vote, all must know,  
 Is nun—hic—nun—hic—*No !*”

As I said, the assistant poets were by no means top-notch men. Anyway, it saved time.

The really annoying part, however, was that the Prince frankly could not sing a note. His voice was like a lost corncrake in a large field—some said two lost corncrakes in a small field, and the Royal Director of Music put it as high as five in a paddock. It soon caused far more annoyance than the hiccups themselves, and the courtiers were hard put to it to conceal their dismay when it was observed that the Prince was clearing his throat to sing a casual remark about the weather.

On his son's eighteenth birthday the King made his first real effort at removing the spell. He organized a birthday feast for everyone in his kingdom, and ordered that wine should flow free in every fountain in the country. He then proposed to send heralds round and collect a testimony of grateful thanks from every single one of his subjects.

Unfortunately, being his first effort, it was quite unsuccessful. He hadn't properly realized what he was up against; nor had the wicked fairy forgotten her rival's emendation of the spell. Before the King had even time to send out the heralds, he received various deputations bearing complaints :

(a) About the Disorganization of their Service, from the Water Supply Company.

(b) About the Small Number of Fountains in Farming Areas, from the Agricultural Labourers' Union.

(c) About the Quality of Wine supplied, from the Society of Gourmets and Topers.

(d) About the Quantity of Wine supplied, from the Cripples' Federation.

(e) About there being Wine at all, from five different Temperance Associations.

This sank the plan completely, and at the end of the

week, when the excitement had died down and the hopeful groups round the fountains were reluctantly dispersing to their homes, the King held another Council, at which the Vizier propounded a new plan.

This was drastic enough. It was that the King should import a fierce dragon—there was one going cheap in a neighbouring kingdom—and should let it ravage his domains. At the end of a month, when presumably everyone would be heartily sick of it, for a dragon does not distinguish, when ravaging, between cornland, rose gardens, allotments, or house-property, the Prince should go forth and slay it, thus earning universal thanks.

There was a silence after this suggestion; but gradually everyone realized that sacrifices would have to be made if they wanted to stop the Prince hiccupping and singing—particularly singing—all over the palace for the rest of their lives. The proposal was then carried with only one dissentient. This dissentient, however, was the Prince himself, which caused a deadlock. At last, however, he gave in, on being reassured by everyone (who, as the Prince's stock of Verses Suitable for All Occasions increased became more and more anxious for him to be cured) that the dragon was very old and could be killed quite easily.

So the dragon was purchased and had the time of its life, ravaging about unmolested, except by amateurs, peasants with pitchforks, farmers, and market-gardeners. Not a single Knight in Armour turned out; for the word had gone round that the dragon was being preserved for royalty. The dragon itself thought the millennium must have come.

After a month the Prince rode out and killed it. He sang a short song of battle, and then cut its head off. Several people suggested unkindly that the sword-blow was unnecessary, and that the dragon had died on the high note in the last verse.

Then the King sent out messengers, wisely saying this time that he should assume that everyone joined in an expression of gratitude if he had not received any contrary statement by the end of the week.

Two days later—for the wicked fairy still kept a vigilant eye on her spell—a man turned up whose wife's mother had been inadvertently trodden on by the dragon during a night ravage, and who adamantly refused ever to be grateful even to

a hiccupping Prince for killing it. This upset everything. The Court went into mourning for a fortnight. The Prince composed a triumphal *Ode to a Slain Dragon*. The Court thereupon stayed in mourning for a further fortnight.

Then the Vizier had another idea, but refused to divulge it till he had explained meaningly to the King that it was his daughter who had suggested both this and the former one, and he had reason to believe she was—er—interested in the Prince. The King, after privately consulting the Vizier's pedigree and family tree, graciously made "a note of her name, just", as he put it, "in case". Whereupon the Vizier expounded his plan.

The idea was to pay for the dragon's ravages by a heavy tax on rich and poor alike. The Court Treasurer instantly seconded the motion, but the King asked where the Prince came in. The Vizier explained craftily that the King would (after, of course, the business had shown a good profit) accede reluctantly to the request of his son and abolish the tax. Upon which his son's popularity would become terrific. "But supposing," said the King a little densely, "he doesn't request me?" Several Councillors (who were musical by nature) promised at once that they would see to that point, and at last he got the idea of it.

The tax was imposed and everyone was vastly annoyed, even to the extent of a small revolt in which one of the tax-collectors was quite spoilt. Then the Prince, having learnt up some verses, publicly implored his father—in twelve cantos—to abolish the tax. The King graciously agreed in a prose speech of one monosyllable. Once more a proclamation was issued, stating that any person who inconceivably did *not* wish to join in a testimonial to the Prince should come to the Palace.

"But supposing someone does?" said the King. "Remember last time. We shall probably have a chap along saying he adores taxes."

"I have," whispered the Vizier, "men with swords on all the doors."

"Ah!" said the King.

"But," pursued the Vizier with a little cough, "I'm positive no one will try to turn up. Quite positive."

"Why?"

"Tell you afterwards," replied the Vizier archly.

The whole Court waited anxiously for the allotted period. But this time not a single complainant appeared.

The King decreed a universal vote of thanks, and the Prince, rising to reply with some prepared verses, was able, to everyone's delight, to tear them up and speak fluently, and without a single hiccup. The applause was simple terrific.

"But why that fairy didn't induce *someone* to demur," said the delighted King to the Vizier afterwards over a glass of madeira, "I can't think. Why were you so positive?"

"Well," began the Vizier delicately, "it's like this. Begging your Majesty's pardon and so on—but my daughter . . ."

"Oh, your daughter again," said the King.

"Yes. Now your—er—future daughter-in-law, that is," he explained firmly. "She—er—being interested, took the liberty of adding—above your signature—a further short paragraph to the proclamation."

The King was first annoyed and then curious. "We forgive her," he said graciously. "What did she put?"

"She simply added: 'In the event of any complainant coming, His Royal Highness will, at a personal interview, *sing* his full reasons for his action in specially written verses.' And so—er—no one came. Mind you," added the Vizier tactfully, "myself, I always thought the Prince sang very nicely."

HILAIRE BELLOC

*On Conversations in Trains*

Hilaire Belloc is a writer of great charm and enormous versatility, his works ranging from the *Bad Child's Book of Beasts* to *The Strategy of the Duke of Marlborough*, and including novels, satires, essays, travel books and military history. The following story is a good example of his lighter mood.



## ON CONVERSATIONS IN TRAINS

I MIGHT have added in this list I have just made of the advantages of railways, that railways let one mix with one's fellow-men and hear their continual conversation. Now, if you will think of it, railways are the only institutions that give us that advantage. In other places we avoid all save those who resemble us, and many men become in middle-age like cabinet ministers, quite ignorant of their fellow-citizens. But in trains, if one travels much, one hears every kind of man talking to every other, and one perceives all England.

It is on this account that I have always been at pains to note what I heard in this way, especially the least expected, most startling, and therefore most revealing dialogues, and as soon as I could to write them down, for in this way one can grow to know men.

Thus I have somewhere preserved a hot discussion among some miners in Derbyshire (voters, good people, voters, remember) whether the United States were bound to us as a colony "like Egypt". And I once heard also a debate as to whether the word were *Horizon* or *Horizon*; this ended in a fight, and the *Horizon* man pushed the *Horizon* man out at Skipton, and wouldn't let him get into the carriage again.

Then, again, I once heard two frightfully rich men near Birmingham arguing why England was the richest and the Happiest Country in the world. Neither of these men was a gentleman, but they argued politely though firmly, for they differed profoundly. One of them, who was almost too rich to walk, said it was because we minded our own affairs, and respected property and were law-abiding. This (he said) was the cause of our prosperity and of the futile envy with which foreigners regarded the homes of our working men. Not so the other: *he* thought that it was the Plain English sense of Duty that did the trick; he showed how this was ingrained in us and appeared in our Schoolboys and our Police: he

contrasted it with Ireland, and he asked what else had made our Criminal Trials the model of the world? All this also I wrote down.

Then also once on a long ride (yes, "ride". Why not?) through Lincolnshire I heard two men of the smaller commercial or salaried kind at issue. The first, who had a rather peevish face, was looking gloomily out of the window and was saying, "Denmark has it: Greece has it—why shouldn't we have it? Eh? America has it and so has Germany—why shouldn't we have it?" Then, after a pause, he added, "Even France has it—why haven't we got it?" He spoke as though he wouldn't stand it much longer, and as though France were the last straw.

The other man was excitable and had an enormous newspaper in his hand, and he answered in a high voice, "'Cause we're too sensible, that's why! 'Cause we know what we're about we do."

The other man said, "Ho! Do we?"

The second man answered, "Yes; we do. What made England?"

"Gord," said the first man.

This brought the second man up all standing and nearly carried away his fore-bob-stay. He answered slowly:

"Well . . . yes . . . in a manner of speaking. But what I meant to say was like this, that what made England was Free Trade!" Here he slapped one hand on to the other with a noise like that of a pistol, and added heavily, "And what's more, I can prove it."

The first man, who was now entrenched in his position, said again, "Ho! Can you?"—and sneered.

The second man then proved it, getting more and more excited. When he had done, all the first man did was to say, "You talk foolishness."

Then there was a long silence: very strained. At last the Free Trader pulled out a pipe and filled it at leisure, with a light sort of womanish tobacco, and just as he struck a match the Protectionist shouted out, "No you don't! This ain't a smoking compartment. I object!" The Free Trader said, "Oh, that's how it is, is it?" The Protectionist answered in a lower voice and surly, "Yes, that's how."

They sat avoiding each other's eyes till we got to Grantham. I had no idea that feeling could run so high, yet neither

of them had a real grip on the Theory of International Exchange.

But by far the most extraordinary conversation, and perhaps the most illuminating I ever heard, was in a train going to the West Country and stopping first at Swindon.

It passed between two men who sat in corners facing each other.

The one was stout, tall, and dressed in a tweed suit. He had a gold watch-chain with a little ornament on it representing a pair of compasses and a square. His beard was brown and soft. His eyes were very sodden. When he got in he first wrapped a rug round and round his legs, then he took off his top-hat and put on a cloth cap, then he sat down.

The other also wore a tweed suit and was also stout, but he was not so tall. His watch-chain also was of gold (but of a different pattern, paler, and with no ornament hung on it). His eyes also were sodden. He had no rug. He also took off his hat, but put no cap upon his head. I noticed that he was rather bald, and in the middle of his baldness was a kind of little knob. For the purposes of this record, therefore, I shall give him the name "Bald", while I shall call the other man "Cap".

I have forgotten, by the way, to tell you that Bald had a very large nose, at the end of which a great number of little veins had congested and turned quite blue.

CAP (*shuts up Levy's paper, "The Daily Telegraph", and opens Harmsworth's "Daily Mail"*): Shuts that up and looks fixedly at BALD): I ask your pardon . . . but isn't your name Binder?

BALD (*his eyes still quite sodden*): That is my name. Binder's my name. (*He coughs to show breeding.*) Why (*his eyes getting a trifle less sodden*), if you aren't Mr. Mowle! Well, Mr. Mowle, sir, how are you?"

CAP (*with some dignity*): Very well, thank you, Mr. Binder. How's Mrs. Binder and the kids? All blooming?

BALD: Why, yes, thank you, Mr. Mowle, but Mrs. Binder still has those attacks (*shaking his head*). Abdominal (*continuing to shake his head*). Gastric. Something cruel.

CAP: They do suffer cruel, as you say, do women, Mr. Binder (*shaking his head too—but more slightly*). This indigestion—ah!

BALD (*more brightly*): Not married yet, Mr. Mowle?

CAP (*contentedly and rather stolidly*): No, Mr. Binder. Nor not inclined to neither. (*Draws a great breath.*) I'm a single man, Mr. Binder, and intend so to adhere. (*A pause to think.*) That's what I call (*a further pause to get the right phrase*) "single blessedness". Yes (*another deep breath*), I find life worth living, Mr. Binder.

BALD (*with great cunning*): That depends upon the liver. (*Roars with laughter.*)

CAP (*laughing a good deal too, but not so much as BALD*): Ar! That was young Cobbler's joke in times gone by.

BALD (*politely*): Ever see young Cobbler now, Mr. Mowle?

CAP (*with importance*): Why, yes, Mr. Binder; I met him at the Thersites' Lodge down Brixham way—only the other day. Wonderful brilliant he was . . . well, there . . . (*his tone changes*) he was sitting next to me—(*thoughtfully*)—as might be here—(*putting Harmsworth's paper down to represent Young Cobbler*)—and here like, would be Lord Haltingtowres.

BALD (*his manner suddenly becoming very serious*): He's a fine man, he is! One of those men I respect.

CAP (*with still greater seriousness*): You may say that, Mr. Binder. No respecter of persons—talks to me or you or any of them just the same.

BALD (*vaguely*): Yes, they're a fine lot. (*Suddenly*): So's Charlie Beresford!

CAP (*with more enthusiasm than he had yet shown*): I say ditto to that, Mr. Binder! (*Thinking for a few moments of the characteristics of Lord Charles Beresford.*) It's pluck—that's what it is—regular British pluck. (*Grimly*): That's the kind of man—no favouritism.

BALD: Ar! It's a case of "Well done, Condor!"

CAP: Ar! You're right there, Mr. Binder.

BALD (*suddenly pulling a large flask out of his pocket and speaking very rapidly*): Well, here's yours, Mr. Mowle. (*He drinks out of it a quantity of neat whiskey, and having drunk it, rubs the top of his flask with his sleeve and hands it over politely to CAP.*)

CAP (*having drunk a lot of neat whiskey, also rubbed his sleeve over it, screwed on the little top and giving that long gasp which the occasion demands*): Yes, you're right there—"Well done, Condor."

At this point the train began to go slowly, and just as it stopped at the station I heard CAP begin again, asking BALD

on what occasion and for what services Lord Charles Beresford had been given his title.

Full of the marvels of this conversation, I got out, went into the waiting-room and wrote it all down. I think I have it accurately word for word.

But there happened to me what always happens after all literary effort ; the enthusiasm vanished, the common day was before me. I went out to do my work in the place and to meet quite ordinary people and to forget, perhaps (so strong is Time), the fantastic beings in the train. In a word, to quote Mr. Binyon's admirable lines :

The world whose wrong  
Mocks holy beauty and our desire returned.



# CHARLES DICKENS

## *Sentiment*

The fame of Charles Dickens as a creator of humorous character began with the publication of *Sketches by Boz*, from which the amusing little tale which follows is taken, and was firmly established by the appearance of the *Pickwick Papers*. Though fashions in literature change the appeal of Dickens seems to be immortal.



## SENTIMENT

**T**HE Miss Crumptions, or to quote the authority of the inscription on the garden gate of Minerva House, Hammersmith, "The Misses Crumpton", were two unusually tall, particularly thin, and exceedingly skinny personages : very upright, and very yellow. Miss Amelia Crumpton owned to thirty-eight, and Miss Maria Crumpton admitted she was forty ; an admission which was rendered perfectly unnecessary by the self-evident fact of her being at least fifty. They dressed in the most interesting manner—like twins !—and looked as happy and comfortable as a couple of marigolds run to seed. They were very precise, had the strictest possible ideas of propriety, wore false hair, and always smelt very strongly of lavender.

Minerva House, conducted under the auspices of the two sisters, was a "finishing establishment for young ladies", where some twenty girls, of the ages of from thirteen to nineteen inclusive, acquired a smattering of everything, and a knowledge of nothing ; instruction in French and Italian, dancing lessons twice a week ; and other necessities of life. The house was a white one, a little removed from the roadside, with close palings in front. The bedroom windows were always left partly open, to afford a bird's-eye view of numerous little bedsteads with very white dimity furniture, and thereby impress the passer-by with a due sense of the luxuries of the establishment ; and there was a front parlour hung round with highly varnished maps which nobody ever looked at, and filled with books which no one ever read, appropriated exclusively to the reception of parents, who, whenever they called, could not fail to be struck with the very deep appearance of the place.

"Amelia, my dear," said Miss Maria Crumpton, entering the schoolroom one morning, with her false hair in papers : as she occasionally did, in order to impress the young ladies

with a conviction of its reality. "Amelia, my dear, here is a most gratifying note I have just received. You needn't mind reading it aloud."

Miss Amelia, thus advised, proceeded to read the following note with an air of great triumph :

*Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., presents his compliments to Miss Crumpton, and will feel much obliged by Miss Crumpton's calling on him, if she conveniently can, to-morrow morning at one o'clock, as Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., is anxious to see Miss Crumpton on the subject of placing Miss Brook Dingwall under her charge.*

*Adelphi.*

*Monday morning.*

"A Member of Parliament's daughter !" ejaculated Amelia, in an ecstatic tone.

"A Member of Parliament's daughter !" repeated Miss Maria, with a smile of delight, which, of course, elicited a concurrent titter of pleasure from all the young ladies.

"It's exceedingly delightful !" said Miss Amelia ; whereupon all the young ladies murmured their admiration again. Courtiers are but schoolboys, and court-ladies schoolgirls.

So important an announcement at once superseded the business of the day. A holiday was declared, in commemoration of the great event ; the Miss Crumptions retired to their private apartment to talk it over ; the smaller girls discussed the probable manners and customs of the daughter of a Member of Parliament ; and the young ladies verging on eighteen wondered whether she was engaged, whether she was pretty, whether she wore much bustle, and many other *whethers* of equal importance.

The two Miss Crumptions proceeded to the Adelphi at the appointed time next day, dressed, of course, in their best style, and looking as amiable as they possibly could—which, by the by, is not saying much for them. Having sent in their cards, through the medium of a red-hot-looking footman in bright livery, they were ushered into the august presence of the profound Dingwall.

Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., was very haughty, solemn, and portentous. He had, naturally, a somewhat

spasmodic expression of countenance, which was not rendered the less remarkable by his wearing an extremely stiff cravat. He was wonderfully proud of the M.P. attached to his name, and never lost an opportunity of reminding people of his dignity. He had a great idea of his own abilities, which must have been a great comfort to him, as no one else had; and in diplomacy, on a small scale, in his own family arrangements, he considered himself unrivalled. He was a county magistrate, and discharged the duties of his station with all due justice and impartiality; frequently committing poachers, and occasionally committing himself. Miss Brook Dingwall was one of the numerous class of young ladies who, like adverbs, may be known by their answering to a commonplace question, and doing nothing else.

On the present occasion, this talented individual was seated in a small library at a table covered with papers, doing nothing, but trying to look busy, playing at shop. Acts of Parliament and letters directed to "Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P.," were ostentatiously scattered over the table, at a little distance from which Mrs. Brook Dingwall was seated at work. One of those public nuisances, a spoiled child, was playing about the room, dressed after the most approved fashion—in a blue tunic with a black belt a quarter of a yard wide, fastened with an immense buckle—looking like a robber in a melodrama seen through a diminishing glass.

After a little pleasantry from the sweet child, who amused himself by running away with Miss Maria Crumpton's chair as fast as it was placed for her, the visitors were seated, and Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., opened the conversation.

He had sent for Miss Crumpton, he said, in consequence of the high character he had received of her establishment from his friend, Sir Alfred Muggs.

Miss Crumpton murmured her acknowledgments to him (Muggs), and Cornelius proceeded.

"One of my principal reasons, Miss Crumpton, for parting with my daughter is that she has lately acquired some sentimental ideas which it is most desirable to eradicate from her young mind." (Here the little innocent before noticed fell out of an armchair with an awful crash.)

"Naughty boy!" said his mamma, who appeared more surprised at his taking the liberty of falling down than at

anything else; "I'll ring the bell for James to take him away."

"Pray don't check him, my love," said the diplomatist, as soon as he could make himself heard amidst the unearthly howling consequent upon the threat and the tumble. "It all arises from his great flow of spirits." This last explanation was addressed to Miss Crumpton.

"Certainly, sir," replied the antique Maria; not exactly seeing, however, the connection between a flow of animal spirits and a fall from an armchair.

Silence was restored, and the M.P. resumed: "Now, I know nothing so likely to effect this object, Miss Crumpton, as her mixing constantly in the society of girls of her own age; and, as I know that in your establishment she will meet such as are not likely to contaminate her young mind, I propose to send her to you."

The younger Miss Crumpton expressed the acknowledgments of the establishment generally. Maria was rendered speechless by bodily pain. The dear little fellow, having recovered his animal spirits, was standing upon her most tender foot, by way of getting his face (which looked like a capital O in a red-lettered play-bill) on a level with the writing-table.

"Of course, Lavinia will be a parlour boarder," continued the enviable father; "and on one point I wish my directions to be strictly observed. The fact is that some ridiculous love affair with a person much her inferior in life has been the cause of her present state of mind. Knowing that, of course, under your care, she can have no opportunity of meeting this person, I do not object to—indeed, I should rather prefer—her mixing with such society as you see yourself."

This important statement was again interrupted by the high-spirited little creature, in the excess of his joyousness, breaking a pane of glass, and nearly precipitating himself into an adjacent area. James was rung for; considerable confusion and screaming succeeded: two little blue legs were seen to kick violently in the air as the man left the room, and the child was gone.

"Mr. Brook Dingwall would like Miss Brook Dingwall to learn everything," said Mrs. Brook Dingwall, who hardly ever said anything at all.

"Certainly," said both the Miss Crumptons together.

“And I trust the plan I have devised will be effectual in weaning my daughter from this absurd idea, Miss Crumpton,” continued the legislator. “I hope you will have the goodness to comply, in all respects, with any request I may forward to you.”

The promise was, of course, made ; and after a lengthened discussion, conducted on behalf of the Dingwalls with the most becoming diplomatic gravity, and on that of the Crumptions with profound respect, it was finally arranged that Miss Lavinia should be forwarded to Hammersmith on the next day but one, on which occasion the half-yearly ball given at the establishment was to take place. It might divert the dear girl’s mind. This, by the way, was another bit of diplomacy.

Miss Lavinia was introduced to her future governess, and both the Miss Crumptions pronounced her “a most charming girl” ; an opinion which, by a singular coincidence, they always entertained of any new pupil.

Courtesies were exchanged, acknowledgments expressed, condescension exhibited, and the interview terminated.

Preparations, to make use of a theatrical phraseology, “on a scale of magnitude never before attempted”, were incessantly made at Minerva House to give effect to the forthcoming ball. The largest room in the house was pleasingly ornamented with blue calico roses, plaid tulips, and other equally natural-looking artificial flowers, the work of the young ladies themselves. The carpet was taken up, the folding-doors were taken down, the furniture was taken out, and rout-seats were taken in. The linen-drapers of Hammersmith were astounded at the sudden demand for blue sarsenet ribbon and long white gloves. Dozens of geraniums were purchased for bouquets, and a harp and two violins were bespoke from town in addition to the grand piano already on the premises. The young ladies who were selected to show off on the occasion, and do credit to the establishment, practised incessantly, much to their own satisfaction, and greatly to the annoyance of the lame old gentleman over the way ; and a constant correspondence was kept up between the Misses Crumpton and the Hammersmith pastrycook.

The evening came ; and then there was such a lacing of stays, and tying of sandals, and dressing of hair, as never

can take place with a proper degree of bustle out of a boarding-school. The smaller girls managed to be in everybody's way, and were pushed about accordingly; and the elder ones dressed, and tied, and flattered, and envied one another, as earnestly and sincerely as if they had actually *come out*.

"How do I look, dear?" inquired Miss Emily Smithers, the belle of the house, of Miss Caroline Wilson, who was her bosom friend, because she was the ugliest girl in Hammer-smith, or out of it.

"Oh, charming, dear. How do I?"

"Delightful! You never looked so handsome," returned the belle, adjusting her own dress and not bestowing a glance on her poor companion.

"I hope young Hilton will come early," said another young lady to Miss somebody else, in a fever of expectation.

"I'm sure he'd be highly flattered if he knew it," returned the other, who was practising *l'été*.

"Oh, he's so handsome!" said the first.

"Such a charming person!" added a second.

"Such a *distingué* air!" said a third.

"Oh, what *do* you think?" said another girl, running into the room. "Miss Crumpton says her cousin's coming."

"What! Theodosius Butler?" said everybody in raptures.

"Is *he* handsome?" inquired a novice.

"No, not particularly handsome," was the general reply; "but, oh, so clever."

Mr. Theodosius Butler was one of those immortal geniuses who are to be met with in almost every circle. They have, usually, very deep, monotonous voices. They always persuade themselves that they are wonderful persons, and that they ought to be very miserable, though they don't precisely know why. They are very conceited, and usually possess half an idea; but, with enthusiastic young ladies, and silly young gentlemen, they are very wonderful persons. The individual in question, Mr. Theodosius, had written a pamphlet containing some very weighty considerations on the expediency of doing something or other; and as every sentence contained a good many words of four syllables, his admirers took it for granted that he meant a good deal.

"Perhaps that's he," exclaimed several young ladies, as the first pull of the evening threatened destruction to the bell of the gate.

An awful pause ensued. Some boxes arrived and a young lady—Miss Brook Dingwall, in full ball costume, with an immense gold chain round her neck, and her dress looped up with a single rose; an ivory fan in her hand, and a most interesting expression of despair in her face.

The Miss Crumptions inquired after the family, with the most excruciating anxiety, and Miss Brook Dingwall was formally introduced to her future companions. The Miss Crumptions conversed with the young ladies in the most mellifluous tones, in order that Miss Brook Dingwall might be properly impressed with their amiable treatment.

Another pull at the bell. Mr. Dadson, the writing-master, and his wife. The wife in green silk, with shoes and cap-trimmings to correspond: the writing-master in a white waistcoat, black knee-shorts, and ditto silk stockings, displaying a leg large enough for two writing-masters. The young ladies whispered to one another, and the writing-master and his wife flattered the Miss Crumptions, who were dressed in amber, with long sashes like dolls.

Repeated pulls at the bell, and arrivals too numerous to particularize: papas and mammas and aunts and uncles, the owners and guardians of the 'different pupils; the singing-master, Signor Lobskini, in a black wig; the pianoforte player and the violins; the harp, in a state of intoxication; and some twenty young men, who stood near the door, and talked to one another, occasionally bursting into a giggle. A general hum of conversation. Coffee handed round, and plentifully partaken of by fat mammas, who looked like the stout people who come on in pantomimes for the sole purpose of being knocked down.

The popular Mr. Hilton was the next arrival; and he, having, at the request of the Miss Crumptions, undertaken the office of Master of the Ceremonies, the quadrilles commenced with considerable spirit. The young men by the door gradually advanced into the middle of the room, and in time became sufficiently at ease to consent to be introduced to partners. The writing-master danced every set, springing about with the most fearful agility, and his wife played a rubber in the back-parlour—a little room with five bookshelves, dignified by the name of the study. Setting her down to whist was a half-yearly piece of generalship on

the part of the Miss Crumptions ; it was necessary to hide her somewhere, on account of her being a fright.

The interesting Lavinia Brook Dingwall was the only girl present who appeared to take no interest in the proceedings of the evening. In vain was she solicited to dance ; in vain was the universal homage paid to her as the daughter of a Member of Parliament. She was equally unmoved by the splendid tenor of the inimitable Lobskini, and the brilliant execution of Miss Lætitia Parsons, whose performance of "The Recollections of Ireland" was universally declared to be almost equal to that of Moscheles himself. Not even the announcement of the arrival of Mr. Theodosius Butler could induce her to leave the corner of the back drawing-room in which she was seated.

"Now, Theodosius," said Miss Maria Crumpton, after that enlightened pamphleteer had nearly run the gauntlet of the whole company, "I must introduce you to our new pupil."

Theodosius looked as if he cared for nothing earthly.

"She's the daughter of a Member of Parliament," said Maria.

Theodosius started.

"And her name is——" he inquired.

"Miss Brook Dingwall."

"Great Heaven!" poetically exclaimed Theodosius, in a low tone.

Miss Crumpton commenced the introduction in due form. Miss Brook Dingwall languidly raised her head.

"Edward!" she exclaimed, with a half-shriek, on seeing the well-known nankeen legs.

Fortunately, as Miss Maria Crumpton possessed no remarkable share of penetration, and as it was one of the diplomatic arrangements that no attention was to be paid to Miss Lavinia's incoherent exclamations, she was perfectly unconscious of the mutual agitation of the parties ; and therefore, seeing that the offer of his hand for the next quadrille was accepted, she left him by the side of Miss Brook Dingwall.

"Oh, Edward!" exclaimed that most romantic of all romantic young ladies, as the light of science seated himself beside her, "Oh, Edward, is it you?"

Mr. Theodosius assured the dear creature, in the most

impassioned manner, that he was not conscious of being anybody but himself.

"Then why—why—this disguise? Oh! Edward M'Neville Walter, what have I not suffered on your account?"

"Lavinia, hear me," replied the hero, in his most poetic strain. "Do not condemn me unheard. If anything that emanates from the soul of such a wretch as I can occupy a place in your recollection—if any being, so vile, deserve your notice—you may remember that I once published a pamphlet (and paid for its publication) entitled 'Considerations on the Policy of Removing the Duty on Beeswax'."

"I do—I do!" sobbed Lavinia.

"That," continued the lover, "was a subject to which your father was devoted, heart and soul."

"He was—he was!" reiterated the sentimentalist.

"I knew it," continued Theodosius tragically; "I knew it—I forwarded him a copy. He wished to know me. Could I disclose my real name? Never! No, I assumed that name which you have so often pronounced in tones of endearment. As M'Neville Walter, I devoted myself to the stirring cause; as M'Neville Walter, I gained your heart; in the same character I was ejected from your house by your father's domestics; and in no character at all have I since been enabled to see you. We now meet again, and I proudly own that I am—Theodosius Butler."

The young lady appeared perfectly satisfied with this argumentative address, and bestowed a look of the most ardent affection on the immortal advocate of beeswax.

"May I hope," said he, "that the promise your father's violent behaviour interrupted may be renewed?"

"Let us join this set," replied Lavinia coquettishly—for girls of nineteen *can* coquette.

"No," ejaculated he of the nankeens; "I stir not from this spot, writhing under this torture of suspense. May I—may I—hope?"

"You may."

"The promise is renewed?"

"It is."

"I have your permission?"

"You have."

"To the fullest extent?"

"You know it," returned the blushing Lavinia. The

contortions of the interesting Butler's visage expressed his raptures.

We would dilate upon the occurrences that ensued. How Mr. Theodosius and Miss Lavinia danced, and talked, and sighed for the remainder of the evening—how the Miss Crumptions were delighted thereat. How the writing-master continued to frisk about with one-horse power, and how his wife, from some unaccountable freak, left the whist table in the little back-parlour, and persisted in displaying her green headdress in the most conspicuous part of the drawing-room. How the supper consisted of small triangular sandwiches in trays, and a tart here and there by way of variety; and how the visitors consumed warm water disguised with lemon, and dotted with nutmeg, under the denomination of negus. These, and other matters of as much interest, however, we pass over, for the purpose of describing a scene of even more importance.

A fortnight after the date of the ball, Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., was seated at the same library table, and in the same room, as we have before described. He was alone, and his face bore an expression of deep thought and solemn gravity—he was drawing up “A Bill for the Better Observance of Easter Monday”.

The footman tapped at the door—the legislator started from his reverie, and “Miss Crumpton” was announced. Permission was given for Miss Crumpton to enter the *sanctum*; Maria came sliding in, and, having taken her seat with a due proportion of affectation, the footman retired, and the governess was left alone with the M.P. Oh, how she longed for the presence of a third party! Even the facetious young gentleman would have been a relief.

Miss Crumpton began the duet. She hoped Mrs. Brook Dingwall and the handsome little boy were in good health.

They were. Mrs. Brook Dingwall and little Frederick were at Brighton.

“Much obliged to you, Miss Crumpton,” said Cornelius in his most dignified manner, “for your attention in calling this morning. I should have driven down to Hammersmith to see Lavinia, but your account was so very satisfactory, and my duties in the House occupy me so much, that I determined to postpone it for a week. How has she gone on?”

“Very well indeed, sir,” returned Maria, dreading to inform the father that she had gone off.

“Ah, I thought the plan on which I proceeded would be a match for her.”

Here was a favourable opportunity to say that somebody else had been a match for her. But the unfortunate governess was unequal to the task.

“You have persevered strictly in the line of conduct I prescribed, Miss Crumpton?”

“Strictly, sir.”

“You tell me in your note that her spirits gradually improved.”

“Very much indeed, sir.”

“To be surc. I was convinced they would.”

“But I fear, sir,” said Miss Crumpton, with visible emotion, “I fear the plan has not succeeded quite so well as we could have wished.”

“No !” exclaimed the prophet. “Bless me ! Miss Crumpton, you look alarmed. What has happened ?”

“Miss Brook Dingwall, sir——”

“Yes, ma’am ?”

“Has gone, sir”—said Maria, exhibiting a strong inclination to faint.

“Gone !”

“Eloped, sir.”

“Eloped ! Who with—when—where—how ?” almost shrieked the agitated diplomatist.

The natural yellow of the unfortunate Maria’s face changed to all the hues of the rainbow, as she laid a small packet on the Member’s table.

He hurriedly opened it. A letter from his daughter, and another from Theodosius. He glanced over their contents—*Ere this reaches you, far distant—appeal to feelings—love to distraction—beeswax—slavery*, etc., etc. He dashed his hand to his forehead, and paced the room with fearfully long strides, to the great alarm of the precise Maria.

“Now mind ; from this time forward,” said Mr. Brook Dingwall, suddenly stopping at the table, and beating time upon it with his hand ; “from this time forward, I never will, under any circumstances whatever, permit a man who writes pamphlets to enter any other room of this house but the kitchen. I’ll allow my daughter and her husband one hundred

and fifty pounds a year, and never see their faces again; and, damme, ma'am, I'll bring in a bill for the abolition of finishing-schools!"

Some time has elapsed since this passionate declaration. Mr. and Mrs. Butler are at present rustivating in a small cottage at Ball's Pond, pleasantly situated in the immediate vicinity of a brick-field. They have no family. Mr. Theodosius looks very important, and writes incessantly; but, in consequence of a gross combination on the part of publishers, none of his productions appear in print. His young wife begins to think that ideal misery is preferable to real unhappiness; and that a marriage contracted in haste, and repented at leisure, is the cause of more substantial wretchedness than she ever anticipated.

On cool reflection, Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., was reluctantly compelled to admit that the untoward result of his admirable arrangements was attributable, not to the Miss Crumptions, but his own diplomacy. He however consoles himself, like some other small diplomatists, by satisfactorily proving that if his plans did not succeed, they ought to have done so. Minerva House is *in statu quo*, and "The Misses Crumpton" remain in the peaceable and undisturbed enjoyment of all the advantages resulting from their finishing-school.

W. TOWNEND

*Interlude in a Quiet Life*

W. Townend is the author of several successful novels and a number of short stories and sketches, many of which deal with sailors and the life of the sea in a vein of realistic humour. His ready pen and keen eye for character make his work popular with readers of all tastes.



## INTERLUDE IN A QUIET LIFE

**T**HERE were villas on either side of the road and green lawns and well-kept gardens. In the middle distance was a stretch of waste land, gay with wild flowers and estate agents' notice-boards, and farther off were woods and the rolling hills, spread out under the blue, unclouded sky.

