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PARADISE ROW

A NOVEL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

SHAW DESMOND

10th Thousand

HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers), LTD.
LONDON :: NEW YORK :: MELBOURNE :: SYDNEY

The characters and incidents in this book are purely imaginary and have no reference to any living person

Dedication

To London Town, who endured to the end

PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN,
AT THE ANCHOR
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:: ESSEX ::

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I

QUEEN ELIZABETH CLOSE

THE little family of mother, father, daughter and son which nested under the red tiles of Queen Elizabeth Close, thirty miles from London Town, listened to the Voice: ". . . *it means that we are at war with Germany. . . .*"

So it had come at last.

Only a year ago, The Close, as the little Queen Anne house was known, had waited day by day, and night by night, for "the arrow that flieth by noonday" and for the big bomb that crasheth by night. But the Lord had been kind, and it had not come.

Now the Lord was not so kind, and it had come.

The Second World War was upon Queen Elizabeth Close in Paradise Row, and upon England.

". . . means that we are at war with Germany. . . ."

Mister O'Brien Leicester knew it, as he stood there this Sunday morn staring downwards at the tiny illuminated pane of the radio. Mistress Leicester, strapped to her couch by invisible legions and lesions, her fine dark sceptical eyes looking upwards for the God who was not there, knew it. Master Sean Leicester, whose name of Shawn was spelt in the Irish way, the dark-faced handsome boy now rising into his seventeenth year, knew it. And even his sister, the fourteen-year-old Miss Patricia Leicester, who refused to be called the "Pat" which everyone called her, knew it.

A girl with straight black hair, brows like moon-parings, had entered to stand there in the shadows, slender as flame in wind. She was looking intently at Sean.

"Well, that's that!" said the father as though something had been decided.

Sean, standing back in the shadows, seemed to be waiting for something. They held themselves as though they were all waiting for something.

Patricia said nothing but bit her lip, held herself taut for an instant, and then had thrown herself down by the side of her mother's bed to bury her mass of tousled red on the thin shoulder as though she had seen something she could not bear.

The Mother said nothing. It was her great gift.

They listened.

A whine overhead—a wail that inheld menace, rising and falling.

World-War had come to Paradise Row in the county of Berks, thirty miles from London Town.

II

PARADISE ROW

PARADISE Row had been built by one Thomas Packenham in the reign of good Queen Anne in the year seventeen hundred and fourteen. "The Charitable Scholar", as Thomas was writ upon the marble in the old church, had also built at the same time the Thomas Packenham Almshouses, "for the discretionary support of the Deserving Poor, and the supernumerary House of Relief for Twelve Decayed Gentle Men and Twelve Decayed Gentle Women for the years permitted to them by their God and up to the day of their release by Gentle Death." For so the inscription ran in the grey stone set within the cherry-red brick underneath the tall elms.

Paradise Row was a row of tall, thin-bodied but not unfriendly houses of red brick, covered with "M" roofs of red tiles, the gutters of which were always being choked by the wistaria and virginia creeper which were the darling pests of the inhabitants. Whenever it rained good and plenty, the complaining gutters, surcharged like an Income Tax return, just flowed under and into the houses to soak their bedded occupants as the water came down through the bulging ceilings. For by a dispensation of the Special Providence which every inhabitant believed watched over the Row, the virtuous and ingenious Packenham had made one outside piping in every seven houses carry the rainfall of the other six, with results dismaying to any other than a Paradise Row imagination. As for the Almshouses, set discreetly away at the other end of the village and under the shadow of the church, their inhabitants, rheumatic and rheumy, lay under their eroded roofs of red tiles in a Perfect Flood.

Imagination was not the strong point of the Row, which, having its special Jehovah, did not need it. Instead, it refuged in prayer, fat dividends from sound securities, gabble-gabble, and tea. Especially tea.

The Row refuged also in Church on Sundays, and in the world, though reputedly never in the flesh and the devil, on weekdays, letting out its own particular private Jehovah-Jah on the first day of the week and locking Him up tight as sixpence on the other six days. And if the flesh, with its accompanying Devil, did at long discreet interval manage to raid the Row, the Row, desiccated, even desecrated, quickly sent both about their damnéd business, as the quietly notorious "Buck" Galanty, now luxuriating within the bosom of Holy Church, would phrase it when in his cups.

But "Buck" Galanty, a deeply religious man and one of the wickeder old bachelors of the Row, had been born two hundred years too late and really belonged to the days of the Regency "bucks", those dear damned days beyond recall of the bare-knuckled prize-ring, cock-fighting, the Church Catechism, "Dearly beloved brethren, the scripture moveth us in sundry places", and the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. He still wore a black stock as befitted "one of the original Galantys", and you always imagined him in tassselled top-boots, tasselled cane, high white furry topper and white gloves, racing from nowhere to the same place.

He had not only strutted his hour upon the stage of unreality we call life,

but also upon the boards of that theatre which masks reality, for he had been an actor of sorts. He would quote Shakespeare, the naughtier novelist-primitives, or the Bible with entire urbanity in his inspired, that is to say, his more drunken moments, and he never missed church, for, as I have said, he was deeply religious. Also, in his own wicked words, he was "a lad for the ladies".

He was a survival, and perhaps not the the "fittest", despite Mr. Darwin and the unquestionable simian characteristic which, in him, from time to time, struggled upwards from that Subconscious which was the fetish of the time in which Mr. Galanty, with his paradisaical neighbours, had the misfortune to live, but of which the Row was almost divinely unconscious. He seemed to be held together by stick and string. His age was apocryphal.

These neighbours will, in their turn, emerge as the story of "War and Paradise Row" unfolds its angelic, but at times, snaky length, for even Paradise had its serpent. But also its angels, as we may see.

In the meantime, the eagle eye of Mr. O'Brien Leicester, commonly known as "The O'Brien", he being by profession a writer of thought and story-teller, was watching how his respectable friends and neighbours would take the coming of Mars to the little village by the side of the Thames—Eventide to wit. And, although I speak of him as "story-teller" leavened by thought, truth to say, he could at times be a very great liar "when the fit was on him", as Mrs. Mallory, the charlady in the kitchen, would remark in her spritely manner.

But, let it be said, a very great liar only in the way of business, or when his perfervid imagination "got the better of his religion" (Mrs. Mallory again). I refer to his fiction, in which, as we all know, the greater the liar, the greater the writer.

For "our Mrs. Mallory," in her way, was quite a lady of letters, and it is my opinion that had there been someone at hand to take down her cryptic criticisms of her "round and about", the Brontë sisters might have had to look to their laurels from that Paradise Row in another world into which they have doubtless retired. And had our Mrs. Mallory heard of them, she probably would in her remarks, have been "wuthering", by which she was presumed to mean "withering". But as she told Mr. Leicester, she had been to see a much appreciated film called "*Withering*" *Heights*, which made it all fair and square.

Lancelot Leicester would, indeed, have his work cut out to keep even his green and eagle eye under his greying hair upon the doings of those selfsame neighbours, upon which the Mallory brooded with such startling revelations, those ladies and gentlemen who held themselves inextricably entrenched behind the dull-painted black doors with their sheets of iron to keep out the gunshots of another age—but not the bombs of the age in which they now found themselves. Even though Buck Galanty was heard to declare in the "Robe of Glory" to which each night he resorted, and in a voice redolent and resonant, that "there wasn't a putty bomb out of that putty Germany that could penetrate the iron apron on *his* hall-door". For, at times, he was of Rabelaisian utterance and forthright. Yet a kinder voice never breathed o'er Eden—that is, over Paradise Row.

▲*

He was a hopeless optimist, especially after his third "double" at the "Robe" at the price of three shillings and sixpence, instead of the old time "one bob and a kick", a vernacular, thank God! unknown to the Row and only used by Buck when in his cups and more religious moments. Gathered at the eleventh hour into the bosom of what he called the "One and Only", he just *knew* that he was safe from damnation whilst those about him, belonging to an entirely different and indeed ungodly "'Suasion", were as certainly damned and no question of purgatory at all, at all. As the local Irishman, one Mick Malone, would aver when he had sponged his fourth whisky from the inflamed generosity of Buck, who was also his hereditary enemy, a Galanty having oppressed a Malone the day before yesterday in 1603 "and hell to his sowl!" None of which prevents Mr. Malone from helping Mr. Galanty in a fraternal process known as knocking 'em back.

All this time we have left O'Brien Leicester awaiting in the bosom of his family the first bomb or gas, both confidently expected at this opening stage of the war, and finding himself and his flesh and blood still intact, deciding in his headlong way, to make a trip down the Row and see how the neighbours were taking it.

After all, it was his business. He had to see, hear and, above all, "feel" everything. And when he had digested his feelings, it was his job to set it down in the cold black and white which inspiration might, or might not, fan into ignition.

And I don't think it would be a bad idea for you and me to go along with him, and as we go, take a look at a man through whose eyes we shall see how Paradise Row went to war.

III

DEATH'S PARADE

"Buck", his high full-blooded "conk", with the carefully plastered and painted black curls projecting from the temples, scenting by faith the double-brandies of "The Robe of Glory" for which he is bound on his nightly peregrination, is just showing himself in the distance as O'Brien Leicester comes out of Queen Elizabeth Close.

In his extraordinary survival of the Georgian Age, the wrap-round black neckcloth which he affects, with its Orient pearl stuck rakishly in it, his button boots with the buff tops, tight frock-coat, tight stripes and the last top hat in Eventide, not to mention his tight-buttoned flesh-coloured gloves and cane, Buck Galanty might have stepped out of his modest cottage on the right at the bottom of the Row in the year of its erection two hundred and twenty-five years before. Or, to bring it nearer nature, only thirty years before "when bo ts was boots and hats was hats" as the old song says. Remarkably gay and remarkably well-preserved is "The Happy Rake", by which cognomen is Mr. Galanty known, and if virtue be its own reward, so also is rakishness, in a Row in which all the virtuous maidens gradually dried up, whilst the

only Naughty Girl in the Row, whom we are soon to meet, bloomed like the Rose of Sharon together with the rakish Mr. Galanty.

The "topper" was set a little back and to one side, giving its owner a devil-may-care look. The malacca gold-topped cane was carried carelessly under what the owner would call his "wing". The toes of the boots were turned genteelly out, and this "turned genteelly out" exactly expresses Mr. Galanty at this moment in time.

The O'Brien Leicester looks at Mr. Galanty. Mr. Galanty looks at the O'Brien Leicester. The former with slightly anxious appreciation. The latter with suspicion—and "Damme, sir! but that fellow Leicester is a Communist or whatever-they-call 'em in disguise . . . and mark my words, so sure as my name's Galanty—and it's a great name—that fellow will yet live to be hanged by the neck until he is dead one of these fine days . . . for the Russian Revolution is upon us!"

So, Buck Galanty, as he hies him to the "Robe of Glory", is sure of himself, sure of his Church, and therefore sure of his private particular robe and crown amongst the saints of heaven, especially after his second or even third double-brandy. A libation served to him by the pop-eyed Mr. Bull, not very old and not very young, who 'neath the minatory eyes of his pa and ma, who like miniature porcelain bulls sit at either end of the saloon bar counter, serves out the alle·ed "four 'arf" and chemical beer, not to mention the popular "Condy's Fluid", as the ribald know the more virulent spirts of the time, with steady attention to business, not to say, *aplomb*. An *aplomb* with phlegm—a magical combination.

Even before our Regency friend can turn the corner, to be lost in the premature stomached-baldness of young Mr. Bull and his cognacs, the tall Viking-figure of Mr. Leicester with its seeking nose like the bowsprit of one of the Viking boats—*if* they had bowsprits—finds itself brought up all standing, as we might put it, we being now in the nautical parlance. Finds itself confronted by a not unrare spectacle in a nearly childless Row, the majority of whose inhabitants seem to be in the sixties, not to say the seventies, and who were always "popping-off".

In front, clad in spotless topper, decent black overcoat, black gloves, and black face, depressed to the extremest of high-priced obsequies, walked at regulation pace "The Little Pope", Mr. Wodes himself, who was the local undertaker and odd-job man—"Removals undertaken whether of Man or Furniture". Behind him, in step and also as one might say, "in face", his four funereal supporters similarly garbed, and, thank God, all of them sober at once, a coincidence not to be guaranteed. Behind them again, what we may call the *pièce de résistance*—to wit and videlecit, the immortal remains of the Second Oldest Inhabitant of Eventide, Mr. Valentine Windermere, of the Gables, a diehard young septuagenarian who had not so much died, as dried up, he being survived by his father, also a Valentine Windermere, "Old Everlasting", a sprightly young near-centenarian who regularly appeared in *The Times* birthday columns and, occasionally, in the obituary columns of various newspapers through excessive reportorial zeal.

Behind the dark quintette, the magnificent hearse, with its four black ostrich plumes, so to speak, "cut from the piece", or, more precisely, "pulled

on the prairie" from coal-black aniline-dyed ostriches specially bred for Mr. Wodes . . . as indicated by that gentleman when he, like Buck, had had his fourth or his forty-fourth—it didn't matter which and he wouldn't know. A vehicle of Death unsullied by the stinking petrol of a decadent age and drawn by two black prancers ("black mourning, heavily fringed stoles £3 extra per horse"), who might have been the not too distant relations of the five bipeds who paced slowly before them and with whom they also kept in step in some miraculous manner, held to it by Solomon, the driver with the fruity nose.

Nor, standing with hat doffed outside the Close, was this the end of the spectacle which had stopped Mr. Leicester from stepping out to see what might be seen of how Paradise Row faced war and with it, death. For behind the black-plumed chariot, there came at suitable interval the following vehicles, once more to wit:

Next to the hearse, Mr. Valentine Windermere, senior, if a survivor of ninety odd years may be called a senior to a "stiff"—the regrettable nomenclature adopted in their lighter and lighted moments by Mr. Wodes' cohorts. It sat there—I say "it" for it had already more or less ceased to be a "he" or indeed anything living—it sat there, I say, crouched over its own spine, a monkey of a man, still with a shrewd grey eye gazing to one side to see what might be seen of the effect of this brilliant and expensive *cortège* upon Paradise Row, and good money too, paid to Mr. Wodes for the magnificently caparisoned turnout in honour of the second last of the Windermeres on his way to the churchyard. His own survival of whom, incidentally, Windermere, senior, was inclined to take as a personal insult, not unmixed with contempt for the holding-out powers of a young-fellar-me-lad only in his mid-70's. Men were certainly not what they used to be.

Nor, all things considered, had Mr. Windermere, senior—if, as I said, we may still call him "senior"—any doubt that all that was immortal of his dearly beloved son Valentine was screwed down into that big black box which rode before him in such a brave solemnity. For, although he went to church and even partook of the sacraments on the off-chance, and also for reasons of business, it is regrettable to state that Mr. Valentine Windermere, senior, and no more bones about it, was an agnostic on the side, that his widower-son, which is to say the "stiff" riding before him, had also been an agnostic. Also that agnosticism and Thomas Huxley, Paine, Voltaire and Co. were in the family blood, like the Real Estate out of which they had made their money, and, if things went auspiciously, would soon all together be, if not in heaven, at least in the family vault which a mile away already gaped for the second last of the Blessed Family of the Windermeres, and great is its name.

Something of this was passing through the mind of Mr. Leicester as he watched from the pavement, catching sight in the brougham behind, also thank God! drawn by honest horseflesh, of Lady Lackplace, Miss Honoria Lackplace, and the Misses Maud, Ethel, Frances, Mary, and Miriam Lackplace, although I think it only fair to say that if camels or dromedaries had been fashionable instead of horses, then the Lackplaces would have been drawn by those animals, bumps and all. All from Devonshire House,

Paradise Row, with the overflow of the last four fruits of the bodies of the defunct and probably damned Sir Reginald and Lady Lackplace, put into the third brougham, and all of them, like their immensely tall tight-strapped ma and two sisters in the brougham before them, with black-edged handkerchiefs pressed in careful grief to their poor useless faces, already well-worn and patched, as they discreetly surveyed the impression they were making upon Mr. Leicester, who, indeed, was thinking something quite other. How much "other" might have surprised the tribe of the Lackplaces.

Leicester knew "the whole bunch", as he would rather coarsely phrase it. The seven Lackplaces, like the man-monkey of the leading brougham before them, were, in their way, "survivors", only they didn't know it. For, as Mick Malone would sing in the "Robe of Glory" of a night, "Them days is gone for ever!" The tocsin of war had sounded for the passing of the Lackplaces and already, as he, Leicester, knew, the great estates were breaking up all over the show, and the Tudor and Elizabethan mansions were now "Good pull-ups for carmen" and for the transport lorry drivers who now swarmed over the face of fair England by day, and especially by night, making them hideous with brassy siren voice.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, for herself, the high and mighty lady in carriage number two knew nothing of this. But, then, it was not her business to know anything, any more than it was the business of her six daughters, still unmarried and fast becoming unmarriageable though still manageable, who had all been sent to "finishing schools" which had finished anything that was left of them for ever and ever, amen.

Honoria was a Spritosophist, whatever that might mean in a sect strictly limited to twenty-one "Chosen Souls" and engaged in deadly unending feud with the theosophists proper and the spiritualists improper, and in the view of her madam mother therefore a heathen and not quite nice. From her mahatmas and Madam Blavatskys and spooks she drew what spiritual sustenance she might, with it her physical sustenance from what Mrs. Mallory would call the "rejooced circumstances" of her formidable Ma. As for her romantic sustenance, the only one that a woman cannot do without, this she extracted from the perilous and now nostalgic memory of a Wicked Man with whom she had run away and who, in one week, had deprived her of her virginity and her bankbook, had taken from her the belief in the Purity of Good Men in which she had been cradled, and, incidentally, left her with the only memory in her faded and fading life worth having.

O Marmaduke! what a little devil you were—and what an angel! But Honoria's Ma believed in neither God nor devil—indeed in nothing but herself, and as she would ejaculate, for she always swore out of the side of her mouth—"to hell with the rest!" For she was one of those *grandes dames* who from all eternity are born to damnation and to the fire that is not quenched.

But what have we here in the fourth appanage as the sable procession still paces its studied beat along Paradise Row, Eventide, in the County of Berkshire, with its great gates drawn across the end of the Row to keep the Vulgar Rabble at Vulgar Rabble's distance?

Why, here come Punch and Judy, with Punch nodding at Judy and Judy

nodding at Punch as the well-hung cabriolet, or whatever might be the high two-wheeled chariot on its "C" springs, with a seat projecting at the side for the driver, an invention of Mr. Punch. The Jehu driver, a rubicund jocose old-timer, with a proboscis that made the sacramental proboscis of Solomon like a carbuncle "going down", and which itself looked like one "coming up", drove his cob with a certain lightheartedness, not to say hilarity, as he flicked his black and white piebald, now on one side, now on the other. And each time he flicked, the cabriolet jumped a little and Punch and Judy, master and mistress of Jehu, nobbed and bobbed at each other as they sat not side by side but facing. And each time they bobbed, they sniggered a little, but not unseemly and, indeed, for many Eventiders who saw them that day, they seemed an integral part of the procession and perhaps the best part, and, as Joe Bings the cracked gardener said, "were as good as a circus". The cob, at any rate, had come out of a travelling circus from which his present owner had acquired him at fabulous cost, and was an animal who at any moment might stand up and beg. His name was Toby.

Nobody knew their real names, or if they did know them, remembered them, but everybody knew them as Punch and Judy, who lived at Jasmine Cottage down near the end of the row and side by side with Buck Galanty. They were little people, were Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill, almost fabulously like the Punch and Judy which still came round to Paradise Row, each with an eagle-like nose, highly veined, and each with the shade of the shadow of hump. Mr. Cocklepill was said to have made his money in patent medicine, in the famous Cocklepill ointment which, "rubbed on anywhere at any time would remove blotches, dandruff, rheumatism and housemaid's knee and contiguous contagious complaints". But that was a long time ago and the once well-known posters had long since disappeared from the hoardings, leaving as survivors from a dead and past magnificence, Punch and Judy, who industriously continued to rub the ointment upon each other, Cocklepill Ointment being the only religion of these rather gay old birds, who were not the only magicians to fall victims to their own magic or the only doctors to believe in their own medicine.

Everybody loved Punch and Judy and Punch and Judy loved everybody, and though they were both high-blooded dyed-in-the-wool Tories and both members of the Primrose League, as also were Lady Lackplace and the six Misses Lackplace in front of them, they distilled a milk of human kindness and sundry "bobs" to anybody who cared to call. Something that softened the rather virulent conservatism of the Row and would have been more suitable to a Liberal or "one of those dreadful Socialists" (I quote Lady Lackplace) than to a Punch and Judy Tory.

Really, the bobbing hob-nobbing pair livened up the whole spectacle of the transit of Valentine Windermere that September morn. And now the *cortège* had halted, for bearded John Bevan, honest man, all in his fine dark blue and crimson livery and corded top hat, to run out from his little lodge at the end of the row to open the gates to permit the passage of death. For not only life but death could be delayed in Paradise Row by the containing gates at the end, where indeed, one confidently expected to find not janitors on ward and watch, but dragons or even angels with flaming swords.

But "to every action there is action equal and contrary", said the courtly Sir Isaac to an unbelieving world in the years that had gone. And to this living loving pair, as he moved a little down the Row, he could faintly see the contrast of another loving pair moving behind the window draperies of the loveliest house in the Row, perhaps in England—the house known as "Happy Shadows", as they peeped shyly out from behind the draperies at Death's Parade.

Scarce anyone knew their real names. They were just known to the Row as "the Lovers" and it left them at that. The man and woman had met when they were both on the edge of middle age and had found themselves in love even as they met, and so had retreated into that company of happy shadows who filled the old wainscotted rooms and Adams ceilings and who looked upon themselves as they were when the world was very young in the portraits on the pinewood walls. And there, a pair of lovers, themselves ghosts, moved and had their unsevered being amidst the memories of a now forgotten age. And there they billed and cooed and made middle-aged love, which is as no other, in the Saint Martin's summer that seemed to have graciously descended upon them to shelter them from the world of reality for ever and ever, amen!

And of this couple, even the censorious Row spoke only good, and no evil thing touched the hem of their garments, and it seemed to some that their dwelling in "Happy Shadows" brought peace and surcease from the new and terrible world now bombing and shooting itself across the age when even the shadows had been happy.

It was at this solemn moment, with Mr. Wodes, halted in his tracks, awaiting the "Opening of the Gates", his eyes cast down in modest boastfulness upon the ground, as one sensible of the "Tremenjous Responsibility" of which he would often speak, laying heavy upon his small shoulders, that the Twentieth Century came shooting across and down upon the Eighteenth, or, at most, Early Nineteenth. Came shooting indeed like lightning bolt from the blue at three hundred miles an hour instead of the seemly seven of the Age upon which its shadow loomed.

IV

"ASHES TO ASHES . . ."

SOMETHING gurgled in the upper regions. A whine, then a scream, then a roar. High, high up, as the Misses Lackplace craned their genteel necks as close to the windows of their brougham as possible, so as not to be too conspicuous—high, high up in that "central blue" of the Tennyson upon whom they had been brought up—high, high, there streamed across the straining vision a tiny kite-like bird, fumes howling from its tail.

An aeroplane.

Bunches of heads came out of the carriages, "stiff" or no "stiff", to screw

upwards. That is to say, all except the "stiff" himself in the leading vehicle, the near-as-no-matter living "stiff" in the first carriage and the occupants of the second carriage, who would not deign to look out upon the stinking iniquitous twentieth century, even though her ladyship believed that she could catch the stink coming in through the window. Oh, for the good old, dear old drying horse-dung, of honest quadrupeds with honest bipeds behind them! But, indeed, "them days was certainly gone for ever", as Mr Malone at that very instant was singing to Buck Galanty in the saloon bar of the "Robe of Glory".

"I know, my dear, that as Bloody Mary or whoever it was, said that they would find written on her coffin or her heart or something, they will find the stink of petrol written on mine when the day comes for Mr. Wodes or whoever it is to lay me asleep in my long-earned rest in the private vault of the Lackplaces." "Her leddyship", as Solomon of the rubicund nose perched just before and above her would call her, was a trifle confused about her history.

The doors down the main street were opening and people rushing out of their houses in the assured and happy belief that Judgment Day had come, that "hell had bruk loose, and that the first contingent's gone down the main street!" The latter coming from Mick, who, as he threw his last glass of John Jamieson down his throat, himself rushed out to see what everybody believed to be the first of the German planes, and presumably all loaded with gas.

The effect of the aerial incursion upon Paradise Row was extraordinary. Ladies and gentlemen who for years had never gone much beyond their black Georgian iron gates, and who would have died rather than show unseemly speed, had hurled down anything in hand from a piece of pokerwork to the cruel or "crewel" work which still was the fashion of a vestigial Row, and had flung out into the sabbatical peace of a Row now given over to hell and the Hun, only to be brought up in their tracks.

For plane or no plane, gas or no gas, Hun or no Hun, there immovable as the Pope himself, stood the Little Pope, hat in hand, looking serenely downwards upon the white road before the just unlocked gates. If Mr. Wodes lifted his orbs once up to the blue above him, it was certainly not to search for Nazi planes, but to send up a prayer, doubtless, to the Fount of all Blessings and of Mr. Wodes' fattening and fatted bank account, to send him more money and plenty of corpses. Then he had gazed down again upon the dust: "Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust!" and if God don't take yez, the Devil must! The former being the Wodesian thought, the latter that of the ribald Mr. Malone, himself a stout Romanist and regarding anything, no matter what, of any other Church as of no account and of no avail against death and eternal damnation . . . "and never the laste taste in life of purgathory in it, neither!"

A strange and prehistoric animal pushed its snout out of the second carriage. A sort of pig. What, oh what! was this?

It was Miss Honoria, who in the previous year of God's Grace, nineteen hundred and thirty-eight, had already ordered her gas-mask in case of emergencies and despite her persistently expressed belief that the God of the

Spritosophs, whose name seemed to be Buddha, would only permit dissolution from the skies to those who were foolish enough to fear death, which her friend the enemy, at Number Four, the spiritualistically minded Miss Serena Gadfly, one good eye and one bad, had also informed the shocked Row, through the medium of a printed tract, "was only passing from one room into another". Miss Honoria, like her more or less revered papa, the eminent banker, now, thank God! passed out to trouble another world, "took no chances".

The lean and hungry Miss Gadfly, hungry for souls, her good eye working overtime, had come out of Number Four holding a saucepan-lid over her greying locks, under the delightful impression that it would save her from "the arrow that flieth by noonday". Others of her sex, and at least two of the sterner sex, made appearance down the Row variously and nefariously garbed in optimistic domestic armour, usually of tin. And, to make confusion worse confounded, Mr. Jark, terrestrial chief of "The Sons and Daughters of Jehovah" and a perfect labyrinth of theology, for the first time had dared to set up his little preaching-stand just on the corner to exhort "the stiff-necked and wicked to turn from the wrath to come and HELL WAITS FOR *YOU*!"—the latter upon his little banner stuck in its socket on the preaching-stand. Mr. Jark revelled in hell and this was his great chance.

But our Mr. Wodes stood there more immovable and indomitable than the Rock of Cashel of which Mr. Malone was always talking. Perhaps, all things considered, Mr. Wodes was the original John Bull, the rock of England and of that British Empire which, despite base exception, the Row knew to be the rock of God and of God's Holy Church. For whatever else Paradise Row knew or did not know, it knew that God was an Englishman and that he ruled the waves in the best of all possible worlds in spite of the dirty Irish and even those thieves and liars, the Welsh, and of the other "furriners" to which the Row, like Athens, relegated all the world of barbarians who dared to stand outside.

. . . . .

The Main Streeters and Paradise Rowers continued to gaze into the empyrean awaiting the wrath of God and of the Hun, but neither wrath nor Hun materialized. Miss Gadfly took off her saucepan-lid and hid it somewhere within her stricken bosom for very shame. The dipsomaniacal Mr. de Burgh, of Number Thirteen, continuing to drink himself to death at perhaps seventy-seven, who always from the war-scare of the previous year had slept in his boots and boasted in his doubtless Norman-French that he was always *en état de partir*, crawled back into his dirty den at Number Thirteen, leggings, leather vest, leather-lined triple-ply "Mackymac", and hide gas-proof gloves, to doff the cullender which he wore upside down upon his inflamed headpiece, pimples and all, in the assurance that so was he protected from the ministrations of Hitler and of Hell.

Mrs. Pompadour, also the mother of five very much unmarried daughters, for the first and last time in her history, wished "the lady next door" a

"Good morning", instead of what often sounded like a "God damn yer!" to which the astounded Next-Door, when she got her wind, graciously replied: "Good morning, and what wonderful weather we're having for this time of the year."

The dark hatchet-faced Mr. Nicodemus, of the Pomade Hongroise moustachios, known as "Young" to distinguish him from the "Old" Nick who was supposed to be his spiritual father, was one of the star-gazers.

Nicodemus, the now slightly ageing young-fellar-me-lad who was Eventide's one and only professional "cut-throat", and who, razor in hand, had led a flight from Egypt of assorted customers, including the last man in the chair who had followed him. This was Mr. Bodger, the milk purveyor, reputed to mix water with his milk but not with his whiskey, at this moment a regular whited sepulchre, for the lather was still thick on him—Mr. Nicodemus, I say, standing there gazing up with open razor in hand, said *sotto voce* that he'd be damned, several times in succession, doubtless knowing very well indeed what he was talking about, he only making the trifling mistake of using the future instead of the past tense as every Ev ni man knew, he having long since sold himself to the Devil.

Indeed, as O'Brien Leicester said to himself, taking it all in the by and large, strange physical, psychological and even psychic changes were taking place in Paradise Row and the Main Street through the advent of Mr. Mars and his friend, Mr. Hitler, and God alone knew where it might lead.

. . . . .

Through it all, Mr. Wodes, standing irrevocably there, held together his *cortège* and the British Empire. The gates opened to their fullest, he deigned to move his right foot, with four other right feet behind him moving at the same instant of time. Hat in hand, his little pop-eyes fixed inexorably before, he led the black-tailed black-plumed prancers to victory over death at twenty guineas a time for the Middle-Classes and from Fifty up to anything you like for the Quality, of whom Valentine Windermere was one.

The prancers, in their drooping black robes, fringed and luscious, did not prance—they were much too well bred for that—and the contents of the broughams did not prance, they also being too well bred, despite the expectations of one or two of them when the will was read. They also moved forward, inexorable as Fate or Mr. Wodes, in discreet transition of the nearly immortal mummy in the black box, out of Paradise Row, into the Main Street, and down the length of that street, in it every blind down, with the occupants of each house lifting the edges to see what might be seen, and if not seen, then imagined, for Eventide had its own imagination. Right to the end of the Street, this being a "Hundred Guineaer", and the more sumptuous the cavalcade, the longer did Mr. Wodes walk for his money.

It was only when they passed out of the end of Eventide's single main street that a quick change came over Mr. Wodes, as though he had just "had one", or even two. With his walking myrmidons, he climbed briskly on to the box seat beside Solomon, gave him the tip, who flicking his chargers

led the cavalcade at a smart trot to the churchyard outside Eventide down by the river, where the Crusaders still slept.

And there, in the family vault of the Windermeres, Mr. Wodes "planted" his Box and its contents where the weeping willows wave, whilst the Reverend Mr. Augustus Rohan, the underpaid undernourished curate of the Reverend Robin Hallowes, his long blond moustaches falling on either side of a patient and long-suffering yet hopeful mouth, franked him into what we may hope to be a better world.

"Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust . . ."

. . . . . .

O'Brien Leicester, who had followed on foot to the churchyard in time to hear those words, looked about him from the mound of earth on which, like some bird of prey, he had perched himself at a distance to oversee the last passage of Mr. Windermere, and, if possible, to oversee the minds and hearts of those who had optimistically gathered as a prelude to the reading of the will. They stood there, draped funereally, eyes also dutifully draped down to the hole before them, an apathetic, not unpathetic, band which had knotted itself into family and class even on the edge of the grave into which, not a single one of them, in his or her own opinion, would ever pass. Graves were things that happened to "the Other Fellow".

O'Brien Leicester sighed as he turned away, to go home.

V

STUDY OF AN ELIZABETHAN

O'BRIEN LEICESTER was possibly the most misunderstood and, occasionally, the most beloved male in Paradise Row, or, for that matter, in the world beyond. Indeed, he was beloved because he was misunderstood. He was also hated.