Captain Crupper of the s.s. *Arpella*, home from China, gathered that his passion for exploration had led him to the uttermost limits of suburban London in this direction at least. He did not know where he was exactly, having lost his way, but he was on new territory and he was happy. Soon he would be alone with Nature, the trees, the grass, butterflies, and singing birds and squirrels, and the worries of a shipmaster could be cast aside for a time and be forgotten.

Ahead of him was a stout blonde lady in pink, carrying parcels and a shopping-basket, dragged slowly along.

Captain Crupper observed her, not without interest.

Perhaps she was tired. No wonder, with those high heels ! He put her down as a slave to fashion and pitied her. Her skirt was too short by inches. All women, he reflected, were crazy. Again he pitied her. Perhaps she was feeling the heat. It was possible, from the way she walked.

When she reached a big red-brick house with blue-and-white sunblinds and a deep veranda overgrown with wistaria, she halted. If she was home, thought Captain Crupper, why didn't she go indoors ? Very slowly she pushed open the iron gate which was ajar. Very deliberately she climbed the step that led to the front path. She hesitated, as though doubtful, then suddenly she let her shopping basket and her parcels fall, raised her hands to her head, and collapsed into a sitting position on to the lawn.

Captain Crupper was a man of action. He knew that the stout blonde lady had been overcome by the heat and he must get her into the house as soon as he could.

He hurried towards her.

"Is anything wrong, ma'am?" he asked, bending over her.

She dropped her hands and stared at him. Her plump face was flushed; in her large, child-like blue eyes there was an appealing, troubled look; she panted for breath; her fair hair was lank under the small, close-fitting straw hat. She seemed the essence of good nature and helplessness and resignation.

"I'm not sitting here for fun!" she said faintly.

Captain Crupper, efficient always, took charge.

"Ma'am," he said, "you must trust yourself to me!" He prided himself on saying the right thing. "I'm a family man with daughters of my own! I'll look after you!" Tactfully he adjusted her skirt.

"Thank you," she said. "The sun was getting so hot I just couldn't see where I was at! Never known it affect me like this before, ever!"

Though short in stature—a sore point—and thin, Captain Crupper was strong. Time and again deck hands, led astray by his mild and clerical-like appearance, had had cause to regret their error. The stout lady in pink was heavy, but not so heavy that he could not haul her to her feet and, with one arm about her waist, support her towards her home.

"My parcels!" she said.

"I've got 'em," he said. "Lean your weight on me, ma'am!"

The stout lady took him at his word. It was with difficulty that he managed to steer her up the steps on to the wide veranda. The front door was open, and they staggered into a cool lounge hall, furnished with chairs and a couch, and a round table on which was a china bowl filled with red roses. The walls were decorated with pictures in gilt frames. On the polished parquet floor was a thick Persian rug. A flight of stairs led to the upper storey.

"Is anyone in?" called Captain Crupper.

There was no reply, yet above his head he could hear footsteps. Someone was walking to and fro in an upstairs room. Captain Crupper diagnosed agitation of mind and petulance, if not temper, from the sound.

The stout lady's eyes were once more closed. She breathed with an effort. Afraid that she might faint, Captain Crupper guided her towards the couch, turned her about, and released

her. She swayed towards him. He laid one hand flat on her chest and pushed firmly. She uttered a little scream and sank back limply on to the cushions.

The tramp of footsteps had ceased. A girl's voice said distinctly :

"It won't! I won't! I tell you I won't! I don't care if you have to beg in the street! So there!"

Captain Crupper waited for the stout lady to explain what was happening. Her face had lost its pinkness. Possibly she had fainted!

In a panic, he opened a door and found himself in a dining-room where there was on the sideboard a jug of water.

As he returned to the hall, carrying a glass of water, a high-heeled, white satin slipper came hurtling past his head from upstairs, crashed against the wall, and fell to the floor, together with a picture and pieces of broken glass.

Startled, Captain Crupper looked up, but saw no one.

The girl's voice said :

"Will you get out? Do you hear me, you old idiot?"

Captain Crupper glanced inquiringly at the stout lady, who gazed back at him with a thoughtful expression but said nothing.

He gave her the glass of water and she drank thirstily.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm a lot better already; my feet don't belong to me, quite, all the same."

A door slammed with violence and an elderly gentleman in his shirt-sleeves hurried downstairs.

He was stout and bald; his face was clean-shaven and plump and pale; he wore spectacles with tortoiseshell rims and thick lenses that made his round eyes appear rounder and larger than they really were; and he showed not the least astonishment at seeing Captain Crupper.

"I've done all I can," he said, "and she just won't listen to reason."

Captain Crupper, after a cautious side-glance at the stout blonde lady in pink, said :

"Won't she? Oh!"

"Isn't that too bad of her?" said the stout lady. She sighed and rubbed her ankles with her heels, and Captain Crupper saw that she had discarded her shoes. "You don't mind do you?" she said.

"Of course not!" said Captain Crupper.

The bald-headed man nodded.

"That's right, too. Why not? I told Mrs. Hennah. I said: 'Sarah, don't you go and leave me with that Sheila! She ain't responsible, the state of mind she's in, no more'n a wet hen!'"

"You don't mean to say!" said the stout lady.

A door upstairs creaked and the bald-headed man held up a finger.

"She's listening!" he said.

"Am I?" said the girl's voice. "Am I?"

Another white satin slipper hit the stout bald man on the side of the head. He yelped sharply and collapsed into an armchair.

"A wild-cat!" he said. "Yes, sir, she's a wild-cat, that girl! I'd rather tackle a tigress, single-handed, any day! That's what I told Mrs. Hennah!"

The stout blonde lady shrieked as a white satin frock fluttered down from over the banisters and hung limp and forlorn from the alabaster bowl of the electric light suspended from the ceiling above. A white lace veil, white silk stockings, and garters followed.

"There!" said the bald man. "What'd I tell you? Beyond all reason!" He removed his spectacles and wiped his eyes with a silk handkerchief. "She'll kill herself, that's what she'll do! She will. Changes her mind at a minute's notice! That's Sheila! I warned 'em, but they wouldn't listen! I know what the girl is, if they don't! You can't trust her! She promised, they said! What's a promise to her?"

Upstairs, the girl Sheila was once more tramping to and fro. There was a sudden crash, as of something heavy falling to the floor, and then silence.

The stout bald man, who was half-way to his feet, sank back into his chair again.

"I knew it! And when Mr. Cargo comes, and come he will, and Mrs. Hennah, maybe, they'll never forgive me!" He turned towards Captain Crupper. "Friend, go upstairs and see if she's hurt. I daren't go near her myself, not after the last time!"

Captain Crupper looked at the stout lady in pink for guidance. He would take instructions from her or no one.

"You'd better," she said. "That girl's apt to go off the deep end, if she's not spoken to!"

Captain Crupper, amazed at her placidity in such a crisis, hurried up the stairs.

A door opened a few inches and a slim hand beckoned.

"Who's that?" said a low voice. "You got a message from Jack?"

The hand clasped his wrist and drew him towards the door, which opened wide and revealed a girl with pink cheeks and black bobbed hair and excited brown eyes.

"Did Jack send you?" she asked in a whisper.

He shook his head, and the excitement died out of her face. Captain Crupper studied her in silence. She was pretty and very young: eighteen, he supposed, or nineteen, not more; she was dressed in a rather crumpled frock of a pretty shade of blue that showed signs of having been hastily put on. Her legs were bare. Her feet were thrust into soft velvet slippers. She frowned, and her small white teeth closed down over her lower lip.

"Well!" said Captain Crupper.

"Are you a friend of old Cargo's, or Mrs. Hennah's?"

"No," he said, "I'm not."

"What are you doing her, then?" she asked. "Listen! You've got to get me out of the house somehow. I'm not a slave, I keep telling 'em. And if Uncle Herman comes up here again, preaching at me, I'll brain him!"

There came to Captain Crupper's ears the sound of a motor-car travelling at high speed approaching the house.

A look of determination was visible in the girl's face.

"That'll be Percy!" she said. "Percy the Prune! Keep him away from me, or there'll be murder done, and it won't be me that'll be the corpse!"

The door closed and Captain Crupper turned and descended the stairs.

The stout lady, still in her stockinged feet, had removed her hat and was patting her fair hair and gazing at her reflection in a small mirror propped on her lap. Uncle Herman, the pale stout man in the tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles and his shirt-sleeves, watching her, round-eyed.

He looked at Captain Crupper as he reached the foot of the stairs.

"Did you get her to see reason?" he asked. "She'd mebbe obey you where she wouldn't obey me."

"What makes you say that?" said Captain Crupper. "Listen! What's this?"

Someone was running up the pathway towards the house.

A thick-set, pasty-faced young man flung himself in through the open door, checked his rush, stared wildly at Captain Crupper and the stout blonde in pink, and then pointed his forefinger in the direction of Uncle Herman, who seemed to have shrunk two or three sizes smaller into his chair.

"Where is she?" he shouted. "Why the devil didn't you bring her along, you old goat?"

"Now, Percy!" said Uncle Herman in a weak voice. "That's no way to speak to a relative."

"Why didn't you put her into the car and bring her?"

"She wouldn't come," said Uncle Herman.

"Wouldn't *come*! My godfather!"

Captain Crupper studied him in amazement. Never before had he beheld anyone quite so magnificent in his apparel. This Percy, the young man with the pasty face and the goggling eyes and the fish-like mouth, might well have stepped straight out of a shop window in the Strand, minus the price-ticket. He was the complete gent, from his glossy top-hat set well on the back of his sleek head to his black patent shoes and white spats. Nothing was missing, not even the white rosebud in his buttonhole or the diamond pin in the grey silk tie knotted so carefully under the wings of his tall white linen collar, or the silver-mounted ebony cane, or the grey suède gloves. His black morning coat and white waistcoat and grey striped trousers made Captain Crupper, who prided himself on his appearance, feel shabby and soiled and insignificant.

"Why wouldn't she come?" said Percy in a high, frightened voice. "Tell me. Why wouldn't she come?"

"She just wouldn't," said Uncle Herman. "She said she'd be—be . . ." He glanced apologetically through his great glasses at the stout lady in pink. "She said she'd be damned—begging your pardon, ma'am."

"Granted," said the stout lady, and powdered her nose.

"Bah!" said Percy. "She won't try any games with me!"

Captain Crupper stood on the third step up.

"Stop where you are!" he said.

"What's that?" said the pasty young man.

"You're not going upstairs!"

"Aren't I? Watch me and see!"

He placed his gloves and the silver-mounted cane on the round table and advanced on Captain Crupper, who, being a kind-hearted little man, had no wish to hurt him, and retreated two steps higher.

"Mister," he said, "let you and me talk things over."

The young man's response was to rush furiously up the stairs and throw his arms around him.

"Leggo!" said Captain Crupper.

He placed the palm of his right hand against the young man's face and shoved, at the same time with his left hand trying to break the grip on his body, the result being that the young man was forced backward and Captain Crupper himself lost his balance and pitched forward on top of him.

They rolled down the stairs, crashed against the round table, which was overturned, and wrestled furiously on the polished floor in the midst of broken china and red roses and a pool of water and white satin slippers and white silk stockings.

Captain Crupper freed himself and struggled to his knees. The pasty young man, seated with his back to the broken table, promptly hit him on the chin.

Captain Crupper, aghast, sat backward on to his heels.

"Oh!" he said grimly. "Now you're asking for it!"

That he, a hard-case Western Ocean skipper, should have been hit by the pasty young man shook him to the very depths of his being. He was disgraced and humiliated.

The young man struck out again and missed.

Without rising to his feet, Captain Crupper caught hold of him by the shoulders and shook him.

"You play any more tricks with me," he said, "and I'll slap you, you dressed-up poodle!"

To use his fists was out of the question.

He heard someone say, "I'll help you," and saw out of the corner of his eye the stout blonde whose furniture they had damaged towering over them, the silver-mounted cane in her hand, raised to hit.

She hit.

Captain Crupper released his hold on the young man, dazed by the blow, dazzled by blinding flashes of light.

"Gosh!" he said.

"For heaven's sake!" said the stout lady. "I meant to hit that Percy! Honest! Have I hurt you?"

Captain Crupper stood up.

"It's quite all right, ma'am," he said.

The pasty young man sat in the pool of water from the broken china bowl. At his feet lay the wreck of a once-immaculate top-hat. He thrust thumb and forefinger into his mouth and said thickly:

"You've broken one of my crowns."

"Pleased with yourself?" said Captain Crupper.

The young man reached forward and picked up the hat. Never again would he know happiness!

"What did you want to interfere between me and my sister for?" he asked.

The girl called down from upstairs.

"Percy, you leave me out of it!"

"Didn't I tell you that girl was a wild-cat?" said Uncle Herman. "I did, I bet!"

"Percy," said the girl, "go and tell that old thief Cargo I've changed my mind!"

The pasty young man sprang to his feet.

"Sheila!" he shouted. "You can't! You're crazy! Do you want to ruin the lot of us? You can't change your mind. So there!"

"Can't I just! Prove it!"

"Haven't you got your duty to'rds your family, Sheila?" said Uncle Herman.

"I don't give a damn if the family starves! I've got my own life to live, the same as anyone else. If you're such mugs you couldn't see what kind of a crook Cargo was, that's your fault, not mine."

"Think of all that money he loaned us!" said Percy.

"You give me shooting pains through the head!" said the sister.

Captain Crupper chuckled.

"And what's it to do with you, eh?" said Percy.

"Young man," said Captain Crupper, "you keep a civil tongue in your head, or maybe I'll be tempted to teach you manners."

The stout lady in pink, once more seated on the couch, nodded her approval. She seemed, in spite of the wreckage in her hall, to be enjoying herself thoroughly.

"That's right, mister," she said. "That's the way to talk to him. You're doing fine!"

But Captain Crupper was worried. It was all very well being landed into a family feud, but where was it going to end? And what did it mean? He ought to be told.

"Ma'am," he said, "maybe you think I'm dull-witted, but this business—all this trouble——"

Uncle Herman lifted a podgy hand.

"Listen!" he said. "Listen, it's Mr. Cargo. Percy"—he levered himself stiffly up out of his chair—"you've got to do something, and pretty quick."

"What can I do?" said Percy. "Tell me."

A stoutish middle-aged man of perhaps forty-five appeared in the front doorway.

"Where is Sheila?" he said in a guttural tone of voice. "Tell me, what is der meaning? Why could I not get through on der 'phone? Why am I kept waiting?"

And then, it seemed, he became aware of the broken table, the broken china bowl, the scattered roses, the pool of water, the Persian rug lying rucked up at the foot of the stairs, the broken glass and the picture, the stockings and shoes and the veil, and the battered top-hat.

"*Gott!*" he said.

He had a black waxed moustache and prominent dark eyes and thick lips and a rapacious nose. He was dressed in the same kind of clothes as the pasty young man, even to the white spats and the top-hat.

"Percy," he said, "are you gone out of your mind? Look at yourself in a glass. And where is Sheila?" He uttered a stifled exclamation and pointed to the white satin frock suspended from the lamp hanging above their heads. "Her dress what I did buy! And der stockings! *Gott!* Explain, one of you dummies, I insist!"

"Mr. Cargo," said the pasty young man, "don't be angry, but I've got to tell you: Sheila won't come!"

"Won't come!" said Mr. Cargo. "Won't come!"

Captain Crupper, standing once more on the stairs, ready to beat back any possible attack, saw two thin elderly ladies in black, a tall, melancholy man with a dark beard, a smart-looking young woman in a short-skirted frock of pale lilac, and a small girl in white with bobbed golden hair and a shrewd little face, all crowding in through the open door.

"What's all the fuss about?" said the young woman in lilac. "Lord! What's been happening?"

"Rhoda," said the tall man with the beard, "hold your tongue!"

"Did anyone have a fall?" asked the thinner of the two ladies in black.

"Such a waste!" said the other.

"Sheila won't come!" said Mr. Cargo. Suddenly he burst out furiously: "She won't, won't she? Oh! And I do nothing. Oh, do I? At der last moment, der guests waiting, der refreshments on der table, der wine, der waiters, der orchestra, everything, and Sheila, if you please, she change her mind! Very good! I go see der young lady mineself!"

"You won't!" said Captain Crupper. "You may say what you like from here—in reason, of course—but you're not going upstairs!" He looked in the direction of the stout blonde lady in pink. "Is he?"

"He certainly isn't!" said the stout lady, beaming. "You keep them vultures from that poor girl, mister! You've got the law on your side, I know."

"Do you hear!" said Captain Crupper.

"Who are you to say, 'Do you hear'?" said Mr. Cargo, bristling. "I intend to see Sheila!"

"Well, Sheila doesn't intend to see you," said the girl from upstairs. "Here, catch!"

There came from the upper floor a shower of cardboard boxes, frocks, silk stockings, shoes, sunshades, hat-boxes and hats, a pearl necklace, two gold bangles, a fur coat, and innumerable little leather cases that looked as though they might contain jewellery.

Mr. Cargo put his gloved hands to his forehead and groaned. A large bouquet of white lilies, flung with precision, knocked his top-hat off his head and revealed pink baldness. He shouted, "All that I have bought her!" and made a rush for the stairs.

Captain Crupper laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Friend," he said, "don't spoil a pleasant day!"

"Go fetch a policeman!" said Mr. Cargo. "Go fetch a policeman!"

The little girl in white with the fair bobbed hair was bundled out on to the veranda, protesting.

"I won't go! Make Rhoda go!"

"Go call a policeman, Clarice," said the melancholy man with the beard, "and be quick about it!"

"That kid's the limit!" said Rhoda.

"Make haste, precious!" said the thinner of the two elderly ladies.

"Then you can come straight back and see!" said the other.

Captain Crupper smiled. They might call fifty policemen: he had, as the stout blonde lady in pink had said, the law on his side. It was at her request that he was guarding the girl called Sheila.

Mr. Cargo, red in the face, argued with Uncle Herman and Percy, the pasty young man, and the man with the beard. He shook his fist and stamped his foot. Uncle Herman patted him on the back and he shouted: "Don't paw me, Herman! You hear what I say!"

The stout blonde lady in pink, Captain Crupper noticed, took no part in the discussion. She seemed curiously aloof.

Mr. Cargo whirled about and gesticulated with both hands in Captain Crupper's direction.

"You, what business is it of yours to come between me and der young lady I intend to marry?"

"The point is," said Captain Crupper, "the young lady doesn't intend to marry you."

"What's more," said the stout blonde lady firmly, "you oughta be ashamed of yourself, a man of your age, thinking of marrying for the third time!"

"What!" said Mr. Cargo.

"And with two grown-up daughters, too!" said the stout lady.

"What are you talking about?" said Mr. Cargo. "Two grown-up daughters! Marrying for der third time! Are you crazy?"

The stout lady rose to her feet and laid a hand on his arm. He slapped at her plump wrist. She drew a long breath, closed her eyes, and wailed:

"Oh, he hit me! He hit me! Maybe he's got a wife living already!"

It was at this moment that the small girl arrived with the policeman.

"There!" she said. "I fetched him!"

"What's the trouble?" said the policeman. He gazed

about him at the wreckage on the floor and whistled. "Fighting!" he said.

"This man hit me!" said the stout lady. "Hit me!"

"I didn't!" said Mr. Cargo. His face was damp. "I'm going to be married, officer, and this man here——"

"That's a lie!" said Captain Crupper. "You're not going to be married, and you know it!"

"She won't have him," said the stout blonde lady.

"She's given him back his presents," said Captain Crupper. "Threw them at him!"

The little girl with the fair bobbed hair squealed and was shaken by the thin elderly ladies in black, and at once broke into hysterical sobbing.

"Lena," said Mr. Cargo fiercely, "put that child out of here this instant!"

"I won't go!" screamed the child. "I won't, I won't!"

"Isn't that kid awful?" said Rhoda.

"I can just see it all in to-morrow's papers," said Captain Crupper. "'Young bride jilts elderly bridegroom and throws presents at him over banisters!'"

Rhoda began to giggle.

"We'll have our pictures on the front page! Mrs. Hennah's, too!"

Percy rounded on her savagely.

"Rhoda, you cut that out about Mrs. Hennah this minute! Or else go on home and stay there!"

"Fancy yourself, don't you?" said Rhoda. "Here, take your ring back! I've done with you! You jelly-fish!"

"I've not understood one word in ten!" said the policeman. "What am I goin' to do? Why did you send out an' fetch me, eh? What for?"

"It's an outrage!" said Mr. Cargo. "An outrage!"

Uncle Herman stood in the front doorway.

"Sheila!" he gasped. "Sheila!"

"What is it now?" said Percy. "Out with it!"

"Let me hear what he's got to say!" said Mr. Cargo. "What's got you, Herman?"

"Sheila's climbed down from her window and run away. I saw her crossing the lawn. That Jack Hosken's got his car in front of the house! Quick!"

There followed a wild stampede for the door, headed by Mr. Cargo.

Captain Crupper and the stout blonde lady in pink stared at each other blankly across the debris of broken glass and china and cardboard boxes and hats and silk stockings.

"Well!" said Captain Crupper. "Well!"

"Crazy, the lot of 'em!" said the stout lady.

"That Mr. Cargo, I take it, was bent on marrying without letting his daughters know!"

The stout lady grinned frankly.

"I didn't even know he had any daughters!"

"You said so, didn't you?" said Captain Crupper.

"Sure I did! You helped me, I wanted to help you!"

"Tell me, then: who were all those people in here?"

"I was just going to ask you the very same question!"

"Me!" said Captain Crupper. "How should I know? It's your house, anyway!"

"My house!" said the stout lady. "Of course it's not! I thought it was yours! We've lived out here only a couple of days, and what with the sun and not knowing my way I got into the wrong street! That's how it was. You did the rest."

Both glanced hastily towards the door.

"They must have thought we were guests invited to that wedding," said the stout lady. "Friends of that Sheila."

"Listen!" said Captain Crupper. "In one minute that bunch of lunatics will be coming back! Let's try if there's a way out at the back of the house. Are you rested enough?"

"Sure," said the stout lady. "Me feet's swelled on me something fierce and I'll have to carry me shoes, but I ain't stopping here to face that Cargo; not if I know it!"

They tiptoed through the kitchen into the back garden.

As Captain Crupper helped the stout lady to climb the fence she gave way to gurgles of laughter.

"I dunno what in the world my husband would say if he seen me now! I forgot my hat, too!"

When she reached the ground on the other side, she said:

"Mister, I dunno your name, and maybe we're not going to meet again, but I want to tell you I've never enjoyed anything so much in all my life as this afternoon!"



G. K. CHESTERTON

*The Mistake of the Machine*

G. K. Chesterton is an essayist and novelist of varied and original talents with a long list of books to his credit, of which the best known are probably *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, *The Flying Inn*, and the series of unusual stories in which "Father Brown" displays his detective talents.



## THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

**F**LAMBEAU and his friend the priest were sitting in the Temple Gardens about sunset ; and their neighbourhood or some such accidental influence had turned their talk to matters of legal process. From the problem of the licence in cross-examination, their talk strayed to Roman and medieval torture, to the examining magistrate in France and the Third Degree in America.

"I've been reading," said Flambeau, "of this new psychometric method they talk about so much, especially in America. You know what I mean ; they put a pulsometer on a man's wrist and judge by how his heart goes at the pronunciation of certain words. What do you think of it ?"

"I think it very interesting," replied Father Brown ; "it reminds me of that interesting idea in the Dark Ages that blood would flow from a corpse if the murderer touched it."

"Do you really mean," demanded his friend, "that you think the two methods equally valuable ?"

"I think them equally valueless," replied Brown. "Blood flows, fast or slow, in dead folk or living, for so many more million reasons than we can ever know. Blood will have to flow very funnily ; blood will have to flow up the Matterhorn before I will take it as a sign that I am to shed it."

"The method," remarked the other, "has been guaranteed by some of the greatest American men of science."

"What sentimentalists men of science are !" exclaimed Father Brown. "And how much more sentimental must American men of science be ! Who but a Yankee would think of proving anything from heart-throbs ? Why, they must be as sentimental as a man who thinks a woman is in love with him if she blushes. That's a test from the circulation of the blood, discovered by the immortal Harvey ; and a jolly rotten test too."

"But surely," insisted Flambeau, "it might point pretty straight at something or other."

"There's a disadvantage in a stick pointing straight," answered the other. "What is it? Why, the other end of the stick always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of the stick by the right end. I saw the thing done once and I've never believed in it since." And he proceeded to tell the story of his disillusionment.

It happened nearly twenty years before, when he was chaplain to his co-religionists in a prison in Chicago—where the Irish population displayed a capacity both for crime and penitence which kept him tolerably busy. The official second-in-command under the Governor was an ex-detective named Greywood Usher, a cadaverous, careful-spoken Yankee philosopher, occasionally varying a very rigid visage with an odd apologetic grimace. He liked Father Brown in a slightly patronizing way; and Father Brown liked him, though he heartily disliked his theories. His theories were extremely complicated and were held with extreme simplicity.

One evening he had sent for the priest, who, according to his custom, took a seat in silence at a table piled and littered with papers, and waited. The official selected from the papers a scrap of newspaper cutting, which he handed across to the cleric, who read it gravely. It appeared to be an extract from one of the pinkest of American Society papers, and ran as follows :

Society's brightest widower is once more on the Freak Dinner stunt. All our exclusive citizens will recall the Perambulator Parade Dinner, in which Last-Trick Todd, at his palatial home at Pilgrim's Pond, caused so many of our prominent *débutantes* to look even younger than their years. Equally elegant and more miscellaneous and large-hearted in social outlook was Last-Trick's show the year previous—the popular Cannibal Crush Lunch, at which the confections handed round were sarcastically moulded in the forms of human arms and legs, and during which more than one of our gayest mental gymnasts was heard offering to eat his partner. The witticism which will inspire this evening is as yet in Mr. Todd's pretty reticent intellect, or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the simple manners and customs at the other end of Society's scale. This would be all the more telling,

as hospitable Todd is entertaining in Lord Falconroy, the famous traveller, a true-blooded aristocrat fresh from England's oak-groves. Lord Falconroy's travels began before his ancient feudal title was resurrected; he was in the Republic in his youth, and fashion murmurs a sly reason for his return. Miss Etta Todd is one of our deep-souled New Yorkers and comes into an income of nearly twelve hundred million dollars.

"Well," asked Usher, "does that interest you?"

"Why, words rather fail me," answered Father Brown. "I cannot think at this moment of anything in this world that would interest me less. And, unless the just anger of the Republic is at last going to electrocute journalists for writing like that, I don't quite see why it should interest you either."

"Ah!" said Mr. Usher dryly, and handing across another scrap of newspaper. "Well, does *that* interest you?"

The paragraph was headed "Savage Murder of a Warder. Convict Escapes", and ran:

Just before dawn this morning a shout for help was heard in the Convict Settlement at Sequah in this State. The authorities, hurrying in the direction of the cry, found the corpse of the warder who patrols the top of the north wall of the prison, the steepest and most difficult exit, for which one man has always been found sufficient. The unfortunate officer had, however, been hurled from the high wall, his brains beaten out as with a club; and his gun was missing. Further inquiries showed that one of the cells was empty; it had been occupied by a rather sullen ruffian giving his name as Oscar Rian. He was only temporarily detained for some comparatively trivial assault; but he gave everyone the impression of a man with a black past and a dangerous future. Finally, when daylight had fully revealed the scene of murder, it was found that he had written on the wall above the body a fragmentary sentence, apparently with a finger dipped in blood; "This was self-defence and he had the gun. I meant no harm to him or any man but one. I am keeping the bullet for Pilgrim's Pond.—O.R." A man must have used most fiendish treachery or most savage and amazing bodily daring to have stormed such a wall in spite of an armed man.

"Well, the literary style is somewhat improved," admitted the priest cheerfully, "but still I don't see what I can do for you. I should cut a poor figure, with my short legs, running about this State after an athletic assassin of that sort. I doubt whether anybody could find him. The convict settlement

at Sequah is thirty miles from here; the country between is wild and tangled enough, and the country beyond, where he will surely have the sense to go, is a perfect no-man's land tumbling away to the prairies. He may be in any hole or up any tree."

"He isn't in any hole," said the governor, "he isn't up any tree."

"Why, how do you know?" asked Father Brown, blinking.

"Would you like to speak to him?" inquired Usher.

Father Brown opened his innocent eyes wide. "He is here?" he exclaimed. "Why, how did your men get hold of him?"

"I got hold of him myself," drawled the American, rising and lazily stretching his lanky legs before the fire. "I got hold of him with the crooked end of a walking-stick. Don't look so surprised. I really did. You know I sometimes take a turn in the country lanes outside this dismal place; well, I was walking early this evening up a steep lane with dark hedges and grey-looking ploughed fields on both sides; and a young moon was up and silvering the road. By the light of it I saw a man running across the field towards the road; running with his body bent and at a good mile-race trot. He appeared to be much exhausted; but when he came to the thick black hedge he went through it as if it were made of spiders' webs; or, rather (for I heard the strong branches breaking and snapping like bayonets), as if he himself were made of stone. In the instant in which he appeared up against the moon, crossing the road, I slung my hooked cane at his legs, tripping him and bringing him down. Then I blew my whistle long and loud, and our fellows came running up to secure him."

"It would have been rather awkward," remarked Brown, "if you had found he was a popular athlete practising a mile race."

"He was not," said Usher grimly. "We soon found out who he was; but I had guessed it with the first glint of the moon on him."

"You thought it was the runaway convict," observed the priest simply, "because you had read in the newspaper cutting that morning that a convict had run away."

"I had somewhat better grounds," replied the governor coolly. "I pass over the first as too simple to be emphasized

—I mean that fashionable athletics do not run across ploughed fields or scratch their eyes out in bramble hedges. Nor do they run all doubled up like a crouching dog. There were more decisive details to a fairly well-trained eye. The man was clad in coarse and ragged clothes, but they were something more than merely coarse and ragged. They were so ill-fitting as to be quite grotesque; even as he appeared in black outline against the moonrise, the coat-collar in which his head was buried made him look like a hunchback, and the long loose sleeves looked as if he had no hands. It at once occurred to me that he had somehow managed to change his convict clothes for some confederate's clothes which did not fit him. Second, there was a pretty stiff wind against which he was running; so that I must have seen the streaky look of blowing hair if the hair had not been very short. Then I remembered that beyond these ploughed fields he was crossing lay Pilgrim's Pond, for which, you will remember, the convict was keeping his bullet; and I sent my walking-stick flying."

"A brilliant piece of rapid deduction," said Father Brown, "but had he got a gun?"

As Usher stopped abruptly in his walk the priest added apologetically: "I've been told a bullet is not half so useful without it."

"He had no gun," said the other gravely, "but that was doubtless due to some very natural mischance or change of plans. Probably the same policy that made him change the clothes made him drop the gun; he began to repent the coat he had left behind him in the blood of his victim."

"Well, that is possible enough," answered the priest.

"And it's hardly worth speculating on," said Usher, turning to some other papers, "for we know it's the man by this time."

His clerical friend asked faintly. "But how?" And Greywood Usher threw down the newspapers and took up the two press-cuttings again.

"Well, since you are so obstinate," he said, "let's begin at the beginning. You will notice that these two cuttings have only one thing in common, which is the mention of Pilgrim's Pond—the estate, as you know, of the millionaire Ireton Todd. You also know that he is a remarkable character; one of those that rose on stepping-stones——"

"Of our dead selves to higher things," assented his companion. "Yes, I know that. Petroleum, I think."

"Anyhow," said Usher, "Last-Trick Todd counts for a great deal in this rum affair."

He stretched himself once more before the fire and continued talking in his expansive, radiantly explanatory style.

"To begin with, on the face of it there is no mystery here at all. It is not mysterious, it is not even odd, that a jailbird should take his gun to Pilgrim's Pond. Our people aren't like the English, who all forgive a man for being rich if he throws away money on hospitals or horses. Last-Trick Todd has made himself big by his own considerable abilities; and there's no doubt that many of those on whom he has shown his abilities would like to show theirs on him with a shot-gun. Todd might easily get dropped by some man he'd never even heard of; some labourer he'd locked out, or some clerk in a business he'd busted. Last-Trick is a man of mental endowments and a high public character; but in this country the relations of employers and employed are considerably strained.

"That's how the whole thing looks supposing this Rian made for Pilgrim's Pond to kill Todd. So it looked to me till another little discovery woke up what I have of the detective in me. When I had my prisoner safe, I picked up my cane again and strolled down the two or three turns of country road that brought me to one of the side entrances of Todd's grounds, the one nearest to the pool or lake after which the place is named. It was some two hours ago, about seven by this time; the moonlight was more luminous, and I could see the long white streaks of it lying on the mysterious mere with its grey, greasy half-liquid shores in which they say our fathers used to make witches walk until they sank. I've forgotten the exact tale; but you know the place I mean; it lies north of Todd's house towards the wilderness, and has two queer wrinkled trees, so dismal that they look more like huge fungoids than decent foliage. As I stood peering at this misty pool, I fancied I saw the faint figure of a man moving from the house towards it, but it was all too dim and distant for one to be certain of the fact, and still less of the details. Besides, my attention was very sharply arrested by something much closer. I crouched behind the fence, which ran not more than two hundred

yards from one wing of the great mansion, and which was fortunately split in places, as if specially for the application of a cautious eye. A door had opened in the dark bulk of the left wing; and a figure appeared black against the illuminated interior—a muffled figure bending forward, evidently peering out into the night. It closed the door behind it, and I saw it was carrying a lantern, which threw a patch of imperfect light on the dress and figure of the wearer. It seemed to be the figure of a woman, wrapped up in a ragged cloak and evidently disguised to avoid notice; there was something very strange both about the rags and the furtiveness in a person coming out of those rooms lined with gold. She took cautiously the curved garden path which brought her within half a hundred yards of me; then she stood up for an instant on the terrace of turf that looks towards the slimy lake, and holding her flaming lantern above her head she deliberately swung it three times to and fro as for a signal. As she swung it the second time a flicker of its light fell for a moment on her own face, a face that I knew. She was unnaturally pale, and her head was bundled in her borrowed plebeian shawl; but I am certain it was Etta Todd, the millionaire's daughter.

“She retraced her steps in equal secrecy and the door closed behind her again. I was about to climb the fence and follow, when I realized that the detective fever that had lured me into the adventure was rather undignified; and that in a more authoritative capacity I already held all the cards in my hand. I was just turning away, when a new noise broke on the night. A window was thrown up in one of the upper floors, but just round the corner of the house so that I could not see it; and a voice of terrible distinctness was heard shouting across the dark garden to know where Lord Falconroy was, for he was missing from every room in the house. There was no mistaking that voice. I have heard it on many a political platform or meeting of directors; it was Ireton Todd himself. Some of the others seemed to have gone to the lower windows or on to the steps, and were calling up to him that Falconroy had gone for a stroll down to the Pilgrim's Pond an hour before, and could not be traced since. Then Todd cried, ‘Mighty murder!’ and shut down the window violently; and I could hear him plunging down the stairs inside. Repossessing myself of my former and

wiser purpose, I whipped out of the way of the general search that must follow, and returned here not much later than eight o'clock.