Straddled by an imagination which cut him off from his world, living in remote past and still remoter future, he scarcely belonged to the moment in which he had been born. Like many men of vision, he had fallen between two stools in time.

Scarce daring to show the real Leicester to the world about him, he was compelled to the mask which he wore with such a gay carelessness. Not the mask of hypocrisy but of self-protection, for weary years of experience had taught him to be wary of self-revelation to the world of the Great Damned Average which is suspicious of two things: originality and versatility.

Like many another original, men admired and hated him for what he wasn't and women loved him sometimes for what he was. And it is strange that in a man of such egoism and, at times, of such vanity, this love of women he almost never suspected until it was too late. For, whatever his weaknesses,

his was no coxcomb march over the hearts of the other sex, hearts which so often for him had no existence until he left them bruised behind him.

The trouble with O'Brien Leicester was that his concern, in the beginning at least, was always with the souls of the women, who, like ships that pass in the night, from time to time crossed his trail of stars. As for their bodies which, after all, are the chief concern of woman and of most males, for this Elizabethan-Irishman, as he called himself, they scarcely had existence. His women, once more in the beginning at least, were disembodied . . . disembodied souls.

But if you imagined this meant that Leicester was sexless, you would make dire mistake. A powerfully sexed man, rather than powerfully sexed male, O'Brien Leicester had so sublimated his emotions to his work as writer, that he had been the despair of more lovely designing females than any one man had the right to daunt. For him, even in the days before he met the one love of his life, the writing of a good story or a good play meant more than the conquering of all the females of the world.

There are many "one-man women". He was a "one-woman man". From the moment when he had met his wife, Aase, she alone existed for him in all the world of women . . . never more so than when one of his "ships that pass in the night" disturbed, for the moment, his own ship of stars.

Nobody knew better than Leicester that a man may love in a dozen ways —a woman only in one way. He had even made the discovery, certainly not through the Freudianism which he despised, that at the very time when a man may love a strange woman with his body, he often finds his moment of deepest love for the woman he loves with his soul.

Not that he ever allowed inclination to drift into accomplishment when the strange woman caught his eye. Yet did he know that a male man cannot help his moods, and none knew better than he that the body has its needs and occasions as apart from the soul it contains.

And as passion, physical or other, stands behind every thought and act of life, so did his absorption for and with women stand behind his art.

Frustrated, but never conquered, O'Brien Leicester had challenged first the world of journalism and then the world of books. Feeling with the invincible optimism of the physically potent romantic that all the world of letters lay open to his free lance, again, and yet again, he found the point of that lance miss the tilting ring. Again and yet again, "*the* book" or "*the* play" eluded him, even though he had achieved a nearly international recognition of sorts.

Feeling the round earth like a football waiting to be kicked, *when* he kicked, the ball was not there!

Leicester had a series of pronouncements, which, as time went on, became a series of *clichés*, to explain his frustrations. "He wrote for the thoughtful, not for the masses." "He wrote to shock into consciousness." "He refused to write down." And, although all these things were true perhaps, worst of all, he came to believe them.

His geese were always swans. Easily uplifted by small success, he was as easily depressed by small failure. Yet, he drew strength even from his failure and his frustration. He recoiled always to rise. Never did he lose

hope or lose heart. And always did he work, this man who had persistence rather than concentration. He had written in one of his novels that out of frustration came not only perspiration but elation.

A remarkable speaker, by nature an orator, he found the immediate and easier success on his platforms, socialist or literary. This man had the peculiar quality of the greater speaker—all men and women were compelled to listen when he opened his mouth. Yet, potent in the moment, when the personality behind the potency had vanished from the sight of the listener, the listener was apt to forget. Often it would come to the man who heard him that, after the lecture which was often a speech, he could not remember what the speaker really had said. Still rarer did he know what he had meant to say.

Yet did the effect remain in the alchemy of mind which O'Brien Leicester conjured, an effect slowly to become recognition.

Slowly and terribly did he progress towards his unknown goal—for Leicester himself could never say what was that goal. Little by little, his name was creeping into the "personal par" of the newspaper, his novels into the longer notices, especially of those who would waste a column upon misunderstanding and castigating him for his style, his carelessness of spelling, his opinions—opinions which they scarcely ever grasped any more than they grasped the music he made and played and which he regarded as the basis not only of *his*, but of *all* art.

His later books, which trended ever more towards religio-philosophic theme, had even been translated into one or two languages, and at the time of the outbreak when war came to Eventide, he was already beginning to have his group-publics in the outlying parts of Empire and even beyond. He had even found the greater recognition in translation.

And one of the more peculiar things about him was that despite the fact that none of his novels or other books were "best sellers", the philosophy behind them was steadily stealing into the consciousness of men and women who had never even read them. People would speak of him as "that man O'Brien Leicester—so interesting and stimulating. . . ." often when they had never read a word of his. Often they reversed his name.

O'Brien Leicester might sometimes be contemptuous of or even indifferent to the great world in which he found himself "incarnated"—a word he often used. The world could never find itself indifferent to O'Brien Leicester, with his wit, his dangerous charm, and the sardony of tongue and pen which had come to him from the ancestors in the island that produced both Swift and Shaw.

As for Eventide village, even after many years, they had not got used to this strange incursion from the world outside—a world as remote to many of them as though George the First still sat on the throne of England. They viewed him varyingly. From admiration to frank detestation. In some few instances, from something like devotion to horror. "You never knew what he would be at." The sin unpardonable in an island which liked its men and women to be made up into neat parcels, stringed and sealing-waxed.

Nobody in Eventide ever read anything much apart from the "Sundays" which, with the artificial rounded periods of the Reverend Hallowes, in the

parish magazine, *Maria Monk*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Daily Mirror*, and the *Daily Mail*, *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, with a streak of novelette, were their mental pabulum. For Eventide *could* read, even Paradise Row, despite that indiscreet contention by Leicester in one of his later novels, obviously upon the village, that whether the village could or could not read was doubtful.

Eventide's attitude to Leicester was easy to define. Leicester's to Eventide, not so easy.

Frankly, his incursion into this Early Victorian, or even Georgian retreat was only a little less remarkable than would have been the incursion of an Olympian. Yes, even though he played cricket in the village eleven, visited everybody, talked to and even *with* everybody, "when he would let them get a word in edgeways", as his irritated and sometimes delighted Paradisers would say.

The fact was that Paradise Row could not stand Leicester, but it could not resist him. It hated his opinions, his religion, and his politics, and it regarded his personal attitude to life as fantastic. But, again, when he was with the Row in person, the Row succumbed. Always excepting the Bass-Marjoriams, Pompadour, Lackplace and company.

As Lady Lackplace would declare to the circumambient, including and especially the Leicester, whom she suspected of the ranker Socialism, "I am a Conservative. I have always been a Conservative. I will die a Conservative. And if you ask me what is a Conservative, I reply, concisely: 'A Conservative is one who preserves or conserves his or her own opinions and *never* changes'" Adding, out of the side of her mouth as though she were spitting: "And if you don't like what I say, then you can jam well lump it!"

But, in a sense, the great Lady herself was a microcosm of the macrocosm that was Eventide—and perhaps was England! And, though he did not know it himself, in ways never suspected, so perhaps was O'Brien Leicester.

He loved these people even whilst he despised them. He would think of them as impossible Diehards, without understanding, who lived on the prejudices which they called convictions, and would then find himself betrayed into admiration when he discovered in them the grain heroic. They knew nothing. They could not think. They were, in a word, damned fools. But he loved them, not because he wished to love them, but because he could not help loving them.

They listened to him with respectful reluctance, but when he had left them they disparaged him. As reluctantly did they admire his name and reputation, even though scarce a soul in the Row had read a book of his up to a year or two before the outbreak of the war. They regarded him as a "revolutionary Red", as a Bolshevik, as an atheist—even though scarce a soul of them all, poor dears, knew what a Bolshevik was or, for that matter, an atheist. But they listened. They had to listen, for this man was compelling.

Half the maiden ladies in the Row, which seemed to breed maiden ladies, who themselves refused to do the same, were secretly in love with "the Green-eyed Monster", which was Lady Lackplace's name for him. And as at least a moiety of these maiden ladies "dabbled in the occult", this moiety

tactfully sidestepped Leicester's "politics and knavish tricks", and concentrated upon spooks, reading the cards, and the casting of horoscopes, all this under the impression, the darlings, that because, for some unearthly reason, Leicester believed in the actual existence of another and probably better world, that he himself must therefore be "spookish" and disembodied and be passionated by the occult. Actually he quietly detested the facile "osophists" and the detached, occasional, meerschaum-coloured *swami*, as he detested the flatulent and "windy" vegetarian.

For the "over-fifties" of Paradise Row, when of the female sex, lived much more in the other world than in this. Theirs was a mixture of Church of England with inclinations to "High", adoration of the Reverend Robin Hallowes with a bypass of passion upon Mr. Augustus Rohan, his blond-moustached curate. And if you ask me what their true religion might be, as opposed to what they thought they believed, I should say it was a tendency to teacup divination, a worship almost blasphemous of Mr. Chamberlain, soon to be replaced by the same for his successor, Mr. Churchill, whom, up to that moment, they had banned as a masked revolutionary, and, in some cases, an "osophic" or "ism" touch which, like the cocoa advertisements of their youth, was "grateful and comforting".

This was the environment to which it had pleased the Almighty to call O'Brien Leicester, and, truth to tell, he found it at times unspeakably "grateful and comforting" himself, on his return from the wilder places of the earth and Seven Seas. For he was a traveller of parts.

It was out from this "beleaguered city" of Eventide, even though it was but a tiny village, that he would make his periodical sallies into a more or less hostile world. And it was back into this nest of Eventide that he would retire after his periodical defeats to lick his wounds and nurse his plans for the next sally.

For never did it even occur to the O'Brien to retire hurt from his fray with life, and lay his sword and armour by. Always was he dead sure of victory—never more so than after defeat. Always did he believe that behind him were ranged the heavenly host, who, if they permitted him the scars and the pains, did so that in the school of earth he might be trained but to fight better. When anybody took his part or stood by his side, he felt himself impotent.

Yet this Elizabethan was as amazed as frustrated. Amazed at the contumacy of the human species, at the steady refusal of his Jerichos to lower their walls when he sounded his trump. For about O'Brien Leicester there was a pathetic *naïveté*. Sophisticated to an amazing but not always amusing world, he might be, yet was he also unsophisticated. For all his scarred experience, he was in the face of that world still a child—a child sitting down in face of a lion and trying to stroke it, and, like Androcles, trying to extract its thorns.

But O'Brien's world didn't want its thorns extracted. Victoriously cockeyed, it wore its thorny crown.

Damned but never daunted by a strange world, he stood his ground like the Irish Robin Hood of the ballad, of whom Mick Malone was always singing, "for bould, brave, undaunted stood young Brennan on the moor!"

It was Kathleen Rafferty, the Irish poetess, who had written of Leicester that "where other men drove horses, he drove lions . . . they tore him, but he held them!" Yet if scarred, the driver knew nothing of the scars. As men in the heat of battle know naught of the wounds which lay them low, so was it with O'Brien Leicester.

And so this valorous, vainglorious, loving and hating, daring and fearing, crying and laughing, "Elizabethan Irishman", sheared his way with his tongue through his Seas of Saragossa, and like many another sailorman-adventurer before him sailed the oceans to the Unknown Haven. Through tempest and calm, sorrow and joy, delight and pain, he battled his way, now yawing as the seas, iron in their hearts, came at him, now from port, now from starboard, trying to "hook" him out of the fight, as will a fierce boxer going after his man for the "knock-out". But undaunted held the O'Brien on his way, flag flying from the truck, in his ship of dreams:

Night after night, day after day,
His Ship of Dreams, in bowsprit play,
Lifts new stars in the faraway.

But for those who thought of this Elizabethan as a dreamer, there often came rude awakening. For Leicester was as practical as his French Huguenot forbears who in the long ago had been silk weavers and merchants, and who had lived on the borders of the Cambridgeshire fens. For him, the Eventide folk, and not only they, were "sloppy" in their approach to life, unpractical in their habits, and, as he would say, and even though they ran an empire, were not fit to run a rabbit-hutch.

But it was to these people and their kind that for the three and a half decades of his life he had been flinging his "pearls", although whether they were pearls or just imitations was a matter of doubt to the multitude. And if, in one of those terrible explosions which he permitted himself at rare interval, he called those who "turned and rent him" by the appellation given to them in the New Testament, it was not because he did not want to help them, and even to love them if they would permit, but because at heart he despised them, even while he loved.

He had found an England who had learned nothing from the First World War. He saw a people who talked of empires and lived in slums—who placed the care of their cats and dogs and horses before their care of the child. Whose ideas of agriculture were primitive and rudimentary. Who owned half a world which they did not understand or want to understand, and who placed in the seats of the mighty, men with the minds of a successful screwmaker, or, failing them, artists of compromise.

He found in Eventide, as outside it, a land which had its own private Jehovah for Sundays and no God worth talking about for the rest of the week—a Jehovah with Whom it had established a debtor and creditor basis on prayers strictly rationed. A land whose inhabitants were ashamed of their own bodies and yet who devoted long hours to "sport", and to games in which because they never studied them, and had never mastered them, they increasingly went down to defeat before the despised "Dago"—a term which

of course settled everything. A country in which the one-eyed man, that is to say the "amateur", was king, and in which the term "professional" was a term of contempt.

All this had O'Brien Leicester found, first to his amazement and then to his amusement, as he grew up in the London suburb where he had seen the light. And, being what he was, headstrong, downright, "difficult", he had reacted in the only way such a man could react—as, indeed, his Elizabethan ancestors had reacted before him—men like Drake and Frobisher and Raleigh. *He fought it.*

It had taken the O'Brien Leicester half a lifetime to see the other phase of the lopsided moon that was England, and even at that, it was only the coming of war to Eventide which first brought the fuller realization.

For he was to find that behind the mask of "hypocrite" and amateur, behind the lethargy and "half-action" of these little men and women about him in this English village, there lay something else—something which, as this veridical record unfolds, will also itself unfold.

VI

THE LEICESTER HOUSEHOLD

I THINK it might not be a bad idea for you and me this September afternoon to follow the Watcher, whom we also watch in this record of Paradise Row at war, and take a look into Queen Elizabeth Close. We shall see quite a lot of it and its inmates before we turn down the record. Whether we shall ever really come to know them is another matter.

O'Brien came back to the wicket in the iron gates which barred the Vulgar Herd from the doubtless angelic consistency within the gates. John Bevan, with his honest whiskers and respectful vacant eye, as usual, was on duty and probably would still be on duty when Gabriel blew his trumpet, as seemed not inconceivably probable in these days of war's alarums.

John Bevan gave the regulation "touch" to the gold-banded high hat as The O'Brien went through like an ancient Irish chief passing into his walled city. John Bevan had a nicely regulated course of salutations for the denizens of the Row, from which the wise might learn exactly how each family stood in Debrett and in a world that was now fast being gathered to its fathers. But, about The O'Brien, even though John Bevan was a Sassenach, what with his green eyes, danger-searching nose, and a jaw and mouth moulded out of an old cement, there was in the porter's eyes acknowledgment of something more than money, more even that nobility—perhaps of something regal. Also, as he knew, Mr. Leicester had in his veins not only the blood of Hawkins Leicester, the Elizabethan "letter of marque"—or, if you preferred, pirate, but also of the Irish O'Briens who every son of Eireann knew sprang panting from the loins of Brian Boru himself.

Kings will be kings.

The Elizabethan, coming to Number Seven, one of the row of high narrow Queen Anne, took his bunch of keys out and his Yale from the bunch and let himself into the shadowed hall, at the distant end of which, through the french window-doors, could be seen the perspective of the Georgian garden. A vista of red-tiled walks, the right-hand walk reaching right down to the Bourbon Lane, upon which a wicket gave, and by which, when you turned to the left, you found the River Thames flowing sweet and steady as he had flown through the centuries.

A great mulberry, with the purple-black berries dull-gleaming in the September sun of afternoon. The quinces and the apples. The parterre of roses of autumn gleaming white and gold and crimson. The lavender hedge dividing the flower garden from the vegetable. And the herbaceous border in which grew sweet-smelling mint and garlicky chives, green-pointed parsley and pungent sage, the evergreen leaves of rue, and spicy herbs from the Elizabethan borders of Hampton Court, the Chief Gardener of which had been generous to a past Leicester at the time the house was built.

There snugged the beds that had grown under his own hands—all of their occupants his children. Marjoram and rosemary. The golden rod dropping its gold. Baldy brazen sunflowers reared their ten-foot stems to the luminary from which they drew life. Gentian and scabious, with the Death's Head moth threatening unseen. And the wilder cousins which he loved to grow: Painted Lady and Viper Bugloss; burdock and teazel; self heal and loose-Strife—a Red Admiral late a-flutter perching here and there. How he loved them all!

O'Brien Leicester paused as he looked along the hall into the soft glow of the garden, with the sun bathing the old fountain that had been a holy water fount rifed by Henry the Eighth for the Hampton Court Palace and thence transferred by stealth to the Close some two hundred years before. In the centre, a great sundial and astrolabe, on it the inscription:

Happy hours.

Only that.

Standing near it, like her own ghost, the frail flower-like fourteen-year-old Snow-White, the little maid who stood closer to him than his own daughter Patricia.

Time seemed to stand still in the Close. The moment he would enter the little hall of sable blue and gold, time ceased. And with him, a shadow always entered.

What was the shadow?

What was the house?

. . . . .

O'Brien Leicester sighed as he stood an instant outside the door on the left half-way along the hall and then opened the door to let himself in to the Long Room, as it was called, which ran from front to back of the house.

A queer old room. Bulging ceilings, mottled with age. Panelled walls—

panelled with the invariable Portland pine which clothed all these houses from attic to basement, houses which were laid, not on concrete foundation, but, as befitted the one-time abode of Maids of Honour, on slabs of white marble, with a pump in the half-basement of each to give fresh water from the stream which was said to run beneath the house.

Silence that lay over the room like a shroud. Looking the length of the room, through the glass door with its smoky blue "Waterford" glass, he could see the length of the garden once more. On the dark panelled walls, the oil-paintings which his wife had brought to him on their marriage as her wedding present. Just before him, the fireplace of wrought iron with its fine steel fender, dull-gleaming. The orange of the sun of afternoon infiltrated the place with a dusky splendour.

On the couch, near the glass door, she lay, her fine dark eyes staring upwards at the ceiling in the way that she had. She lay there, as it always seemed to him, like the mummy of the Egyptian queen whom from time to time he visited in the British Museum, as he would say, "to bring back old memories".

For to this Elizabethan Irishman, as to all with a streak of Irish Celt, a thousand years were but as yesterday. Filled with unimaginable fancies, the tall athletic-looking man standing in that room of another day believed with all his heart—something for him much more important than his head—that the woman on the couch *was* the Egyptian queen that he had known in the long agos, and that their present life together in the Close was but a continuation of an oft-told tale.

A madman mathematician had been telling his world that the story of earth and of life thereon was but one of eternal recurrence. That what we had been, we would be. That what we were, we should one day be again.

O'Brien Leicester despised that man. For him and his like, with the Celtic upsurge from matter to spirit, there was no eternal recurrence but only eternal progression. The earth was a school. Back to earth we came again and again, meeting and parting from the same people who had walked with us down the corridors of time, until we, and they, had learned the lesson they and we had been sent to earth to learn. Then, and only then, did we return no more to our little nest of earth—a nest—but only one fleeting as the nest of spring.

Something of this was running through his mind as he turned his head to the woman on the couch. What did she really think of these things?

She lay there, inscrutable, and, as he thought, wise. Time was locked within that face and form. But what Aase thought of these things, he knew as little as he knew what she thought of the man who, twenty years before, had found her in her northern home near the edge of the Arctic:

> *That cloud-encircled head where snaky birth*
> *Doth weave itself in cunning snaky length—*
> *The Woman Wise, inscrutable, with feet that grip the earth—*
> *Telluric womb from which she draws her strength.*

He, a poet by the grace of God, had written those lines about her soon

after their meeting. They were still true. Clouds might encircle that wise and noble head—dark clouds, if you will, but always Aase Leicester held her feet to solid earth, as he knew to his daunting misery.

He came over to the couch, to which his fair young northern bride had been clamped year by year, stricken down in her pride of beauty and brain. One moment, lovely as the flower-clad fells of her native land, deep brown eyes touched in moments with the blue sheen of the fjords—and then . . . this.

War had come to Paradise Row, but war had not come to Queen Elizabeth Close. For war had come to the Close many years before. Unrelenting, persistent battle. A battle not between bodies but between souls.

Bodies and souls.

. . . . .

He looked down at the woman on the couch, the woman who alone of all earth's women held his love and passionate pity. But the woman did not stir. Not the movement of an eyelash. Still Aase Leicester looked up at the ceiling above her, unseeing, unrecognisant of the husband beside her.

And then the man had said as indifferently as he could contrive:

"Did you hear the rush of the plane, Aase? Where is Snow-White?"

The woman did not answer.

VII

TEA-PARTY IN PARADISE

"Our Queen" was about to give a tea-party.

Those simple words may not engender in the mind of the sophisticated reader, whether a him or a her, the delightful thrill of anticipation which it certainly engendered in the minds, and even, if the forbidden word may be used quickly and forgotten, the "stomachs" of the Row. That cannot be helped.

It is sufficient to say that "Our Queen" was about to give a tea-party.

"Our Queen" was the slightly satirical nickname for Mrs. Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam, and please don't forget the "i" in the last name, "which", as the lady herself would point you, "made *all* the difference in the world", her husband's family have no connection whatever with the common or garden Marjorams. And would you please remember to pronounce it with the accent on the "*jor*" thus: "Mar-*jore*-iam"? And if you cared to remain friends with the owner, you did.

Mrs. Bass-Mar*jor*iam was a rather regal personage with staring, glass-blue eye, who some score of years before had "fared-thee-well" to Mr. Marjoriam, a rather hazy personage who, though still roofing with his spouse for the sake of appearances, had seldom been seen and still more rarely heard

and who was supposed by fellows of the baser sort in the Row to have made his money in Beer. Hence, perhaps, the "Bass".

They had had "differences".

"Fellows of the baser sort", but of the other sex, females to wit, had even spread it about that "Our Queen", for all her magnificent head and bosoms and the aristocratic port-winey hue of her face, had been no better than a common barmaid. For this, it may at once be said, there was exactly the same basis as for the equally widespread rumour that poor Mrs. Ketch, at Number Twelve, by reason of her name, had been married to the Common Hangman . . . "and, my dear, and I am sure I can rely upon your discretion not to repeat it, it is said that she goes to bed every night with a piece of the rope that hung Jack-the-Ripper, or, if not him, then Palmer the Poisoner". Then the Poison-Tongue, looking indifferently over the shoulder of the avid recipient, would remark, indifferently, "just to bring back old memories of the time, *They* say, when she would help her husband to test the noose so as to avoid unpleasant accidents".

Now the attitude of the Paradisers upon the subject of birth and money was a trifle dubious—not to say muddled. The Row loved a lord, even if he were a pauper, like the Lord Lovem who had lost himself within the Wilderness, which was the actual name of the corner house farthest down the Row, and, as the newspapers have it about the drowned, "was not again seen". Lovem had been a regular goer on the racecourse, as all the world knew, and in the end had himself "gone". Gone out of sight of horse and man into that wilderness of abandoned stables and ghosty kennels and unchecked undergrowth, even though the Paradise Rower put a horse or dog before any man of them all. Yet this sparse mannikin of pale, sporty eye, and thinning hair parted in the middle, "a bit groggy on his pins" (Buck Galanty), intangible as one of the wraiths of his own Wilderness, was not altogether undeserving of the title "noble lord", for at least he was not ignoble even if he were "sketchy". And the Row loved a lord.

But if the Row loved a lord, it also loved "the root of all evil", the "Ell-Ess-Dee" through which the only lord who lived in the Row had run like one of his own horses. But, although it could tolerate a banking account that had been left to a family two generations before, that is to say, a banking account made by "trade", the word at which every man-jack and woman-judy of them all turned up their noses—it had to be at least *two*, and for preference, *three*, generations before. If, and I said *if*, you could get blood with money together in the same individual, why, then you had found something as close to the perfected human being as you could find this side of the heavenly Paradise which undoubtedly awaited all the inhabitants of its earthly namesake.

But such a combination was "as rare as skateo in hell", as Mr. Galanty would say in his picturesque basic English.

Now the Row was prepared to overlook the base, or is it "Bass", side of Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam's origins, if such indeed ever existed except in its solitary flamboyance about "Our Queen". And it was prepared to do this because, which is to say, and videlecit:

First, that "Our Queen" lived in the finest house in the Row, at the very

end, through the pillared gates of wrought iron with chess-knights on each spike. Secondly, as would say one of the aforesaid fellows of the baser sort (who, the Fiend abetting, *would* from time to time wriggle their ill-considered way into the earthly paradise of the 1700s)—*if* you knew how to wangle it, you could always get the loan of one of the punts or skiffs, moored in their hidden tunnels, which were part of the splendour and glory of The Bowers, as the Bass-Marjoriam mansion was titled. Though, truth to tell, there was not a bower of any kind upon the square of what the auctioneers' bills would one day describe as "that magnificent and highly desirable Georgian residence", and may God forgive them!

Thirdly and lastly, as the fruity Mr. Hallowes would put in one of his fourteen-point sermons, "Our Queen" gave the best teas in Marston, with such a plethora of succulent scone and *hot* apple-tarts, cream-buns and pound cake (the original pre-war pound, with a pound of everything in it from butter to sugar and flour—and if you don't believe me, see Mrs. Beeton) as could not be matched even in Windsor Castle, where "the dear good Queen" used to live when Queens were Queens and Prince Consorts were Consorts.

For the majority of the Row still lived in the reign of Good Queen Victoria, and, indeed, one or two of them in that of Queen Elizabeth, who had once slept, it was said, in Queen Elizabeth Close. But as Malone would say, "she was a wildering sort of a woman—her that nearly desthroyed Ireland and that this very minit is scorching on the red hearthstone of hell for that same—and hell to her sowl! and say a prayer for her for she needs it!"

. . . . .

So behold Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam on this lovely afternoon of early September queening it over her environment on the shadowy lawns of The Bowers.

The tea-party was, as one might say, amphibious, part of it being held by the side of or even *on* the river—which is to say the part that was the overflow from the drawing-room in which the rest of the party was held. That the war had done something to Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam was evidenced by a lawn tea-party in September, something up to that time unheard, for everyone knew that August was the very latest month in which you could "tea" in the open air. Just as the twenty-first of March was the earliest possible date for the pruning of rose-trees, as everybody knew, and such dates were to the Paradisers as the laws of the Medes and Persians, only much more stringent, because they were religious, not civil.

The majority of the guests had elected to come out into the air, and, some of them, even to punt and skiff genteelly on the bosom of Father Thames, at least four out of five remarking from time to time, "what lovely weather we're having for this time of the year!" as they sniffed ecstatic.

Paradise Row might be cloistered from the rest of Haven Isle, but, like the Chinese boxes into which its mandarins were divided and the Chinese minds within those boxes, it had its cliques and its classes. Indeed, not to put too fine a point on it, it had a habit of knotting itself up into wens or ganglions

or whatever the new-fangled world of science was calling what we may term the knotty tendency in man, and especially woman. And to these wens or ganglions you either belonged or you did not, and if you did *not*, then no earthly or indeed heavenly power could bring you within the knotty walls of the ganglion, wen, bunion, or however you cared to describe it. Not that the Row would dream of speaking about the bunions to which half the Row was affected through the unfortunate habit of plunging numbers "5" and "10" into numbers "4" and "a small 9". There were certain things of which you did not speak in Paradise. Amongst them, not only "bunions", but "trade", "communism", and, above all and beneath all, *sex*. Sex was tabu, and as Mick Malone would say: "Why, 'twas the wondher of the wurruld how some of these people got into the same wurruld at all, at all, seein' that babbies came out of gooseberry bushes and that really dacint women didn't go to bed with anything but their own shadows, and God Save the Queen!"

But Mick was a short, rotund, genial personage, and for all his luring laugh, a red-faced, scorbutic and sceptic individual, with a mouthful of teeth, white and false, and a hat on the back of his head, and "what could you expect of the Irishry"?

On this September afternoon, everybody who was anybody had been collected on to the lawns of The Bowers. Because, in the invitation printed upon a card of vellum which in the case of this tea-party, a sort of Boston tea-party as you might say, there stood the words of magic menace: "*To discuss the coming of war to Paradise Row, and to take suitable measures accordingly.*"

The hostess had laid the tea on hot and strong, she, not being quite a fool, knowing that good hot tea was the best foundation for discussion, for tittle-tattle, or for getting subscriptions for charitable objects, though yet more efficacious were whiskeys and cocktails. *The* Pound-Cake was everywhere in evidence and how it was that Punch and Judy in particular "didn't get sick all over the place", in the words of that hostess's nephew who had been lent for the occasion by the Royal Air Force or whatever you liked to call it, and who it might be said was the limit. In a uniform of blue-grey and pleasant to look upon was that child, but of him also it might be said: "There's a chiel amang ye takin' notes."

In every fold there is a wolf in sheep's clothing. In every paradise there is a serpent. And the Serpent was there!

Something fewer than twenty years before the opening of this veridical chronicle, there had not so much wandered into as injected himself into the Row, the green-eyed gentleman whose acquaintance we have already made —O'Brien Leicester to wit. Indeed, you couldn't keep him out.

And the very devil of it was that he was obviously a man of breeding, the O'Brien Leicesters appearing in all histories of the Elizabethan times, behaved like a gentleman, spoke like a gentleman, but did not *think* like a gentleman.

Also, he had the nasty and inconvenient habit of not *writing* like a gentleman, or, apart from his remarkably fluent courtesy to the individual, of speaking or writing like one. I say "writing" as referring to his books and rather vitriolic articles—for his letters, as his speech, which is to say off the platform, were gentility itself.

And here he was positively pervading the house and the lawns with his masterful, be damned to it! presence. The piratical boldness of the Elizabethan and the *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre* of the island race which knows how to die, if not always how to live. For in the veins of this Englishman, the little drop of Irish ran like quicksilver.

As even Our Queen regretfully confessed to her cronies, there was no getting over or round or through this freebooter, with his rather magnificent presence, his powers of expression, and his universal *bonhomie* towards all and sundry. And how he is likely to turn out in these chronicles of the Row nobody, least of all the Scribe, may say.

With him was his daughter Patricia, the afternoon sun striking lights of red-gold from her massy hair, which fell about her shoulders. Behind her, again, the very tall, serious-looking son, Sean, named after his Irish ancestor who had come over with Raleigh to Youghal at the time that redoubtable pirate, helped by the Devil, had introduced both tobacco and the potato into the Isle of Saints. Behind, always in the background, the wistful Mercy White, known to everybody as Snow-White, the Leicester *protégée*, watching out over Sean like a young mother.

Sean seemed to overshadow his young sister not only with his height, but with something *inside* him. In him, a strange awareness. The large dark eyes which he had got from his mother looked out over and into a world in which, at times, it seemed that the boy had nothing to do. The dark intelligent eyes in the swarth face looked out from under their finely drawn brows and high forehead as though their owner was someone standing apart from those about him. Perhaps he was, as his father would say, a human being who lived in more than one vibration and, perhaps, at times in another world, and it may be that Sean Leicester was not intended to remain long down here. O'Brien Leicester had many strange beliefs, none stranger than when he would declare: "None of us knows anything much about anything on this tiny earth."

Yet Sean Leicester was a remarkable athlete, a runner and, like his father, a piano player and admirable exponent of the gentle art of "catch". Brains and athletics together seemed to run in the Leicesters. Maybe they were ancient Greeks, as O'Brien would contend.

The three Leicesters moved across the lawn towards their hostess who, beneath the great cedar tree, stood dispensing through her retainers—they were not "servants"—gallons and gallons of the Golden Bohea for which she was famous. They moved as a family, and yet a family divided, for whilst father and son seemed to be one in understanding, fourteen-year-old Patricia held a little away from them, as though with them she had little to do, the flame-slender Snow-White always watching from behind.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam," said Leicester easily. "I see that you have called the Row together for a Council of War . . . and yet war seems very far away here by the side of the Thames, doesn't it?"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Leicester," returned the glassy hostess with the condescending graciousness that was her own but politely evasive, as though she did not care about the subject. "Won't you have a cup of tea?"

"Thank you . . . but . . . er . . . talking about this war . . ." O'Brien Leicester broke off as his hostess asked affably:

"Two lumps of sugar to the cup, Mr. Leicester?"

"Soon, they say, we won't have any sugar . . . it will be a case of two cups to the lump . . ." Again Mr. Leicester stopped. There was tension in the air.

It was at this critical moment that there debouched into the distance the tightlaced and tight-strapped Lackplace, with a black parasol gripped like a marshal's batón as she led her troops—which is to say her six daughters. From a different quarter also appeared Mrs. Pompadour with her little lot, to use the coarse expression of the sucking R.A.F.er, in whose hands a dog-whip had replaced the parasol. The first general carried her familiar demon, Phtah, the Egyptian cat, in her arms, Honoria also bringing a Siamese kitten that looked unpleasantly like a human being, whilst the Pompadour was fringed by the flock of snapping Pekes which accompanied her everywhere. There was always merry hell when the cats met the Pekes and the respective mistresses themselves took sides.

As he passed from group to group, balancing his cup with the thick slice of "pound" in the saucer as well as he might, he soon discovered that the Bowers' tea-party had divided itself into two camps—one the vulgar realist, the other the genteelly ignoring. Strange to say, and despite the italicized line about a war discussion on the invitation, the lady who gave the party belonged to the latter. Also he found that even of the realists, quite a number were more than half inclined to ignore the war in gentlemanly fashion.

". . . you see my way of looking at it is this," he heard Lady Lackplace say in her high-shouldered voice to Lord Lovem, who had for this occasion only come out of his wilderness, "you see my way of looking at it is this . . . if there be a war, well and good. If there be not a war, then why in hell—I mean why in the name of the amenities of life and living, even in these degenerate days, should we be troubled to discuss it?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed the noble lord, who always wore riding-breeches in order to have something into which to place his hands and who was always a faint echo of himself, just as his son and heir, Clarence, was a fainter echo of his father. This "echo" he had brought with him, one which from monocle and scanty parted hair to riding-breeches was his papa's double, and he not so much followed as haunted that pa.

"I doubt the existence of any war, Lord Lovem. For that matter, at times I doubt my own. When I came protesting out of the womb of my mother and refused the proffered nipple, my dear mother said prophetically to my aunt: 'That child, Constantia, is a Doubter.' She was right. I doubt everything.

"Now there's Honoria over there" (Lady Lackplace indicated her eldest offspring with the handle of the black parasol she affected and carried over from the gay nineties)—"just look at her talking to that hateful Buck Galanty—now Honoria, as I was saying, takes it in this way—if the war murders us all in our beds, why it's the best thing that could happen to us, when you remember, she says, it is based on the laws of Curry or Curma or something Indian and horrid. That's the way the war takes *her*. But, thank God, I'm

a strong-minded woman and a member of the Church of England, even though I take strong exception to many of its tenets, and, not to put too fine a point on it, although I hope I am a good Christian, I have certain doubts about that Virgin-birth story, even though I saw to it that Honoria and the other five were all vaccinated and confirmed." She added as an afterthought: ". . . and, of course, baptized."

"Of course, of course," echoed Lovem, looking more than ever like an outline of himself.

"You've got to have discipline in these days of Decadent Democracy and therefore you've got to have a Church by Law Established—and think of the help it's going to be to all of us *if* the war really does start, to know that we are 'Established' under the Union Jack and that whatever God may be—and I personally know very little about Him—at any rate He is, if not an Englishman, at least British. Be British! I always say." Then she had added unexpectedly, as though to clinch it: "Be British and be damned to you!"

"Of course, of course!" murmured his lordship as though he were talking in his sleep. Then, to cap it, as royalty so often does when inspecting arsenals, lunatic asylums and babies' homes, he added, "Quite, quite!"

O'Brien, overhearing some of this remarkable conversation and realizing the general determination to ignore the War, wondered, not for the first time, if the English God or the English mind really was keyed to the point of comprehension of what a world war might be—yes, even though it had skated over the First World War of twenty-five years before. The British, which is to say the English—not the Scots or Welsh, who are of a different breed "outside the law", as Kipling might put it—had through the centuries made skating over the thin ice of compromise into a fine art, the art of ignoring the inconvenient. But would this be sufficient to meet what the German legions at that moment were handing out to the dear Poles and in liberal doses?

After all, you couldn't ignore the Juggernaut of the Nazi tank, even though he was sure that the six Misses Lackplace were quite capable of letting it go over their yielding bodies without even being aware of it and of being mildly surprised at waking up in the Other and Better World—the world in which their agnostic Ma did not believe except as carrot for the Democratic Donkey in order to keep him quiet.

It was quite a relief to stagger on Punch and Judy, who sat at a little round table as near the edge of the river as no matter, as they bobbed and chattered and found themselves, as always, in the best of all possible worlds—and war certainly did not exist for them.

"Saw you at the funeral, Mr. Leicester," said Judy roguishly. "What a day—what a day—what a day!" She nodded violently.

"Planted him seven foot deep if an inch," chimed in her husband as he nodded O'Brien to a chair. "Even Valentine Windermere won't get out from under that in a hurry—and it clay! What a lark if he did manage to come out and haunt the village. What a blessed lark!"

Mr. Cocklepill, or, as I prefer to call him, Mr. Punch, was in excellent spirits. He was actually absorbing his fourth large cup of tea and his very suggestion of hump seemed to take on larger proportion as he stuffed. O'Brien could never look at him or his wife without fearing they might burst

asunder under the stress of the comestibles which they both poked into themselves, not to mention Something Else, which may or may not appear as we go on.

"Come and have a cup o' tea, Mr. Leicester," said Mr. Cocklepill, "a cup with something in it to sweeten it," he added roguishly. "You see I insisted on having our own pot." He pointed to the little brown teapot on the table which he had purloined or persuaded out of the Marjoriam butler. Making a sleight-of-hand movement, with a dexterity incredible, he felt in the coat-tails of the voluminous morning-coat, brought it out with something shining in it, lifted the lid and passed it over the steaming pot like a conjurer. Then the shining object vanished in the tails which was also the receptacle for all sorts of delicacies, especially the barley sugar and Turkish Delight of which he and his spouse were inordinately fond, he being a barley-sugar fiend and his better half doting on Delight.

O'Brien made vague gestures of disavowal as Judy promptly poured him out a cup of the mixture, which Punch waved dreamily under the nostrils of his guest. "That's the stuff to give the troops," he said.

O'Brien Leicester thought this an apposite moment to bring the tea-party to a sense of duty about the little World War, which, unless the newspapers and the radio were "lying in league", as Honoria Lackplace had suggested, was actually going on at that very moment in a country called Poland, where poles or pole-cats or something lived. Geography was not the strong point of England's Paradise Rows, who governed an empire of which they knew nothing—and were proud of it—that is the ignorance, not the empire.

"I see that the Polish cavalry proved no match for the Nazi tanks, even though I see it is proposed by some saphead to arm the Defence Volunteers with pikes—and presumably, later on, with bows and arrows," he said quietly. "Don't you think, Mr. Cocklepill, that the moment has come, so to speak, 'to call the meeting to order', and to initiate the discussion which you see stands here on my card of invitation?" He showed the card to his host, who brushed it aside with a delighted cackle:

"Ah, that reminds me! Here—wot-do-yer-think-of-this?" He said it in one word, as he read out from an indescribably dirty grey leaflet which he fished out of his coat-tails:

"PUBLIC INFORMATION LEAFLET NO. 1

When air raids are threatened, warning will be given by sir*eens* or hooters . . . by short blasts . . . in other places by a warbling note . . ."

"What is that?" asked Leicester.

"Never mind what is that," replied Punch in high delight and now in his element. "Wot-cher think of this, my boy?"

" 'The Lord Privy Seal presents his compliments to the British Public and begs to inform them that if the sir*eens*' " (Mr. Punch persisted in his Basic English) " '*and* the boots *and* the blasts *and* the warbles are not enough, there

will be an orchestra of '"Police and Air Raid Wardens blowing short blasts on whistles."'"

Mrs. Judy appeared to think this very funny and laughed with great heartiness

"And what's more, my boy, a little later on he tells us in his blessed Public Defamation Leaflet Number Umpty-umph, that we are all to put our heads in brown paper bags, paste the ditto on our windows, and then draw down the blinds. Can't make out what the dear old boy is driving at, even though he does tell us a few pars later on that if we can't stand the bags or something we are 'to have some buckets handy' to throw water on ourselves to cool us off." Mr. Punch muttered to himself and then mumbled . . . "and I see something here about our exploding and throwing burning fragments of ourselves in all directions, after which we are to smother anything that is left of us in sand or dry earth. . . . Got another cup o' tea, Judy Brightonight?" he asked his lady without transition of any kind, "and don't forget the doin's, old girl!"

Judy, *née* Brightonight, didn't, she performing a similar sleight of hand with something which she pulled up from her bosom on a silver chain which, to the bemused guest, looked like a silver flask with a top that unscrewed.

Leicester, who was, as he would say, "all things to all men and to some women", the latter in a strictly proper sense, viewed these sleights of hand with amusement. Only, for himself, he being practically a teetotaler, he waived the wave of Judy's hand over his own cup, to be surprised by the shadow of a hand holding another cup and a voice:

"The tops and bottoms of all the evenin's in the wur-rld to the three of yez, and God save all here, and if annybody axes me what was me father's religion I'll tell 'em it was the same as me mother's, and if you ax what was me mother's, I'll answer yez like a man and an Irishman: 'She tuk whiskey in her tay.'"

The voice was that of Mr. Malone, who, like a scorbutic cherub, his round face shining between the spots and two small devils in each of his bright blue Irish eyes, had inserted himself into the Cocklepill tea-table and, in some way best known to himself, to the bellicose tea-party of Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam. For Mr. Malone did not live within the 'chanted Row and therefore was automatically and autocratically excluded from its tea-parties. Also, travelling in spirits as he did, and as a living sample at that, he would be of course simply "impossible", a word which meant everything inside Paradise.

But Mr. and Mrs. Punch made no bones about Mick, or about anything. Maybe there wasn't so much difference between making your pile out of ointment and patent medicine and out of spirits, especially when part of that medicine was Cocklepill's famous "Restoration Wine", which, as the advertisement said, "cocked your hearts and cocked your gills and made your heart and stomach rosy every morn". Also, mark, "it was quite different from the patent nostrums so often advertised and foisted upon a credulous public, consisting as it did of the purest alcohol with the merest 'touch' of a secret stimulating urge brought to this country in the reign of King George the First by an explorer in the country of the Yucatan Indians . . . and

PLEASE NOTE THE NAME ON THE BOTTLE AND REFUSE TO TAKE THE SPECIOUS IMITATIONS PROFFERED UNDER THE GUISE OF A SPURIOUS CHEAPNESS."

I don't know that all this was going on in the mind of the two jolly hosts, but it certainly was in the mind of O'Brien Leicester. Paradise Row, after all, was slightly "mixed" and, "as this dreadful democracy marched to its end over the bodies of men and women who had a stake in the country, crushing in its stride Tradition and True Religion", it was more likely than not to get still more mixed. (I quote Buck Galanty in one of his more flowery periods at the "Robe of Glory".)

In the distance, hovering around each group as though on the prowl for bodies, he could sense rather than see the sardonic Scots doctor—Doctor Crab, who frightened the lives out of the Paradise bodies instead of trying to keep them in them. A gaunt lean hungry cure of bodies, certainly not cure of souls, "The Brute", as he was known, had a finer nose for death than he ever had for the preservation of Life. "It'll catch you one of these fine days in the throat when you're not thinking," he would say to his more apoplectic patients, or impatients, such as the mountainous Miss Buzzard and even the unapproachable and formidable Mrs. Masseyton of the Rosy Cross fastness. Everybody feared to offend him and all sought to placate him—for he ruled by fear. But he worked nicely with Mr. Wodes and Mr. Jark, the embalmer.

Also in the distance, as O'Brien listened to the crash of the coming Juggernaut, he could see manœuvring in the faraway the monumental tight-strapped figure of Lady Lackplace, Honoria treading dutifully under her shoulder, with, behind, the remaining five Misses Lackplace, strung out at intervals.

Behind them, again, Miss Gadfly, the good eye still working overtime and dragged forward by the gigantic doormat of a dog to which she was slave, Buster to wit and a presumed survival of the last of the Old English sheepdogs, though, if ever there were animal in whose veins flowed the blood of half the dogs of the village, that animal was Buster. Who, scenting Leicester, by whom he was beloved, dragged his mistress at his lead.

By now, however, the "liquorice all-sorts" of Paradise Row tea-parties, was steadily gravitating towards the Anglo-Irishman.

It was one of the queerer things about O'Brien Leicester that, wherever he went, he had, quite unconsciously, the power of attracting to him all and sundry. If he entered one of the Georgian drawing-rooms of Eventide, after a little, all the women, and even a few of the men, would gravitate to his corner and against all the known laws of gravity, for some of the men positively hated him. As for the women, they as positively adored him, made excuses for him, and, generally, laid their hearts and even the livers about which they would often consult him, at his indifferent feet.

For Leicester, as we have said, was a one-woman man. His trail through life was dotted with bruised or bleeding hearts, hearts which he passed over with as little conscience and consciousness as Buck Galanty's "Juggernaut". And nobody was more astonished than he when, from time to time, he found some of these hearts, so to speak, rising up and protesting. In such matters

he was intensely selfish, thinking only of his writing and lecturing and always being surprised when he found that the broken-hearted damosels loved him more than they loved his books or his verse, or even his plays.

Leicester was not a "talented" man. He had that queer demoniacal thing we call "genius". And having the invariable quality of genius, unconsciousness and consciencelessness, for all his very genuine love for and sympathy with other humans, a thousand broken hearts, or even lives, would weigh less with him than a novel of idea which had "got over" to the amorphous stony-hearted public, or an Albert Hall or Queen's Hall lecture that told him he had accomplished the most difficult feat on earth—got under the skins of that public—that pachydermatous, horny-hided, horny-handed public, whom he so often loved but so often despised.

Queerest of all, neither money nor power appealed to him. "They were playthings for babies," he would say with a not unfine scorn. He did honestly believe that he had been born on the outskirts of London and an Englishman of Elizabethan Irish extraction, for the purpose of saving his world. And however presumptuous and even foolish it might seem to those about him, he had never had the faintest doubt from the moment when, protesting, he fought his way out of his mother's womb, that he was equal to the task.

But this madman was animate with strange madnesses. Nevertheless, as his wife Aase would think, but never say, a madman with a method.

VIII

SOME CELESTIALS

LADY LACKPLACE, rouged to the eyes, in which, just now, there was vinegar, at this moment making her way towards the madman of whom we have been speaking, was saying to Honoria, as with her parasol she stroked Phtah who had twined himself about her arm as though he had been a familiar:

"Look at him! Just look at him, Honoria! Standing there as if he owned the whole sanguinary place, those green eyes of his looking out across the Thames as though he owned that, too, bless, blast and blister him! How I'd like to knock him off his perch!"

The full-blooded Georgian Lady Lackplace, her mouth "full of strange oaths" and, literally, bearded like the pard, occasionally paralysed her surroundings by her unsuspected "damn" or even "bloody"—a word of her late beloved. For the aristocratic preciseness of her tight-strapped figure seemed the quintessence of the proprieties, until she erupted like an unsuspected Vesuvius, down the crater of which, it was rumoured, she had once pushed an offending guide with the parasol which sceptred her everywhere. But this was probably a slight exaggeration.

"Yes, mama," said Honoria dutifully. Then she had added hesitatingly: "But he always reminds me of a Viking, somehow . . ."

"How incurably romantic you are, child," returned her mother, uncompromisingly.

But Honoria was thinking to herself: "I'd rather have one word from O'Brien Leicester than all the books and all the sermons in the world. What a lovely figure of a man—just look at him, Honoria—he does look, as Mama says, as if he owned not the whole place, but the whole world. And he is king of the world—*my* King!"

Fortunately, her Mama was not telepathic.

"Oh, there is that darling O'Brien Leicester," twittered from the garland of damsels behind. "He says such daring things."

"He's afraid of nothing. . . ."

"He's stuck-up and vain. . . ."

"He thinks he's the cat's whiskers. . . ."

"You can't help admiring him—he's such a saint—and yet such a devil, too. . . ."

"I do like a bit of the devil in a man, especially in a saint. . . ."

These were some of the spoken and, more important, unspoken comments from the groups which had bunched themselves together on the green grass, for when you come to think of it, when we are with our kind, we spend nine-tenths of our time keeping our masks on so that we may bear one another. Furs, frills and furbelows of the older people. Bright Liberty silk and, remembering the Row, daring shortness of skirt for the younger. Bouquets of flowers on the green velvet of the Bowers.

Lord Lovem, in a faint echo of himself and, as it was alleged he slept in them and as he appeared not yet to have taken them off, still wearing his immaculate riding-breeches and brown leggings in defiance of all known conventions, expresses the opinion that "that fellar, that Leicester man . . . ought to be shot . . . danger to society . . . worse than Bernard Shaw . . . ought to be—er—*shot*!"

Buck Galanty, marvellous in very tight stripes and varnished "buttons" of a vanished day, tight morning-coat and spotless topper, carrying his "lavenders" in his left hand, agrees with his lordship. It is one of his Shakespearian days:

"Y'know, me lud, from the dear old City to the village of Charing, you wouldn't find such a masked Red—such a revolutionary as Leicester. How he ever got into the Row beats me. And take my word for it, we haven't seen the end of that snake in human guise yet. As the dear old Bard has it: 'We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it. She'll close and be herself; whilst our poor malice remains in danger of her former tooth.'"

This, Buck declaimed with energy, waving his high hat the while and quite oblivious that his voice carried to the farthest confines of the Bowers.

"Mark my words, sir, this fellow is a scurvy fellow, he drinks not honest wine or good sound spirits or those 'potations pottle deep' of which Will Shakespeare writes, nor does he even smack the taste of sound tobacco of which, with Byron, we may say:

> Sublime tobacco! which from east to west
> Cheer's the tar's labour or the Turkman's rest.

As for me—ahem!—it is not that I have indulged too freely in the flowing

bowl: 'For in my youth I never did apply hot and rebellious liquors in my blood'—it is only that the man who savours neither good wine nor good tobacco is no man—he is a queer fish—and 'very like a whale' (Shakespeare again!)."

At this point, Mr. Galanty, who before coming to the tea-party had rather obviously not followed his own encomiums, drew himself up and after distinctly hiccoughing twice, declaimed to the circumambient:

"I'll tell you what this man Leicester is. He's what Dryden called a 'damned neuter':

> "Damned neuters in their middle way of steering,
> Are neither fish nor flesh nor good red-herring:
> Not Whigs nor Tories they; nor this, nor that;
> Nor birds, nor beasts; but just a kind of bat;
> A twilight animal, true to neither cause,
> *With Satan's wings and Socialist teeth and claws.*

"If I may say so, I have slightly improved the last line of dear old Dryden, as being more applicable to the times and to the measure of the man. Indeed, to tell the truth, I often took liberties with the Bard himself when I strutted, I trust what was my not unstately measure upon the boards at the dear old Lyceum with dear old Henry. Ah, what a man was Henry! Henry Irving! What a man! I remember the evening I went on in *The Merchant* instead of Henry, when Henry said to me as he stood in the wings as I came off to a perfect thunder of applause: 'Buck, my boy, I thank the gods you made your appearance upon any stage twenty years *after* your admiring Henry!'"

And, as an afterthought: "If we don't hang that revolutionist upon a gallows high as Haman's that revolutionist will hang us . . . and, by the way, I think I'll go into the house for a moment, I want to see a man about a dog . . ." And so Buck Galanty vanished into the bowels of the Bowers, where he would ferret out the nearly non-existent Mr. Marjoriam and they would "crack a glass together", as he would say.

But what have we here?

A tiny dried-up figure wandered into the tea-party, long malacca in hand, monkey head and monkey face peering forward out at a suspicious world. It was Mr. Valentine Windermere himself—"Old Everlasting", the name by which he was known.

Nearly on the one hundred mark, Old Everlasting was ever to the fore in all amusements, all parties, all concourses. His dry cackle could be heard a mile off. And now, with his long-lipped monkey mouth, was heading a trifle uncertainly for the knot which had been growing about O'Brien, following the very long malacca with its carved ivory Buddha which he balanced delicately between finger and thumb like the "Monkey-on-the-Stick", which the Eventide boys called after him as he pokingly peregrinated.

For some strange reason of his own, O'Brien Leicester was a favourite with Valentine. He seemed to detect in him a bird of his own breed, even though he, Leicester, was a believer in spooks whilst he, Valentine, was an agnostic, not to say atheist, dyed in the wool. But Valentine liked brave men, especially when they did not come into collision with himself.

"Hello, Leicester! How are the O'Briens this afternoon?"

"Hello, Mr. Windermere—and may I ask how are the Windermeres?"

"Flourishing, like the wicked man under the green bay tree or like the frills upon the fretful porcupine that Galanty is always talking about or however it goes in the Book." Though if ever a man looked like anything rather than a bay tree, green or other, that man was Valentine Windermere.

"Flourishing, indeed!" came a voice from above them. "Why, Mr. Windermere, I haven't seen you look so flourishing since the day of the funeral of your lamented son. Good God! what a day!"

Valentine bowed a little lower behind his malacca. "You know, Lady Lackplace, the fact is that we Windermeres thrive on our dead. One down, t'other come on!" He cackled triumphantly. "Fact is that Valentine had no business to die when he did—and he a mere seventy odd years. No age—no age!"

Mr. Valentine Windermere, senior, seemed to hold a certain malign satisfaction in the fact that he had survived his son and an equally malign dissatisfaction that his son had succumbed to the Man with the Scythe.

"I know what you're thinking . . . I know what you're thinking, Lady Lackplace. You're thinking that you will outlive me." He cackled again. "There you make your mistake—one that many have made. I'll yet live to see you cock your toes to the daisies—and many a younger than you." He cackled again like some malignant old hen.

Now the one thing that this tight-strapped painted woman clung to was life. Nobody knew her age. All one knew was that, at a distance, she looked anything from forty-five. Actually, they suspected she was long into her seventies. But cling to life she did and with every advancing year.

"I see it is war to the knife between us, Valentine Windermere—*bloody* war—or is it war to the death? Take care that Death doesn't use his knife first on you! War to the knife."

Phtah, the Egyptian, spat at the flock of Pompadour Pekes who hovered in the distance.

"Talking about 'war'," inserted O'Brien Leicester tactfully, "I thought we had been collected by our hostess to discuss that very thing."

"'War?' Who cares about war? I think fighting's great fun. Keeps you young." The speaker was Mr. Punch.

Mrs. Judy laughed in hearty concurrence, as she took another sup at her teacup.

"Why, dammit!—and excuse the language, Lady Lackplace—" continued Mr. Punch, "but I don't mind telling you good people, and Mr. Windermere will be able to confirm, that the only solitary chance of having a real good time and some adventure for millions of lonely women was during the last war. It'll be the same this time."

"And every woman to her boy-friend and the divil take the hindmost!" chimed in Mr. Malone, intrudingly merry and bright.

Judy Cocklepill, *née* Brightonight, did one of her sleights of hand over Mr. Malone's cup as though to encourage him.

"That's all very well, Mr. Malone," replied her ladyship, in this hotting moment of war admitting even the Mick Malones to the comradeship of their

social superiors—"that's all very well—but what about the 'war-babies' of the last war?" She turned to her daughter: "Tell 'em, Honoria."

Honoria, who herself had had a war-baby unless all the rumours were lies, and who, during his month of life, had borne the name of Marmaduke, looked about her in the piteous cracked way that she had. It was her Mama's way of punishing her for the solitary dereliction with the wicked and fascinating Marmaduke, something Lady Lackplace had never forgiven or would ever forgive. Her lady mother tugged a little at her "beard" as she gazed thoughtfully at her eldest, as though wondering exactly where to "have her".

Honoria still hung in the wind.

"Tell them, Honoria, what you saw when you went to that Home for Fallen Women in order to study them at the time when you had thought of taking up rescue work." The tall proud woman, with the high-coloured cheekbones, seemed to have borrowed something of the Windermere malignity of the moment before.

"Talking about war——" inserted Leicester again. But the great lady was inexorable.

". . . and about how these sparks of undisciplined passions so quickly are snuffed out and put deep down into the dank earth in their little wooden overalls. . . ."

Honoria, without warning, burst into tears and hurried away.

"Too much for the poor dear girl," said Lady Lackplace after her, "Honoria always did have such a sensitive spirit." Then she added: "She is all heart." She said it like limejuice on blue steel.

"What is this I hear about war?" It was Mrs. Bass-Majoriam, who had stolen on them unawares. "And what have you done to poor dear Honoria?"

". . . Yes, yes. What have you done to poor Honoria?" came an echo from her side. It was Lord Lovem, his hands as usual set deep in the vasty cross-pockets of his riding-breeches. Lovem always echoed the last speaker.

"And talking about *war*," inserted for the last time and desperately, O'Brien Leicester, "what are we going to do about it?"

And now some of the other groups were finding their way to the knot about the O'Brien. Amongst them, Mrs. Pompadour and her little lot of unmarried daughters, including the one who, though twenty years younger like her opposite number Honoria Lackplace, was regarded as "damaged goods", to confirm Lady Lackplace's contention that "there was always at least one black bitch in every family of girls", so referring obliquely to Honoria. Mr. de Burgh of fruity nose and fruity disposition, a dipsomaniac at seventy-seven and his girl-friend Mrs. Jack Ketch, who lived next door to him at Number Twelve, with whom he seemed so extraordinarily well mated or something, Mrs. Jack herself, thirty years his junior, with her hungry yearning look of a dog who loves the master who has kicked him. The also lean and hungry Miss Gadfly, who, with Buster, prowled about the outskirts of the group searching for converts and Truth, seeking whom both she and the ragged doormat she led at the end of a curb chain might devour. Though Buster, the doormat, despite his ferocious appearance, had never bitten anything in

his life except his dinner, and, indeed, as Joe Bings, the odd-job gardener often averred, "couldn't bite a dint in a pat of butter".

With them, the odds and ends of a gregarious humanity which gravitates to its kind as drift together ships becalmed on painted ocean.

IX

PARADISE ROW LOOKS AT THE WAR

"It mightn't be a bad idea for the lot of us gathered here together to decide what we are going to do about the War," continued Leicester. "You know, the War is a fact."

A more unfortunate introduction that fated gentleman could not have made.

"I deny every word you've uttered, sir. I deny that there *is* a war, and though I'm a pacifist by nature, I am satisfied this minit to fight any man that says there is. Tear an' ages! are we to be destroyed out of our natchural sleep and shocked in our sacredest emotions by dhraggin' a World-War into Paradise Row. God forbid!"

The interjector was Mick Malone, who had been having quite a little of the Cocklepill tea. But he only said it because he wanted a private little war of his own, for at heart he hoped there would be a divil of a bust-up with everybody ate up by everybody else, except Ireland.

"And as for me, I not only agree with Mr. Malone, but I may state here and now that I have not the slightest intention, or indeed the faintest, to admit that there is any *real* war. There *cannot* be a war." The words came from the outside of the circle. The speaker, Miss Gadfly.

"And why the Blue Alsatian Mountains do you say, Miss Gadfly, that there isn't any war when we have just read in the papers that the German Juggernaut has gone over the brave and gallant Polish army? Why, may I ask?" Lady Lackplace asked it in a highbred voice, as though the word came through a strainer.

"Because my Spirit Guides say that there can't be any war . . . or did so up to its outbreak . . . if one may call it an 'outbreak', which I deny."

"And I associate myself with Miss Gadfly," came timidly from the outside of the group. It was Honoria, who had stolen back and who, with a courage which might have won the Victoria Cross, had stood up for her convictions. Also, although a Spritosophist, she had what are called "leanings" to spiritualism, and was always quarrelling with and making it up with Serena Gadfly, who hated the "osophy" side of Honoria's schizophrenia.

"You put a cork in your roseate mouth, Honoria!" snapped her mother, in her highbred Rabelaisian way. "The war is here. We've seen the first of the planes—the day of the funeral. Didn't Mr. Chamberlain tell us we were at war on that first of September?"

"Chamberlain . . . that fellow! Oh, the dirty, dir-r-r-ty coward!" Mr. Malone had returned to the assault.

Judy repeated her dose with that deft passing movement.

Here the hostess intervened.

"I cannot hear our Prime Minister defamed on my lawns. He has done his best to appease Mr. Hitler. Also he has dignity and respect for Institutions."

"Institutions be damned!" came back from Mr. Malone like a shot out of a gun. "It isn't 'institutions' we want but guns. So yez all can put that in your pipes and smoke it." That last "sleight of hand" by Judy over Mr. Malone's cup of tea was doing its work.

"You are not in Ireland now, Mr. Malone," said his hostess, staring glassily. "And, what is more, I don't know that I invited you to my tea-party."

The pimples under Mr. Malone's skin were coming up one by one, as he said scorbutically and scornfully:

"And who wants to be invoited to your dirty ould tea-party, ma'am?" Then, recalling something: "And who sez a word about Ireland? Is there a man here that'll say the breath of the shadow of a word again the ould sod?" Here, Mr. Malone began to fumble with his coat as though to trail it in the dust of combat. "For if there is, and he is a man, and not a monkey"—here he looked pointedly at Mr. Valentine Windermere—"now's the time for him to take off his coat and say it to me puss!" At this point, the Friend of Ireland burst in o song:

"See the front of battle lower,
See approach proud Edward's power . . .
Chains and slavery!"

It seemed on this redoubtable occasion that it was to be the O'Brien's fate to act as perpetual intervener. Wrapping his long arms about the little barrel-bodied Irishman, he asked him as a personal favour not to continue the argument—at least on lines of personal combat. And the Irishman, who loved him, gracefully gave himself up to the Leicester charm, remarking in passing, "And may bad luck to you, sor, for the lucky charm that sits on you like a clucking hen on her nest, for no man, and few women they say, can resist it—the cratchures! But 'tis the mark of the saints on every Irishman of us all, God bless and save us from ourselves!" He then suffered himself to be led away into the interior of the Bowers, where on such occasions there lay in waiting Mr. Bass-Marjoriam and the bottle of John Jamieson which was Mr. Bass-Marjoriam's inevitable companion.

It might also be said, in passing, that Mr. Bass-Marjoriam had, so far in this fated tea-party, not been seen by any inhabitant of the Row, or, if seen, recognized. He was one of those men.

"Now that one of the disgraces to Eventide has been removed," said Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam majestically, as she gazed glassily at the Thames, "we might decide what Paradise Row should do in face of the war . . ."

"The existence of which I deny," interposed Miss Gadfly poisonously.

"Treat it as a Lark," said Mr. Punch brightly.

"Don't admit that it is there," said Mr. Valentine Windermere. "That's my tip!"

"And a—er—'tip', I think you said—most excellent," Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam smiled. "Most probably, if we say nothing about it, it will not take place—or if it *has* taken place, it will not continue. After all, we are protected here in this sheltered spot. Nothing can touch us here. . . ."

She was broken off by a heavy explosion in the distance.

"Exercises . . . manœuvres . . . nothing to worry about," smiled the Reverend Mr. Robin Hallowes, who had been prowling about the group for the previous five minutes as though he would calm it and envelop it with his seventeen stones of comfortable corpus. He was one of those fat men with tiny feminine mouths and with a suggestion of cruelty in the burning brown eye. Yet was the Reverend Robin all things to all men and a comfortable sort of man.

"The war will be all over in a mouth or two, perhaps three," he added as an afterthought.

"They said that about the last war," inserted Leicester apologetically.

"Oh, but this is an entirely different affair, my dear Mr. O'Brien Leicester. This is bluff—all bluff."

This happy word was at once seized upon by many of those assembled. Miss Gadfly whispered "Bluff!" Honoria Lackplace was "quite sure it was bluff". Half a dozen other Paradise Rowers murmured the word as in their sleep—"Bluff. Bluff. Bluff."