"I now ask you to recall that little Society paragraph which seemed to you so painfully lacking in interest. If the convict was not keeping the shot for Todd, as he evidently wasn't, it is most likely that he was keeping it for Lord Falconry; and it looks as if he had delivered the goods. No more handy place to shoot a man than in the curious geological surroundings of that pool, where a body thrown down would sink through thick slime to a depth practically unknown. Let us suppose, then, that our friend with the cropped hair came to kill Falconroy, and not Todd. But, as I have pointed out, there are many reasons why many people in America might want to kill Todd. There is no reason why anybody in America should want to kill an English lord newly landed, except for the one reason mentioned in the pink paper—that the lord is paying his attentions to the millionaire's daughter. Our crop-haired friend, despite his ill-fitting clothes, must be an aspiring lover.

"I know the notion will seem to you jarring and even comic; but that's because you are English. It sounds to you like saying the Archbishop of Canterbury's daughter will be married in St. George's, Hanover Square, to a crossing-sweeper on ticket-of-leave. You don't do justice to the climbing and aspiring power of our more remarkable citizens. You see a good-looking grey-haired man in evening dress with a sort of authority about him, you know he is a pillar of the State, and you fancy he had a father. You are in error. You do not realize that a comparatively few years ago he may have been in a tenement or (quite likely) in a jail. You don't follow all our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential citizens have not only risen recently, but risen comparatively late in life. Todd's daughter was fully eighteen when her father first made his pile; so there isn't really anything impossible in her having a hanger-on in low life; or even in her hanging on to him, as I think she must be doing, to judge by the lantern business. If so, the hand that held the lantern may not be unconnected with the hand that held the gun. This case, sir, will make a noise."

"Well," said the priest patiently, "and what did you do next?"

"I reckon you'll be shocked," replied Greywood Usher, "as I know you don't cotton to the march of science in these matters. I am given a good deal of discretion here, and perhaps take a little more than I'm given; and I thought it was an excellent opportunity to test that psychometric machine I told you about. Now, in my opinion that machine can't lie."

"No machine can lie," said Father Brown, "nor can it tell the truth."

"It did in this case, as I'll show you," went on Usher positively. "I sat the man in the ill-fitting clothes in a comfortable chair, and simply wrote words on a blackboard; and the machine simply recorded the variations of his pulse; and I simply observed his manner. The trick is to introduce some word connected with the supposed crime in a list of words connected with something quite different, yet a list in which it occurs quite naturally. Thus I wrote 'heron' and 'eagle' and 'owl', and when I wrote 'falcon' he was tremendously agitated; and when I began to make an *r* at the end of the word, that machine just bounded. Who else in this republic has any reason to jump at the name of a newly arrived Englishman like Falconroy except the man who's shot him? Isn't that better evidence than a lot of gabble from witnesses; the evidence of a reliable machine."

"You always forget," observed his companion, "that the reliable machine always has to be worked by an unreliable machine."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the detective.

"I mean Man," said Father Brown, "the most unreliable machine I know of. I don't want to be rude; and I don't think you will consider Man to be an offensive or inaccurate description of yourself. You say you observed his manner; but how do you know you observed it right? You say the words have to come in a natural way; but how do you know that you did it naturally? How do you know, if you come to that, that he did not observe your manner? Who is to prove that you were not tremendously agitated? There was no machine tied on to your pulse."

"I tell you," cried the American in the utmost excitement, "I was as cool as a cucumber."

"Criminals also can be as cool as cucumbers," said Brown, with a smile. "And almost as cool as you."

"Well, this one wasn't," said Usher, throwing the papers about. "Oh, you make me tired!"

"I'm sorry," said the other. "I only point out what seems a reasonable possibility. If you could tell by his manner when the word that might hang him had come, why shouldn't he tell from your manner that the word that might hang him was coming? I should ask for more than words myself before I hanged anybody."

Usher smote the table and rose in a sort of angry triumph.

"And that," he cried, "is just what I'm going to give you. I tried the machine first just in order to test the thing in other ways afterwards; and the machine, sir, is right."

He paused a moment and resumed with less excitement. "I rather want to insist, if it comes to that, that so far I had very little to go on except the scientific experiment. There was really nothing against the man at all. His clothes were ill-fitting, as I've said, but they were rather better, if anything, than those of the submerged class to which he evidently belonged. Moreover, under all the stains of his plunging through ploughed fields or bursting through dusty hedges, the man was comparatively clean. This might mean, of course, that he had only just broken prison; but it reminded me more of the desperate decency of the comparatively respectable poor. His demeanour was, I am bound to confess, quite in accordance with theirs. He was silent and dignified as they are; he seemed to have a big, but buried, grievance, as they do. He professed total ignorance of the crime and the whole question; and showed nothing but a sullen impatience for something sensible that might come to take him out of his meaningless scrape. He asked me more than once if he could telephone for a lawyer who had helped him a long time ago in a trade dispute, and in every sense acted as you would expect an innocent man to act. There was nothing against him in the world except that little finger on the dial that pointed to the change of his pulse.

"Then, sir, the machine was on its trial; and the machine was right. By the time I came with him out of the private room into the vestibule where all sorts of other people were awaiting examination, I think he had already more or less made up his mind to clear things up by something like a confession. He turned to me, and began to say in a low voice:

“Oh, I can’t stick this any more. If you must know all about me——”

“At the same instant one of the poor women sitting on the long bench stood up, screaming aloud and pointing at him with her finger. I have never in my life heard anything more demoniacally distinct. Her lean finger seemed to pick him out as if it were a pea-shooter. Though the words were a mere howl, every syllable was as clear as a separate stroke on the clock.

“‘Drugger Davis!’ she shouted. ‘They’ve got Drugger Davis!’

Among the wretched women, mostly thieves and street-walkers, twenty faces were turned, gaping with glee and hate. If I had never heard the words, I should have known by the very shock upon his features that the so-called Oscar Rian had heard his real name. But I’m not quite so ignorant, you may be surprised to hear. Drugger Davis was one of the most terrible and depraved criminals that ever baffled our police. It is certain he had done murder more than once long before his last exploit with the warder. But he was never entirely fixed for it, curiously enough, because he did it in the same manner as those milder—or meaner—crimes for which he was fixed pretty often. He was a handsome, well-bred-looking brute, as he still is, to some extent; and he used mostly to go about with barmaids or shop-girls and do them out of their money. Very often, though, he went a good deal farther, and they were found drugged with cigarettes or chocolates, and their whole property missing. Then came one case where the girl was found dead; but deliberation could not quite be proved, and, what was more practical still, the criminal could not be found. I heard a rumour of his having reappeared somewhere in the opposite character this time, lending money instead of borrowing it; but still to such poor widows as he might personally fascinate, and still with the same bad results for them. Well, there is your innocent man, and there is his innocent record. Even since four criminals and three warders have identified him and confirmed the story. Now what have you got to say to my poor little machine after that? Hasn’t the machine done for him? Or do you prefer to say that the woman and I have done for him?”

“As to what you’ve done for him,” replied Father Brown, rising and shaking himself in a floppy way, “you’ve saved him

from the electrical chair. I don't think they can kill Druggier Davis on that old vague story of the poison; and as for the convict who killed the warder, I suppose it's obvious that you haven't got him. Mr. Davis is innocent of that crime, at any rate."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other. "Why should he be innocent of that crime?"

"Why, bless us all," cried the small man in one of his rare moments of animation, "why, because he's guilty of the other crimes! I don't know what you people are made of. You seem to think that all sins are kept together in a bag. You talk as if a miser on Monday were always a spendthrift on Tuesday. You tell me this man you have here spent weeks and months wheedling needy women out of small sums of money; that he used a drug at the best, and a poison at the worst; that he turned up afterwards as the lowest kind of moneylender, and cheated more poor people in the same patient and pacific style. Let it be granted—let us admit, for the sake of argument, that he did all this. If that is so, I will tell you what he didn't do. He didn't storm a spiked wall against a man with a loaded gun. He didn't write on the wall with his own hand, to say he had done it. He didn't stop to state that his justification was self-defence. He didn't explain that he had no quarrel with the poor warder. He didn't name the house of the rich man to which he was going with the gun. He didn't write his own initials in a man's blood. Saints alive! Can't you see the whole character is different, in good and evil? Why, you don't seem to be like I am a bit. One would think you'd never had any vices of your own."

The amazed American had already parted his lips in protest when the door of his private and official room was hammered and rattled in an unceremonious way to which he was totally unaccustomed.

The door flew open. The moment before Greywood Usher had been coming to the conclusion that Father Brown might possibly be mad. The moment after he began to think he was mad himself. There burst and fell into his private room a man in the filthiest rags, with a greasy squash hat still askew on his head, and a shabby green shade showed up from one of his eyes, both of which were glaring like a tiger's. The rest of his face was almost undiscoverable, being masked with a matted beard and whiskers through which the nose

could barely thrust itself, and further buried in a squalid red scarf or handkerchief. Mr. Usher prided himself on having seen most of the roughest specimens in the State, but he thought he had never seen such a baboon dressed as a scarecrow as this. But above all, he had never in all his placid scientific existence heard a man like that speak to him first.

"See here, old man Usher," shouted the being in the red handkerchief, "I'm getting tired. Don't you try any of your hide-and-peek on me; I don't get fooled any. Leave go of my guests, and I'll let up on the fancy clockwork. Keep him here for a split instant and you'll feel pretty mean. I reckon I'm not a man with no pull."

The eminent Usher was regarding the bellowing monster with an amazement which had dried up all other sentiments. The mere shock to his eyes had rendered his ears almost useless. At last he rang a bell with a hand of violence. While the bell was still strong and pealing, the voice of Father Brown felt soft but distinct.

"I have a suggestion to make," he said, "but it seems a little confusing. I don't know this gentleman—but—but I think I know him. Now, you know him—you know him quite well—but you don't know him; naturally. Sounds paradoxical, I know."

"I reckon the Cosmos is cracked," said Usher, and fell sprawl in his round office chair.

"Now, see here," vociferated the stranger, striking the table, but speaking in a voice that was all the more mysterious because it was comparatively mild and rational though still resounding, "I won't let you in. I want——"

"Who the hell are you?" yelled Usher, suddenly sitting up straight.

"I think the gentleman's name is Todd," said the priest.

Then he picked up the pink slip of newspaper.

"I fear you don't read the Society papers properly," he said, and began to read out in a monotonous voice, "Or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the manners and customs of the other end of Society's scale." There's been a big Slum Dinner up at Pilgrim's Pond to-night; and a man, one of the guests, disappeared. Mr. Ireton Todd is a good host, and has tracked him here, without even waiting to take off his fancy dress."

"What man do you mean?"

"I mean the man with the comically ill-fitting clothes you saw running across the ploughed field. Hadn't you better go and investigate him? He will be rather impatient to get back to his champagne, from which he ran away in such a hurry when the convict with the gun hove in sight."

"Do you seriously mean——" began the official.

"Why, look here, Mr. Usher," said Father Brown quietly, "you said the machine couldn't make a mistake; and in one sense it didn't. But the other machine did—the machine that worked it. You assumed that the man in rags jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy because he was Lord Falconroy's murderer. He jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy because he *is* Lord Falconroy."

"Then why the blazes didn't he say so?" demanded the staring Usher.

"He felt his plight and recent panic were hardly patrician," replied the priest, "so he tried to keep the name back at first. But he was just going to tell it you, when"—and Father Brown looked down at his boots—"when a woman found another name for him."

"But you can't be so mad as to say," said Greywood Usher, very white, "that Lord Falconroy was Druggar Davis."

The priest looked at him very earnestly but with a baffling and an undecipherable face.

"I am not saying anything about it," he said; "I leave all the rest to you. Your pink paper says that the title was recently revived for him; but those papers are very unreliable. It says he was in the States in youth; but the whole story seems very strange. Davis and Falconroy are both pretty considerable cowards, but so are lots of other men. I would not hang a dog on my own opinion about this. But I think," he went on softly and reflectively, "I think you Americans are too modest. I think you idealize the English aristocracy—even in assuming it to be so aristocratic. You see a good-looking Englishman in evening dress; you know he's in the House of Lords; and you fancy he has a father. You don't allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential noblemen have not only risen recently, but——"

"Oh, stop it!" cried Greywood Usher, wringing one lean hand in impatience against a shade of irony in the other's face.

“Don’t stay talking to this lunatic!” cried Todd brutally. “Take me to my friend.”

Next morning Father Brown appeared with the same demure expression, carrying yet another piece of pink newspaper.

“I’m afraid you neglect the fashionable press rather,” he said, “but this cutting may interest you.”

Usher’s read the headlines, “Last-Trick’s Strayed Revellers : Mirthful Incident near Pilgrim’s Pond.” The paragraph went on :

A laughable occurrence took place outside Wilkinson’s Motor Garage last night. A policeman on duty had his attention drawn by larrikins to a man in prison dress who was stepping with considerable coolness into the steering-seat of a pretty high-toned Panhard; he was accompanied by a girl wrapped in a ragged shawl. On the police interfering, the young woman threw back the shawl, and all recognized Millionaire Todd’s daughter, who had just come from the Slum Freak Dinner at the Pond, where all the choicest guests were in a similar *deshabille*. She and the gentleman who had donned prison uniform were going for the customary joy-ride.

Under the pink slip Mr. Usher found a strip of a later paper, headed, “Astounding Escape of Millionaire’s Daughter with Convict. She Had Arranged Freak Dinner. Now safe in——”

Mr. Greywood Usher lifted his eyes, but Father Brown was gone.



# ISRAEL ZANGWILL

## *The Red Mark*

Israel Zangwill was “born within the sound of Bow bells”, and the life of the Jewish community in the East End of London forms the subject of several of his books and plays. *The Children of the Ghetto*, from which this tale is taken, is a real contribution to social history as well as a work of humour.



## THE RED MARK

**T**HE curious episode in the London Ghetto the other winter, while the epidemic of smallpox was raging, escaped the attention of the reporters, though in the world of the Board-schools it is a vivid memory. But even the teachers and the committees, the inspectors and the Board members, have remained ignorant of the part little Bloomah Beckenstein played in it.

To explain how she came to be outside the school-gates instead of inside them, we must go back a little and explain her situation both outside and inside her school.

Bloomah was probably "*Blume*", which is German for a flower, but she had always been spelt "Bloomah" in the school register, for even Board-school teachers are not necessarily familiar with foreign languages.

They might have been forgiven for not connecting Bloomah with blooms, for she was a sad-faced child, and even in her tenth year showed deep, dark circles round her eyes. But they were beautiful eyes—large, brown, and soft, shining with love and obedience.

Mrs. Beckenstein, however, found neither of these qualities in her youngest-born, who seemed to her entirely sucked up by the school.

"In my days," she would grumble, "it used to be God Almighty first, your parents next, and school last. Now it's all a red mark first, your parents and God Almighty nowhere."

The red mark was the symbol of punctuality set opposite the child's name in the register. To gain it, she must be in her place at nine o'clock to the stroke. A moment after nine, and only the black mark was attainable. Twenty to ten, and the duck's egg of the absent was sorrowfully inscribed by the Recording Angel, who in Bloomah's case was a pale pupil-teacher with eyeglasses.

But it was the Banner which loomed largest on the school

horizon, intensifying Bloomah's anxiety and her mother's grievance.

"I don't see nothing," Mrs. Beckenstein iterated; "no prize, no medal—nothing but a red mark and a banner."

The Banner was indeed a novelty. It had not unfurled itself in Mrs. Beckenstein's young days, nor even in the young days of Bloomah's married brothers and sisters.

As the worthy matron would say: "There's been Jack Beckenstein, there's been Joey Beckenstein, there's been Briny Beckenstein, there's been Benjy Beckenstein, there's been Ada Beckenstein, there's been Becky Beckenstein, God bless their hearts! And they all grew up scholars and prize-winners and a credit to their Queen and their religion without this *meshuggas* [madness] of a Babner."

Vaguely Mrs. Beckenstein connected the degenerate innovation with the invasion of the school by "furriners"—all these hordes of Russian, Polish, and Roumanian Jews flying from persecution who were sweeping away the good old English families, of which she considered the Beckensteins a shining example. What did English people want with banners and suck-like gewgaws?

The Banner was a class trophy of regularity and punctuality. It might be said metaphorically to be made of red marks; and, indeed, its ground-hue was purple.

The class that had scored the highest weekly average of red marks enjoyed its emblazoned splendours for the next week. It hung by a cord on the classroom wall, amid the dull, drab maps—a glorious sight with its oaken frame and its rich-coloured design in silk. Life moved to a chivalrous music, lessons went more easily, in presence of its proud pomp; 'twas like marching to a band instead of painfully plodding.

And the desire to keep it became a passion to the winners; the little girls strained every nerve never to be late or absent; but, alas, some mischance would occur to one or other, and it passed, in its purple and gold, to some strenuous and luckier class in another section of the building, turning to a funeral-banner as it disappeared dismally through the door of the cold and empty room.

Woe to the late-comer who imperilled the Banner. The black mark on the register was a snowflake compared with the black frown on all those childish foreheads. As for the

absentee, the scowls that would meet her return not improbably operated to prolong her absence.

Only once had Bloomah's class won the trophy, and that was largely through a yellow fog which hit the other classes worse.

For Bloomah was the black sheep that spoilt the chances of the fold—the black sheep with the black marks. Perhaps those great rings round her eyes were the black marks incarnate, so morbidly did the poor child grieve over her sins of omission.

Yet these sins of omission were virtues of commission elsewhere; for if Bloomah's desk was vacant, it was only because Bloomah was slaving at something that her mother considered more important.