The Reverend Robin was perfectly convinced it had been bluff from the first gun. "Hitler is bluffing, my dear people! We are much too civilized for war in these days—much too Christian. And if people had only listened to that much misunderstood and Christian gentleman, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, we should not be in this pass now and we should have come to a Christian arrangement with Mr. Hitler, who, after all, and when all is said and done, is not so much malignant as misguided. Has he not told the world that his only wish is to work with England and the English whom he admires so much? Why, then, do we not take the proffered hand . . . ?"

"The proffered paw, you mane," inserted Mr. Malone, who was a trifle muddled and who had returned from seeing that man about that dog, and, having inserted himself, once more was not.

"Because it's bloody!" said O'Brien Leicester, shortly.

"And I say the same," said Lady Lackplace. "It *is* a bloody hand." She seemed to revel in the word.

"'Bloody?' 'Bloody?' What sort of language is this, Mr. Leicester?" expostulated the reverend gentleman.

Leicester was silent.

"Why do we not take the proffered hand? I asked," the smiling clergyman said as though Leicester had not spoken, and as he smiled he looked more and more like the robin redbreast, glutted with worms, to which Leicester had once likened him.

"Why, oh why?" said Miss Honoria ecstatically as she clasped her hands tight down over her nearly virginal abdomen as though she would suppress

something. But Honoria had been suppressing ever since she had come into the world.

"Don't admit that the war is there—that's my tip," repeated Windermere in his dry cackle as he bent a trifle behind his long malacca with the ivory Buddha top. "These things blow over. I've seen many wars—the Soudan—the Boer war—the last big war . . . and they all blew over. Don't mention 'em is the idea."

"That is also Mr. Chamberlain's idea, Mr. Windermere," beamed the red-faced man in the white choker.

"But, goodness gracious!" came in Leicester, "I think you gentlemen forget that Munich is past, that Hitler has marched into Poland and is killing Poles as I speak, and that he'll next have a go at France after he has finished off little Belgium. For God's sake don't go on living in history as do most of our countrymen. We are living in the present, though, Heaven knows, most of us seem to be living in the past."

"All words—words—words," said Mr. Hallowes, smiling more than ever "'Words butter no parsnips', they used to say when I was up at Oxford *Constantia et virtute*—by constancy and virtue do we advance, not by the wordy periods of Demos. *Consilio et prudentia*—by wisdom and prudence do we progress—and according to the exigency of the moment. . . . *E re natâ*." The Reverend Hallowes invariably got out of his fixes by quoting some Latin tag, which seemed to settle everything.

"I entirely agree with Mr. Hallowes," said Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam, who hadn't understood a word.

"Madam—I thank you," bowed the gentleman mentioned as he lifted his round clerical hat.

The little informal gathering on the lawn seemed to be going pacifist, when in the distance O'Brien Leicester saw bearing down upon the knot of people the redoubtable Mrs. Pompadour and her five presumed virgins, *en échelon* Early on, she had joined the band by the river, but on the approach of her inveterate enemy, Lady Lackplace, who headed the other Paradise Row faction, she had marched her daughters off the field. Now, having gathered her strength or something, she advanced anew, the Pekes scouting as they piped about her heels. Snow-White and Patricia removed themselves as they saw her come, Sean not following them, but drawing closer to his father.

Leicester, looking on, wondered again at the peculiarities of his family group. Snow-White and Patricia were close friends, and Snow-White seemed to worship the tall red-haired girl. But "Pat" always held herself a little away from her brother and father, and clung to her mother. Even here, the grouping held true.

O'Brien Leicester groaned inwardly. He knew what was coming. He know that now the Battle of Europe would become the Battle of Paradise Row and a much more serious matter.

But the rival general had already descried the strategic advance of her antagonist, and took her precautions accordingly:

"I propose, right away, that we form ourselves into a Corps of Vigilantes for the Protection of Public Safety and that someone should be proposed as

leader. Would you care to second that, Mr. Leicester?" she asked in a high ingratiating voice.

"Certainly," said the O'Brien, glad of the respite before the coming of the shock troops of the Pompadour, now only a few yards away.

"Well, then, *that's* carried!" said Lady Lackplace decisively and watching the Pompadour out of the corner of a wicked eye. "Now who is to be leader?" She looked about her, fixing into immobility her surroundings. "You, Honoria—have you any suggestion to make?" She fastened her eye upon her eldest.

"No, mama . . . only . . ."

"Only what? Out with it."

"Only that I think you might make a good leader." She said it timidly.

The tall patrician stooped upon the suggestion like a hawk—literally "stooped to conquer", which was the title of the favourite ballad of the Row. But she now had only a few seconds in which to put the resolution, which had not been seconded, and to get it through.

"Of course—of course, dear Honoria . . . if our friends wish me to act, I shall be only too happy, and as my uncle, the general, conveyed quite a lot of military knowledge to me when I was a very little girl about the Crimea War, I may not be altogether without expert knowledge if it comes to actual fighting."

Here, however, her ladyship's "timing" was spoiled by the onrush of the Pompadour phalanx, headed by the little fat important woman who was the chief, her dog-whip swishing.

"Here—what's going on here?" she exploded, for Mrs. Pompadour, like so many of the E ntidi ns had been corrupted by the American of the Hollywood films which, despite a two years' opposition, were now being shown in the little local picture theatre, "to the loosening of the morals and the degradation of the souls of the people of Ev ntide", as Mr. Jark, the street-preacher and leader of the titulary head of the Sons and Daughters of Jehovah, would so neatly put it.

Lady Lackplace's face, hitherto enwreathed in smiles, froze, literally froze. There was a dreadful silence.

Mrs. Pompadour's pug nose snouted the air. She smelt something. She was right.

". . . Well, that is to say, Mrs. Pompadour . . . ahem! . . . we had been thinking of establishing a Corpse of Vigilantes to protect our lives," murmured the hostess as she gazed about her, her smile ghastly and glassy and anglicizing her French by "being British".

"I *thought* so!" said Mrs. Pompadour, with a black line underlying the second word. "Doing things behind one's back." She glanced by accident at Lady Lackplace, who looked loftily into the blue ether. "Well, there's not going to be any shilly-shally and nasty little tricks where this war is concerned —I am going to see to that." Mrs. Pompadour spoke as though she had taken the war under her wing. In her way, she was a terrible woman and a great general.

But if she was Buonaparte, there was also a Wellington in the field.

"If Mrs. Pompadour is referring to me," came the haughty voice of Lady Lackplace, "I hope she will say so. It is always well to know who are one's friends and who one's foes."

"If the cap fits, put it on," came back the lady referred to, "like a shot out of a gun", as Mick Malone remarked afterwards, for, accompanied by a very weary Buck Galanty, he had once more returned to the knot on the lawn as though by some law of gravitation.

The five Misses Pompadour gathered about their oppressed Ma as chickens will gather to the mother hen. I should have said "four", for the youngest Miss Pompadour, commonly known as "Damaged Goods" in the whisperings of the Paradise Row drawing-rooms, as always, stood a little away from her mother and sisters, with that queer little hard smile, as though she could tell quite a lot if she would.

The six Misses Lackplace gathered about *their* Ma, and so "the battle was on", as Mr. Malone remarked in no uncertain voice, for he had been "having a couple over the limit". Buck Galanty, who was always chummy with his social inferior when *he* had been having the same, put his arm through that of the Irishman to say in a whisper which could be heard at the house, that "those two old hens will tear out each other's eyes in the twinkling of a cat's tail, Malone, and for Heaven's sake hold me up as the landscape seems turning about me for no particular reason that I can see, and I wouldn't miss the fun for a king's ransom".

Mr. Malone dutifully held him up and, let be said, was himself "held". The two "old hens" now glancing balefully at each other were ruffling their feathers to prepare for one of the many fights of their lives, the spectators in that secret way which even at times possesses the very best of us when the other fellow is doing the fighting, got ready for "the fun", waiting for the feathers to fly, when that bad sport, O'Brien Leicester, spoiled it all by walking up to Lady Lackplace and saying casually as though really nothing had happened or was about to happen:

"I am sure, Lady Lackplace, and"—he turned to bow to her antagonist —"you, also, Mrs. Pompadour, both realize in your hearts that all these questions of local defence against the perils of war should be left to a general meeting of the inhabitants of Lve[illegible]. Indeed, Mrs. Pompadour, I gathered as much from what you have said, and as for Lady Lackplace, to whom our village *also* owes so much for guidance and leadership, I can see in her eye that she is also of my opinion. Also, as I could see, she had in her mind the calling of such a public meeting to approve or rescind any hasty and pressing steps we might have taken today at this delightful tea-party, which we owe to a third charming lady, who is our hostess."

"The O'Brien" had done it again, as Mick whispered to his tottering partner. The ladies permitted themselves to be temporarily mollified. And so it was arranged that a public Defence Meeting should at once be called for the Parish Hall, with the Reverend Hallowes in the chair.

It was only as the principal belligerents were leaving that it came to them that they had been "diddled", the regrettable expression used by Mrs. Pompadour to her quintette, or "gutted", the expression of the Rabelaisian Lady Lackplace to her half-dozen.

X

ELLA CATTERMOLE

It is at this conjuncture of Paradise Row and the World-War that Ella Cattermole sticks in her distinguished head. I have kept out that head as long as possible because wherever it came, there trouble was, and I have the feeling that in this simple story of how an English village faced Mr. Hitler and a World-War we shall not find any exception.

She deserves a separate entrance upon our little stage, a stage which, however, had behind it the whole wide world at war. And war was the business of Mrs. Cattermole, as perhaps it has always been the business of what Paradise Row would refer to as "that sort of woman".

Not that the Row knew what sort of woman Ella Cattermole might be. For the Ella Cattermoles of life are as far removed from the Paradise Rowers, if we may call them that, as darkness is removed from that twilight of the gods in which Paradise has always lived—though whether Mrs. Cattermole lived in one or other may later emerge. Heaven is often so very like hell.

Ella Cattermole had one day come out of the outer dark of which the world outside Eventide was regarded by the world inside Eventide as consisting. Much as the old Greeks regarded the outside world as inhabited by barbarians—those Greeks of whom indeed the Paradise Rowers were the descendants in time.

She came out of nothing, and to that nothingness it seemed probable, at least in the opinion of the Row, that she would one day return. She came with a perfect profile, a magnificent carriage, and one old man—the whole caught up in that atmosphere of the Trèfle Incarnat which was her perfume.

Why she had come and whence, nobody dared to ask, nor did she volunteer to say.

Everything about Ella was indeterminate. Her scent. Her origins. Her social position. Even the old man who accompanied her was indeterminate. He was supposed to be her butler and general factotum, but he might as easily have been her guardian or her father. She herself might as easily have been twenty-five as the thirty-five she looked in some lights.

With him she held herself perched within the fastness of one of the Queen Anne's—herself one of other regrettable incursions of this year of grace nineteen hundred and thirty-nine, a year in which, presumably, and according to the Reverend Hallowes, Christianity had reached its apotheosis upon the bloodstained fields of Poland and the Continent.

This incursion was housed in a lofty, narrow Queen Anne house which had been sold—actually been *sold*!—by an unfeeling executor of the aged owner, who had tottered towards the century mark when Death caught him up with his scythe at the very last moment. The brute who had bought it—and he was known as "The Brute" to the outraged Row—had actually let it

out in *flats*. It grieves me to write of such enormities, but this happens to be a veracious chronicle abating neither jot nor tittle of the truth.

Into the top flat of Number Five the wild strange bird had made her nest—a nest without eggs, for Ella Cattermole, whatever she might have done with her husband, who also was indeterminate, was childless.

It is this tall and lovely creature, with her corsetless torso of Gibson Girl, her slender shapely head of dark hair, caught smoothly up into a kind of frieze to crown her, who at this moment is standing over against the low Georgian window with its thickened frames, to look out over the trees before the house which gave on to the Close. She is partly in shadow this lovely September afternoon, but the fine profile of arching brow and short nose with the merest tilt in the world to give it distinction and humanity, shows in the dead-white of the face, as she stands there, her hand high up on the green curtain, looking out in that blinded way of hers.

"You are going to be a good boy," she is saying as our curtain goes up on her entrance into these pages. "You are not going to be a silly boy. I have known so many *silly* boys—both here and in India, Sean." And she smiled a little as she still stood there, her gracious back slightly turned from the tall boy who was watching her from his chair.

Sean Leicester's face was very white.

". . . but I tell you, I will always love you, Mrs. Cattermole. Always—*always*."

The "Mrs." sat quaintly on the boy, who was very much in earnest, in a pale, dark way, in his face something pitiful.

Perhaps it was the reflection of this which the face of the tall woman showed. For as her head turned for an instant to glance at the boy, there was pity as well as something else in it.

"Let me see, Sean. How old are you?"

"I am seventeen. Nearly eighteen—but you can't judge by age a man's affections."

Again there passed over the face of the woman a certain pitifulness for the boy before her. In it, experience and memory.

"And how old do you think I am, Sean?"

"Oh, I don't know—nor do I care. I only know that I love you, Mrs. Cattermole."

"Hadn't you better drop the 'Mrs.' and call me Ella?" She smiled to him a little.

"Yes, if I dared." The boy's soul was in his face as he spoke.

"But how old do you think *I* am?" she asked again.

"Oh, I suppose—well—that is to say—people say that you might be any age."

The clumsiness of the boy made Ella Cattermole laugh.

"When people say that, Sean, they always mean not 'any' age, but 'a certain age'. Which means an uncertain age."

The young man before her stood nonplussed. He was out of her depth. Perhaps he was not the only young man who had been out of his depth with Ella Cattermole.

"Supposing I was old enough nearly to be your mother, Sean? What then?"

"That wouldn't make any difference—any difference at all!" he said impulsively. "Age has nothing to do with love, has it?"

"More than you know," she answered like a sybil. And laughed again. "Now supposing it had only been your father!"

"But everybody loves you . . ." he hesitated, "Ella."

"How terribly daring you are getting, Sean."

"Now I have offended you." The boy spoke in desperation.

"Not at all. But if you go on at this pace, I shan't feel safe with you perched up here in my eyrie, with nobody to take care of me but Theophilus . . . and he's out at the moment."

She was provocative and sarcastic, like a woman to whom provocation and sarcasm have become second nature—even with a boy like Sean Leicester.

". . . and you know, everybody does *not* love me."

"Snow-White does, anyhow," he said valiantly.

"I'm glad you mentioned Snow-White, Sean. By the way, how do you know she loves me?"

"Because she says so herself. She adores you . . . Ella."

"But doesn't she also adore you, Sean? In a way, is she not in love with you! Why, she is my deadly rival." She laughed.

"But she's only a child!" The boy's voice had scorn in it. "Why, Snow-White is not yet fifteen. A girl can't fall in love at fifteen."

"But a boy can."

"Ah, but I'm seventeen and soon will be eighteen—and it won't be so long after that I shall be twenty-one and then can do what I like."

There came from Ella Cattermole a long laugh. In it, as in her voice, the deep note of the nightingale. A sort of *glug-glug*. Queer that with such a voice, for her singing voice had the same rich *timbre*, Ella Cattermole had not made her name anywhere—on the concert hall or the stage. For nobody knew whether she had ever seen a stage, although everybody vaguely assumed her to be "an actress"—in the Row a term of contempt.

"Why, Sean, you can't do what you like at twenty-one or one hundred and one. None of us ever can. I discovered that in India. There's something or Somebody behind us which compels us to do what we don't want to do—sometimes to do what we *really* want to do—for which one of us really knows what she or he wants?"

"I know what I want," said the boy with a deep, quiet assurance which sat oddly on him. "I am going to be a musician."

"Play to me 'Whispering Trees', Sean!" said the woman suddenly.

The boy went over to the baby-grand which nearly filled half the room and began to run his fingers over the keys. . . .

As he took up the melody, the contralto of Ella Cattermole joined in an *obbligato* like a deep flute. Little by little the voice grew and now she was singing with a certain rare distinction, holding back something underneath and controlling volume and spirit:

"Winds that whisper across the seas,
Winds that whisper across the trees,
Whispering memories of days that have gone,
Leaving me, weeping, to sit here alone—
As the ghosts of the past come up, one by one,
To whisper 'Remember!' *for now there are none*
Who in darkness or light, in moon or in sun,
Can comfort, console, for the days that are done—
Can comfort, console, for the days that are done—
Can comfort, console . . ."

The dark voice quavered, hesitated, was silent, as it left the last line unfinished. The hands of the player, in sympathy, fell from the keys.

There was a click in the silence. Singer and player turned to the door, which had opened, to show a very young girl standing there, hand on handle, looking towards the piano, her lips slightly apart, her eyes wide and a little frightened.

Such a strange young thing, her dark curls clustering her small shapely head to frame the faint half-moons of brows, dark pencilled finely there, the large wondering eyes with their almost ridiculously long lashes, the luscious little mouth and tiny chin. A waist so slender that it seemed like flame in wind, the girl who stood there that afternoon might have come out of some fairy world—if in such a world of elemental, humanity could live.

For Snow-White was very human, and everybody loved her, even in Paradise Row where it is sometimes very hard to be loved—harder even to love.

"So there you are—you two."

She had run over to Ella and had flung both arms about her neck to kiss her.

"I told you she loved you," remarked Sean, sitting there at the piano, sententious.

"But Snow-White loves everybody and is loved by everybody," pouted the tall woman, rueful. "Now, if she loved me *only*, then I should appreciate it, but I won't share her." She had added as an afterthought: "I never share anything."

"Not even me," said Sean, still sententious. This dark-faced boy was strangely earnest and grown-up in some ways.

"Not even you, Sean," laughed Ella.

But Snow-White did not laugh. She had taken her arms from about her friend's neck and was staring at her, all the colour gone out of her face.

"He is *my* Sean," she said at last, simply.

"Is he?" Ella Cattermole looked at the boy.

"Of course I am," replied Sean, his own face white. "But——"

"But what, Sean?" asked Snow-White, coming to him and bending down over him from behind to look round into his face, for he had turned his face again to the keyboard.

"Oh, nothing, Snow-White."

Then he had turned towards her again to ask, impatient: "Why did you come, Snow-White? What do you want?"

Then, as the pale little girl looked down at him reproachful, and seemed

about to cry the boy's heart melted suddenly, and he had put his arm about her and had said with the curious gentleness that became him:

"Please don't be angry with me, dear Snow-White. I only wondered why you had come."

"You didn't want Snow-White to come," she said, and seemed about again to break into tears, like a child.

"Of course I wanted you to come, Snow-White. I always want you to come." He lied valiantly—and yet was it a lie?

She had run her arm about his strong neck and had curled a little hand upwards to ruffle his dark wavy hair, and so having kissed him from behind on his cheek, had forgiven him.

"O'Brien says that he wants you home quickly to see if you two can't arrange together a war meeting or council or something of Ev n'id>. You know how queer O'Brien is—he always likes you to be by his side in everything. I only wish he wanted me half as much." She pouted—then laughed. It was as though a little bird had laughed.

"Why, what's up?"

"Oh, it seems that after that garden party a few weeks ago, the Pompadour and the Lackplace began canvassing for votes for something—at least I think Father called it 'canvassing'. And the two of them met in the street today when they were . . . canvassing, and Phtah sprang out of Lady Lackplace's arms and nearly tore poor Imperial Emperor, the Peke, in pieces—and the other dogs joined in with the Siamese cat which Honoria was carrying . . . and there was what Father called 'the very devil of a shimozzle' . . . and they're going to law or something . . . and . . ." she broke down, breathless.

Sean looked at his foster-sister, who always called Leicester by his first name, "O'Brien". Then he had said:

"All right, Snow-White, I'm coming."

He had turned for a moment to the tall dark woman who stood there, looking at the two of them:

"I wish . . . El . . . I mean, Mrs. Cattermole, you could come, too. My father has much confidence in your judgment. He says you seem to know everything about everybody."

Ella Cattermole had broken into a peal of laughter.

"All right, Sean, I'm coming, too . . ." she paused, 'that is if Snow-White doesn't mind." Then she had gone over to the little girl and had put her arm about her waist and hugged her to herself.

It was the hug of a mother—close and loving. Even Sean saw that.

So they went out of Ella Cattermole's flat.

XI

ELSPETH

LORD LOVEM had a housekeeper.

Her name was Elspeth McGluskie.

When I say he had a housekeeper, I mean he had much more. He had

a human problem of an almost divinely intricate nature, to understand which, if he had ever showed any wish to understand it, might have elevated the noble lord not to over-lordship, but to godship. For to understand Elspeth McGluskie would be to understand the puzzle of our earth, and as she also is destined to take silent part in the coming Council of War, and, with it, to affect through a third party the whole of this veridical history of an English village at war, it is as well that we should see with what sort of woman we have to deal. If only Mr. Honeypot could also have seen . . . but that is anticipating.

Elspeth was a tallish, well-made woman, with a really lovely pair of unmentionables—the word beloved of the Row, a pair of which she may or may not have been conscious. She was Scots but not gawky-Scots—"Scots" but not lean and hungry Scots. But in one thing, Scots all over—something she called "metaphe*e*sics".

This white-faced handsome Highlander of the dark staring eyes, lovely and large and set just "the wee bittie bittest in the wur-rld", as Elspeth herself would say—set aslant in the head, a lassie who, in the words of Micky Malone, "would argue the hindleg off of an ass". As Michael himself was quite able to do the same thing, and at any time of the day or the night, he ought to know

Her authority was not the Bible—but the Shorter Catechism, from which dread missal she would on the more inapposite occasion draw bucketfuls of wisdom as from a well. She was terrible rel*ee*gious, was this lovely dark implacable creature who not so much mothered as step-mothered the "puir wee lord", as she called her paymaster but not her master. For no man had mastered Elspeth, who could not even always master herself.

Both the Larger and the Shorter Catechisms she knew by heart, and so permitted herself to take full liberty of metaphysical and symbolical expression in relation to them, at times wandering, malignantly, into the Westminster Confession of Faith. But the Gog and Magog of the McGluskie were two gentlemen of the name of M'Crie and Palmer, who came to her rescue in her darker hours. The former an exegetist and theologian of massive accomplishment, who juggernauted, with Miss McGluskie seated on the juggernaut, over all adversaries—the latter a pestilential fellow. One not on any account to be confused with those other two renowned Palmers, the champion light-weight whose speciality was putting other gentlemen to sleep in the "ring", "Pedlar" of that ilk, and "Palmer the Poisoner", who, if I remember aright, had the happy little habit of putting ladies to sleep in their beds, after he had enjoyed them. For the McGluskie Palmer was "Palmer", not of the "Poison Cup", but of the "Poison Pen", for to him the indomitable, and now probably damned, M'Cried ascribed the Shorter Catechism itself.

Elspeth, under her magnificent dark crown of hair, caught up from the neck and then wound in a sort of mad spiral about her head in fuzzy-wuzzy fashion, had reached the unquestionable age of thirty-nine at the time this veracious story of a fight between death and life opens. She was still virgin, as she, quite unnecessarily, told the world, for *virgo intacta* was writ upon her countenance, or to use her own freighted words: "Elspeth McGluskie hath

never known man." Incidentally, many a man thought that he knew women, and therefore Elspeth, only to find that he did not, and that the sapping and mining which had afforded such favourable results in other quarters here only resulted in his own "blowing up" and in his becoming hoist with his own petard. For Elspeth McGluskie was not a woman. She was a calamity. Especially unto the Wicked Man.

That is to say, until *the* Man, good or bad, who always enters each woman's life at least once, made his appearance in Paradise Row. For even the McGluskie had her Achillean heel, although she would have been mighty surprised had anyone told her so.

The Man was one Alexander Honeypot. And from this Alexander there exuded not only sting but honey. But wait a while now.

Alexander, pot-belly shifty eyes and all, made his appearance one rainy Saturday afternoon at the Wilderness with a honeyed tongue and an invisible trap. The tongue was for Lord Lovem and also the trap.

Lovem was what the Row would describe as "a bit near"— or in that inimitable American which had pushed its gangsterish head into Paradise Row, "a tight-wad". Not to put too fine a point on it, it was reputed that Lovem would sell his own grandmother as pickled cabbage at a price—and *if* she cou'd be pickled. Not that the dear lady needed vinegar, of which she had a plenty, as the infrequent caller at the Wilderness would discover when the Voice came down from some remote region to demand immediate information of the "skivvy" who now had to do duty for the flunkeys of old time as to "what that person was doing at *that* door". But more of the vinegarish dowager anon, if she should continue to "demand informations".

It was to this "proposition" that Alexander, after cautious *pourparlers* from afar, through the medium of a mystical "mutual friend" who never had existence save in Mr. Honeypot's vivid imagination, made his proposal of "something for nothing". It was "a perfect little gold-mine", according to Honeypot, nor was he speaking metaphorically, as it did happen to be a patch of ground in a part of West Africa known as Akinassi-acra which had never been worked for gold but which, situated near the famous Gold-Bug mine, was, according to Mr. Honeypot, "almost dead sure to have the Gold-Bug lode running through it". "Natives", a word in drawing-power like "Mesopotamia", had found large nuggets or something up to a pound in weight when passing by, "and, me lord, if you'll only chance your arm and a few thou, when the war is over you and I are made men for the rest of our naturals".

In vain is the snare set in the sight of any bird, and for all his grabbiness, Lovem was a wily bird in his own way. "Alexander the Great", as he would facetiously call himself, with more than a suspicion of right to the title, saw this in a flash with the diabolic sixth sense of the natural-born company promoter. For, if Alexander Honeypot ever got to heaven, something itself debatable, there is not in my mind the slightest doubt that the first thing he would do would be to buttonhole Peter with "a cast iron rock-bottom" wild-cat scheme "dead certain to return at least a cool thousand—no, Your Reverence, not a thousand, for one must be careful of exaggeration, but, shall we say, to be on the safe side, five hundred per cent?" And when that

much harassed holy man, with a gleam of commonsense, would retort, "You can go to hell, so now beat it," there is also no doubt whatever in my mind that Alexander would at once beat it for "Down Below" and there make his proposal to the one solitary business man Financier as wily as himself, one Beelzebub, who, of course, is a financier, as all sensible people know.

Alexander Honeypot was that sort of man.

Now on this rainy Saturday afternoon—"seductive Saturday"—a day and weather beloved of the Tempter, upon Mr. Honeypot taking his leave from the noble lord, with whom he had left "the papers" for his cooler perusal, it happed that the lady who answered the bell of showing out was Elspeth McGluskie, the noble lord himself having opened the door. It also happed that as Mr. Honeypot, his back to the hall-door, was making his profuse bows and scrapes to his lordship, who had good-naturedly come to usher him out, what was it that caught his luscious lascivious eye but two lovely white legs descending the stairs, and both stockingless. About one of them, the right, a bandage coquettishly just below the knee, for in contradistinction to so much else of her make-up, the calvinistic Elspeth McGluskie had a tendency to very short frocks and never, through the summer at least, wore stockings. For the lovely legs belonged to Elspeth, one of them marred by a mosquito sting, hence the bandage.

In that moment the soft and heaving amoristic organ of Mr. Honeypot, which, in his lighter moments, he called his heart, heaved not once, but several times. And when, the noble lord having retired to his dungeon or wherever noble lords do retire, the eyes of his caller had wandered up to what may be termed the superstructure above the legs, his polygamous organ nearly stopped beating. At least, as he afterwards averred to Mick Malone, "it missed at least a couple of raps, Mick, so sure as you're an Irishman and I'm . . . well, never mind what I am . . ."

For the shifty smallish eyes met a voluptuous bust set out from a well-rounded waist, a dead white face, "handsome as hell", as he said to Mick, a pair of staring black eyes beneath brows thick and dark, well formed, and nearly meeting over the long straight nose, and the gathered frenzy of hair which has already been catalogued.

Now Mr. Honeypot was a Mormon.

Don't mistake me, in a chronicle which has to be almost suspiciously accurate.

Alexander did not subscribe to the Mormon faith, nor was he, even in any sense, "a Latter-Day Saint". But he "picked 'em as they came", his own delightful expression, and at this present moment, as it happened, he was "carrying on" with half a dozen females, whilst preparing the approaches —"sapping and mining" was the term used by this Wicked Man—of another half-dozen, "for use in emergencies". Which, as he irrefragably pointed out, was exactly what quite a large proportion of his puritanical countrymen were doing at that moment, for however shocking it may be to the Gentle Reader, as he once used to be termed before he turned ferocious, the vast majority of English, Scots and Welsh males are polygamous in moments. One has to except the Irish, for there is so much woman in the Irish male that he takes out his promiscuous lusts in cock-fighting, fist-fighting, and badger-baiting,

and in what Mick Malone would describe as "the good ould times, wid landlord-tumbling from behind the stone walls of Clare and Kerry". "And God be wid the times!" he would add piously

But to return to Miss McGluskie's legs from our Irish exile, then and there, Alexander Honeypot fell head over heels in love with this grand Hielan' woman who seemed to have descended from the clouds. For the first, and last, time in his variegated existence, he was actually in love. He stood there, his little mouth open and jaw—what there was of it—dropped, as he lost himself in the apparition, for Mr. Honeypot was one of those rare males who can love a female with more than their lustful persons—personality more than person!

Now this is a love story as well as a story of war, and of war, love is always part and with it the surrender of the fair to the return of the conqueror. In every love story there must be two persons. So what of the attitude of Elspeth McGluskie herself?

As this outline of a man, pot-bellied and evasive, with no claim to beauty of form or being, turned to look at the McGluskie, the McGluskie stood there, rooted to the stair, gazing down into the shifty eyes of our friend, who was an engaging ruffian in his own way, as we, and Miss McGluskie, are about to see. For the first time in her virgin life, apart from a passing madness in the vestry for a gaunt Calvinist minister when she had reached the age of fourteen, Cupid's feathered dart had found its target, good and true, in the McGluskie heart. It was not Mr. Honeypot who stood before Elspeth McGluskie that wet afternoon, but Elspeth McGluskie's god.

As she said afterwards, not to a friend, for she had no friends, but to the friend that never faileth, her Self, "My knees were weak through looking; and my flesh failed of fatness in that moment." A very passable paraphrase of the original, for Elspeth McGluskie took "awfu' liberties wi' her Bible and even wi' the Shorter Catechism".

It was only a considerable time after that, when she and Mr. Honeypot had become better acquainted, that she was to intone sadly:

"Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire . . ." but, mak' no mistake aboot it, Elspeth McGluskie, as the Gude Buik adds: ". . . if ye do so, then shall ye lie doon in sorrow!" For that wet Saturday afternoon, Elspeth McGluskie had "kindled a fire", not to say an *auto-da-fé*.

XII

COUNCIL OF WAR

"BELIEVE it or believe it not," as our Mrs. Mallory would say, it was this rub'y ry, shifty-eyed little man who was destined to play a strange part in the preparation of Paradise Row for the art of war, and, with it, make preparation for that "sapping and mining", not only of maiden hearts but of maidens' finances, in the time that was coming.

Leicester, whom I think we can now call by his stately surname, as we are beginning to get on all fours with him, was the recipient of a call from Mr. Honeypot soon after the garden party, his eyes moist and promising.

"I have come, Sir O'Brien, to lay before you some views I have formed and conclusions I have reached about the needs of Eventide, and particularly Paradise Row, in the hour that is approaching." Leicester gently deprecated the conferring of a knighthood, or even a baronetcy, upon him, but the quietly implacable Alexander Honeypot just lapped him up and rolled over him. And perhaps our green-eyed friend had met his match at last.

"You, by virtue of your noble blood and commanding appearance—I said, 'commanding appearance'." Mr. Honeypot repeated as though expecting contradiction—"you, Sir O'Brien, are the natural leader of this neck of the woods." The final words quite spoiled the grandiose opening.

O'Brien Leicester bowed.

"But, Sir O'Brien, if I may say so, I have had vast—I said 'vast'—experience in the handling of men and women and—er—things in the last war. . . ." Here Mr. Honeypot drew Mr. Leicester's "lug" towards him to whisper: "I happen to be a V.C., but I would rather it were not known and I never wear the little bit of iron." Another whisper: "Pawned it when in dire poverty . . . liable to penal servitude, I understand, if it were known, so please swear that you will keep my secret locked in your bosom!" The utter confidence of Mr. Honeypot in Mr. Leicester would have to be seen to be believed—and not then.

O'Brien Leicester made a mumbling noise in his throat, which his caller interpreted at once as the "swear".

"Now, sir, I am of the opinion—always subject to your, our natural leader's, opinion—that the time has come to hold that War Protection Meeting, and that it should be called at once." He looked hard at the big man, or as hard as his shifty eyes would let him. "Ah, thank God! I see you agree with me.

"It might be called for this day week in the Parish Hall, at, say, 7 p.m., and I have even ventured to have a hundred or two invitations Roneoed . . . here they are." Mr. Honeypot, the ever-ready, here produced a sheaf of forms, at which Leicester looked as though he were sleep-walking. At any rate, he was quite sure he would wake up in a moment to find Mr. Honeypot a bad dream. "You see, Sir O'Brien, I have a Roneo machine myself at my little digs round the corner." Mr. Honeypot was one of those men who are always "round the corner". Actually, Alexander Honeypot was quite a new arrival in Eventide, having appeared right out of the blue only a few months before. He was, it seemed, "Som thing in the City", and went up to town every day by the 10.18 with the other "City Men".

However that may be, Honeypot hypnotized "Sir O'Brien" so completely that on that day week, exactly at seven of the evening, everybody in Paradise Row who was anybody found himself or herself in the Parish Hall in the old-fashioned lane behind the Row which ran down to the Thames and which was also a Board School in its off moments. "One of those horrid innovations," the dear vicar would call it, "as though the Church Schools were not good

enough for the—er—'proletariat' I think is the word. Terrible times. No religion. No morals!" He had almost added "No nothing," but remembered his grammar and himself in time.

. . . . .

This historic War Conclave, confined rigidly to the Row and immediate environs, was the predecessor of innumerable "A.R.P." or "Air Raid Prevention" meetings, which had a habit of starting nowhere and ending in the same place. Incidentally, it marked the first breach in the aristocratic Victorian-Edwardian defences of that fastness of privilege and the first decline into "a dreadful and levelling democracy". I quote Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam, who, however, was a great woman in her way. All these things turn so much upon the angle of vision and the onlooker.

It was tacitly assumed by her and the Vicar that only the "respectable" residents of the Row would be present. Judge, then, the inward perturbation, carefully concealed, when, upon the gentlemanly late arrival of the Vicar, he was to find quite a sprinkling of what he termed the *hoi polloi* sitting, still subdued, thank God! in the back seats. All except Mick Malone, who would tell anybody who cared to listen that "the Malones sprang red-hot and reeling from the loins of the Kings of Ireland and what the divil does a Malone care for a *Brass*-Marjoriam or a Lady Lickface, or whatever she calls herself!" He was, in fact, in the very act of conveying this oft-repeated view to his immediate environment as the Bass-Marjoriam came up the aisle, side by side with Lady Lackplace and Mrs. Pompadour, who toddled by under their lee, with all her daughters behind her, marshalled and manicured not only as to the last nail and the last hair but as to the last mind. Worse than all, he had planted himself right in the front row, on the extreme left, from which he proceeded to dominate the situation, adding: "And what's more, if ye want to have the naked truth of God, there's only two min in the whole boiling that's got the rale blue blood of them same kings of Tara in their veins—and that's the O'Brien and your humble."

It was obvious that Mr. Malone had made a call for a "quick one" at The Robe of Glory before entering.

The "whole boiling", as boilings will, had collected itself already into knots, according to class and custom. The front three rows, with the exception of the Irish gentleman on the extreme left, were filled with the *pukkah* members of the Row, including Lord Lovem and heir, whilst the mid-sections showed the laughing faces of Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill; the bitten features of Miss Gadfly; the solemn ditto of Mr. Wodes, the undertaker; Mr. Bull of "The Robe of Glory", filling his seat like a very young bull in a teacup; Mrs. "Jack" Ketch and her dipsomaniacal friend, Mr. de Burgh, as befitted two of the more doubtfully placed members of the Row; and a sprinkling of "decayed gentlewomen" and some decayed gentlemen like Mr. de Burgh. For even in the Row, blue-blood was not sufficient to compensate for the lack of "the root of all evil", Paradise having already begun to "weaken" under the encroachment of Jewish Gentlemen of financial persuasion and the growing necessity for such noblemen as Lovem, even

though "straight out of the cask of Burgundy", making friends with the Mammon of unrighteousness and becoming "Guinea-Pigs" in "the City"—a Jericho which, though it as yet knew it not, was about to fall beneath the trumpet-blasts of war, for the dressy golden days of the City jungle were gone for ever.

Behind these again, at the very back, Mr. Jark, the street preacher and embalmer to Mr. Wodes, showed his diabolical, though, from his own passionate profession, presumably angelic countenance, in an age when the difference between saint and devil rested upon a very thin line. Joe Bings, the cracked gardener and, as always, looking five ways for Christmas, "rubbered" the roof, by his side Solomon, the Jehu of Mr. Wodes, with a nasal organ so well lit up that the electric light seemed a superfluity.

It was only when the proceedings had well begun that a hoarse unladylike voice was heard outside the school crying: "Come on Coffee!" Everybody there knew who *that* was, as, the next moment, the doors burst inwards to admit the piratical Mrs. Morgana Coffee, grasping her inevitable "gamp" like a cutlass, as, oblivious to time and place, she cried to the wretched little man behind: "Come on Coffee!" Although this terrible little black-avised woman never wore them, you could always see her in sea-boots, boarding some doomed craft at the head of her buccaneers, to the cry "Come on Coffee!"

At the back prowled the sardonic Doctor Crab, as though seeking bodies for the ghastly private *post mortems* with which he was credited.

One peculiar thing in all this *olla podrida*. Ella Cattermole, looking quietly, darkly distinguished, had chosen to seat herself in the second row, as though claiming her natural right as a connection through marriage of the Cattermole earls. And, to speak truth, she looked a queen amongst a rather "mixed bag" of Pompadour and Lackplace girls.

She sat there, dressed in her invariable black, in her dark, serene beauty, hair caught up from the white shapely neck, hatless, and, were it not for her way of glancing to one side without moving her head, one would have said of Ella Cattermole that she was a woman without a care in the world.

Far behind her at the very back sat the Common People, living in the adjoining lane, who had dared under the impellent war, for this occasion only, to come out of their poor broken cottages. But to this meeting, the Eventide that lay outside the Row and that Lane which was the Row's appendage and from which it was accustomed to draw its servitors, did not send a single representative. For the Row had not invited any invasion of its Paradise, this being for it a private war.

Only a single person of the inhabitants of Eventide was both "present and not present", as Mick had it. That was the terrible Personage who lived locked into her "castle" or fastness a mile from Eventide and said to be the largest private house in England—a vast confused pile known as "the Palace", which had been built in the eighteen hundreds by a millionaire madman who had made his millions in the West Indies and then didn't know what to do with them. And when, at the opening of the proceedings, the chairman had read out the message or ukase of the terrible, mountainous Mrs. Masseyton,

who graciously accorded her patronage to the occasion whilst regretting her non-attendance, there was not a single Evenidian there who did not feel this gigantic and frightening creature looming over the Council. That was it, The Masseyton "loomed". Never, in the memory of man, had she left her fortress.

One figure there stood out of the common ruck if only by a certain tragic secrecy which clothed it as a shroud will clothe a corpse. That was Theophilus, Ella Cattermole's shrunken, inturned little man, venous and perhaps venomous. He sat there, his eyes fixed piteous on his mistress, like a dog deprived of a bone, as it seemed to Leicester. But what was the bone? and what was the relation between him and Mrs. Cattermole?—mistress and a general factotum who was a sort of maid-of-all-work, and the factotum ridden on a tight rein if Sean had told the truth.

Perhaps this setting of Paradise Row for a war with Adolf Hitler was in miniature an England that was passing under the threat of war and which the First World War had already begun socially to break into pieces.

It was at the moment when, O'Brien Leicester having gracefully refused the proposal of Lady Lackplace that he should take the chair and it was obvious that the dear Vicar as the natural representative of God in Eventide should be asked to take it, that there came a strange incursion, one to have curious consequences in the dark days to follow.

Some low scoundrel had started the song of the moment in the Lane outside—"Boomps-a-Daisy"—and was about to be suppressed by Bevan, the Messenger, when the folding doors at the end of the room opened to show standing there the two people whom we have just met.

One of these was a tall, white-faced, implacable woman, a little to the rear of the smallish rotund man with the shifty eyes, whom she seemed to shepherd from behind. The other was the man himself. Elspeth McGluskie and Alexander Honeypot—no less, for there could be no more.

The doors had been flung back with a crash which brought every eye there to slew about and to focus upon the pair. The hall was packed to the last seat, there being only a form or bench at the side, far up by the chairman's table with its glass of water. To this table, the man, having parted company with the McGluskie, who remained modestly at the back, Mr. Honeypot made his uncertain way, for it was his way to affect an uncertainty he did not always feel. And as he came, he bent aside to whisper to Leicester, who at that moment was in mortal dread that the fatheaded Vicar would be elected to a chair which he was incompetent to fill and to a position upon which so much turned in the fate of Eventide. It was a sibilant whisper, and everybody in the room heard it:

"I have matters of the utmost importance, sir, to communicate to the meeting before the proceedings open. Perhaps you would see that I have permission to communicate them."

Nobody afterwards could exactly say how it happened, but within five minutes of entering that room Alexander Honeypot was on his feet and, as he himself said afterwards *to* himself, talking like a cock-angel and again, in his peculiar way, dominating the meeting and the situation.

XIII

AN IRISH NIGHT

SUCH was the setting for the first of the "A.R.P." meetings, or War Councils, as they came to be called. And such was the human stuff which Leicester had to face when he took the chair, for after the Reverend Hallowes had "taken a lunar" of the "Proletariat", and especially of Mr. Malone and Mr. Honeypot, he refused steadfastly and nearly profanely to take either the chair or anything else. "There were limits," he said, cryptic, and so proposed that Mr. O'Brien Leicester fill the bill.

But this was after the latter gentleman, in a fit of madness for which he could never afterwards account, had suggested after Mr. Alexander Honeypot had made his momentous communication, that that gentleman—if "gentleman" he were—should fill the chair. Which, much to the astonishment not only of O'Brien Leicester but himself, that gentleman magnanimously refused, instead, seconding the proposition of the Reverend.

The momentous communication was nothing less than the fact that Mr. Honeypot had been, in his youth, a professional fire-fighter, and later, as it had been hinted, doubtless by fellows of the baser sort, an equally expert fire-raiser. On the latter point he was beautifully dumb. On the former, eloquent.

Also he had studied "trenches" in the "previous shimozzle", to use his own term, and his criticisms of the trenches dug by the local council, even at this early stage of the proceedings, were, to say the least, caustic. He implied that they wouldn't keep out a tax-collector, much less a Nazi, and in this he was much helped by Miss Gadfly, who, as everyone knew, had insisted upon volunteering for trench-digging in the local park, with the result that the trench had fallen in and immolated her.

"Now, Ladies and Gentlemen," began the chairman, "we have heard our friend" (for the life of him he couldn't help using the words which brought from Mr. Honeypot wide, moist appreciation as though they had been life-long pals) "and now to get down to business."

But "getting down to business" seemed as impossible in that atmosphere as getting down to the other side of the moon. No sooner had Leicester suggested that a Committee should be formed, than it was evident there was going to be "ructions".

The first nomination out of the body of the Parish Hall, which had once been a Friends' Meeting House, and which was also now used as a board school, with a gallery at one end, was met with loud applause and one sibilant hiss, as of a serpent. The nomination was Lady Lackplace, and the nominator Honoria, nudged thereto by her august ma.

The hiss repeated. cut across the silence which had followed. Lady Lackplace was seen to glare at the Pompadour, who sat there, her short stubby nose set into infinity, as though she knew less of the origin of the hiss than anyone there. But upon Honoria timidly nominating her mother again, there came, certainly from the Pompadour quarter, another and, if possible, more snaky hiss. But the face of the Pompadour remained motionless.

The eldest Miss Pompadour thereupon proposed her own mother, which resulted in a storm of hisses from the Lackplace corner, confused clapping, and cat-calls from the gallery, where the Malone had now entrenched himself.

"I propose meself!" came a stentorian voice. "Anny backers?"

It was Mick Malone himself, his proposal being greeted with tremendous and raucous cheering from half a dozen Irish Guards who were on a visit to Eventide—that is, to "The Robe of Glory", where they spent all their spare time as a bodyguard for Mr. Malone and Ireland.

"We are not in a bear-garden," inserted Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam optimistically.

"Oh, aren't we? How the divil do ye know that, ma'am?" asked a voice from the gallery. "Maybe 'tis afther the job ye are yerself."

"No decency. No respect for law and order," came back the lady addressed, courageously.

"The levelling tendency . . . the triumph of the Proletariat . . . we have indeed fallen on evil days, we have reached bottom," was heard to issue from the tiny mouth of Mr. Hallowes, who was one of those fat men with small orifices.

"Fall on your own bottom, ye *omadaun*!"

"Order, order!"

"Order phwat ye plaze."

"Two fingers of rum for me!"

"A double Scotch for me!"

"A drop of the stuff that ruined mother!"

The cries broke through the hall, being stimulated thereto by the evilly disposed Celts in the gallery. In vain did Leicester appeal for order. It seemed to be a commodity not in stock. Ella Cattermole alone sat there serenely indifferent and, although she did not interfere, gradually seemed to control the meeting by her presence.

The middle-aged lovers from Happy Shadows had timorously shown themselves at the doors a little time before, for Leicester himself to leave the chair in order to shepherd them to their places, for he could be the gallant knight at times. They seemed bewildered a little, but had probably put in an appearance because they felt it to be their duty. Rather lovely people, thought Leicester, but lost in a strange world.

During all this, I regret to say that Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill, apparently not realizing the serious nature of the situation, laughed heartily as though they were in a theatre or at a play—which, indeed, was what they *were* at. They were in a high state of delight, Mr. Cocklepill every now and then handing a paper bag of the peppermints to which he was so partial to Mrs. Cocklepill (*née* Brightonight), "to keep her spirits up". Though there appeared to be little danger of their drooping, for little lights had come into her eyes and her Judy nose shone brightly:

Like those small sprites
On dewy nights
Whose noses shine like candlelights.

A slight interval for the Irish contingent to pull itself together for another invasion permitted a dark and solemn voice to croak :

"What is the world coming to? No discipline. No order. No nothing. This meeting ought to be cremated and I wish I had the commission myself."

The speaker was our Mr. Wodes, the undertaker.

"Where *you're* goin' when you kick the chamberpot, you won't need to pay for any cremation, me fine boyo! They'll be doin' it free. Anyhow, I'll meet you there, Mr. Wodes—for, as they say, heaven for climate but hell for company!" It was the one and only Mr. Malone.

"*Up the Rebels!*"

It was at this delicate juncture that the chairman *pro tem.* intervened.

"I am going to ask my ebullient friend of Ireland to keep his tongue well back in his throat or to withdraw." And O'Brien smiled quite nicely upon Mr. Malone, who opened his portmanteau mouth with its gleaming daunting rows of sharky teeth, to cry ag in :

"Up the . . ." and then hung in mid-air, as he caught his compatriot's eye and with it the clannishness of the one and only Island.

"All right, 'the O'Brien Leicester'. If the O'Brien says so, then it *is* so. But before I sling my hook, I want to say," and the irascible Irishman hung on to the front rail of the gallery, "I want to say that if there's a man here what calls himself a man and not a monkey, and he thinks he could *putt* me out, I'm willin'. Here I am and here I stand on me roights." He glared down into the body of the hall, but nobody obliging, he made his way in splendid dignity towards the gallery entrance with his cohorts aforesaid, one gentleman, it seemed having a passion exclusively for the I.R.A., or Irish Republican Army, and the other a passion for Eire generally. However, the contingent did manage to get through the exit and gradually the sound of the running fight died away.

It seemed to be generally conceded that the chairman had accomplished a masterly piece of work, the fact being that if he had not had Irish blood in him, neither devil nor damned could have shifted the implacable Malone. But the meeting, being generally silly Saxon, knew nothing of that.

It was at this moment that a queer little figure jumped up from the back of the hall to suggest that whilst the meeting was still in a state of grace and not disgrace, the time had come to elect the Committee. The speaker was known throughout the row as "The Little Old Lady of the Curls", not in any way to be confused with another Little Old Lady who many years before could be seen riding in Hyde Park in her victoria with two "tigers" behind and a most remarkable coachman at the "ribbons". For this latter and very naughty Old Lady was also known in her time as "The Little Old Lady of the Curls", and as her fate and her infamy were still fresh in the minds of the Lackplaces and the Lovems and the Windermeres, who all lived in the yesterdays, it is still more necessary to make clear the difference. For that dainty, frail Victorian dame, as she said in the dock when sentenced to seven years of the best. "had only done her duty in supplying a long-felt want", she being in the White Flesh business, and it takes all sorts to make a world, as she also said.

Our "Little Old Lady" lived in a tiny cottage off the row shaped like a

nightcap, where she cultivated her honeysuckles and her sweet peas, her sweet herbs and her roses. Nobody knew her by any other name than the one we have set down. Everybody loved her, with perhaps one exception—that of Mrs. Pompadour, who loved nobody but herself and her Pekes in a cockatricish way, her five daughters, and always excepting even there the youngest, who was suspected of being "a regular little devil on the sly".

She was the "Lady of the Lamp" of Eventide. Running to any house which housed sickness, acting as dry nurse and Lady Bountiful, our Little Old Lady, though with an income which would not have supported Lady Lackplace's Phtah, the green-eyed terror, managed to bring calves' foot jellies and custards and all sorts of little things to those who were too poor to buy them themselves. But, one of the queer things about her, she was just as ready to help the Lackplaces or even the Pompadours as the "Poor", for as she was once, only once, heard to say: "It is easy to be nice to the Good—it is much harder to be nice and good to the Wicked." But who were the "Wicked" she did not say, and she is so modest and backward-drawing that I doubt whether we shall be able to induce her to show herself again in these chronicles.

It was this tiny vibrant figure with her white curls a-tremble like springs upon her little eager head with her rose-leaf complexion and still deep-blue eyes, who had erupted and then sat down again. And it may be said that incursion of any kind was most unlike her, and that this was her solitary essay.

"A most excellent idea," said Leicester, rather prosily for him. "Now to act upon it."

"May I make a suggestion, Sir O'Brien?" asked Mr. Honeypot, who had held himself admirably in hand during the preceding. It was one of his greater qualities. Always "just round the corner", and always "holding himself in hand."

"Certainly, Mr.—er—Honeypot," responded the chairman. "But are you *quite* sure you won't reconsider your decision not to take the chair?" He was faintly ironical.

"I feel myself freer to speak from the body of the hall," replied Honeypot magnanimously. "Here is my suggestion. Why not take, say, a dozen nominations from the hall and then put the names into a hat, *my* hat, any hat," he looked into his remarkable outsize bowler, "and take a voting on a show of hands, or, if you prefer, a secret ballot on these strips of paper which I happen to have by me in my little black bag, and elect the first half-dozen to office?"

Leicester had no objection. Mr. Honeypot's ideas were so sane that nobody ever could find legitimate objection to them.

I really do not know why Mrs. Kish Chicks has been so long putting her short courageous nose into these pages, but, anyhow, she does so now, as the dear little woman gets up on her short strong legs to inject:

"If I know anything of Paradise Row, Mr. Chairman, we shall be asking for trouble—*and* getting it—if we put up more than the nominations of the six we propose to elect. All those who are left out will want to eat the others, and without butter. Why not ask for nominations and take the first six

nominated and then for the love of Mike don't vote on 'em, or five of the six will make a little hell on earth for the other one and then of one another." Wee Mrs. Chicks was often shockingly forthright. The Row loved and feared her.

"I'm afraid that whatever we do, Mrs. Chicks, we shall meet that—er—'trouble'. I think we had better take Mr. Honeypot's suggestion, don't you?"

"Does the meeting agree?" asked Leicester, generally.

"All right, I'm willing," replied the lady addressed, perkily, nose in air, "but just look out for my 'trouble', and remember what I said when it's too late."

There was silence.

"Thank God for that!" prayed Leicester inwardly. He was a little previous.

It was at this moment of primary agreement that Phtah, the green-eyed monster who crouched, as always, on his mistress's shoulder and who had been glaring balefully for the previous five minutes at Buldger, the Pompadour bulldog, imagined himself to be insulted or something. For, springing from his mistress's anguished shoulder—he had driven his claws in pretty deep for his spring—who let out a howl of her own, Phtah had hurled himself upon the bulldog, who actually had been fast asleep up to that moment behind the bare legs of *his* mistress.

Pandemonium had broken loose.

The flock of Pompadour dogs, hounds, Pekes or what not, had hurled themselves into the fray in their endeavours to get at their hereditary enemy. But this was not the worst. For Lady Lackplace, still bleeding freely from Phtah's claws, and outraged in her inners by the sight of the Pompadour belabouring her beloved cat with the dog-whip she invariably carried, had lifted her own invariable parasol and broken it over her rival's "napper".

When that little fracas was past, with both animals recovered by their owners, old passions again had been loosed, which bid to break up the gathering.

So, within one fell moment, all the O'Brien Leicester tact had foundered.

Once more, however, it was Alexander Honeypot who came to the rescue by going about the meeting handing out his slips of paper as though nothing had happened. He even handed them to the chief protagonists, who took them sulkily enough. His *sang froid* was magnificent. Here, indeed, was a *man*, as doubtless Miss McGluskie was thinking, her eyes glowing in the white of her face as she followed each movement of her god out of the blue. It was as though she were mothering him. Elspeth certainly was the captive of his bow and spear, even though she had not given in as yet, for the pride of the McGluskies was notorious.

It was at this moment that Mr. Jark, coming up to the head of the hall from his noisome lair behind, slowly unfolded a little banner on which stood in capitals: "HELL WAITS FOR YOU!" but this was only after somebody had nominated him for the Committee—probably another madman. The little banner was possibly part of his political propaganda, for the Jarkish concept of life and love was quaint. Indeeed, to tell the truth, it was English.

When, finally, the nominations were made and the voting slips collected, Mr. Leicester and Mr. Honeypot, who were chosen as the tellers, discovered, possibly to their surprise, that the voting had gone as follows:

Mr. Leicester, 17 votes.
Doctor Crab, 16 votes.
Mr. Jark, 16 votes.
Mr. Honeypot, 16 votes.
Lady Lackplace, 14 votes.
Mrs. Pompadour, 13 votes.
Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill (who had insisted upon being nominated jointly on a single vote), 11 votes.
Mrs. Mallory, 9 votes.
Mrs. Chicks, 13 votes.
Ella Cattermole, 11 votes.
Lord Lovem, 4 votes.

The "also-rans" were Buck Galanty; "Come on Coffee!" and his buccaneer wife, Morgana; Miss Gadfly; the abundant Miss Buzzard, who was "mad" on the wrongs of Performing Animals, especially the elephant whom she so much resembled, and who always seemed to be hatching out a clutch of eggs which never came to chickens; Mr. Wodes; Mr. Bull of "The Robe of Glory"; "Jack the Ripper", the saturnine doctor; and, to everybody's astonishment, Mrs. Masseyton, the millionaire Venus of Eventide. As for the poor dear Rector, not a single Eventidian or, rather, Paradiser, had had a single vote for him to spare, and one really does not know what religion *is* coming to these days.

XIV

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

It had been originally suggested that the Air Raid Prevention executive should consist of twelve. And this had been carried more or less unanimously, some of the "also-rans" voting against it, ambition running high in the Row. Indeed, not to put too fine an edge on it, everybody wanted to sit on the Committee.

The announcement of the poll by the chairman, one regrets to say, was met by catcalls, hisses, booings and a most ungenteel shuffling of feet, in which the dear vicar, although one of the "also-rans", did not join, so vindicating the Etonian system, even though the election of his own charwoman, Mrs. Mallory, by nine votes was a bit too thick. (It was only long afterwards that it was discovered some local *farceur* had forged all the nine.)

One or two had even begun to move towards the door, mumbling as they went, and the majestic and elephantine Miss Buzzard, of the Eyrie, patron of souls, declaring quietly that "the voting had been rigged", a most regrettable lapse. "Come on Coffee" and his buccaneer wife did not move towards any door, but the female half of the crew told the world that so far as they

were concerned, they didn't mind if Paradise Row were burned down and with it its inmates, and that she, Morgana Coffee, would set fire to it if Hitler did *not*, and had indeed often thought of doing so in the past.

But Morgana had a voice like a file, a "walk-the-plank" face, and might have got her name from Morgan the Pirate himself, a descent from whom she always boasted. And what she would not do to Hitler if she could get at him might be written on a gooseberry leaf, for Morgana was one of those who have a man's soul in a woman's body.

The meeting unveiled such horrid unsuspected tendencies that the chairman resolved on a bold stroke. He suggested that the Committee be reduced to the first five on the poll, hoping that with such a reduced representation, the also-rans would not feel hurt.

He little knew his Row, which obviously did not get its name for nothing. He had scarce got this out of his lips, when there broke about his head a storm the like of which had never been known in the placid precincts of this side of Paradise.

"I am surprised at you, Mr. Leicester. . . ."

"Disgusting! A plant! A frame-up!"

"He wants the job for his little self!"

"Why not make him a bloomin' dictator right away?"

"In all my life, I have never imagined that——"

"Come off your twig, 'Itler!"

The exclamations, as will be seen, came from what we may call the East End and the West End. But O'Brien Leicester felt himself lost in the democracy of hate.

He wanted to hide his wretched head. He wanted to resign. He wanted to do anything except be in that chair at that moment.

It was in this hotted hour that once more the indefatigable and fertile Mr. Alexander Honeypot sprang to the rescue.

"If I may make a suggestion, Mr. Chairman," came the thin piping voice which carried sibilantly through the riot, "if I may make a suggestion—why not take on to our Committee everybody who has been nominated?"

This paralysing proposal stilled the meeting. A stillness broken by a murmur of approbation from the West End and by uproarious and perhaps sardonic acquiescence from that East End which had now invaded the sacred preserves of the Row.

"*O tempora, O mores!*" groaned Mr. Hallowes.

Doctor Crab was discovered on his feet, greeted by cries of "Good old Jack the Ripper!" from the riff-raff.

"If I may say so, as we are all soon to be bombed and gassed out of this world into one probably much worse, I don't think it matters whether and who or what sits on our Committee, so I support Mr.—er—Honeypot is the name I think—Mr. Honeypot's proposal. And will Lady Lackplace in future kindly keep her damned tiger out of my pants." For "Jack" had been rather badly mauled by Phtah in the fracas with Buldger the bulldog, he catching that animal, so to speak, on the rebound. Then he added, saturninely: "And her leddyship will remember what I said about her heart and the danger of giving way to temper."

This terrible Scot was feared by everybody there—even by her ladyship, who feared neither heaven nor hell. The only reason he had got his 16 votes was because nobody dared not to vote for the man whom they believed, like St. Peter, carried the keys of life and death. The man let them believe it.

It was at this juncture that Mr. Jark, like Jack the Ripper, a specialist in hell, thought the moment happy to start the business of the day, so to speak, with a little warning of his own, to be delivered over the apron of his placard which he held before him: "HELL WAITS FOR *YOU!*"

"My dear brothers and sisters," he began, to the horror of the Pompadours and the Lackplaces. "I think we could not do better than commence our proceedings by approaching the throne of grace in prayer." Without more ado and without asking anyone's permission, Mr. Jark opened:

"O Lord, look down upon these miserable sinners gathered here together under the shadow of death! You know as well as I, your unworthy and humble servant, that this war has been sent to cleanse the wickedness of Eventide and of Paradise Row in particular, which has spurned and rejected the teachings of your servant throughout the years that have gone—for which he forgives them on your behalf even as he hopes to be forgiven. And when the poison gas covers Paradise Row, as it will, and they cry: 'Lord, Lord! we didn't know!' you, sitting on your cloud, will laugh back at them and will cry: 'Well, you know *now*!' "

A hush had fallen over a meeting which felt in its heart that perhaps, even if Jark was a damned fool, there yet might be something in it. The hush and the darkness deepened as our Miss Gadfly, getting on to *her* little hindlegs, stated that she had received direct from the Lord Privy Seal a delightful little tract titled "YOUR GAS MASK—HOW TO KEEP IT AND HOW TO USE IT", this being, it seemed, "Public Information Leaflet number umpty-umph," or at least that was how it sounded to the assembly, Miss Gadfly's strong point not being elocution.

She was proceeding to expatiate on the pamphlet or "tract", when Jack the Ripper, hoisting his length of misery from its chair, interposed with the remark that he also had received one of these sentences of death and, with the meeting's permission, would read out the more salient and juicy portions, of which he had made notes.

In awestruck silence, the meeting listened as men and women will who feel themselves under sentence of death:

" 'TAKE CARE OF YOUR GAS MASK AND YOUR GAS MASK WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU,' it opens," said the dear doctor. "It says right away that 'in war your life will depend upon your gas mask', and precious cold comfort it gives to any man of intelligence. For, mark what I say, it tells you that the slightest 'scratch or crack or dent' makes it useless and a veritable death-trap. Exposure to heat or light will do the trick, it says, and adds: 'Remember it will not protect you from the ordinary gas you burn in the house.' In other words, wear it and be gassed!"

The meeting shuddered. He looked about him with a certain secret satisfaction and then producing from those voluminous tails of his what he called "the death-trap", he made a swift passage of his hands and then turned to face the meeting in a goggling horror, with a tube hanging down like a

proboscis of some elemental worldling. From behind the mask there came a gurgling sound as a death-rattle, and then a choking sound . . . then dreadful silence.

"There are in the Lord Privy Seal's instructions upon how to be gassed, for that is what it comes to, perhaps half a dozen mistakes you can make at any moment—any one of which will be fatal. You mustn't sit on it. You mustn't chew it. You mustn't 'bend or fold the window, or let it get scratched, cracked, or dented'." Then the saturnine medicine man had looked out over the now stunned gathering to say mockingly: "I think I know who is 'cracked and dented'. And, by the way, you have to do ten minutes' practice every morning at inserting a thumb, if you by then have a thumb to insert, under the back of your head and then, with a gratifying sucking noise, proceed to extract your head from the death-mask as if it were a whelk." He laughed. A horrid cacophonous crackle. This was the moment chosen by the clans of the Lackplaces and the Pompadours to start a private war of their own, Lady Lackplace accusing Mrs. "Pomp" of deliberately setting her Buldger at her, Lady Lackplace's, Phtah, and if there was a law in England, which was doubtful, she would have that law upon her and her blasted bulldog and she wasn't excusing the language either and there was no need whatever for the eldest Miss Pompadour to set her catty eye upon the Honourable Clarence as she didn't stand a sanguinary earthly, and anyhow the noble lordling was already bespoke . . . and . . .

There was a slight subsidence in the front. Miss Gadfly had fainted. Some of the faces about her were turning green.

"Take the body out," said the doctor. "I'll see 'o it in a moment. For look here!

"You've got to mask not only your noddle but your windows, shutting yourselves behind 'dark blue or black or dark-green glazed Holland, Lancaster or Italian cloth'—and may the Lord have mer-r-r-cy on your soul if you substitute linen or any other colour—and for God's sake, ladies and gentlemen, don't ask me why! Ask the Lord Privy Seal."

There was another subsidence—not slight. Miss Buzzard had come off her eggs.

"Take the body out," said the doctor with "the mixture as before" air. Somebody tried but nobody succeeded. For if Britomart Buzzard weighed an ounce she weighed a ton, and in the Voice from the Gallery, which had returned, to cry: "Fetch the Council's new muckshifter," it was universally felt that "you had something there".

"I forgot to say," continued the black medico as though nothing had happened, "that according to the Privy Pamphlet it is *most important* not to forget your skylight, especially if you have one, as any failure to black this out will lead to a brisk receipt of machine-gun fire from the Hun planes." He looked about him again. "Whatever that skylight may be—for maybe it's a pane of glass you have to carry in your tummy to see if your bowels turn to water when you absorb the poison gas. Any questions?"

Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam was seen to be on her feet murmuring something with a glassy stare.

"For God's sake, ma'am, speak up!" cried the irascible Crab. "You

know I've often told you that you tremble on the edge of the grave, so you've nothing left to be frightened of. Speak up!"

Bedelia was understood to ask how she was to "stay put". She went on tremblingly to explain that a friend of hers at the War Office had told her in strict confidence that they were about to issue a leaflet headed "STAY WHERE YOU ARE", giving six reasons why she should "stay put" and which said, "If you don't stay put you will stand a very good chance of being killed." "So, if you please, Doctor Crab, please do tell me how I am to stay put."