"The Beckenstein family first, the workshop second, and school nowhere," Bloomah might have retorted to her mother.

At home she was the girl-of-all-work. In the living-rooms she did cooking and washing and sweeping; in the shop above, whenever a hand fell sick or work fell heavy, she was utilized to make buttonholes, school hours or no school hours.

Bloomah was likewise the errand-girl of the establishment, and the portress of goods to and from S. Cohn's Emporium in Holloway, and the watch-dog when Mrs. Beckenstein went shopping or pleasuring.

"Lock up the house!" the latter would cry, when Bloomah tearfully pleaded for that course. "My things are much too valuable to be locked up. But I know you'd rather lose my jewellery than your precious Banner."

When Mrs. Beckenstein had new grandchildren—and they came frequently—Bloomah would be summoned in hot haste to the new scene of service. Curt post-cards came on these occasions, thus conceived:

*Dear Mother,*

*A son. Send Bloomah.*

*Briny.*

Sometimes these messages were mournfully inverted:

*Dear Mother,*

*Poor little Rachie is gone. Send Bloomah to your heartbroken*

*Becky.*

Occasionally the post-card went the other way :

*Dear Becky,  
Send back Bloomah.*

*Your loving mother.*

The care of her elder brother Daniel was also part of Bloomah's burden ; and in the evenings she had to keep an eye on his street sports and comrades, for since he had shocked his parents by dumping down a new pair of boots on the table, he could not be trusted without supervision.

Not that he had stolen the boots—far worse ! Beguiled by a card cunningly printed in Hebrew, he had attended the evening classes of the *Mesbummodim*, those converted Jews who try to bribe their brethren from the faith, and who are the bugbear and execration of the Ghetto.

Daniel was thereafter looked upon at home as a lamb who had escaped from the lions' den, and must be the object of their vengeful pursuit, while on Bloomah devolved the duties of shepherd and sheepdog.

It was in the midst of all these diverse duties that Bloomah tried to go to school by day and do her home lessons by night. She did not murmur against her mother, though she often pleaded. She recognized that the poor woman was similarly distracted between domestic duties and turns at the machines upstairs.

Only it was hard for the child to dovetail the two halves of her life. At night she must sit up as late as her elders, poring over her school books, and in the morning it was a fierce rush to get through her share of the housework in time for the red mark. In Mrs. Beckenstein's language : "Don't eat, don't sleep, boil nor bake, stew nor roast, nor fry, nor nothing."

Her case was even worse than her mother imagined, for sometimes it was ten minutes to nine before Bloomah could sit down to her own breakfast, and then the steaming cup of tea served by her mother was a terrible hindrance ; and if that good woman's head was turned, Bloomah would sneak towards the improvised sink—which consisted of two dirty buckets, the one holding the clean water being recognizable by the tin pot standing on its covering-board—where she would pour half her tea into the one bucket and fill up from the other.

When this stratagem was impossible, she almost scalded

herself in her gulpy haste. 'Then how she snatched up her satchel and ran through rain, or snow, or fog, or scorching sunshine! Yet often she lost her breath without gaining her mark, and as she cowered tearfully under the angry eyes of the classroom, a stab at her heart was added to the stitch in her side.

It made her classmates only the angrier that, despite all her unpunctuality, she kept a high position in the class, even if she could never quite attain prize-rank.

But there came a week when Bloomah's family remained astonishingly quiet and self-sufficient, and it looked as if the Banner might once again adorn the dry, scholastic room and throw a halo of romance round the blackboard.

Then a curious calamity befell. A girl who had left the school for another at the end of the previous week returned on the Thursday, explaining that her parents had decided to keep her in the old school. An indignant heart-cry broke through all the discipline :

"Teacher, don't have her!"

From Bloomah burst the peremptory command : "Go back, Sarah!"

For the unlucky children felt that her interval would now be reckoned one of absence. And they were right. Sarah reduced the gross attendance by six, and the Banner was lost.

Yet to have been so near incited them to a fresh spurt. Again the tantalizing Thursday was reached before their hopes were dashed. This time the breakdown was even crueller, for every pinafores pupil, not excluding Bloomah, was in her place, red-marked.

Upon this saintly company burst suddenly Bloomah's mother, who, ignoring the teacher, and pointing her finger dramatically at her daughter, cried :

"Bloomah Beckenstein, go home!"

Bloomah's face became one large red mark, at which all the other girls' eyes were directed. Tears of humiliation and distress dripped down her cheeks over the dark rings. If she were thus haled off ere she had received two hours of secular instruction, her attendance would be cancelled.

The class was all in confusion. "Fold arms!" cried the teacher sharply, and the girls sat up rigidly. Bloomah obeyed instinctively with the rest.

"Bloomah Beckenstein, do you want me to pull you out by your plait?"

"Mrs. Beckenstein, really you mustn't come here like that!" said the teacher in her most ladylike accents.

"Tell Bloomah that," answered Mrs. Beckenstein, unimpressed. "She's come here by runnin' away from home. There's nobody but her to see to things, for we are all broken in our bones from dancin' at a weddin' last night, and comin' home at four in the mornin', and pourin' cats and dogs. If you go to our house, please, teacher, you'll see my Benjy in bed; he's given up his day's work; he must have his sleep; he earns three pounds a week as head cutter at S. Cohn's—he can afford to be in bed, thank God! So now, then, Bloomah Beckenstein! Don't they teach you here 'Honour thy father and thy mother'?"

Poor Bloomah rose, feeling vaguely that fathers and mothers should not dishonour their children. With hanging head she moved to the door, and burst into a passion of tears as soon as she got outside.

After, if not in consequence of, this behaviour, Mrs. Beckenstein broke her leg, and lay for weeks with the limb cased in plaster-of-paris. That finished the chances of the Banner for a long time. Between nursing and house management Bloomah could scarcely ever put in an attendance.

So heavily did her twin troubles weigh upon the sensitive child day and night that she walked almost with a limp, and dreamed of her name in the register with ominous rows of black ciphers; they stretched on and on to infinity—in vain did she turn page after page in the hope of a red mark; the little black eggs became larger and larger, till at last horrid horned insects began to creep from them and scramble all over her, and she woke with creeping flesh. Sometimes she lay swathed and choking in the coils of a Black Banner.

And, to add to these worries, the School Board officer hovered and buzzed around, threatening summonses.

But at last she was able to escape to her beloved school. The expected scowl of the room was changed to a sigh of relief; extremes meet, and her absence had been so prolonged that reproach was turned to welcome.

Bloomah remorsefully redoubled her exertions. The hope of the Banner flamed anew in every breast. But the

other classes were no less keen ; a fifth standard, in particular, kept the Banner for a full month, grimly holding it against all comers, came they ever so regularly and punctually.

Suddenly a new and melancholy factor entered into the competition. An epidemic of smallpox broke out in the East End, with its haphazard effects upon the varying classes. Red marks, and black marks, medals and prizes, all was luck an lottery. The pride of the fifth standard was laid low ; one of its girls was attacked, two others were kept at home through parental panic. A disturbing insecurity as of an earthquake vibrated through the school. In Bloomah's class alone—as if inspired by her martial determination—the ranks stood firm, unwavering.

The epidemic spread. The Ghetto began to talk of special psalms in the little synagogues.

In this crisis which the epidemic produced the Banner seemed drifting steadily towards Bloomah and her mates. They started Monday morning with all hands on deck, so to speak ; they sailed round Tuesday and Wednesday without a black mark in the school-log. The Thursday on which they had so often split was passed under full canvas, and if they could only get through Friday the trophy was theirs.

And Friday was the easiest day of all, inasmuch as, in view of the incoming Sabbath, it finished earlier. School did not break up between the two attendances ; there was a mere dinner-interval in the playground at midday. Nobody could get away, and whoever scored the first mark was sure of the second.

Bloomah was up before dawn on the fateful winter morning ; she could run no risks of being late. She polished off all her house-work, wondering anxiously if any of her classmates would oversleep herself, yet at heart confident that all were as eager as she. Still, there was always that troublesome smallpox——! She breathed a prayer that God would keep all the little girls and send them the Banner.

As she sat at breakfast the postman brought a post-card for her mother. Bloomah's heart was in her mouth when Mrs. Beckenstein clucked her tongue in reading it. She felt sure that the epidemic had invaded one of those numerous family hearths.

Her mother handed her the card silently.

Dear Mother,

I am rakked with neuraljia. Send Bloomah to fry the fish.  
Becky.

Bloomah turned white ; this was scarcely less tragic.

"Poor Becky !" said her heedless parent.

"There's time after school," she faltered.

"What !" shrieked Mrs. Beckenstein. "And not give the fish time to get cold ! It's that red mark again—sooner than lose it you'd see your own sister eat hot fish. Be off at once to her, you unnatural brat, or I'll bang the frying-pan about your head. That'll give you a red mark—yes, and a black mark too ! My poor Becky never persecuted me with Banners and she's twice the scholard you are."

"Why, she can't spell 'neuralgia'," said Bloomah resentfully.

"And who wants to spell a thing like that ? It's bad enough to feel it. Wait till you have babies and neuralgy of your own, and you'll see how you'll spell."

"She can't spell 'racked' either," put in Daniel.

His mother turned on him witheringly. "She didn't go to school with the *Meshummodim*."

Bloomah suddenly picked up her satchel.

"What's your books for ? You don't fry fish with books." Mrs. Beckenstein wrested it away from her, and dashed it on the floor. The pencil-case rolled one way, the thimble another.

"But I can get to school for the afternoon attendance."

"Madness ! With your sister in agony ? Have you no feelings ? Don't let me see your brazen face before the Sabbath !"

Bloomah crept out broken-hearted. On the way to Becky's her feet turned of themselves by long habit down the miry street in which the red-brick school-building rose in dreary importance. The sight of the great iron gate and the hurrying children caused her a throb of guilt. For a moment she stood wrestling with the temptation to enter.

It was but for the moment. She might rise to the heresy of *hot* fried fish in lieu of cold, but Becky's Sabbath altogether devoid of fried fish was a thought too sacrilegious for her childish brain.

From her earliest babyhood chunks of cold fried fish had

been part of her conception of the Day of Rest. Visions and odours of her mother frying plaice and soles—at worst, cod, or mackerel—were inwoven with her most sacred memories of the coming Sabbath; it is probable she thought Friday was short for frying-day.

With a sob she turned back, hurrying as if to escape the tug of temptation.

“Bloomah! Where are you off to?”

It was the alarmed cry of a classmate. Bloomah took to her heels, her face a fiery mass of shame and grief.

Towards midday Becky’s fish, nicely browned and sprigged with parsley, stood cooling on the great blue willow-pattern dish, and Becky’s neuralgia abated, perhaps from the mental relief of the spectacle.

When the clock struck twelve, Bloomah was allowed to scamper off to school in the desperate hope of saving the afternoon attendance.

The London sky was of lead, and the London pavement of mud, but her heart was aglow with hope. As she reached the familiar street a certain strangeness in its aspect struck her. People stood at the doors gossiping and excited, as though no Sabbath pots were a-cooking; straggling groups possessed the roadway, impeding her advance, and as she got nearer to the school the crowd thickened, the roadway became impassable, a gesticulating mob blocked the iron gate.

Poor Bloomah paused in her breathless career ready to cry at this malicious fate fighting against her, and for the first time allowing herself time to speculate on what was up. All around her she became aware of weeping and wailing and shrieking and wringing of hands.

The throng was chiefly composed of Russian and Roumanian women of the latest immigration, as she could tell by the pious wigs hiding their tresses. Those in the front were pressed against the bars of the locked gate, shrieking through them, shaking them with passion.

Although Bloomah’s knowledge of Yiddish was slight—as became a scion of an old English family—she could make out their elemental ejaculations.

“You murderers!”

“Give me my Rachel!”

“They are destroying our daughters as Pharaoh destroyed our sons.”

"Give me back my children, and I'll go back to Russia."

"They are worse than the Russians, the poisoners!"

"O God of Abraham, how shall I live without my Leah?"

On the other side of the bars the children—released for the dinner-interval—were clamouring equally, shouting, weeping, trying to get to their mothers. Some howled, with their sleeves rolled up, to exhibit the upper arm.

"See," the women cried, "the red marks! Oh, the poisoners!"

A light began to break upon Bloomah's brain. Evidently the School Board had suddenly sent down compulsory vaccinators.

"I won't die," moaned a plump golden-haired girl. "I'm too young to die yet."

"My little lamb is dying!" A woman near Bloomah, with auburn wisps showing under her black wig, wrung her hands. "I hear her talk—always, always about the red mark. Now they have given it her. She is poisoned—my little apple."

"Your little carrot is all right," said Bloomah testily. "They've only vaccinated her."

The woman caught at the only word she understood. "Vaccinate, vaccinate!" she repeated. Then, relapsing into jargon and raising her hands heavenward: "A sudden death upon them all!"

Bloomah turned despairingly in search of a wigless woman. One stood at her elbow.

"Can't you explain to her that the doctors mean no harm?" Bloomah asked.

"Oh, don't they, indeed? Just you read this!" She flourished a handbill, English on one side, Yiddish on the other.

Bloomah read the English version, not without agitation:

Mothers, look after your little ones! The School Tyrants are plotting to inject filthy vaccine into their innocent veins. Keep them away rather than let them be poisoned to enrich the doctors.

There followed statistics to appal even Bloomah. What wonder if the refugees from lands of persecution—lands in which anything might happen—believed they had fallen from the frying-pan into the fire; if the rumour that executioners

with instruments had entered the school-buildings had run like wildfire through the quarter, enflaming Oriental imagination to semi-madness ?

While Bloomah was reading, a head-shawled woman fainted and the din and frenzy grew.

"But I was vaccinated when a baby, and I'm all right," murmured Bloomah, half to reassure herself.

"My arm ! I'm poisoned !" And another pupil flew frantically towards the gate.

The women outside replied with a dull roar of rage, and hurled themselves furiously against the lock.

A window looking on the playground was raised with a sharp snap, and the head-mistress appeared, shouting alternately at the children and the parents ; but she was neither heard nor understood, and a Polish crone shook an answering fist.

"You old maid—childless, pitiless !"

Shrill whistles sounded and resounded from every side, and soon a posse of eight policemen were battling with the besiegers, trying to push themselves between them and the gate. A fat and genial officer worked his way past Bloomah, his truncheon ready for action.

"Don't hurt the poor women," Bloomah pleaded. "They think their children are being poisoned."

"I know, missie. What can you do with such green-horns ? Why don't they stop in their own country ? I've just been vaccinated myself, and it's no joke to get my arm knocked about like this !"

"Then show them the red marks, and that will quiet them."

The policeman laughed. A sleeveless policeman ! It would destroy all the dignity and prestige of the force.

"Then I'll show them mine," said Bloomah resolutely. "Mine are old and not very showy, but perhaps they'll do. Lift me up, please—I mean on your unvaccinated arm."

Overcome by her earnestness, the policeman hoisted her on his burly shoulder. The apparent arrest made a diversion ; all eyes turned towards her.

"You *Narronium* !" (fools), she shrieked, desperately mustering her scraps of Yiddish. "Your children are safe. Ich bin vaccinated. Look !" She rolled up her sleeve. "Der policeman ist vaccinated. Look—if I tap him he winces. See !"

"Hold on, missie !" The policeman grimaced.

"The King ist vaccinated," went on Bloomah, "and the Queen, and the Prince of Wales, yes, even the Teachers themselves. There are no devils inside there. This paper"—she held up the bill—"is lies and falsehood." She tore it into fragments.

"No ; it is true as the Law of Moses," retorted a man in the mob.

"As the Law of Moses !" echoed the women hoarsely.

Bloomah had an inspiration. "The Law of Moses ! Pooh ! Don't you know this is written by the *Mesbummodim* ?"

The crowd looked blank, fell silent. If, indeed, the hand-bill was written by apostates, what could it hold but Satan's lies ?

Bloomah profited by her moment of triumph. "Go home, you *Narronim* !" she cried pityingly from her perch. And then, veering round towards the children behind the bars : "Shut up, you squalling sillies !" she cried. "As for you, Golda Benjamin, I'm ashamed of you—a girl of your age ! Put your sleeve down, cry-baby !"

Bloomah would have carried the day had not her harangue distracted the police from observing another party of rioters—women, assisted by husbands hastily summoned from stall and barrow, who were battering at a side gate. And at this very instant they burst it open, and with a great cry poured into the playground, screaming and searching for their progeny.

The police darted round to the new battlefield, expecting an attack upon doors and windows, and Bloomah was hastily set down in the seething throng and carried with it in the wake of the police, who could not prevent it flooding through the broken side gate.

The large playground became a pandemonium of parents, children, police, and teachers all shouting and gesticulating. But there was no riot. The law could not prevent mothers and fathers from snatching their offspring to their bosoms and making off overjoyed. The children who had not the luck to be kidnapped escaped of themselves, some panic-stricken, some merely mischievous, and in a few minutes the school was empty.

. . . . .

The School Management Committee sat formally to consider this unprecedented episode. It was decided to cancel

the attendance for the day. Red marks, black marks—all fell into equality; the very ciphers were reduced to their native nothingness. The school-week was made to end on the Thursday.

Next Monday morning saw Bloomah at her desk, happiest of a radiant sisterhood. On the wall shone the Banner.



## MORLEY ROBERTS

### *A Comedy in Capricorn*

Morley Roberts has had a varied and adventurous career as a sailor before the mast, as a cattle hand and lumberman all over the United States, and as a traveller in many other parts of the world. His wanderings have provided material for many books, of which his sea stories have been particularly popular.