"Quite easy to answer. I believe it's got something to do with golf. Get pamphlet No. 15, page 3, sub-paragraph 2, line 4, and study carefully the following directions: 'How shall I prepare to stay put?' 'What shall I do if an Invader comes my way?' *And*, my dear Mrs. Bass-Majoriam, the extra leaflet, 15a, which gives, partly in German, the minutest instructions on how to treat a Nazi in case you have the luck to catch him at it. . . . Next question!"

But here the chairman intervened.

"I think, Doctor Crab, if you don't mind, and unless you have decided to wrest from me the chairmanship, I think that we had better get on with the appointment of the various Committees which I presume we shall have to set to work in Fire Raid Prevention."

"Oh, of course, of course, Mr. Leicester. If you wish, that is to say, *if* you wish to waste the time of the meeting by permitting it to discuss mere irrelevancies, instead of the way of preventing loss of life by gas and fire . . . and *worse*. And, by the way, I hope everybody who has even a modicum of brains has been careful to sit up o' nights and study carefully that beautiful piece of official thought, 'THE PROTECTION OF YOUR HOME AGAINST AIR RAIDS'. I especially commend to my own patients Section 2 upon how to prepare your refuge room against explosive bombs, or as it says so tactfully, 'Things to do if there should EVER be a War', as if there ever shouldn't, and a bit about where to put the cat. Also a delightful little bit about mustard-gas burns, and Section 4 on the thousand and one gases which I now believe exist to scorch and burn us into the next world, doubtless as training for a longer, even eternal, burning. . . . Also, by the way . . ."

But here Leicester put his foot on the Crab. "Please sit down, Doctor Crab, and keep your horrors to yourself. There may be even worse things than horrors—there may be the forecasting of them. Sit down!"

The dark doctor, like his pamphlet, subsided in sections, with the grin which in him took the place of the smile of ordinary humanity ghastly on his face.

It was at this delicate moment that Leicester, gazing rather frantically about him and wondering how the Air Raid Prevention conclave would end, saw enter his son and Snow-White with Patricia a little behind, at her heels White Satan, her bull-terrier and inseparable companion. As they walked up the hall, with Snow-White mothering the tall dark boy as she always did, every eye there turned to look at them. The chairman thanked his God for their entrance, heaven-sent.

The doctor sat down. Lady Lackplace no longer glared at the "Pomp". The meeting did at last get down to business, the fuller results of which are recorded in the archives of Eventide village at war, results which will make themselves felt as this faithful history unfolds its pages.

XV

"GAS" AND "BLAST"

Now appeared the full sun of Paradise Row in action. Oh, the Row knew how to do it when it wanted. It did not often "want".

The war outside the Row was nothing to the war inside which now broached in the Battles of the Committees. The first of these battles had started through one of those odd trifles which, seeming to arise out of nothing and often ending in the same place, do upset the councils not only of Committees but of nations. In short, Honoria Lackplace, who in these days of war had become what her mother called "crotchety", solemnly stated before the meeting that she had with her own eyes, and not anyone else's, seen Ella Cattermole's butler, Theophilus, abstract a ten-shilling note from a door-to-door collection which had been initiated to provide funds for stirrup-pumps. The Row had instantly plunged into its own name and taken sides.

It was Lady Lackplace who, before these started, suggested that the "Twelve Apostles", as she blasphemously called those who had been elected to the War Council Executive, should take their places on the low platform, where, at the time when it had been a Friends' Meeting House, once an altar had been created to the glory of God, now an altar to war.

"Just to see what we've got!" she said. This was carried with ribald acclamation by the *hoi polloi*.

Accordingly, the more or less Noble Dozen rather shamefacedly wended their way to the altar, and a nice lot of mixed pickles they looked, as the Scots doctor remarked to the air about him.

The critical audience beheld the high-shouldered pelican figure of Lady Lackplace herself, with the figure of "8" Pompadour crouching under her lee, but, for the first time in the history of Eventide, without her dogs, which had been left tethered to the chair she had just vacated. Doctor Crab and Mr. Jark, two omens of doom, hobnobbed at the end evilly enough as befitted partners in death—the one getting "the body" ready, the other preparing him for his last sepulture, and "good work if you can get it" as the third partner, Mr. Wodes, would drop o' nights in "The Robe of Glory". Punch and Judy not only hobnobbed but jogged their heads brightly to each other and the audience from their vantage point, whilst our Mrs. Mallory, the charlady, nodded warmly from time to time to her *vis-à-vis*, Lord Lovem, who stared back vacantly as though he couldn't believe his eyes, which he couldn't—lords and commons indeed! Mr. Honeypot just made brief appearance and then disappeared "on that urgent business" which always awaited him, whilst

Mrs. Kish Chicks, "Kish" being the name her nine brothers and sisters had given her because of her supposed likeness to one of Kipling's characters, perched up there like a very saucy tom-tit on a twig, looking quite at home.

The most distinguished person on that variegated platform was Ella Cattermole, who, sitting on the extreme left of the chairman, looked out over the gathering in the blinded way that she had, her eyes half closed as though seeking someone. The twelfth member of the company was of course the chairman, already *in situ.*

"*Waxworks!*"

The solitary word had come from Mick Malone, the darling! who had then again disappeared—probably round to "The Robe" to have one, to get up his "sthrngth" for the next foray into the hall.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, that you have seen the men and women to whom you are entrusting your lives, we had better decide upon the Sub-Committees of Action we should now enrol," said the chairman.

Mrs. Mallory it was who broke the ice to make the portentous proposal for "a Committee of Fortifications". (She had been reading all about trench-digging in the *News of the World*, her favourite Sunday tipple.)

The dear little fat Sussexer, her fair hair blowsy about her round head, determined to make her wants known, proceeded without an atom of shyness ("Just shows what we're coming to, with charwomen daring to talk before their betters!": Buck Galanty, from the side): "What we want is plenty of bricks and mortar to protect us from the German, my son Alf says. And, more than anything else, ladies and gents, we want to prevent what I was a-reading of in the *News of the World* on Sunday—and that is misconceptions. I've had a rare lot of misconceptions meself and I know what I'm atorkin' about, as Doctor Crab there will tell you."

As our Mrs. Mallory went on to become confidential about her "insides", and kept harping on "the misconceptions she had had", she obviously making oblique reference to her miscarriages which she had renamed "misconceptions", a dreadful silence descended over the front rows of the hall. And, as she became inextricably entangled in the "fortifications" and "misconceptions" which had some mystical connection understandable only to the initiate, the chairman blandly intervened to suggest that they might take trench-digging as their first committee, and that if there was anybody there with experience—he looked hopefully at Mr. Wodes—they would be glad to hear from him.

But even the usually optimistic Mr. Leicester could not but feel that the Mallorian incursion was indifferent beginning to serious measures against the might of the German army. However, he went on hoping.

It was not a "him", however, but a "her" from whom he was to get response. Miss Gadfly, to wit, who, having had her little faint out in comfort at the back of the hall and summoning her resources, had returned to the body of the meeting.

She held up her hand like a small girl asking permission from her mistress to leave the room.

"I think I have had some experience," she began timidly but with a certain assurance, too. "I have studied 'The Art of Digging-in', which is Tract No. 6

issued by, I think, the Minister of War, but I'm not quite sure. So I went into my front garden at Number Four with my little shovel—I could only find the coal-shovel, but *that* was all right—and I began to dig—and at the end of the third day, I had dug deep enough to lie down in the hole and get cover. And indeed, to tell you the truth, I did get covered, for the hole fell in on me and only that Joe Bings happened to be passing with his spade, I think I should still be there. And what a blessing it is that Joe is a gravedigger as well as a gardener and knows how to handle a spade!"

This experience was at once seized upon to elect Miss Gadfly to the "Council for Fortifications", she being empowered to "commandeer" some real shovels from the local council, whether they would or not, and to set to work to dig trenches down the Row.

There were sounds of satisfaction from the meeting and the feeling spread that something at last had been accomplished.

It was the work of a moment, so to speak, to appoint a "Gas Council", whose work, very generally, was presumed to consist of first learning and then showing from that work of art, "The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids", page 14, "How to Seal the Windows of your Refuge-Room". Mrs. Kish Chicks was entrusted with the "command" of this Committee, and it was interesting to note how, as time went on, warlike terms kept on creeping into the vocabulary of the Row and of Paradise.

The unspeakable Crab used the appointment to expatiate upon the Home Office instructions, the failure to observe any one of which would inevitably call him in—("And that ud be the end and be sugared to yez!")—it was the Voice which had again returned to the Gallery but without disconcerting Crab, who with a certain magnificent detachment and gazing evilly upon the interrupter, went on, "And as I was about to add, in a professional capacity, as preparatory to Mr. Wodes and our old friend Death."

"My dear friends," he began darkly, "the Home Office tells us that we must 'wedge the windows firmly, sealing them with gummed strip or pasted paper', and you are 'to be cautious and make a thorough job of it'. But in order to 'keep the Home-Fires Burning', as the dear old song has it, it tells you that none of this is any use, as this will not prevent the possibility of glass being broken by the blast—'blast', I said—the blast of a bomb explosion, perhaps quite a long way away. So it'll get you whatever you do—still, all the same, you've got to do it.

"For to the end of this war, *if* there be an end, it will be a case of Blast and Gas, Gas and Blast, so you'd better make your wills. . . . But I had forgotten," he added, as though he had just that moment had a bright idea of hope, "in one of the Instructions it says: 'As it will be quite impossible to answer nature's summonses in the usual legitimate situations, it will be as well to instal in the corner of the living-room, protected from gas, a lavatory or W.C. with a stock of ordinary newspaper (as the customary toilet paper may not be available), so that you may be as snug and comfy as possible . . .' at least I think that's how it goes."

He sat down again, as a man who has done his duty, leaving the meeting, if possible, in still deeper depression.

Mr. Cocklepill, feeling that this was the shining moment to improve the

shining hour, and to parody the doctor, whom he heartily hated, here took from his pocket the tract in question, to read brightly, even merrily, laughing heartily as he did so:

"And, my dear, dear friends and fellow-victims, you ought to read this little bit in the same Instructions, about how you are 'to nail pieces of wood padded with felt' over the doors and floors, and over that again the family blankets which you are to drape at least 12 inches—10 inches is no use—'to stop air from blowing underneath them'! And when you've used all the blankets on a cold winter's night and are freezing to death—and, by the way, do not forget that whatever else you don't do you've got to keep the blankets wet until they freeze into icicles—and when you are freezing to death, as I said, why then you can comfort yourselves with the feeling that as in any case you will be suffocated to death within a few minutes, what does it all matter?" He repeated slowly: "What—does—it—all—matter? And if you don't believe me, why, ask Doctor Crab."

O'Brien Leicester, feeling that this was the last straw, even though he had yet to plumb the sadistic resources of Paradise Row, now suggested that they form a "Bomb Council" for protection against bombs.

It was this, one thinks, which completed the melancholia of Eventide, for what with the horrors now unveiled by every imaginative denizen of the Eventide backblocks, incited thereto by our Mrs. Mallory, who again, so to speak, plunged devastatingly into her internal or infernal arrangements, and what with the drawings on a handy blackboard of the stout posts of scaffold-poles you had to erect in your basement or kitchen to prevent the roof falling in on you, there was scarce an Eventidian of them all who had not already yielded all to the Hun and, with it, the pale ghost of hope.

Both Mr. Jark and Doctor Crab positively revelled in the possibilities of glass-splinters and flaming gases, and it may be said of both that they both gassed and blasted their surroundings, and, as it happened, much of the meeting did run home to make amateurish experiments in "shoring up", the "Come on Coffees!" even succeeding with the help of a borrowed sledge-hammer in driving wedges under ceiling supports in their worm-eaten cellar, which, without any extraneous help from the Hun, did bring down those ceilings upon their heads. But the female half of the Coffees was a rather desperate person, as we have indicated, and she wielded a hefty hammer, one of the wilder swings of which sent Mr. Coffee into the local hospital for six weeks.

However, in some miraculous way, Fire and Bomb Councils were formed and the "Boiling", now reduced to temporary aberration and permanent melancholia, retired feverishly to its several abodes to await the wrath of the Hun, something that would have enormously bucked Mr. Hitler at Berchtesgaden, could he have heard of it.

XVI

"TO DISCOURSE SWEET MUSICK"

"If music be the food of love, then play on," says Orsino in *Twelfth Night*.

Possibly it was from the fount of love that Honoria Lackplace, aided and

abetted by her dear friend, Serena Gadfly, "got up" a concert for the purpose of raising funds for Air Raid Protection. For at this fell moment both ladies were rather more violently in love than usual—the one with the Reverend Robin, the other with Mr. de Rohan's moustachios.

This was to be a greater occasion, and one which needed the consumption of various *delicatessen*, and with them some gallons of that good hot strong tea beloved of the Row. Heaven alone knew what scandal, what deterioration and disintegration of character, good and bad, went on under the guise of Music for Air Raid Protection. The Row was simply tearing itself to pieces.

After a series of tea-fights extending over many moons, at last the great evening arrived in the Parish School Room, to which one of the voluminous Mrs. Masseyton's twenty-two grand pianos had been conveyed. When it was suggested by some ill-conditioned wight that an invitation to play for nothing but love and charity should be extended to a famous pianist, it was rejected instantly with contumely. "We don't want any of your miserable professionals at *our* concert. We are amateurs, *pure* amateurs!" And they got them.

For some weeks before the music festival, the Row had been a-glug with thrills and warblings and a-hum with the pounding of pianos, big and little, and the *ping-pong* of at least one harp and one ukulele. Ladies who "had not sung for years" suddenly burst forth into song. Gentlemen, who all had been compared at one time or other to another gentleman, named Caruso, suddenly took their voices out of cold storage, threw open their chests and also their windows so that the neighbours might not lose a golden note, and let themselves loose on the landscape.

Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam, who according to herself *had* been more than a bit of a pianist in her prime and time and who had even graciously accepted lessons from one of the hated professionals, took it into her head to look for that beautiful thing, "The Song that Broke my Heart", with which, some umpteen years before, she had regaled her nearest and dearest, turning them, incidentally, into her farthest and worst. And let it be remarked that the end of Eventide from which Miss Lackplace not so much sprang, as emerged, was musically, and not only musically, still living in the Victorian Period.

Mr. de Burgh, more dipsomaniacal than ever, despite the admonitions of Mrs. Jack Ketch, remembered a comic song he had sung half a century before with *éclat* to up-the-river junketings with other sports of the period. And this song he insisted upon singing, whatever the cost—and the cost was high.

For some of those approached developed a remarkable, even vicious, tendency, however delicately conveyed, to refuse to "cough up" subscriptions to the A.R.P. Fund unless they were allowed to say or play or what not. "No play, no pay!" was their motto.

Buck Galanty, catching the infection, remembered his famous speech in the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, and, what was worse, could not forget it, but, like Mr. de Burgh, insisted upon getting the chance to deliver it, every comma and full stop, and at a ridiculously reduced price, for the limit of his "coughings" appeared to be a five-pound note.

Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill, or, if you prefer, "Punch and Judy", who had ravished *their* period with the part-song, "I know a bank whereon the wild

thyme grows", also insisted, instead of desisted. And as both were amongst the more lucrative patrons of all local good works, the Concert Committee finally permitted them to have their way, as we shall see.

But the limit, it was felt, had been reached when our Mrs. Mallory, also "remembering", volunteered to "do" her famous recitation-song of "The Drunkard", which opened with "O Father, dear Father, come 'ome, for the clock in the steeple struck one" and finished delectably with the coming home of the dissolute "parient" and the prompt decease of Mother, at the hands of the aforesaid Father, who had strangled her.

"Really, there *was* a limit . . ." It was Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam speaking. But *was* there?

. . . . .

So behold our dear old Parish Hall once more packed to the doors on this spring night, of which it might be writ that "it was a night of sweat and tears", as the poet or somebody wrote.

In the front seats sat the "toffs", and, war or no war, all of them arrayed in such a manner that it might be said that Solomon, or even one of his dissolute wives, "in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these". For it was, as we have said, one of the Greater Occasions.

There they sat, inexorably passed and laced into their ironbound shirt-fronts or "straight-fronts" or even, in the case of the more centenarianly inclined, into "stays". For whalebone was not yet by any means extinct in Paradise Row, either materially or mentally. But the Row was distinctly "bony".

As for the gowns of the tired matrons, who had done their duty by husband and child and none by themselves and who gloried in their shame, and of the more aged virgins, they were of colours which rivalled a drunkard's rainbow, shadowing off into shades and hues which took the owners far beyond the seven primary colours of that same rainbow. Puce-pink was the prevailing tone, with magenta and bilious yellow as runners-up.

Every old diamond, or what Mrs. Mallory always referred to generically as "ta-ra-ra," that the Row could produce was produced. For was it not the Greater Occasion?

In the chair, who other than our dear Lovem, who as a more or less noble lord, was obviously the only man to fill the bill and the chair. Supported, let it be said, on either hand by the Reverend Robin Hallowes, and much against his will by the O'Brien Leicester who that spring night wished himself and everybody about him in hell.

The orchestra had been lent from his cinema by the one and only Universal Provider, Alexander Honeypot, who would often modestly declare that "like Another Universal Provider, who should be nameless, he was prepared at a moment's notice, or even without notice, to produce anything Eventide wanted from a needle to a White Elephant". And it might be said that most of Mr. Honeypot's elephants, financial or otherwise, were "White", but in this sense only.

As *The Bugle* was to recount, the proceedings opened, as they were expected to close, with "God Save The King", it being felt that in these days

of wars you could not have too much of a good thing. It was also opened by prayer from the Reverend Robin, upon the same principle, the beauty of his delivery, adenoided but earnest, being possibly slightly marred by the insistence of Mr. Jark, at the back, upon himself also delivering a prayer, in which the words "hell" and "flames" occurred seventeen times and "love" only once and then only in connection with bombs. The loving lightnings of an offended God filled up the rest. Incidentally, he, by implication, directed the divine lightnings upon all those present "at this wicked sing-song, in a time when only hymns and psalms should by sung". Having said which, and having thoroughly disorganized the assembly, he had withdrawn into the night to be enshrouded in darkness like some evil monster of that night.

Careful graduation being the order of the evening, so as not to dazzle the audience by too much of a good thing, the first artist loosed upon that audience was Mrs. Mallory's niece, aged seven, she having been a compromise with our Mrs. Mallory and as a buy-off of that insistent lady, who in the contrary event of non-acquiescence, would have insisted upon giving "The Drunkard" in full, or as alternative, bringing in the Bourbon Lane lot "to bust up the proceedings", she being a most determined lady and passionate in her rights. So had the Committee commuted, little Dora, seemingly a most dissipated little darling, "doing" it instead of her aunt. And when she came to the grand finale of her drunken parent, and the clock in the church steeple having struck not only "one", but two and three, and that parent himself also striking—in this case her sainted mother, whose part little Dora also took, there wasn't a dry nose in the room.

The gifted infant was recalled again and again by the Bourbon Lane lot and compelled, not that she needed compulsion, to do the last verse once more.

Anything after this was felt to be a post-climax.

It was at this delicate stage that Miss Gadfly "obliged" with "I'll sing thee Songs of Araby . . ." something which had been violently popular, even *de rigueur*, thirty years before. It now appeared that for years and years our Serena Gadfly had been modestly concealing a voice like that of a railway locomotive when appealing for "signals", and when this most surprising voice, or loco, appeared out of that narrow, panting bosom it so surprised Eventide that after a time it even ceased to hoot—the back rows only, of course, as toffs don't hoot—they snoot, or look down their noses. And the artiste went on and went on singing them songs of Araby and telling them tales of brave Cashmere, until the cows came home, with the result that she received a most tumultuous encore, she then "rendering", as *The Bugle* was to put it, "with a tenderness of execution and a power of expression that once exquisite flower of the brain of the late Signor Tosti—'For Ever and For Ever'."

And when Serena assured her audience that she would never forget them "For Ever and For Ever", the hearers, stunned by the "loco" and not unnaturally in their condition of musical evolution mistaking it for the *crème de la crème* of virtuosity, sat spellbound. And as the last despairing cry died away into the distance—"for e-e-e-ver and for ever!" it was felt by everybody there

who was anybody that Miss Gadfly had risen nobly to the occasion, especially when she finished on a warbling note, resistlessly reminiscent of the air siren, she singing the final "Ever", "for Eh-*heh-heh-heh*-ver and for *Hehiaoh*-ver", she going all round the ring until she caught up with the final syllable which, after a neck-and-neck race, she triumphantly accomplished.

As she was attired in a sky-blue gown, very *décolletée* for so modest a woman, which had been a regular stunner of a quarter of a century before, and wore long white kid gloves upon her slender, not to say rather skinny, arms, the effect was still more striking.

After this heartrending plunge into Love, the oncoming of Mr. Nicodemus, the barber, in shiny quiff and the full dress of crimson handkerchief, was welcomed as an antidote or easer-off.

Now Mr. Nicodemus, in addition to cutting hair and wielding a nifty blade over the faces or dials of Eventide had a number of accomplishments which, if such things happened, as they sometimes do and sometimes don't, should have won him fame on the music-hall stage, so earning him a hundred pounds a week instead of a measly fourpence a shave and, in view of war prices, eightpence instead of sixpence the haircut. But so it is—and such is life, and the beauty of the talented and nearly diabolical Nicodemus being to do everything and to do it with *flair* and air, Mr. Honeypot being his only rival in Eventide.

To hear Mr. Nicodemus "come a couple of cats on the tiles" at our war concert was to realize that the Concert Committee had made no mistake in relying solely upon local talent. The heartrending appeal of the gentleman Tom to his ladye-love would have moved, and actually did move, anybody susceptible to the higher things in art and romance, and when, with a certain diabolic tremolo, he managed to convey both the pussies at one and the same time in a sort of broken-hearted double note, Eventide knew that feline art and feeling heart could no further go.

This, without intermediary, he followed up by producing from the pocket of his clawhammer coat, which he had thoughtfully adorned with the scarlet aforesaid, a mouth-organ on which he was the virtuoso *in excelsis*, and which he seemed to be able to play in any way but the right way and with any part of his anatomy but his mouth, over which he would, in his more exalted moments, place his long white ratty paws.

Also, without intermission, he took a single side step to the piano and just as he seemed about to sit down and to play it in the usual way, he cast himself head downwards, feet in air over the top of the fated instrument, and with hands double-jointed backwards and singing as he played, in a falsetto delightful:

Just before the missis, too,
How I did perspire,
As I saw her temper rising—
Higher—Higher—HIGHER!
But when she got the poker
And began to poke the fire,
I knew that she meant making matters *warm* for me!

When the audience could scarcely bear more, again without droop of pinion, the agile Mr. Nicodemus, his dark wicked eye slanting from side to side, produced from the ever-ready clawhammer tails a large jew's harp upon which he played a fantasia sometimes with his mouth and sometimes apparently with his earhole. After which he retired. But on a now frantic and intensely musical audience insisting upon an encore in one of those hotted moments when an encore is more imperative than breath, the gifted tonsorial artist, producing for the occasion a remarkable bass of melancholic timbre, sang lugubriously the one-time famous "Trinity Church" lament, something which did, indeed, bring down a house which, appreciating the onus of the occasion, joined in the chorus, but, let it be said, only the male portion of Eventide, for the females sat studiously aloof and looked daggers:

At Trinity Church I met my doom—
I met my doom—
Now I live in a top back room—
Top back room—
Up to me eyes in debt for rent . . .
That's what she's done for me!

As Mr. Nicodemus sang or rather intoned the main lines as though he had left his voice in the tomb of memory, and rendered the repetitive echoes in the falsetto in which he had given his previous song, the effect was paralysing.

So, quiff and scarlet handkerchief and all, our Mr. Nicodemus took his bow and with it the count, it being felt by all the *hoi polloi* that art had gone beyond art, and by the "Clawses" that such vulgarity was beneath contempt "and how did that wretched Concert Committee permit such a strange and foreign incursion and, indeed, it all showed what the war was doing and heaven alone knew what would happen to Europe, and, something much more important, to Eventide, when that war was overpast and . . ."

After so flamboyant an apparition as Mr. Nicodemus, the oncoming of the Coffees was a relief. "Done in character", with Mrs. Coffee attired in full Air Raid Prevention "fig", from axe to sea-boots, and Mr. Coffee as the victim, Mrs. Coffee sang with *éclat* and in a very hoarse voice "The Buccaneer", with a "yo-heave-ho" and a "blow the man down" touch not to be communicated by pen and paper. And when she concluded with the well-known lines (the last a *jeu d'esprit* of Morgana):

Fifteen men on a dead man's chest,
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum,
Drink and the Devil had done for the rest
And send 'em down to Kingdom Come!

not a soul there but yearned for life on ocean wave, walking the plank, and the Jolly Roger.

There now not so much appeared as wafted on to the platform a figure of innocence clad from head to foot in white muslin, flounced and furbelowed, who, like Niobe, sat down upon a little stool which had been placed in the centre of the stage for some purpose not distinct. And there, an abandoned

woman in the musical sense of that term, our one and only Honoria waited the coming of someone—perhaps a lover, who knows?

Somebody or other then remembered that to this forlorn figure something, lover or other, had to be attached. And so somebody staggering beneath it, there was borne upon the stage a harp, which, setting against Honoria, somebody left the two of them to their own devices. Devices sweet and soothing—no less indeed than Mr. J. Smith's "Angels' Wings", which the fair player had learned, let me see, how many years before? But discretion always being the better part of chivalry, we forbear.

As an encore, the player gave "Woodland Warblings", in which you could distinctly hear the nightingale, the thrush, and the skylark, as the player forewarned her audience at the apposite places. And there was, indeed, something a-twitter throughout, which might have been the player's heart, of the skylark to which she had alluded, giving to it the quality of love's sweet elusiveness. Ah me!

The sere and yellow a-languish in the seats echoed the "Ah me!" plunging themselves into a voluptuous orgy of melancholic nostalgia.

The incursion of the Sardonic Doctor was unexpected and devastating. For after the soothing warblings of Miss Honoria, nobody expected that this dark devil would, first bewraying a voice like the clang of doom and coming out of his black boots and doubtless black heart, sang "The Wolf". And when the wolf, that is to say, Doctor Crab, yowled and howled, why it was practically the same thing as having the animal himself in the room . . . :

> Where the wolf in nightly prowl—
> Bays the moon with hideous howl. . . .

Hideous howl indeed! It struck terror to every patient there. And of Doctor Crab it may be said that he certainly "crabbed" the proceedings, and as our Mrs. Mallory aptly expressed it, "oughter have 'is little muzzle on and ought never to have been let off the lead".

Soothing indeed, after this yapping horror, was the Paradise Row Glee Singers, got up by Bedelia, who in diverse keys as wild fancy led, sang the famous, not to say notorious, "Sweet and Low". So sweet, that sugar was salt to the strains, not to say the strainings, and so low that practically nothing could be heard of it after the first go-off.

Now, however regrettable it may seem to be on this little sorrowful planet, as it is said to be known in the Higher Regions, we are constantly finding that Righteousness is not always rewarded and that Wickedness has a nasty little habit of flourishing like the Wicked Man under his green bay tree. Also, that the Wicked seem often to be much happier and, so to speak, more getatable than the Good—and that, not to put too fine a point on it, the Good are often a dam' nuisance, and the unco' guid a perfect horror, especially vegetarians, teetotallers, non-smokers, and "Auld Lichts"—this Chronicler, he thanks his God, being one of the Very Few who are free from prejudice of any kind.

Some months before our famous concert, a pungent par had appeared in the morning paper, not that *Morning Post* which was the guide, philosopher

and friend of a Paradise Row who believed that the cherubim and seraphim always read *The Times*—to quote the "Prunes and Prisms" of the Row. No, dear reader, it appeared, according to the Row, "in one of those disgusting and indeed filthy Yellow Press rags in whom all decency was dead", in which the Row included all papers however excellent with which it didn't agree. For Paradise Row had never quite gotten over the shock of that awful day when, forty years before, the *Daily Mail*, then sniffed at by the Row as "The Daily Sale", had appeared at one halfpenny and the old Thunderer had been shocked to his adamantine innards, especially when it was found that some of these giddybiddies, as the Old Grundies sarcastically observed, "were 24-hours ahead of the news". For to the Row, as our concert indicates, half a century was but as an evening gone, and much of it, as we have seen, still lived in the Victorian Era, in which they had beatified the Good Queen, as once in the still longer agos it had beatified the Good Prince Consort.

Now this little par was to the effect that before the genial Bow Street magistrate there had appeared a Naughty Girl, "leader in a Night Club orchestra". And the Row at last knew where its Naughty Girl went each evening. But as naughty girls at this time were appearing in droves before this dear and understanding Rhadamanthus, there would have been nothing noteworthy about that. Unfortunately, in this case, it was one of the girls of the Row, and it did actually send a shock of horror through "the old geezers" of that row—and even the Old Beezers, which is the male of "Geezers".

It seemed that Constable Sheepshanks, that active and devoted Protector of Public Morals, upon duty at three o'clock of the morning in Piccadilly Circus had found himself in violent altercation with a young gentleman of the Air Force to an extent clothed in uniform but apparantly, according to the constable, not clothed in his right mind, he being, in fact, trouserless. Now Constable Sheepshanks had become accustomed to overlook all sorts of queer things in the purlieus of Piccadilly in a wartime in which Authority had turned a lenient eye upon Night Clubs ("for the poor darlings had to be amused"), and dance-halls, and various other entertainment impedimenta ("for the boys had to have their little fling") before they were squiffed or, in plain English, slaughtered. But a gentleman in peaked cap, decorations, underpants with garters, and without his trousers, was a little bit too much, and so Constable Sheepshankst old the trouserless gentleman, who was rapidly becoming blasphemous, that he would have to come along with him and explain in the morning to the Bow Street "beak" or magistrate. He then had set his grappling-hooks into the Air Force preparatory to dragging it off to his lair.

Whereupon a young lady, a charming young lady, as the Court could see, had materialized from under the lea of the trouserless gentleman "and without any introduction whatever, your washup, had clawed me in the h'eye in the h'execution of my duty, and then had tried to cause myself to be in the same condition as the defendant, by endeavouring to claw me trousers off me, saying 'wot was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander'.

"And her breath smelt something orful, your washup, when we took her to the station with her paramour, and it transpired later that she had been

with the gentleman over there at the Geranium Night Club where she had been having cocktails 'arf the night, and she not in a fit condition to be at liberty—so I took her up with the young gentleman after, in strictly self-defence, your washup, I had dotted him one on the crumpet with a knuckle-duster that I always carry 'andy."

When the charming young lady was asked by the beneficent magistrate what she had to say for herself, she said she had nothing to say, that what she had done she would do again. Also that she had only tried to get the constable's lower garments in order that he might realize what it felt to be without them, as was her friend, who had lost his in a trifling scuffle in the "Geranium" with a Greek Street coloured gentleman—a sailor.

Whereupon the magistrate, who all this time had covered his mouth with his hand, as though like Mr. Nicodemus he were playing some invisible mouth-organ, assumed a portentous air which to the expectant Constable Sheepshanks meant at least a "month's hard", and promotion, and looking hardly upon the young gentleman, now attired in a loaned pair of Constable Sheepshanks' trousers, half a foot too long for him and concertinaed, opined that justice ravid would be met and a ravid law satiated by his warning them both to come up for judgment if called upon at some uncertain date and if, greatly daring, he might advise it—age being now at a discount in these raging days of war—*if* he might advise, it wouldn't be a bad idea for the young gentleman to get back to his bomber and Miss Pompadour, the young lady by his side, to her mother and home.

So the murder had come out. And for many moons the Geezers and Ganders in the Row had boycotted Miss Pompadour as the Naughty Girl . . . and for them she was not. Until it was discovered that the Naughty One had developed a regrettable (in such a vicious person) little habit of risking her life when the bombs began to fall, and had been the recipient of one of the new medals for civilian courage during the air raids.

Whereupon the Row had magnanimously decided to give Naughtiness one more chance, and to invite her to contribute to the concert, as, with an effrontery that was horrifying, she had asked to be allowed to play upon her fiddle in the cause of sweet Charity . . . another accomplishment of which the Row had hitherto known nothing . . . and these things would keep on slipping out to the Confounding of the Unco' Guid.

It being now secretly hoped by the more geezerish geezers that Naughtiness, especially that Beautiful Naughtiness which was the sin unforgivable, would show its barer patches by breaking down or playing horribly, the coming on to the platform of our concert of the youngest Miss Pompadour was eagerly, even malignly, awaited, and we have to apologize to the Gentle Reader for our own Naughtiness in so lengthy an interpolation as justification for the introduction of a Naughty Girl to so select an audience.

But, alas! once more things on this planet did not work out true to how they ought to work, and not only did the youngest Miss Pompadour distinguish herself in her Paganini Variations, but she extinguished all the hopes and expectations of the Geezers of whom we have spoken. And it eventuated that not only had her nightly visits to town for many moons not been connected with her supposed surreptitious wicked visits to the Night Clubs

which were springing up like fungi throughout London, but that she had been playing as first violin in one of those clubs with the Amoureuse Orchestra, her portrait appearing in *Picture Post*, which of course set the seal upon her fame, and so although a professional, had franked her even on to the pure and chaste amateur platform of the Eventide Parish Hall. Honour indeed!

The Pomp. girl was unhappily beautiful. A silent watchful sort of girl about whom hung the aroma of wickedness. She had beautiful hands and feet and legs and was beautifully clothed—far more modestly indeed than Miss Gadfly, in a close-fitting China dress of some silky shining black stuff, slippery as sin. And there was not a younger male in that audience, including Clarence Lovem who sat there, his mouth on one side and a little slavering, who would not have chosen the naughty Miss Pompadour for his wife rather than any paragon of perfection of them all. Which, indeed, attempting soon after, Clarence was to get one of the surprises of his young life when, as he said to his pa, "she turned him down flat".

Of course you never knew what might break into or out of war concerts in wartime, especially as you had to take so much on trust, and as there was so little time for auditions. But what now broke out, or in, as you like, "was a bit too thick", in the words of the Honourable Clarence, or in those of his father, "Well—er . . . a fellah never knew—and in these days when everything was going to demnition wowsers what was a fellah to expect and—er—that is to say—er—ahem. . . ."

The Concert Committee had made sickly attempt at what they called "balancing" the modern and the old-fashioned in their programme, which, sold at sixpence, seemed to be more than worth the money, having upon it forget-me-nots and peregrinating pussy-cats for an audience still in the state of the frolicsome Eve immediately before the Fall. Across the top of that programme stood the gentle motto: "*To discourse sweet Musick.*"

So had they permitted Miss Pompadour and Mr. Nicodemus. And with them the two sweet young things out of Chelsea now about to waltz on to our stage, the one dressed in a sailor suit with bare legs, sailor collar and dog-whistle on white cord and child's sand-shoes, and the other in shockingly abbreviated muslin skirts, an enormous blue bow tied around waist, the bare legs of the period, and a most winning expression of babyish frolic. This of course was "modern".

I am sorry to record that these two of the very latest young things out of wartime and representing the last thing in the *joie-de-vivre* Chelsea, had been invited by the Naughty Miss Pompadour, who assured the Committee in her quiet convincing way that "nothing improper would be displayed or that could shock even the most sensitive". But whether she stated this with diabolic intent or in all good faith cannot be said. The reader must judge for himself or herself.

Miss Margery Daw, of the Devonshire Daws, and Mr. Jubilant, of the Worcestershire Jubilants and full of the sauce for which that county is renowned, were better known to their familiars as "Marge" and "Jube", or, as they were called in the more solemn moment, Margarine and Ju-Jube.

These two delightful dears had insisted upon having upon the stage a

"property" wicket gate on a swivel, which stood there naked to the expectant audience, who heard "off" certain strange noises presaging approach.

Appearing suddenly from the side, and carrying their little pails and wooden spades, they are seen to be of those who fear nothing, believe nothing, and say everything. And as they spun round and round with the gate which they pretended to be trying to open, they were finally deposited upon the stage showing more than even nature ever intended and to the extreme indignation of what may be called the "red flannels" and "wool stockings" or fuzzy-wuzzies.

Their opening was unfortunate, it being nothing more or less than, "Hello, people! People, hello!" to be followed by a general invitation to "come and have a tiddley". After which, hand in hand, and staring at an already inebriated audience, they informed them that they had already had a couple of Manhattan Corpse Revivers, half a dozen Pink-Eyes, two Army Mules (with a kick in either hindleg), and a Cock Robin, Marge informing her auditors that "Moderashun was her middle name". "And your last name's 'Damnashun'," being Ju-Jube's retort, which is a fair example of the wit of these dear young things.

Then, hand in hand, they recited:

> "We don't care if it snows,
> We don't care if it blows,
> For where we go there's always trouble brewin'—
> So let us have another
> You've said it, sister, brother,
> And have a drop of dear old Mother's Ruin."

Here, breaking into what they called "The Hokey-Pokey Hotstep", they did succeed in bringing their fascinated spectators out of their trance, the "Hotstep" having some remarkably complicated evolutions and revolutions, reminiscent of the Dance of the Apes in Ashthar's comedy, and in the opinion of the Committee indicating the depravity of this Age of Licence. This being followed by the "Wiggle-Waggle", which so astonished the Committee that no hindrance was offered even to the detested and feared Mr. Jark when, solemnly rising upon his hindlegs, he called upon his God to strike the unbelievers down and with them this Dance of Belial.

By this time the Bourbon Lane lot, always low in taste, had quite got out of hand and, after howling with laughter at the antics of Marge and Jube, now established as popular favourites, had themselves begun to break into the "Wiggle-Waggle" with their feet and then with their bodies as they swayed in their seats, for so facilely does the Mass return to type.

Nor does one think they would have been turned from a general orgy of Wiggle-Waggle had it not providentially happened that Marge, like her Ju-Jube, drunk with success and other things, had in striking a match to ignite the dissipated cigarette which she had just inserted in Ju-Jube's expectant mouth, managed to light the whole box and with it her flimsier undergarments. Feeling the flames upon the tenderer portions of her anatomy, and quite losing herself, the unhappy young Chelseaite had sprung down amongst the audience carrying dismay and fire wherever she ran, until she

had managed to do what even Mr. Adolf Hitler's bombs had been unable to accomplish—set fire to a good portion of the locale.

The rest of the chronicles of that fated evening, with the Eventide Fire Brigade racing up at the double and the fighting of the flames, may not be here set down, for are they not writ in the record of Paradise Row in War Time? and God Save the King! and Eventide . . . "and a good time was had by all", which, in the notable terseness of Mrs. Mallory, I think sums up the story.

XVII

THEOPHILUS

We are about to do something to which I, at least, as the Recorder, am reluctant. That is to lift the veil on the *purdah* of the Paradise mind and to pass from the external world of the Paradiser to the world internal—and, also, so often, infernal. Also, I am not at all sure as to what the outcome may be of this search into the emotional sources of being of the man and woman whom we are now about to investigate.

It was a month or two after the Concert and the famous Council of War in which, although she scarcely opened her lips, the Woman we are now to see, after a little seemed quietly to dominate, much as our now old friend Alexander Honeypot dominated it actively.

She had not pushed herself forward, had Ella Cattermole. As I said, she had scarcely spoken. Nevertheless, as the nomination of the sub-committees of action went on, it was more and more "What does Mrs. Cattermole think?" and "Would Mrs. Cattermole take an *ex-officio* position as temporary supervisor of the Finance or Fire-Fighting or other Committees?" or whatever it might be.

. . . . . .

It was this still young woman who this nasty bleak December day, lounged luxuriously in her matutinal bed, as she watched Theophilus making the fire in the old-fashioned grates to which Paradise Row clung as to its god. For, as it would say: "They talk about new-fangled American inventions for running the home—but give me, if you don't mind, a good old English slavey and plenty of elbow grease—and the Yankees can keep their patent kitchens to themselves!" The world might change under the stresses of war. Not Paradise Row, which stood unchangeable and embattled against the slingstones of war as of time. Even in that "Decline and Fall" of an epoch, which this poor chronicler is attempting, however feebly, to paint, the Row stood four-square to the evolution which it invariably called "revolution".

But we are leaving our beautiful Mrs. Cattermole, as she, filmy-laced arms beneath tousle of dark hair, watches her butler, or whatever he was,

trying with a shortage of paper and stick to do what none, save the ubiquitous Boy Scout, had ever done—that is the impossible.

The old man crouched there with bent head as though he were serving the stove. But it was perhaps the woman in the bed he was serving.

"You're a pretty fire-raiser," the woman in the filmy pyjamas was saying. "You never do anything properly—queer when you spent a lifetime in the Cattermole service. Do you know, Theophilus, if you don't do better, I shall have to get another servant."

The old man went on with his work without reply. A bent and broken old man, if truth be told.

"And something else, Theophilus. You know what I know about the burglary of the Cattermole silver when you were butler at 'Saulsbury'. An 'inside' job is what I believe the professional calls it?"

There was no reply except for the old head to come round a little from the outside room to look for an instant at the woman in the bed.

"Isn't it? Why don't you answer me? *Isn't* it?

"I believe it's worth six or seven years, Theophilus. Sometimes I think I'll go to the Yard and tell them. I believe there is still that thousand pound reward for finding the stuff. What did you do with it, dear Theophilus? Now, what *did* you do with it?"

The woman in the bed was enjoying herself, as she had perhaps enjoyed herself for many other mornings, and would enjoy herself for many more. But the man at the fire did not answer.

"If you don't tell me, so sure as God is my maker, I will go to the Yard after I get up and dress myself. It seems to me time that you were put behind bars for all the sly wickedness you have done in your wasted wastrel life, Theophilus Tombs."

Only then did the grey head slew round:

"Don't do that, Ella! For God's sake don't do that! I couldn't bear it. I would kill myself."

"That is what I was hoping," smiled the woman in the bed. "Only, as it happens, I don't mean you to get off so lightly. For you, I want agony long drawn-out, as Shakespeare or somebody says."

The old man came slowly to his feet and, turning towards the woman in the other room said in low tones:

"You know it was for you I did that. Everything I have done since you came into the world out of the womb of your mother has been for you. I loved your mother and I love you—and . . ."—he said it in unimpassioned tone as though it scarcely concerned either of them—". . . and the one thing you can't take from me is my love for you. There always was something in the Cattermole blood that seized all about it to it. You have that blood. Your mother had that blood. I am like a rat caught in a trap—I can't free myself. I do not want to free myself."

There sat on this old man a queer dignity as he spoke.

Mrs. Cattermole laughed.

"It is only through that, what you call 'love', that I shall be able to wring the last agony out of that wicked old heart of yours. So may you continue to love me. You broke my mother's heart and you nearly broke mine. Now

I'm going to break yours . . . if you have a heart and not, as the Russian poet I was reading only last night called . . . *'a thing of calculation, of forced draught, that feels to order and to order ices—a thing that pities but when Satan laughed, a thing of stratagems and dark devices'*. How, by the way, I wish I could read him in the original, but my Russian studies make scant progress. And, by the way, Theophilus, if you go on refusing to answer my simple questions, I may have to take the whip to you as I did once before."

The man stood there, looking intently at the woman. It would have been the clever psychologist who could unravel that rede and know what lay behind.

Perhaps, as our story unfolds, we shall find the key, and with it much that at present must remain undecipherable.

XVIII

THE MONSTER

THE sub-Councils of War, from the "Prevention of Waste" to the "Prevention of Fire", and from the "Council of Finance" to the "Life-Saving Council", went the way of all such stratagems and devices. That is to say, as Mick Malone averred, they "talked a hell of a lot, and did a hell of a little". They quarrelled and made up. They broke up into vulgar fractions and at times reached the lowest common denominators of personalities, and yet, in the British way, they did in some miraculous manner manage to accomplish the impossible, by bringing order out of disorder and form out of chaos. And the title "sub-Councils of War" they insisted upon using, as claiming equality with the chief Eventide Council of War and, perhaps, with the War Office and all that sort of thing.

"Be British!" Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam kept on saying. And they *were* "British".

Of course all these devices of war did not go their several ways without some setbacks. "That, no reasonable man or woman could expect, but by Jingo! we're going to show Hitler where he gets off!" (Lady Lackplace *loquitur*, in one of her more blasphemously impassioned moments.)

Our Mrs. Mallory proved, in her Sussex way, a tower of strength when it came to soup-kitchen management. Mrs. Kish Chicks proved a ditto when it came to anything at all, for she was always equal to the occasion—and that occasion was always coming. But the power behind the throne of the Eventide mind was the woman the Paradise Row end of Eventide had always regarded as "useless flummery"—that is Ella Cattermole.

Mrs. Cattermole never seemed to say much, or, even, personally to to do anything. Nevertheless, it was increasingly to her that the Lackplaces and the Bass-Marjoriams, the Windermeres and the Cocklepills turned when they really wanted anything done and especially when they didn't. Almost everybody so turned, and especially the one and only Alexander

Honeypot who had made fast partnership with Ella, and always excepting the Pompadours who, led by their indomitable ma and her whip, kow-towed to nobody, and Miss Gadfly, who, an anarchist without knowing it, was beyond all known law.

It was near the first Christmas of war that the last-named discovered her mare's nest. Even Miss Gadfly, who was a fertile discoverer or inventor of such apocryphal nurseries, surpassed herself on this occasion, to the consternation and then to the indignation of a village that was so full of mares and even, if Lady Lackplace were to be believed, of "bitches", that any such discoveries of lower orders of life might have been imagined to be taken in the Eventide stride and no more bones about it.

Miss Gadfly, as chairwoman, or in the Mallory English, "charwoman" of the Council of Fortifications, had gone on with her excavation experiments *con amore*. Twice, like the Wicked Man, had Miss Gadfly digged a pit into which she had herself fallen, and twice had she been extricated by the "Council of Rescue"—for such Councils grew like mushrooms in the night and disappeared like "the early cloud and morning dew" of which the Reverend Robin Hallowes was always spouting, it being his solitary flight of clerical imagination and that not quite original.

But in her third attempt at immolation, one made across the road in the little patches of garden attached to each of the tall solemn Queen Anne houses, and when she had reached a depth of some six feet, heaping the excavated rubble at the side, her spade struck something hard and horny. Something with spikes on, which she described to the local authorities as "hedgehoggy" and which she said she felt sure was a revival of the horned sea-mines which in the previous war had at times strewn the coast after they had broken loose from their moorings. Why they should have been washed up in Paradise Row, she did not say, but trifles of that kind had no power to disturb the mind of the Gadfly.

"Only the blessing of Heaven and my special Guardian Angel, Anastasia —*Saint* Anastasia—to whom, gentlemen, by the way, I have often spoken personally I do assure you—only this saved my precious life. Had my spade struck one of the horns, I was a dead woman and the whole of Paradise Row blown to the skies, but by the grace of that Heaven, I had at that instant in my hand the little coal-shovel I use for the fire instead of my digging spade which is my usual agricultural implement when excavating. The blow was light, the nipple"—Miss Gadfly blushed a little—"did not explode, and that is why I am here to tell you about it instead of, at this moment, growing my flowers in the Elysian fields." Miss Gadfly could be quite flowery at times when emotionally exacerbated.

These were war's early days and there were no experts or demolition squads upon whom to call to take away the unexploded "mine", or "land-mines" as they were later to be known. So the wary Eventidian Council, summoning all its resources, which were of no mean order, gallantly determined upon its removal. This task was entrusted to a Mr. Artichoke, a gentleman in the building trade who was said by base opponents to be not only past-Master of a Lodge of Freemasons ("Loving-Faith and Hearts of Gold"), but alas a past-Master of bribery and corruption. Mr. Artichoke

accepted, at a price, and, as he neatly put it, "determined to chance his arm". However, when he took a look at the job from a new angle, which is to say the angle of his precious life and fortune, he gracefully retired, saying he would win his George Medal in another way, "and why not let Mr. Honeypot, who was a V.C., have a shot at it?"

Most fortunately, it appeared that the indefatigable Mr. Honeypot, in his younger days, had been apprenticed to a firm of "demolitionists", whatever that might be. It seemed, however, that its chief concern was to demolish and remove aged houses, whether by elbow grease, dynamite or "act of God", and in some way or other this was supposed to be prime training for bomb removal. The actual final words of command were, however, entrusted (after a personal battle of two hours in Committee) to Mr. Galanty, as Chief of "The Doors and Windows".

The sapping and mining of the garden patch opposite Number Four, Miss Gadfly's abode, in its careful approach would have done credit to any corps of engineers of the British Army—those "Sappers" to whom the British Public one day were to owe so much and not only in bomb demolition.

After having removed by hard sweat and spadework some two tons or so of earth, then digging down in an oblique direction to a distance of about six feet under the bomb, it was felt that the moment had come to get to grips with the embedded monster. For this purpose the sub-Council for Explosives insisted that every door and window in the Row should be opened and kept open and even recommended safe retirement to a distance of not less than half a mile from the scene of the projected demolition or explosion or whatever else it might turn out to be. For nobody, not even the Honeypot, knew what would happen when they came to grapple with the monster's horns. Strange were the effects of the *ukase*.

Miss Gadfly herself went indoors and made her will. Mr. Bass-Marjoriam, for the first time for twenty years and after repeated applications to his favourite brandy, made tentative "offers" to kiss a glassy Bedelia good-bye. Aase Leicester just refused to be moved with her couch—and that was that. There was also a freshet of tea-parties whilst the local Council's Fire Brigade brought up the grappling-irons and ropes and harnessed them to the fire-engine at as far a distance as possible. Mr. Jark was also very active, pitching his platform almost over the bomb site and calling in the name of the Lord, who he kept on saying, was essentially "a God of Battles", upon the foredamned denizens of the Row to turn from their sins before the bomb went off and blew them all to hell.

It was only after it was all over and the worst had happened that Paradise Row remembered that all it had to do was quickly to remove itself a mile or two from Eventide until the proceedings had terminated. There was a fatal fascination about that monster, and the regulation "half-mile" was apt to become one hundred yards, or even less.

The crew of the fire-brigade had turned out in brassy helmets that shamed the sun, and, as men committed to a vasty nasty enterprise, had kissed their spouses and children farewell ere setting out to do their duty like men and Britons. The ropes were attached, steam had been "got up" in the slightly crazy "kettle" of the ancient engine, and as it was always a matter of specu-

lation as to whether the kettle would just hiss or bust when fire was applied to the water in the boiler, this naturally added to the pleasing possibilities of the occasion.

The chief of the "Doors and Windows", Buck Galanty himself, now took up position on the pillar of Miss Gadfly's Number Four, his malacca at the ready, and from that position like some second Wellington, dropped the "fateful wand", as the local rag recorded later, with an "Up Guards and at 'em!" look. The fire captain dropped *his* hand, and the driver his. There was an almighty scrunch and crash as the engine went into gear or something, the "Old Girl", as she was affectionately known, sprang forward like an unleashed greyhound, there came a dreadful *twang* as the ropes tautened and . . . the fire-engine remained exactly where it was, and the Monster also where *it* was.

The onlookers took their hands from their ears or, in the case of Miss Gadfly, the cotton wool with which she had hoped to deaden the sound "in case anything went wrong", and all the proceedings had to begin all over again, after the "kettle" had been stoked to the limit.

Once more "General" Galanty dropped his wand, the "Old Girl" crashed into gear, the ropes tautened, and then, with a "sickly sucking sound", to antedate the report in the *Eventide Bugle*, out came the Monster like a plug out of a hole.

The spectators flung themselves upon their bellies, grovelling like devotees of Moloch, as per instructions of the "Doors and Windows", to escape the blast of a horned monster being dragged along the Row at umpteen miles per hour, with the horns banging on anything they could find before the brakes of the fire-engine came into uncertain action. And as the Paradisers believed that their last hour had come and doubtless went over in their minds both the things they had left undone and the things they had done, as per prayer book on Sundays . . . there came a fearful silence.

They felt themselves defrauded. No explosion. No bust-up. No nothing.

Some bright person thought of taking a look at the Monster who had refused to "go off". The Monster took a look at Mrs. Kish Chicks, who was the person with the bright idea.

A fearsome goggle-eyed monster, indeed, his stony head and stony look encircled with stony horns.

For Miss Gadfly's bomb turned out to be one of the stone monsters beloved of Paradise Row in the time of good Queen Anne—a grinning stone gargoyle, buried in the previous century and forgotten.

XIX

"POMPS" AND "CIRCS"

THE coming of the sub-councils seemed to have caused that periodical "loosing of devils into the Gadarene swine"—I quote the Vicar in a fit of the

Blues—which had always been a physiological, or was it psychological? phenomenon of Paradise Row. Sometimes it might be a battle between the Pompadours and the Lackplaces, with the very cats and dogs taking sides, the Pekes cutting the cats dead, and sometimes the tired virgins of the Row, who, failing outlet through their natural channels, would get "a fit of the Willies", this time to quote Kish Chicks, who could be terse at times.

Incidentally, there was nothing suppressed about Kish, who had a great big man all her own, and whom one may suspect, without immodesty, to be a bit of a devil in love.

No sooner had our hero, O'Brien Leicester, if he be a hero, which is doubtful, got his little lots out of one tangle than they promptly got themselves into another. As for the "Subs", as we may call the War Council Committees of Action, they were engaged in daily and even hourly battle over their rights and perquisites, and the worst of it was that the chief or chieftainess of each "Sub" demanded, and got, absolute subservience to the divine will of the head, or tutelary chief. If you didn't give that subservience, you were "for it", and you usually "got it". Incidentally, there was usually a chieftainess kicking around and looking for trouble in the matriarchate of Eventide.

In all this, Leicester found three human gyroscopes, so to speak, who helped to keep the trains from running off the line, and, as he confided to Ella Cattermole, "if the drivers at the bends, went the same way as the road, it was a coincidence". One of these was Alexander Honeypot, who with Elspeth McGluskie, reputed to be in the background as his consoler, counsellor and friend—especially consoler—admirably kept "The Boiling" together. The other two "gyros" were Ella Cattermole and Kish Chicks, who were positive darlings when it came to a pinch and no bones about it . . . for both were symmetrical and well covered.

Alexander, like all really great generals, did his work from back stage, and always did he defer to his Head—the O'Brien Leicester himself. If the latest Committee of Ways and Means couldn't quite detach its personality from the sub-Committee of Doors and Windows or from the nearly inaccessible Committee of Moral Council known to the ribald as the "Council of Pep", composed of the Elder Brethren and Elder Sisters of the Row, it was Alexander who with tact unbelievable, "arranged" the matter to the satisfaction, more or less, of all parties. If the Eventide Borough Council itself, nominally the Chief Executive of all, didn't know where to lay its hands on wire netting for preventing splinter-blast from windows, or if it were unsure as to its exact legal standing with the Councils and Committees which now swarmed like bees under its *ægis*, it was always Mr. Honeypot who, quoting from Lord Justice Alverstone or a gent of the name of Palmer and another whose monicker sounded like "Rats", settled the exact relationship in two shakes of a cat's tail, as he would lightly remark. It seemed that Mr. Honeypot, in his middle youth, had been harnessed or apprenticed or something to a solicitor in the City, "and what he didn't know about the law wasn't worth knowing".

Incidentally, it was only long afterwards that it appeared that Messrs.

Palmer and "Rats" were the authors respectively of "Palmer's Company Precedents" and of a neat little pamphlet called "The Manual of the Successful Company Promoter", and what these works had to do with the legal position of the Eventide Council this deponent sayeth not, and as nobody knew anything about it perhaps it didn't matter. And let it not be forgotten that Eventide was a *Royal* Borough under the charter of Good Queen Anne or Good Queen Victoria or something, and God Save the Queen!

The personal squabbles were never referred by Leicester to Mr. Honeypot, but to Mrs. Kish Chicks, who would drop in "for a cup of the stuff that didn't kill mother" and "josh" the giver into "seeing reason". Then, with an entirely fictitious story of her own, of the first lady's (it was invariably a lady) personal grief that anything should come between her and the second dame, she would extract from that second dame a mumbled act of contrition, which she would take back to the first lady and so the breach would be healed. For the time!

But there was one permanent breach that neither Mrs. Chicks nor Mr. Honeypot, nor even Mrs. Cattermole, could bridge. The breach between the Lackplace cats and the Pompadour chicks, to paraphrase Mrs. Chicks' own name.

For Mrs. Pompadour kept fowls.

In those last words, tragedy resides.

When it was realized that fresh eggs would soon be extinct 'neath the fires of war and that even the High and Mighties would have to do their own "slaveying" and raise their own food, nearly every Man Jack and Woman Jill of Marston set to work to erect coops and to enclose fowl-runs. And those who, like the foolish virgins, had not trimmed their wicks or their chicks, and didn't want to be bothered, promptly hated all those who did want. It was at these junctures, or, rather, divisions, that a Walt Disney film was shown in the local cinema, the picture coyly revealing itself in between the flickers, for the cinema was slightly prehistoric, and, not to beat about the bush, actually a most ingeniously devised death-trap in the event of fire. This film showed a foolish grasshopper or something, a mad fiddler of an insect, fiddling the summer away and refusing the admonitions of the insect Jarks, so that when the winter came, those Busy Bees of elves who had stored up honey and nuts through the summer as store for the icy blasted winter, had all that they wanted, whilst the wretched grasshopper had nothing, and looked like freezing to death.

Over this highly moral film, Eventide and its Paradise Row appendix, took sides, the grasshopper being held generally to refer to anybody you didn't happen to like at the moment, and the busy bees of elves being your own saintly self with a halo on. At any rate, the "Pomp", as Mrs. Pompadour was known to the ribald, was held indirectly by Lady "Lickface", to employ the Malone nomenclature now borrowed by the "Pomp", to stand for all the green and silly Grasshoppers of the world, "frightening people out of their wits, when they had any, and why couldn't old Pompey get her five virgins off her hands—and not all of them intact by any means—she that frightened the crows or the young men who so rarely made incursion into the Pompadour household with a view possibly to holy matrimony, and was

always talking about her roseate chicks, that Phtah, the Egyptian, would ather die than touch, they being like the Pomp. herself, deadly poison . . ." and so on and so in a malignant *obbligato* that, like a stage-whisper, reached the farthest confines of Eventide. Only Lady Lackplace didn't say "roseate".

To which, the Pomp, champ. at her weight, as we *are* using abbreviations, came back:

"It might be well for the careless ne'er-do-weel trying to live at a house that should be nameless, but it bore a county name" (this was asute reference to Number Three, or Devonshire House), "and she up to her silly painted eyes in debt and more like the long lanky green grasshopper in the Disney film than anyone else in Eventide . . . it might be well," said the Pomp, for she by now had lost her thread, "for such Lickfaces, and they with not five but six unmarried daughters and one of them at least, one of the 'war-widows' of the last war and she without a marriage line to show for the little bastard . . . it might be as well, she said, for such to look at home before they stuck their ill-mannered snouts abroad and if any of their damned tigers stuck their damned teeth and claws into her chicken-run again, why she, Mrs. Pompadour, would use the airgun she had purchased for the purpose of letting daylight into that devil Phtah—the cat with a name like a sneeze . . . and anyhow, she'd bet a fiver to anybody who liked to take her, that her own brood of virgins would be married before the Lickface got even one of her little lot—including the *demi-viérge*—off the shelf . . . anyhow, she was going to take a libel action against the painted powdered old devil herself, and she, the old rip, old enough to be her own grandmother", and etcetera, etcetera. All this in one breath.

For a perfect lady, it must be admitted that Mrs. Pompadour was a bit strained.

She had the pleasant little habit when she differed with anybody of sticking out her tongue derisively into that anybody's face. Also, to any female enemy, which is to say the majority of the Paradise Row females, she might at any moment unexpectedly turn her back upon that enemy as she went out of the room and fling her short skirts into the air behind her—something which she called "giving the back of her hand to the pig"! But it was not the back of the hand that Mrs. Pompadour gave, and sometimes there were sights unexpected, though it must be said that her linen was always impeccable.

There had been a Mr. Pompadour, it seemed, who long years before, unable to bear the charms of "Mrs. Pomp", had, according to Mrs. Mallory, "done a bunk or something". From that moment, "Mrs. Pomp" had devoted all her time, and then some, to getting her daughters "off". Unfortunately they refused to go off—or the young men to "come on", even though their ma was seductively sirenic to any stray young man who might wander into "The Trap", as Lady Lackplace ("Lickface" to the Pomp) invariably spoke of "The Commonweal" or Number Two of the Row. "Come on Will!" was the Lackplace interpretation of the name of the Pompadour domicile.

These young men, often of curious dimensions, mental and physical, did appear from time to time—and then disappeared into the wide. Lady Lackplace would say that the ma-in-law frightened them away. This, of course, was mere slander.

However that may be, what was true was that although the Pompadour girls made their appearance both in public and private with every individual hair in place, their faces made up to the very last shade from Paris or Vienna, and although their figures were marvellous, with slank hips and virginal busts and every appurtenance correctly in place, the young men wouldn't bite. Let the ma make her curries (she was a dab at curries) never so rich, or produce at the psychological moment the tantalus of whiskey or the bottle of beer which has so often wreaked the very devil with incautious young men matrimonially uninclined, the young men would *not* bite. Save one young devil who had bet his pals that he'd get into "The Trap" and get out again, and with the cheese too, and who was supposed to have taken a nibble at the "Naughty Girl", as the youngest Miss Pompadour was known to the Row. But as it was suspected by the "old cats" that she had been nibbled before, this was not so juicy a story as it might have been.

And perhaps the youngest Miss Pompadour liked being "nibbled", especially under the exacerbations and emotions of war and warriors. She was even reputed to have said in a deliberately unguarded moment that that was what warriors were for.

It is sad to reflect that the eldest Miss Pomp was already well on the way to thirty—the fatal age, and that if she didn't "get off" pretty quick, she'd be likely to be left on the shelf, which was the Old Cats' way of expressing themselves. But the war gave the prospective ma-in-law her chance.

It being a case of do or die, "General" Pompadour, as she was sometimes known, determined upon desperate measures. So she put one of the five into the A.T.S., one into the "D.V.C.", or the "if God be willing Corpse" as interpreted by Lady Lackplace, one into the latest transport service for women, her "number 3" virgin having acquired quite a local reputation for crashing into gear with disastrous results to the engine or something, and one into the Wrens (her mother thought the three-cornered hat would suit her type of face if she ever became an officer). Which according to the youngest Miss Pompadour in an elusive allusiveness peculiarly her own, might happen when the Devil learned to cock his tail outside his breeches.

How four of the five Misses Pompadour ever found time to serve their country was a mystery and a miracle. For no uniforms ever fitted as theirs. No faces were ever made up as theirs. No gloves or belts fitted so tightly as theirs. And as it must on the slightest computation have taken them at least three hours a morning to reach such heights, the Paradise back-chatters couldn't understand how they ever got to their duties. The belts alone were marvels and clung to the hopefully virginal waists closer than any Cluny girdle, the mother telling the world that she would never dream of permitting any of her daughters to pass the twenty-four inch mark—meaning doubtless unless they got married of course and with marriage got children—at the moment a most unlikely event.

The second eldest in some way of her own managed "to get her hooks" into Lord Lovem's Clarence, to the intense curiosity of the Paradisers, who wanted to see if Clarence, like his predecessors, would wriggle off the hook. For a time, Clarence, who suffered from the slight disability of not being able to express himself, he having a cleft palate, was seen to enter the portals of

the "Common Weal", or, as Buck Galanty had it, for he had a rare turn of wit, "for weal or woe", and then, somehow, he didn't enter them and as the Good Book says, "was not". Buck said that Lovem had had "a near go".

After such disappointments, the Misses Pompadour would show themselves, so to speak, draped in widows' weeds in black faces and black dresses, but after a little would perk up, get the dye-bottle to work with the "Egyptian Rose Flush" or the "Turkish Delight", which they affected, and would turn out quite new beings, with new wiles and entirely new faces. For the eldest girl, poor darling, who had started in life as a "mouse-blonde", had passed through stages of "full blonde", and, finally, platinum blonde, which the mother was sure would "do the trick". But the trick was not done. She was now reaching the last stage of the permed or permanent blonde and would possibly end up as the blonde impermanent of any man who cared to take her.