## A COMEDY IN CAPRICORN

*For reasons which will be obvious to readers of her letters, this little story is inscribed to the charming memory of Elizabeth Montague, Queen of the Blue-Stockings.*

IT was in her aunt's box at the Opera that Gwendolen Oakhurst first met Lord Bampton. They were playing something revolutionary by Stravinsky, but to Gwen the music was but a prelude to her own romance.

"He's certainly handsome," said Gwen pensively, as she looked across the theatre.

"And wishes to meet you, my dear," said old Lady Mary Warrington. "With a reserved nature like Harry's, that speaks whole encyclopaedias."

"Tell me about him," said Gwen. "I really think I shall like him, Auntie."

"Like him? You will love him, my dear," said Lady Mary. "He has looks, brains, immense wealth, and is of the kindest disposition. With such advantages, one expects to find a failure somewhere, perhaps in manners. His are perfect. He possesses the magnificent calm which was held in my youth to distinguish the well bred."

"Has he no faults whatever?" asked her niece.

"If he has one, it is a virtue," replied Lady Mary, "and one which should be an additional attraction to you. He adores animals to a degree beyond reason. He even breeds wild horses in his park, and he asks to be introduced to you! Do you want an archangel?"

"With wings?" asked Gwen. "Not with my passion for china!"

"I have none on my visiting list," said Lady Mary.

On one whose heart was also warm, who adored animals and was herself a notably sweet example of the type best represented by Gainsborough in his most successful portraits,

such representations could not fail to have an instant effect, although Lady Mary's collocation of wild-horse breeding and a desire for an introduction was somewhat startling. When representation was replaced by adoring reality, the result was all that Lady Mary hoped for. It came about with such amazing rapidity that in less than a week there would have been news concerning his daughter to be imparted to Colonel Oakhurst had not Gwen begged her lover to give her time to break it. She owned that her father was conservative to an extreme degree, and that any change whatsoever was apt to disturb him, and possibly the neighbourhood, since long employment in India had given him the high military complexion and habit which betokened irascibility.

"As long as our marriage is not delayed," said Lord Bampton amiably, "I do not mind postponing the news of our engagement. I will, then, call early next week and ask for permission to pay you my addresses, dearest."

"They will be well received," said Gwen, smiling.

"And if your dear, ferocious, white-haired father is not amenable, I shall, of course, run away with you," said her lover, as he kissed her hand.

"With your wild horses, Harry?" asked Gwendolen.

"They would symbolize my feeling," said Lord Bampton. "But I am very happy."

And so was Gwen, though she was a little nervous when her lover called at Warrington Grange a few days later. Even Mrs. Oakhurst did not know how far matters had really advanced, but the colonel showed no irascibility when she hinted, not vaguely, that his daughter had made a more than notable conquest. It is true that he searched his mind for objections in order to relieve his conservative conscience, but he owned presently that he had heard nothing against his would-be son-in-law save that he was, perhaps, somewhat eccentric in his devotion to the animal kingdom.

"Still, that's nothing, and if he don't shoot or hunt it can't be helped. It's his loss, not mine," said the colonel. "I don't care a—a Continental! He may come here with his wild horses if he likes, or with a chimpanzee! Didn't I hear he keeps 'em?"

"Will he really bring one with him?" asked Mrs. Oakhurst anxiously. "I don't think quite I should care for a chimpanzee to come here. The animal might break something."

“Let him bring a gorilla if he likes and break up the house,” said the colonel, chuckling. “I’ll tell Benson that if Lord Bampton turns up with a polar bear or a Bengal tiger it’s to come into the drawing-room. For I’ll say this much : that, on thinking it over, my dear, there’s not a man in England I’d prefer for a son-in-law. I remember Dicky Brown, who knows everyone on earth, sayin’ Bampton had the manners of Lord Chesterfield and the morals of the Archbishop of Canterbury, while as for property he owns half this county and a coal-mine in Yorkshire. If he brings the Zoo, you’ll see me take it like a lamb ! By the Lord Harry, like a lamb !”

Long years in India had made the colonel look like anything but a lamb. And when he gave orders they were not neglected. He feared no one but his wife and his Scotch gardener ; and Benson, the butler, in spite of his imposing appearance, was but as clay in his hands.

“Look here, Benson,” said the colonel, “Lord Bampton will call this afternoon about four.”

“Yes, sir,” said the butler.

“If everything isn’t spick and span and as bright as blazes there will be appointments vacant in this infernal neighbourhood,” cried the colonel fiercely. “And if that damned Thompson drops the tea-tray again I’ll drag him out into the garden and cut his throat from ear to ear.”

“I will attend to everything myself, sir,” said Benson.

“And another thing,” said the colonel ; “his lordship is fond of pets.”

“Yes, sir ?” said the butler.

“And I understand he takes them about with him,” said the colonel. “So if he brings a chimpanzee or a gorilla with him it’s to come into the drawing-room ; right in, by all that’s holy !”

“How shall I know if it’s a chimpanzee or a gorilla, sir ?” asked the butler.

“By its bite, of course,” replied the colonel. “But when I say a chimpanzee or a gorilla, I mean any livin’ thing, a polar bear or a Bengal tiger or billy-goat. Do you understand clearly—quite clearly ?”

“Quite clearly, sir,” said the butler, who by now was prepared to usher into the drawing-room any animal whatsoever, even if it were an elephant or a crocodile.

"I'm to know it by its bite, am I?" he said bitterly. "At times there's no knowin' what to make of the colonel. He's the most harbitrary gent in the county."

It was about a quarter to four when his lordship's car, driven unostentatiously by himself, stayed outside the imposing front entrance of Warrington Grange. By one of those highly remarkable coincidences which seem to happen in order to bring the pure, logical sequence of the universe into contempt, a handsome young billy-goat, about three parts grown, and that very day imported into the village by the blacksmith, had broken loose from its tether and wandered into the colonel's grounds. Finding rich feed there, he had satiated his appetite, and was now resolved to satisfy the curiosity which seems inherent in the species. Having been brought up by hand, he was of an amiable and kindly disposition, and well disposed towards humanity. It may be, of course, that Lord Bampton's fondness for pets of all kinds was by some mysterious means communicated to the goat, for the lively animal rushed from behind the car just as Lord Bampton alighted. The genial creature, pleased to be with company after a period of solitude, uttered a friendly *baa* as he mounted the steps side by side with the expected and honoured guest. At that very moment Benson appeared at the door, and Lord Bampton was ushered into the drawing-room with the goat following him. The butler, being much relieved to find that he was under no necessity to recognize the species of this unlikely pet by its bite, considered himself peculiarly fortunate in finding it not only gentle but tractable, and so much attached to its master that it entered the room without being coerced or chased into doing so.

Colonel Oakhurst was alone in the drawing-room when the curious pair entered. Mrs. Oakhurst considered it advisable to leave them alone for a while in order that Lord Bampton might be at full liberty to speak to Gwendolen's father. She and Gwen therefore waited a while in the library.

"I am delighted to meet you, Lord Bampton," said Colonel Oakhurst, "and as my wife and daughter are for the moment not here, you must allow me to introduce myself."

It seemed obvious to Lord Bampton that he and Colonel Oakhurst would be friends. For in order to please his guest the colonel patted the goat, even while he wondered at his choice of pets, and the visitor was obviously touched by the

affection displayed by its owner for this highly engaging animal. As the goat wandered round the room with all the curiosity owned to be characteristic of the race, host and guest alike expatiated upon its merits. It ate part of a cushion tassel, and though the colonel cursed it in his heart he smiled with what seemed ferocious tenderness.

"It's a very fine goat," said Lord Bampton. "Very fine indeed."

"Yes, a splendid animal—splendid. I—I love goats," sputtered the colonel. "It's well bred, too—dashed well bred."

The splendid well-bred goat sampled another sofa-cushion, and Lord Bampton could not help wondering at the splendid well-bred calm of his host. For, judging merely by his complexion and his fierce white moustache, he would have thought him rather more explosive than dynamite. It was odd that Gwen had not mentioned her father's passion for pets.

"I understand you have an uncommon love for animals," said the colonel.

"I grieve that it is uncommon," said Lord Bampton, fervently following the line of agreement indicated. "I adore them, as you do!"

"You don't draw the line anywhere?" asked the colonel, as the goat climbed the sofa and eyed a shining bureau which stood close by.

"Absolutely nowhere," said Lord Bampton, wondering if his host did.

"Have you many pets of this kind?"

"Oh, yes; I have a most delightful pet lamb."

"Is it at all mischievous?" asked the colonel.

"At times," said Lord Bampton; "but, like you, I love to see animals happy and active."

The happy and active goat made a wonderful spring and landed safely on the bureau.

"How beautifully he jumps!" cried the colonel, wishing he could boil the animal in a brass pan.

"Magnificently," said Lord Bampton, thinking his host must be mad to allow a goat in such a beautiful room. "But won't he break something?"

"It doesn't matter if he does," said the colonel, looking at the goat as if he were hypnotized. "I—I rather want something broken."

"You do? Isn't that china good?"

"Not if the goat likes to break it," said the colonel. "This room has been just the same for the last hundred years, and I'm tired of it—fairly wearied out by it."

The goat, after balancing himself in the most beautiful manner, jumped from the bureau upon a table, and only dislodged an old punch-bowl.

"He certainly jumps very skilfully," said Lord Bampton. "I thought he might bring everything down. How he does enjoy himself!"

"True!" said the colonel. "It affords me the deepest, the most enchanting pleasure to see animals enjoy themselves. Some don't! Some men hate to! I absolutely know men who would cut that goat's throat, or boil it or fry it!"

"Do you really?" asked Lord Bampton, with surprise. "There is no end to human cruelty. I have rarely seen a goat who could jump better. You don't mind him chewing that curtain?"

"Not in the least," said Colonel Oakhurst. "It's old brocade—very old, too old! Let him do as he likes."

"You almost excel me in your love of animals," said Lord Bampton warmly; "but there is, I maintain, no sign of an amiable nature so certain. I try all my friends by that test. This particular goat is really a most remarkable animal, and seems to have immense intellectual curiosity."

"It looks like it," growled the colonel. "Now just you watch him! He's going to jump on that table."

"It looks a highly polished and very slippery table," said his guest; "will he be able to keep his footing? I am curious to see."

The goat made a spring and, landing on the table, slid with all four feet together, and only brought up on the edge.

"He seems to have scratched the polished surface," said Lord Bampton. "Do you mind his scratching it?"

"Oh, no, not in the least," said the colonel, with powerfully concentrated calm. "The table belonged to my great-grandfather, and it's high time it was scratched. Till now there wasn't a scratch on it."

"Does Mrs. Oakhurst like goats?" asked Lord Bampton.

The colonel chewed at his lips and made curious sounds.

"Oh, yes, she has a perfect passion for them! But being, as most women are, a trifle uncertain in her temper, she is apt to take a dislike to a particular goat."

"Surely not to this very delightful animal?" asked the courteous guest, with an air of warm, interested surprise at the bare possibility.

"What, dislike a goat like that?" roared the colonel. "Such an active, inquiring animal! Oh, no! Why, if it was a simple, dull, inactive goat she would sell it and buy another just like that!"

The goat immediately demonstrated that it was not dull or inactive by springing from the hitherto unscratched table that had belonged to the colonel's great grandfather to one which had belonged to his grandmother, and brought a large silver bowl with a crash to the ground, as he and the table cover and the bowl slid off together. With beautiful agility, the goat avoided damage to himself and, making a pleasing little buck, began to eat some flowers from the bowl and drink a little of the water as it meandered over the parquet floor.

"And Miss Oakhurst?" asked Lord Bampton, wondering what he should do when they were married if Gwen introduced goats into the drawing-room of Woodhurst.

"She also likes 'em, adores 'em!" gasped the colonel, wondering if a rich and noble son-in-law were worth the price he was paying.

"Does she feel towards them as you do?"

"Oh, no!" said the colonel. "Oh, no; I absolutely defy her to come up to the feelings with which I regard this goat! She couldn't—couldn't do it! My feelings with regard to this goat are indescribable—perfectly indescribable!"

"They do you honour," said Lord Bampton.

The goat now inspected an old Venetian mirror, and, discovering a rival in it, after a few preliminary bucks, rose up and charged the other goat which so obviously intended to charge him. There was a fearful crash, and after a moment's surprise at his sudden victory, the successful warrior sought other fields.

"I'm afraid he's broken that mirror," said Lord Bampton.

"It's time it was broken—full time," said the colonel desperately. "It's—it's only an old Venetian thing an ancestor of mine brought to England. I'll order a nice new one from Tottenham Court Road."

It was certainly remarkable that such a man should speak

like that of an old Venetian mirror; but as Lord Bampton knew those who owned goats became mad so far as goats were concerned, a very common observation among those who kept other animals and went insane in other ways, he felt he could say nothing. The colonel also felt for the moment that he could say nothing. A determination of blood to the head seemed to threaten him with apoplexy, and he was perfectly aware that his complexion was that of a ripe prize tomato as his hands shook with the madly repressed desire to strangle Lord Bampton's goat without delay. To save his own life and that of this accursed animal it was necessary for him to quit the room at all costs. He choked as he said he must leave his guest for a moment.

"I'll see if my wife and daughter have got back," he sputtered. "You don't mind if I leave you and the goat for a minute?"

"Not at all," said Lord Bampton; "we shall no doubt enjoy ourselves while you are away."

And even as the colonel hastened blindly to the door, the goat obviously took a fancy to something upon the mantelpiece. It was perhaps a piece of old Chelsea, or the photograph of the colonel in a silver frame. The animal was not at all awed by the difficult approach to his desire, and Lord Bampton watched him with great curiosity, being firmly convinced it was not the first time the animal had been up there. By a very skilful use of a sofa, an occasional table, and the back of an easy chair, Billy achieved his desire, and stood with all four feet together on the summit of his Matterhorn, having done nothing more in the way of damage than upsetting the little table and knocking a leg off it, and capsizing a brass tray into the fender.

"Bravo, Billy!" said his lordship, and Billy baaed.

And so did the colonel in the passage—for he ran against his wife and Gwendolen.

"How—how do you like him?" they asked eagerly.

It was then that the colonel baaed and made strange and peculiar noises.

Mrs. Oakhurst and Gwendolen took him by the arms. He seemed in the first throes of an epileptic fit.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" they cried in chorus.

"That—that accursed Bampton!" said the colonel. "He's wreckin' the house—fairly wreckin' it!"

"Oh, father," said Gwen, "what *can* you mean? Do—do be calm!"

"Ain't I calm?" roared the colonel, as he tugged at his collar. "I'm so calm it's killin' me. The goat, the goat!"

"Tom, what goat are you speaking of?" asked his wife. "Tell us—do tell us!"

"Lord Bampton's goat, his pet goat, that he brought with him," gasped the colonel. "He says it's a splendid, well-bred goat with amazin' intellectual curiosity, and, by the Holy Poker, if you want real cold-blooded calmness go in and see his infernal well-bred lordship fairly eggin' on the animal to do more damage. I think he must be mad, for there's nothing left—nothing! The room's a wreck and so am I, and every time it smashed something he smiled and said it was a well-bred goat, or a fine goat, or that it jumped beautifully, and I—what did I do?—why, I said, curse me, that it was a damned well-bred goat, when the infernal beast was wrecking my house, and that it was a very, very fine goat, oh, Lord, and that it jumped, oh, so beautifully! Go in and see for yourselves. There, listen!"

And what they heard was the fall of the brass tray.

"Why, the infernal thing must be on the mantelpiece, or perhaps his mad master is," gurgled the colonel. "Look here, Mary, I can't stand this—I can't!"

And the unhappy old gentleman took several short runs up and down the passage.

"There must be some mistake——" began his wife.

"Go in, go in and see!" sputtered the colonel. "Let me stay here. I'll put my head under the tap in the bathroom and come back presently."

And he took a longer run for the bathroom.

"What shall we do?" asked Gwendolen's mother. "You said he was everything a man should be."

"And so he is," said Gwen firmly. "I don't care if he does keep goats. I'll cure him of that later. Whatever happens, you must keep calm. Come in, or I'll go by myself."

Thus encouraged, Mrs. Oakhurst entered the drawing-room, and nothing but the sense of *noblesse oblige* kept her from uttering wild yells worthy of an East End lady when the cat breaks ornaments in the parlour. For upon the mantelpiece, the lambrequin of which she had embroidered with her own hands, the goat was now disporting himself.

At every step something came into the fender, and at every crash the goat was more and more pleased with himself. It seemed also that he pleased Lord Bampton, who did not observe the ladies come in.

"Bravo, Billy!" said his lordship.

"Baa," said Billy.

"You're simply magnificent, Billy," said his lordship, "and the most remarkable goat I ever saw."

By this time Mrs. Oakhurst had recovered herself. The damage was done and could not be undone. But the possible match remained. That his lordship had desired to meet Gwendolen was much, but Lord Bampton, whose manners, if eccentric in points, were irreproachable, was said never to forgive want of manners in others. It suddenly occurred to her that it might even be that he had determined to put the Oakhursts to a severe test—the very severest he could devise. If that was so, she and Gwen, to whom she whispered her conclusions as Billy upset the other brass tray, would not fail to meet the occasion, whatever stress was put upon them.

"Good afternoon, Lord Bampton," said Mrs. Oakhurst. And when his lordship turned and saw not only Gwendolen, but her mother as well, taking matters so sweetly, he was doubly impressed, once by the fact of their high-bred calm and again by the certainty that nothing but a series of similar dramas conducted on many other occasions by Colonel Oakhurst could possibly account for it.

"As my husband is detained for a moment, my daughter must introduce us," said Mrs. Oakhurst.

The beautiful calm courtesy and deep interest shown by Lord Bampton as he was made acquainted personally with Gwendolen's mother assured them that his manners were perfect, while this fact was confirmed by his total indifference to the noise made by his curious pet.

As was only natural, the conversation turned cheerfully and lightly upon goats in general, and particularly upon the goat in the room.

"The goat really seems to be enjoying himself to-day," said Mrs. Oakhurst, settling herself in a settee from which she had an admirable view of the Matterhorn and the goat upon its dangerous traverse.

"Colonel Oakhurst made the very same remark," said

Lord Bampton. "It is delightful to find you are all so fond of animals."

"I told you I adored them," said Gwendolen, smiling.

"Do you like goats as much as your father does?" asked his lordship.

"Even more," said Gwendolen truthfully.

Lord Bampton allowed himself the trifling relaxation of a look of mild wonder.

"Dear me, you don't say so," he remarked. "Still, they have a peculiar elegance of their own, and it does not really surprise me. I can forgive anyone anything who is fond of animals. I think, by the way, that the one on the mantelpiece is measuring with his eye the distance from his perch to your settee, Mrs. Oakhurst."

But before he or Mrs. Oakhurst could move, the goat launched himself into the air and, missing her head by some inches, landed on the bare barquet floor and slid for ten feet, thus well displaying the peculiar elegance for which his lordship commended the goat family. Mrs. Oakhurst, although it was the first time in her life that a goat had jumped over her from a mantelpiece, once more displayed the high-bred calm which had pleased their guest. It now led him on to the further reflection that, if her mother was thus attuned to the peculiar harmonies of the colonel's mind, and preserved the Horatian precept of keeping cool when in difficulties, her daughter was likely to make an equally good wife. Thus every action of the goat and Mrs. Oakhurst and Gwendolen riveted the fetters of love upon Lord Bampton. He naturally assumed that their passion for the animal would make them interested in a light zoological sketch of the *Capra hircus* or Domestic Goat, and of the *Capra aegagrus*, the wild goat or *paseng* of the Persians.

"The paseng ranges from the Himalayas to the Caucasus," he told them, and they well believed it, for the goat, having left the Himalayas of the mantelpiece, discovered Caucasus in the grand piano, and, perhaps imagining that a pile of modern music represented Elburz, leapt upon the piano lightly. The sound that proceeded from it seemed to excite his curiosity, for he stamped as though trying the instrument's general resonance, and then climbed on the peak of music.

"You don't mind him being on the piano, I trust?" said Lord Bampton, breaking off in his description of the reasons

why the sacrifice of the goat to Athena was forbidden on the Acropolis, just at the point that Mrs. Oakhurst longed for him to give a practical example in the art of sacrifice to the goddess of domestic order.

"Certainly not," said Gwen, "if it pleases the goat."

"He seems to take great interest in the music," said Lord Bampton.

"He may eat a great deal of Debussy without getting much further," said Gwen, as she saw the animal devouring "L'Après-midi d'un Faune".

And while the goat browsed like a destructive critic among modern music, the incipient lovers and Mrs. Oakhurst discussed Stravinsky, Tcherepnine, and Strauss. The conversation was, however, interrupted by the goat discovering that the keyboard suggested to his native instincts a snowy and rocky mountain path. He leapt upon it, and was so greatly surprised by the result that he left it with a wild buck and landed with a clatter among the fire-irons.

"That last simple chord that he struck distinctly reminded me of a theme of Moussorgsky's," said Lord Bampton. "But, see! His interest in the instrument is by no means exhausted."

Certainly the goat had both courage and curiosity, for after refreshing himself with a bite of Tschaiowsky and a taste of Brahms he returned to the instrument and walked up and down the keyboard with the greatest delight. His lordship pointed out how evident it was that the goat was pleased with the simple wood-notes which he evoked, and from this built up a pleasing theory as to the origin of much modern music. Gwendolen argued the point eagerly, for she adored the moderns, and Lord Bampton at last admitted that it was only his fun to decry them.

"One cannot deny that there is a simple wildness in the goat's performance which is distinctly pleasing. He has, as the critics say, an idiom of his own, not remotely like the Russian idiom."

"I think it would please my husband," said Mrs. Oakhurst thoughtfully.

"Then he likes music?" asked Lord Bampton eagerly.

"No, I cannot say that. What he likes is the simpler noises of the popular song," replied Mrs. Oakhurst. "But I wonder what detains him. Gwendolen, please see if your father is still manipulating that cold-water tap in the bathroom."

"Yes, mother," said Gwendolen.

"Has the water supply gone wrong?" asked Lord Bampton as the door closed.

"Oh, no," replied his hostess; "but when he gets excited about anything my husband puts his head under the tap, and he is apt to leave the water running."

"Has he been at all excited this morning?" asked his lordship. "Has anything occurred to disturb him?"

Once more the goat played an accompaniment to the conversation, but, with no more than a casual glance at the performer, Mrs. Oakhurst replied that the colonel was not disturbed but excited by the surprising activity of the goat.

"Then I gather that you have never had a goat in here before?" asked Lord Bampton.

"Not that I remember," said Mrs. Oakhurst; "but you must not for a moment, one single moment, imagine that I object. I adore all animals, and so does Gwendolen."

What Lord Bampton said then was a proof of his real passion, for, during one terrible moment, he feared it was obscuring his discretion. The behaviour of Colonel Oakhurst in allowing valuable and beautiful things to be destroyed by a goat, so distinctly out of place in a drawing-room, could possibly be understood. A wild military experience might account for much. But when Mrs. Oakhurst, and Gwendolen as well, displayed neither distress nor anxiety, even when the animal became musical, it opened to the lover the awful possibility of the whole household being alike afflicted. And yet it could not be! In town, Gwen had spoken as if her father was capable on occasions of going directly contrary to all dictates of reason. And was this not common in fathers, to say nothing of men generally? Lord Bampton accordingly put hesitation aside and seized the happy moment.

"You may have heard it stated that I am somewhat eccentric——"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Oakhurst. "I cannot credit that!"

"I have known it said," declared Lord Bampton. "But I am only simple and direct. I shall be so now. I wish to be allowed to pay my addresses to your daughter. One moment, I beg! In London I admired her beauty and the eager interest she shared with me in music, but since observing in her whole family such a delightful sympathy with the animal kingdom, I own I am entirely conquered. May I reckon

upon your assistance and that of Colonel Oakhurst in the achievement of my dearest wishes?"

And while Mrs. Oakhurst was expressing her sincere pleasure at the prospect, Gwendolen was arguing with her outraged father.

"By God, the man's mad!" said the colonel, as he rubbed his head with a rough towel. "Mad, mad as ten thousand hatters!"

"No, dad, he is only a little eccentric," urged his daughter. "And mother says she thinks he has done it to try us."

"To try us!" roared the colonel. "What the devil——"

"To find out if we really love animals," said Gwen eagerly.

"You go in and tell him I don't," piped the colonel furiously. "Tell him I loathe 'em, and that the only use I have for a pet is to boil it. If I thought—but no, it's impossible, impossible! By the—the—the—I'd murder him if I thought so! To try us! Oh, Lord, to try us!"

Gwen caught him by the arm.

"Do, do be patient, dearest. He's really such a dear. See how sweetly calm he is through it all."

The colonel grasped Gwen by her arm in his turn and spoke with deadly earnestness and great rapidity.

"Look here, I'm your poor old father, and I like to behave decently, but if you talk like that you'll—you'll drive me mad. D'ye want me to have apoplexy? Calm through it all! My Venetian mirror! My great grandfather's table and a goat! Tell him I won't stand it—I won't! Don't you see I *can't*? Calm, is he? Would he be calm if I visited his house with an unbroken jackass?"

"Oh, father, but this is only a sweet little goat," urged Gwen. "He is really a duck."

"No," said the colonel. "I may be mad, and Lord Bampton may be madder, but I'm not so mad as to think a goat is a duck. You ain't thinkin' of marryin' him after this, Gwen?"

"Oh, yes, I am," said Gwen.

"Don't," said her father, "don't! I beg you not to. I knew a man who liked animals so that he used to take a bag of rats into his wife's bedroom, and with 'em three terriers, and said he'd divorce her because she didn't like it. A man that will bring a goat into an inoffensive stranger's house would put rattlesnakes into a baby's cradle. What's your mother doin'?"

"She's so calm, so sweet," said Gwen. "Do, do be patient, father dear, and it will all come right. Please come back now. If you don't, he'll think you didn't like him! Oh, even when the goat jumped over mother's head she never turned a hair! She—she was quite majestic!"

"Was she now?" asked the colonel, as he threw the towel into the corner. "She was majestic! And am I to be majestic too?"

"Yes," said Gwen; "do, do try!"

"Very well," said her father, in sudden gloom. "Come in and see me tryin'. But if this infernal nobleman tries it again with any other animal, a bull-calf or an orang-utan, I'll shoot it in the drawing-room. Yes, by all that's sacred, I'll blow its bleatin' head off! But come! I want to look at your mother being majestic. Majestic! Oh, Lord!"

They were just in time to see Mrs. Oakhurst trying to be majestic and making very little of it. Although she sustained the conversation with serious sweetness during the absence of her husband and daughter, it was, as she owned later, a very considerable strain on her not to turn round when the goat broke the three lower glass doors of an eighteenth-century bookcase while she discoursed to Lord Bampton about Gwen and the pictures in the room. It seemed that he had a true connoisseur's appreciation of Bonington and Cotman, and found the examples of these artists' work in the colonel's possession of the highest merit. But when Mrs. Oakhurst left her seat to point out a drawing attributed to Turner, the goat, having finished his work among the books, made three successive bucks and charged the mistress of the house from behind.

"Majestic!" said the colonel. "That's your word, Gwen!"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Oakhurst. "Oh!"

"I trust most sincerely you were not hurt," said Lord Bampton, saving her from a fall.

"No, not in the least," said Mrs. Oakhurst, gasping, but recovering herself with great rapidity. "I don't suppose the dear creature meant any harm. It's—it's only his play."

"That's it," said the colonel thickly. "By all that's holy, he has been playing with my bookcase! The whole room looks majestic."

"Does it?" asked Lord Bampton. "Does it? Ah, I see You mean it looks like a ruin."

"That's it," said the colonel, throwing himself into a chair. "I've never seen a room like this since I was in an earthquake in Chile. It wasn't any common earthquake, I tell you."

"Earthquakes are very interesting phenomena," said Lord Bampton. "I too was in one once."

"But it didn't disturb you, I'm sure," said the colonel. "I'll bet the unwrecked part of this house you were as cool as a ton of cucumbers."

"I was not disturbed in the least," replied Lord Bampton. "I took notes and sketches."

"Have you a notebook about you now?" asked the owner of the scene of desolation.

It seemed that Lord Bampton had none, and any further suggestion on the part of the colonel as to a sketch was stayed by the goat assaulting the window.

"He seemed to wish to go into the garden," said the guest. "Perhaps it might be as well to let him out."

"It's a very fine garden," said the colonel, "and in perfect order, quite perfect. That's my beastly gardener's fault. I hate order myself. What I like is ruins—complete, majestic ruins! But my gardener doesn't. He's a very arbitrary gardener; there's no making him see reason. That goat will be a dead goat if you let him out."

"Do I gather you would rather the goat remained here?" said Lord Bampton.

"I—I don't know," said the colonel; "he seems cramped here. Would you like him to look at the rest of the house?"

"That is as you please, of course," said the guest. "Do you usually let goats go everywhere, or do you keep them to this particular room?"

"I don't keep 'em anywhere," said the colonel, choking. "They only come in as visitors—just as visitors."

"Yes, only as welcome visitors," said Mrs. Oakhurst, eyeing her husband anxiously.

"Just as occasional visitors," said Gwendolen sweetly. "Do you allow them all over your house, Lord Bampton?"

"I beg your pardon," said Lord Bampton. "Do I allow goats all over my house? Oh, no, never, never! I don't in the least mind what they do elsewhere, but I draw the line there."

The colonel jumped to his feet.

"Father!" said his daughter.

"I can't be majestic any more," roared the colonel. "I must speak—I must! What's more, I will. Do you mean to say, Lord Bampton, that you never allow your goat to enter your house? Do you mean to tell us that you are so damnably unkind to a precious pet like a half-grown billy-goat as never to let him wreck a room full of valuable furniture, never to climb upon the mantelpiece, never to smash a few ancient mirrors, and, most of all, never to butt a visitor from behind?"

"Certainly not," said Lord Bampton warmly. "I am, I may say, notoriously fond of animals, but though it affords me no inconsiderable pleasure to see others even more attached and devoted to them, the very last thing I myself should allow is a goat, however well bred, to be in any of my own rooms. What goats, or other pet animals, do in other houses is, of course, a matter of perfect indifference to me."

"Stop!" said Colonel Oakhurst. "Stop before I break a blood-vessel. Perfect indifference! My hat!"

The colonel's agitation was now so obvious that it would have been ill-breeding on the part of the calmest nobleman in the kingdom not to notice it. Lord Bampton did notice it.

"Did I say anything particularly remarkable?" he asked, with perhaps a tinge of rebuke in his voice.

"Oh, no," said the colonel. "After all that's happened, what you said in the way of not carin' a Continental if I had a house over my head or not seemed like a long drink on a hot day. But, by this goat and all the goats that ever reared over-end in a cabbage-garden, there's nothing more to be said. It's no go. It can't be done. I won't allow it. I'd rather die first."

"Than do what, dad?" asked Gwen.

The colonel gasped and again tugged at his collar.

"You—you know! You can't marry Lord Bampton—you can't! I won't have it. He's mad, mad, quite mad!"

Mrs. Oakhurst rose in haste. Gwen made a step towards her lover, who looked the picture of well-bred amazement. After his own apparently sound doubts of the colonel's entire sanity it was strange to discover that for some peculiar reason his own was doubted.

"Oh, father!" said Gwen.

"Oh, Tom!" said his wife.

"Don't Tom me," roared the colonel savagely. "I forbid it—all of it. I won't have it. Mad, mad as a hatter!"

Lord Bampton now perceived that he was in an awkward situation. He therefore sought to temporize with the colonel knowing that to contradict a maniac in the acute stage was, by those best acquainted with the insane, considered both useless and dangerous. It seemed possible to the guest that he had unwittingly shown disapproval of the goat being in the drawing-room. He hastened to remove this impression.

"Perhaps I was wrong in saying something which seemed to imply a lack of feeling for this delightful animal," he said very earnestly. "I assure you, Colonel Oakhurst, that when I said that what it did here was a matter of indifference to me, I by no means meant that I was not charmed and interested by it. I trust you will not think me inconsiderate to animals."

Colonel Oakhurst went the colour of an oak tree in autumn.

"Look here!" he said, and then stopped to catch his breath.

"Pray continue," said Lord Bampton.

"Take your damned goat out of my house," roared the colonel, "or by the Holy Poker I'll get a gun and shoot it!"

"Take *whose* goat?" asked Lord Bampton.

"Whose goat? Whose goat?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, whose?"

"Yours, yours!" said the colonel.

And Lord Bampton, for the first time losing the calm which became him so well, sat down in the nearest chair with a positive thump. The goat came up to him, and his lordship absolutely glared at it.

"My—my goat?"

"Yes! Take it away—take it away quick, before I explode," said the colonel. "Or else I'll do your cursed pet a mischief."

And Lord Bampton fairly collapsed.

"It's *not* my goat," he said feebly. "Oh, no, it's not mine! I never saw the awful animal before."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Oakhurst.

"Oh!" said Gwendolen, and once more the colonel did one of those peculiar little runs up and down the room which betokened a really disturbed state of mind.

"You never, never saw it before?" he asked at last in a curious choked whisper.

"Never, never!" said his lordship. "Why, naturally enough, I thought it was yours!"

It was the colonel's turn to sit down. He did so, and opened his mouth three times before he could speak.

"Oh, you thought it mine, did you?" he asked. "May I—may I ask if you thought I was twice as mad as a March hare?"

"The possibility never entered my head," said Lord Bampton earnestly. "I merely thought that your choice of a household pet was uncommon and the latitude you gave it surprising."

The colonel mopped his face.

"But—but it came in with you?" he urged. "I saw it myself."

"So did your butler," replied Lord Bampton; "but that doesn't make him *my* butler. If I had come in with a tiger after me, would that have made him my tiger? Of course I thought it was your goat."

"Then—then whose goat is it?" asked the colonel fiercely. "If Benson can't tell me, he'll be no one's butler in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Let me get at him!"

And then Gwen, who had been speechless, burst into laughter and interrupted her father at the door.

"Dad, didn't you tell poor Benson that Lord Bampton loved pets, and that if he brought one it was to come into this room?" she asked.

"You did, Tom," said Mrs. Oakhurst; "yes, you did!"

"So I did," said the colonel, "so I did! But I never, never, never reckoned on a goat! Look at the fiend now! He's eating my old Persian rug. Let him, what's it matter?"

But it did matter, for the goat was disappointed with green worsted and eyed the whole party with malignancy.

"I apologize, Lord Bampton," said the colonel, "I apologize humbly and more than humbly. I—I——"

"Don't mention it," said Lord Bampton. "I have a confession to make."

The colonel started.

"Look here, you ain't by any chance goin' to say it's your goat after all, are you? I tell you I couldn't, couldn't bear it!"

"No, Colonel Oakhurst," said Lord Bampton. "But you seem to know that I came here to ask permission to pay my

addresses to Miss Oakhurst. I confess such a question would have been disingenuous since I have her permission to ask for her hand."

"My—my hat!" said the colonel. "You don't say so!"

"I do say so," replied Lord Bampton firmly.

"Speak, Tom, speak!" said Mrs. Oakhurst.

But the colonel couldn't speak. He looked round and, catching Gwen's beaming eye, saw the only thing to do. He took her hand and made a step towards Lord Bampton. But he didn't deliver the goods. The goat did that.