The third girl, who had been a blonde, became a brunette and then went back atavistically to blonde, finally in a fit of despair jumping to flaring red. But it was left to the "Naughty One", who had the splendid red hair that God had given her, to declare to her shocked ma when she had suggested that she might like to "tone down the Titian", that her dear ma could take her dyes and go to hell! For, as I said, she was a Naughty Girl, although, despite the admonitions and warning of the good people of Paradise, she got more fun out of life than all the rest of the boiling. Of course, as she herself declared, as she was in any case bound for hell, she might as well "have a hell of a time before she had to take her medicine". And the very worst of it all was that this Naughty Girl was perhaps the only inhabitant at Number Two who really had a heart and who really justified the name of the house in which she lived. For she, most regrettably, was always doing little acts of kindness to ill-considered denizens of the Lane, giving them flowers which she herself grew, and, generally, as a wicked woman doing what she had no right to do. For so do the Wicked invade the preserves of the Pure.

When the Pomps went on parade, it was a sight for the Row. For, "stritted and strutted" to the last hair, with shining faces and shining hair and shining shoes, but not shining noses, and headed by their indomitable ma, whiplash, Pekes and all, they would sally forth to do their shopping or "to go to town", or as Lady Lackplace said, "seeking any male they might devour with or without sauce". That is to say, four of 'em, for the Naughty Girl steadfastly refused to "shine" or, indeed, to go anywhere with her blessed family—only she didn't say "blessed".

And often, by strange coincidence, at the very moment when the regiment of Pomps headed by the "General", would make their début at Number Two out of Number Three would pour in strength the full contingent of the Lackplaces, all of them "done up to the nines". But what a poor sight they made when compared with the glassy brilliance of the "Number Two's!" For the Lackplace gang" (I quote their next-door neighbour), being a bit Irish, had no ideas of dress, most of them looking as though "they had been dragged through a rag-bag and trusted to a benign Providence that some of the rags would stick to them in transit" (again it is Mrs. Pomp speaking).

Lady Lackplace was invariably armoured in rows of glassy beads, with paste diamonds stuck on the most inconvenient places, "and the lord only knew why she didn't put a ring through her nose while she was at it" (Mrs. Pomp *loq.*). She wore beneath something like a high Turkish turban, an imperfectly dyed wig, which passed through three stages: the brilliant red; the rusty red; and the grey and brown.

Strapped to the last hair herself, the lofty high-shouldered figure of the Lackplace carried upon it as a perambulating clothes-hanger a most exciting selection of colour and material. Honoria, who took after her mother and who, nearly invariably, showed a "new potato" in her heels, which "sloshed up and down" in her irregular shoes, a size too large, would appear on a day of high summer in Harris Tweeds of a peculiarly vile smell and consistency, and just before Christmas, in a white "waist", or blouse more suitable to the tropics. Also, her stockings had a quaint habit of falling over her shoes. Otherwise, she was perfect. Also, for mystical reasons, she always said her prayers *in puris naturalibus*.

To be quite confidential with my gentle friend the reader, the fact was that the Lackplaces were miserably poor, and, as the haggard Mr. Buzzard, the grocer, would confide, "kept up appearances in a world of falling dividends behind a shop-window where everything was stuck in the window and with nothing behind the shop". Also, Mr. Buzzard alleged that he positively knew that the Lackplaces were starving, and he himself "was having a devil of a time in getting in his little bills". Being a man of melancholic confidences and disposition, he would also add, of course on the strictest Q.T., that "her ladyship stayed in bed with Honoria on the winter days to save the gas and the coal". And in all this, remember it is of the utmost import that we should not confuse Mr. Blizzard with Miss Buzzard, a post-office confusion of which had led to the opening of Miss Buzzard's private post by Mrs. Blizzard and mutual recriminations of a perfectly hideous nature.

It seemed that there was not likely to be any cure for all this disability of nobility, for her ladyship "wouldn't let any daughter of hers soil her hands with menial work, and Mr. Right would turn up one day". She was in addition of unalterable conviction that the Peruvian Silver Mines in which the Late Lamented had put his eggs, would also one day "turn up trumps—and then be damned to the croakers!"

But the facts were against her. For the six Misses Lackplace, especially Honoria, grew steadily older. Prices went up and dividends went down. The "Mr. Rights" either didn't turn up or, when they appeared at increasingly straggling interval, proved to be fortune-hunting Mr. Wrongs. And, generally, it didn't look too good with the House of Lackplace at Devonshire House, Paradise Row, Eventide, in the county of Berkshire.

And if the Recorder may be permitted one more horrible confidence, the females of the Lackplace had *not* inherited their august mother's good looks, for she had been a "good-looker" in her day. Truth to say, "they rather ran to tops and bottoms", to quote the coarse Mr. Galanty in his cups at "The Robe of Glory", and even though, under the ministrations of their ma they would from time to time cultivate the arts of fascination by waggling at the hips or high-heeling on "Grecian bends" as though they were paralysed from

the waist down, or by a subtle cord-drawing of the dress beneath the aforesaid "bottoms" (as copied from the Pomps, who, unlike their plagiarists, knew exactly "where to draw the line")—it was all one. The young men, despite the mama's title, like those other Pompadourish young men, would not "bite".

For, as the Reverend Robin would moralize, "in vain is the snare set in the sight of any bird".

And often it might be that Honoria thanked her God on the quiet for that wild and reckless flinging over the traces of her youth and the memory, at least, of an hour of glorious life.

All of which is most profoundly immoral, and natural.

XX

"WITCHES' POT"

PARADISE Row might seem to the casual entrant just "a row of Paradise". But "row" can be pronounced in two ways and can mean two different things. Not to be too finicking about it, one might even say that the other meaning attaching to the letters "r-o-w" was going on night and day beneath the paradisaical surface of things, and even the scoffer might indicate that Paradise Row was not only paradisaical but pharisaical. So much depends upon the point of view, does it not?

At this time of our minificent story of an English community, there was, indeed, quite a hellish little brew bubbling beneath the smoother surfaces of a social life united in face of Mr. Hitler, who himself was a great smoother out, not to say "steam-roller". Some of this we have indicated in our last chapter. Indeed, Eventide, like every English village, had its own Hitlers and Hitleresses.

Whatever might or might not be happening at Number Five, where Ella Cattermole resided with her butler Theophilus, if he were her butler, it at least "happened". But what was that "it"?

Peculiar sounds had been heard coming from the top flat in which these two ill-assorted persons lived. There had been "noises off" and "on". And Theophilus had a habit of appearing from time to time with a black eye or a swollen nose or what-not, it now being rumoured by "the old cats" of the Row that "he was addicted". Yet nobody had ever seen Theophilus drunk, or even present at the bar of "The Robe of Glory", that fount of delight and cackle—which added to the tantilization and mystery of it all, and "which only showed you". But what it "showed", the aforesaid old cats would never mew.

The Row was now sadly declining in prestige and privacy 'neath the onslaughts of the democracy of war. One or two of the high narrow houses

were being let out into flats, and the people on the floor below the top flat of Number Five averred that once, in the middle of the night, they had heard the sound of beating and even the swish of a stick or whip—although this last may have been due to the at times torrid imagination of an English village—incidentally about its only imagination—a sort of inflammation. What did, however, appear to be fact was that Theophilus had been seen, immediately after, to run out of the flat above in a long old-fashioned nightshirt, which, as he passed out into the night like a ghost fleeing in hell, showed itself to be cut into ribbons. But, as the fiendish Doctor Crab opined, that might have been an excessive effort at ventilation. However, nobody took "Jack the Ripper", as we know the doctor was called, too seriously—for he also had an inflamed imagination.

But wherever Ella Cattermole went, there went Theophilus, who trailed her like a dog, his grey head bent a little between the shoulders and his little grey eyes fixed imploringly upon his mistress. And I think for the present, we shall have to leave it there, which is more, one thinks, than Mrs. Cattermole, or fate, is going to do.

Part of the "witches' brew" bubbling beneath still waters, was possibly the love-affair, if it were a "love-affair", of Elspeth McGluskie and Alexander Honeypot. Here, again, it appeared as if the all-victorious Alexander, who had by now got his hands well into the affairs of those about him, like Theophilus with Mrs. Cattermole, might have to take a subordinate position to the female portion of the alliance or friendship, or whatever you liked to call it.

Rarely seen in public together, Elspeth seemed to be the power behind the throne or, rather, that "Woman behind the Man", of whom we so often hear but whom we so seldom see.

Mr. Honeypot, who had now got Eventide nicely organized, or, if you prefer to use the Ripperish expression of the dark doctor, "under his knife", was now foreshadowing the most tremendous undertakings in the not too distant future. There was to be a new cinema on up-to-date lines and a luxus garage and teashop attached, and in one way or other it seemed that Alexander had a sort of malign genius for getting his fangs into any bit of likely, or unlikely, property that might be going. Of Lord Lovem, whom he now frequented like his own shadow, it might be murmured, as Elspeth so often paraphrased, that "Moab was his washpot and over the Lord Lovem had he cast out his shoe".

Indeed the power of the little adipose man was uncanny. He had only to beckon and like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the others followed. What was more, they not only opened their hearts to him but something much more important—their pocket-books; and what Mr. Honeypot had down on the secret investors' list he kept in his own now gargantuan pocket-book which stuffed out his breast pocket, might or might not be every potential bank balance in Eventide. Always excepting the unapproachable Mrs. Masseyton, whom I hope you have not forgotten, the formidable female of three hundred pounds who lurked within the walls of her "Palace", and loomed outside it.

For to get at Mrs. Masseyton's millions, even Mr. Honeypot "would have had to rise with the lark in the summer morning and even before it, and even

thin he wouldn't be able to get the outside edge of a sniff at the Old Wan's bank balance and she rotten wid the goold." (This is Mr. Malone, as the sapient reader will at once see.)

And the queer thing about the little man was that although he invariably refused himself to go on any Committee, he was as invariably elected to *ex officio* offices on such Committees. If they wanted to know where to get a stirrup-pump or an eye-shield, it was always to Mr. Honeypot they went. And if they wished to know exactly how they stood under the English law in relation to fences, offences, or defences, again it was: "Ask Mr. Honeypot about it, he's *sure* to know." He was also the highest authority on the finance, the interpretation of which his Chief, O'Brien Leicester, left to him, and before long he was to be practically the only Eventidian (if Eventidian he were, for only a little time before Eventide had never seen or heard of him) who really knew how that centre of English life stood financially.

How far his attacks in the domain of money had succeeded upon the finances of Eventide were obvious. Not so his attacks in the domain of love upon the affections and, as it was said, again by "the old cats", the person of Miss McGluskie, who, however, as the Malone insisted, "was a two-handed fighter and able to take care of herself in the clinches". Nobody could say how far his conquests in the shadowy domain of love and passion had progressed. For Alexander never spoke about it, but left it to the "inflammation" to which we have already alluded. Once, indeed, Mr. Honeypot had confided to his doctor, who was not Jack the Ripper, to whom he had gone for treatment for a broken tooth and nearly broken jaw, that Miss McGluskie had, in her delirium of love or something, all at once horrified him, Mr. Honeypot, by turning her back on him, bending herself in two like a hairpin, and glaring at him backwards through her legs, the effect of the eyes of ink staring at him out of a white face, he insisted, being simply appalling.

It was now said that Miss McGluskie was fierce in her moments, and that the shocking eyes with which Mr. Honeypot from time to time rivalled those of Mrs. Cattermole's butler, including going one better however with tooth-marks in the neck, were due to "the release of the Shorter Catechism", as we might put it in the extreme delicacy which characterizes these pages. But Mr. Honeypot, being a gent of Mormonistic tendency, might just as easily have acquired them from one of his other conquests, had it not been, perhaps, for the fact that Elspeth McGluskie brooked no rival on her honeypot preserve and that the chances were that she would probably have spifflicated her beloved if she had suspected other contemporary attachments. On this, however, we must perforce at this juncture be silent, whilst holding out to the avid reader the possibilities of unveilings and revelations as our tale progresses.

. . . . .

Then in our witches' pot, there was that exceedingly interesting evolution or *dénouement* of the "triangle" of our little friend, Snow-White and Sean Leicester and Ella Cattermole, which, although it has not hitherto done more than make its bow a long way back in our chronicle, like many another thing,

was at work—also beneath the surface of paradise and doing that work as such work is done, remorselessly.

But this, I think, deserves a chapter to itself.

XXI

THE PASSIONATE QUADRANGLE

This business of love is highly complicated, and when it concerns a highly complicated man, and a woman perhaps, in her way, just as complicated, then it is apt to become the very devil. Whether it come to that in this chronicle remains to be seen.

Put into plain language, the coming of Ella Cattermole to the village of Eventide had raised the Lord Satan. And yet nobody could say exactly how it had raised him, least of all the O'Brien Leicester, who had on his hands quite enough demons of his own, including himself, without having extra ones thrust upon him.

He hadn't "asked for it", as his young daughter would fling at him in her rare abandoned moments, for she usually let her august father alone. These two avoided each other as will two giant sharks in the smaller "swims", for they were both "queer fish". Leicester, however, knew quite a lot about Patricia, if only because she was so very like himself and as he was always fighting with himself it was natural he should also fight with her.

It had all come out of Sean's boyish passion for the tall distinguished woman, thought Leicester. You couldn't account for these things, but they *were*. And why should you account for them anyway? The boy had to burn his fingers and his heart at the candle of passion, with its still white light always burning in the dark heart of each one of us. Perhaps he was very immoral, but even if he knew that the tall dark boy was about to have "an affair", that hateful modern word on a par with "having a date", he wasn't so sure that it would have troubled him as much today as it would have done ten years ago. And after all, whether you liked it or not, men and women, boys and older women, younger women and old men, did run together in the dark night of passion to find that flame together.

A terrible thought. But maybe the professional moralists had been talking stupid nonsense all these centuries! Just think of it. Maybe we all lived, not under a God of Love, but under the Great God Taboo.

It was different with him, Leicester. He was and always had been a one-woman man. It was because of that he had held himself intact in the London maelstrom. His horses, or was it his lions? had torn him, but he had held them. That Irishwoman who wrote poetry had been right. He was "different".

But *was* he different?

He found himself thinking at odd times of the pale slender creature with that blinded look in the top flat of Number Five. He did not dream of her,

for he never dreamt of anybody with whom he was primarily concerned. He had not dreamt of Aase, his wife, a score of times in their more or less joint life together, such as it was . . . yet Aase, in her way, was the beginning, middle and end of his life. Men loved their stranger women, not their comfortable women.

He would find Sean at the piano when he dropped in just to see Mrs. Cattermole about some of those infernal Committees, or to ask her advice upon some matter of state—and in what a state was not Paradise Row! The big dark boy, his wavy dark brown hair falling into his eyes, would be either playing some of his own music on the Blüthner baby-grand or accompanying Ella, whose "dark" full contralto would hold the Row entranced. And this would usually be in the mornings, for Sean's studies at the Guildhall School of Music, where he was studying counterpoint and harmony for composition, and the piano for his own pleasure, did not prevent the boy from "running up there after breakfast". Queer, how often he, Leicester, found his boy up there in the summer mornings and in the winter eves.

He didn't quite know what to make of it all. Either Sean Leicester was deeply in love, as a grown man may be, or he was just passing through love's moon-flow, out of which he would drift sooner or later, as boys will. Yet Sean was not a "boy". He was a child of an elder growth, and it sometimes seemed to his father that he had been born full-fledged into the world, for all the books of life appeared to be open to him.

When he would appear in the door, his boy would, for the first time in their lives, seem to be troubled as though he had been caught in something wrong. Not that he was doing anything wrong, but it looked like that. And stranger still, that was how Leicester himself felt. He knew that.

As for the woman who presumably was causing all these perturbations of spirit, she was always different and even unaware. She welcomed either father or son in the same way with her queenly gentleness and courtesy. And when she would make her marvellous Mocha, she served both with the same courtesy, one almost affectionate, for she liked both father and son, and in its way it was all very beautiful. Like a calm summer evening with the storm-clouds banking up on the horizon, he would think.

Then, after a little, the tension—if tension it was—would yield little by little to the presence of the dark lady, and they three would be very happy together. It even seemed to Leicester that as time went on, the tension itself was disappearing and even once or twice they all three had arranged to meet in the upper chamber for some music and talk. And what Aase thought of all this, for he never had hidden anything from his wife, he could not say. She appeared, as always, profoundly indifferent. Never had he seen a spark of jealousy in her—but he sometimes asked himself: "Is she *really* indifferent?"

For who could know the heart of wife and woman—and in one way a wife was not a woman but a "wife?" He could not know it, even after two decades of marriage. But what was "marriage"? "Mind" alone made marriage, not living under the same roof—not even "living together" as the phrase so inadequately went.

He would often speak to Ella about Aase, but never when the boy was

present. He knew how close was Sean to his mother—and he also knew that, although in some ways Sean was closer to him, his father, it was the mother who held him in his "psychic" centres, but that in his heart his father held his affection and even his love. For Sean loved to be with his father always, or had, until Ella Cattermole's advent. But he could not resist his mother. There was something lethal about Aase, Leicester would often think. Something "drawing".

Father and son might be very near, might be one person in some ways, but always it was the mother who held the boy by filaments intangible—threads that possibly went far back into now forgotten pasts. They were "on the same vibration". Yet, was he, Leicester, and she, Aase, engaged in a life and death struggle for the soul of Sean. It sounded grandiloquent, but it was fact, and he, O'Brien Leicester, never flinched his facts.

Into this "triangle" of a woman and two men there had entered, or rather emerged, unannounced, almost imperceptible, that other triangle of Ella, Sean and himself. It was like those cabalistic circles, squares and triangles you sometimes saw on the Disney screen, emerging and being absorbed again. Magic.

And now into this new triangle there was coming another element—Snow-White herself. What could he say or think about little Snow-White whom he loved more even than he loved Patricia, who was very difficult to love?

From the day he had taken her into and under the wing of Queen Elizabeth Close, Snow-White, this daughter and only child of his old friend, who had bequeathed her to him, had clung to him, Leicester. She would not be separated from him, and if he did not know that she, from the first time she laid her eyes upon Sean, had loved the boy, he would have imagined that, although a child and he a grown man, she was in love with him. As in a way she was, and as she herself would say: "I love you, O'Brien" (she always called him O'Brien), "and there are moments when Snow-White is in love with you. For 'loving' and 'being in love' are two quite different things, and maybe it is that the former lasts and the latter doesn't!" Then she would kiss him, flinging both arms about his neck and snuggling her dark curls down to his breast. And as to how far Sean loved the little maid, who could say? They were always together, or always had been together until Ella Cattermole passed into the landscape.

But if Snow-White loved him, Leicester, and with him, Sean, she also loved Ella. From the very beginning, they had been friends and they were constantly going to town to shop and as constantly meeting in Ella's flat. But, one curious thing, Ella would never enter the doors of Queen Elizabeth Close. Sometimes he felt that she was afraid of Aase, even though she had never seen or spoken with her. But Aase did pervade the Close, presence or no presence. You could feel her there when you entered the door, and Ella must have felt that. Some people did fill their houses. Aase was one.

Nor was Snow-White jealous of the attention that Sean was increasingly paying Ella, and if she were troubled, she did not show it, for there was something pristinely innocent about the little girl, who herself seemed to love Ella more and more as the days went by. Sometimes it seemed even as if she

wished to share her Sean with the "Lovely Lady", as she called Ella. And he, Leicester, also thought that she was a lovely lady.

So there was Aase and there was Ella Cattermole. Strange how he was coming to set them in contradistinction. And there were Sean and Snow-White. And there, God help him, was he, the O'Brien Leicester.

What was coming out of this *mélange*? Or was it not rather a witches' brew?

"Lovely Lady."

XXII

GRAND PARADE

It was in the very vortex of these perennial and parochial differences that Mr. Honeypot, inspired vicariously by Miss McGluskie, suggested a Grand Parade.

You see Miss McGluskie viewed it this way, as Mr. Honeypot, after infinite vice and device, had managed to worm his way sufficiently into the icy heart of Miss McG. to obtain permission to lay his fevered headachy headpiece upon her lap in the sainted grove by the side of Father Thames, that Father who, in his time, had listened to so many stratagems and devices and who had probably said to himself: "Let the good work go on" for is not the good father himself, like Father Nile, the god of fertility? Not that either Mr. Honeypot or Miss McGluskie were of the fertile sort.

"The folks about here, Mister-r-r Honeypot" (they had not yet reached the "Alexander" stage), "are all fightin' like wild cats on the Committees and Councils, and if ye don't do something about it, and that vera quick, it is civil war we are going to have in Eventide and not a wur-r-ld war. My advice is to take what they call their minds off themselves, and establish a great parade or something, with everybody dressed up and doing something in it—just to show the wur-rld what Eventide is going to do to the Hun, whom the Lord is about to de-str-roy for ever and ever."

The "headachy piece" pondered this a little and then, after due cogitation and collaboration with the author of the idea, Alexander sallied forth to put it before his head—the O'Brien Leicester to wit. Who, also cogitating, gave his gracious adhesion to it.

The result being that on this fine spring day, there was heard in the far distance by the inhabitants of Eventide and the neighbouring villages, the beating of a big bass drum. Intermingled with it, the brassy sound of trumpet and even the shrill of fife. And I don't think that you and I can do any better than take our places in the scant ranks which lined the route of the Grand Parade, as, having marshalled itself outside the village, it now made its approach to what Miss McGluskie called "the sound of timbrel and dulcimer", she being flowery and biblical on that morn.

You and I, at the moment of meeting in these pages, now far removed

from the alarums of a war which has long since run its switchback course out of time into eternity, can see ourselves as we stand there in the main street of Eventide awaiting with those others the coming of Pomp and Circumstance. You, the reader, and I, the Chronicler, can see the people about us, attired in their poor war-best to do honour to their fellows, as they gaze anxiously the length of the street into the country beyond where it runs past the church. You see, we want to know exactly what is the power and strength that Eventide could offer to the Nazi mightiness and to the fanfares of victory which each day we hear on our wireless as the German announcer in his raucous chant tells us of new mightinesses by the German Juggernaut, as it rolls and rolled over Poland and Belgium and Holland and, one day, was to ride over Russia, until *der Fuehrer* was to discover, like Napoleon, that riding on the back of a grizzly had its inconveniences.

And I suppose as we watch the ghost-picture of a now "far and distant", that picture which Science tells us in its secluded voice is permanized for ever upon the ether and one day may be recaptured, we are really watching the story of more than an English village in face of war. We are watching the British Spirit and the British Genius as it unfolds its secret way before us, drawing its strength from unknown sources and passing to what may be its final accomplishment before it, like all heavyweight champions, "takes the count" of Time, the Referee:

A young bucko named Adolf got busy
When he went for a ride on a grizzly
Crying: "I'm sure, Mr. Bear,
That you wouldn't dare
My panties to tear—
They're my very last pair!
And I'm going dizzy . . .
and *mizzy* . . .
and *fizzy* . . .
and *sizzy* . . ."
Until Mr. Bruin
Of his panties made ruin
And got busy on Adolf's Tin Lizzie!*

For, like Mr. J. W. Dunne, we, making our own "Experiment with Time", are taking a dip forward into that same time—a time when Mr. Honeypot, who was Universal Agent for Everything, would tell the world of Eventide of what he would call "The Tightest Brightest Lightest Car on Earth"—the "TIN LIZZIE," or Ford. Also agent for the Patent Tambourine Tin Kettle with warning drum attachment, the "Honeypot Teapot," and the Poor Man's Porous Plasters Pain-Preventers, and the "Little Mary" Let-'em-have it. The whole set out and decorated with the above happy effort in very blank verse by our volatile friend, who had confidentially informed Mr. Leicester as a fellow artist that he was a regular devil at *vers libre*.

* N.B—"Tin Lizzie", as everybody knows, is the pet name for the world's best motor-car, that of Mr. Henry Ford, a treasure which can be bought at rock-bottom prices through Alexander Honeypot at the new up-to-date Honeypot garage.

D*

And here returning to the present from the future, and starting with No. 1 instead of No. 2 of a series of lightning leaflets, was one of his myrmidons, big drum and all, scattering Mr. Honeypot's pamphlets upon all and sundry so that the shining hour of Grand Parade might be improved and like the Busy Bee, no time lost. For a man of many parts, Alexander Honeypot was now telling the world in those pamphlets that the PALACE CINEMA TEA-SHOP was the place "to tea and talk, as all *really* up and up society folk knew, and roll up in your thousands!"

Tump-tump-tump!

Bang-bang-bang!

Tweetle-weetle-weetle!

Confused patchwork of colour. Confused cries. Confused shuffle of marchers, no two of them, in the time-honoured English fashion, keeping step.

Uniforms that didn't fit. Faces that didn't fit. Uniforms that didn't fit faces.

Small boys with gawky hands sticking out of foreshortened sleeves. Small boys and girls half in uniform and half out of it. White-chokered parsons, long and lean and bony, tin helmets set cock-eyed over the parsonic nose, Adam's apples working up and down in the stringy gorges 'neath emotional stresses unsuspected by watcher or wearer, for Eventide had borrowed from neighbouring parishes so as to make a braver show of cleric.

An invertebate serpent winding its uncertain way out of the circumambient. Really, Mr. Hitler, you oughtn't to have much trouble in handling this little lot!

Here they come!

Marching in front and holding impotently but indomitably a Union Jack the size of a good-sized pocket-handkerchief on the end of an extremely high bamboo, was the head and front of the offending and of the procession. Our one and only Miss Gadfly, the good eye a-swivel and the other gazing into vistas unknown, as do those of pug-dogs, Russian ballet dancers, and Jesuit priests.

Immediately behind her, as they entered the main street of Eventide, a slightly confused mob of small boys, some in forage caps set at any old angle and others with white straps across meagre chest who told the world through the medium of a crazy banner—a sheet held between two sticks, that they were the "Boys' Brigade". Behind them again, the *tump-tump-tumpers* and the *tweetle-weetle-weetlers*, the former consisting of three youths, two of them pimply to an alarming degree, who blew their damnedest upon three brass trumpets, all in different measure and in different tune. For the middle boy, sporting a "forager" obviously loaned by his pa, remained permanently under the impression that he was playing the "Revally", whilst his two companions, each with a white cotton glove on one hand, was just as certain that they were playing "Lights Out" or it might have been "The Last Post". The effect was striking, not to say blasting.

Woman occupied the place she had done throughout the ages—that is, behind the Male. For behind the boys, as a sort of tail or addendum marched a body of girls, from six to sixteen, their skirts clinging thinly to their legs, and

some of the legs were very thin indeed. But thin legs are always pathetic, and always spiritually superior to balustrades.

Behind these youthful warriors, the first of the Council Contingents, each contingent telling the world what it was either by ill-considered banner bearing its title printed and running in ink, or by other strange device.

In the van, the Council of Fortifications, the head of which as we know, being that Miss Gadfly who headed the "Whole Damn Boiling" (Mr. Galanty). As evidence of their intent and desire, two of the ferro-concrete maidens bore between them a piece of wall or trench or something, painted upon a piece of canvas much as Snout the Joiner in *Midsummer Night's Dream* bore *his* wall. Mr. Blizzard, the melancholic grocer, for some unconsidered reason, carried over his shoulder the pasteboard model of a mortar or gun on it: "What WE ARE UP AGAINST" in white characters. Supporting him, an uncertain medley of maidens, all of the Ferro-Concrete Persuasion, and with Rodean thighs and calves, who upon their virgin shoulders bore spades and shovels of striking variety and pattern. As they were all dressed in the "shorts" now beginning not so much to show as not to show themselves and with it more than themselves, and as these shorts were very very short indeed, the effect of Amazonian thews and sinews was enhanced to a degree.

Here entered the spirit of mirth—that spirit without which the English landscape would not be as it is. But why Eventide, like many other English villages and towns one will not mention, chose Italo-French instead of Elizabethan English for its exhibition of mirth, this deponent sayeth not. It being one of the mysteries of the landscape aforesaid that when the Briton attends a marriage he hurls showers of *confetti* at the presumably delirious bride and groom, and when he wants to be *really* funny, he usually adopts a masque of all the colours of the rainbow and especially of the Mediterranean rainbow.

'Neath the scroll, "MASKS, MIMES AND MUMMERS", there now appeared a quite extraordinary collection of clowns and mirthmakers, apparently of the Elizabethan period, who with bladders filled with peas, painted faces, white conical, and presumably comical, caps of felt and pantaloons, made play with the aforesaid bladders upon the "nappers" or skulls of the onlookers and one another.

Nicodemus, the hatchet-faced and saturnine barber, but imperfectly concealed by his mask of devil, carried a red-hot poker with which he proceeded to make inimical approach to the various damsels who lined the way to the utter horror of those damsels, who had the gravest doubts of his intentions. Undisheartened, he tried the effect of the gigantic scissors he carried slung behind his back and "made devious offer" at their back hair, again arousing not mirth but misery. Even the play he made with his forked caudal appendage which appeared from a convenient orifice in the seat of his long black pantaloons was quite misunderstood.

Our one and only Buck Galanty, who really should have led the "Doors and Windows" section, attired in the guise of the Poet of Avon, Shakespeare himself, tome in hand, from moment to moment let himself go in suitable quotations from *Twelfth Night* or *Hamlet* or whatever it might be, and in so doing aroused more mirth than all the professional mirthmakers together.

When one of the mirthmakers, breaking from his group, let go at some convenient skull lining the route, the only effect was a growl from the recipient and a veiled threat "to punch his bloomin' nose". In vain did the Reverend Robin Hallowes, attired as Bottom, present that portion of his anatomy for bladder-attack—the more he bent forward as General Receiver, the greater the indignation amongst some of the Elder Virgins of the district as they murmured something about "Ought to be ashamed of himself at his time of life!" and "No more Church for me—never no more!" Even the solemn long blond moustachios of his curate, the Reverend Augustus Rohan, who had also sacrificed himself on the altar of patriotism as a Norman knight in a suit of armour specially lent for the occasion by Mrs. Masseyton, could not retrieve the clerical situation, as he, considerably overweighted by his "tin", tamped along in spurs and corslet, sword carried in what he conceived to be a warlike and menacing attitude and held stiffly before him in both hands, as though he were carrying the weekly cross around the church, in the Children's Service, his visor however mercifully raised.

For fearful and wonderful are the parts that the stolid Englishman will play for the sake of patriotism . . . and other things. Undramatic himself in the mass, unpoetical, undreaming, he produces the world's greatest dramatists, poets and dreamers—and dreaming, it may be, is more important than anything else Man and his uneasy partner, Woman, can do in this earthly world.

Or, as Mr. Malone neatly put it: "The Englishman, thank God, never stands outside himself to take a look at himself, for if he did he couldn't bear what he'd see." Or, to quote our Mrs. Mallory, herself a part of the Grand Parade, to her neighbour: " 'Tis lovely to see them turning themselves inside out for sweet charity, with their insides on their outsides and their outsides on their insides and their front sides on their backsides." And doubtless the sardonic Irishman and the ecstatic Mrs. Mallory both said the same thing in different ways.

From the makers of mirth and the "Period of the Conquest" of which the Reverend Augustus Rohan, himself a descendant of the William the Conquerors, was presumed to be emblematic, we come to the prosaic "Doors and Windows", within whose serried ranks Mrs Mallory, who had been transferred from "Fortifications" because she couldn't get her "misconceptions" out of her head as being part of "Fortifications and Defence"—Mrs. Mallory, I say, carried a door and Miss Honoria Lackplace a small window. When I say "a door", do not mistake me. Even the short strong stubby figure of "our Mrs. Mallory" might not be expected to bear, say, one of the gates of Gaza, but what she did bear was a papered frame, marked "DOOR", through the paper of which she had stuck her round blowsy blonde head for comfort's sake early in the proceedings, and finding it fit, had let it remain, to the chortling joy of the onlookers, to whom she bowed from left to right like a jolly queen. And maybe she was a queen, for it is a world of deceitful appearance.

It was the unspeakable Doctor Crab, or, if you prefer, and Eventide certainly did prefer, "Jack-the-Ripper", who had got the very bright idea of "educating the people of Eventide to a sense of war and of responsibility", by loaning a hearse from the patriotic Mr. Wodes and within its glass cover to

exhibit an operating table with white-robed nurses and doctors with knives and anæsthetics and gas-masks all complete. The aptly chosen platform certainly lent colour to the tableau—that colour black as the night which had presumably permanently settled about Doctor Crab's soul unless he had, as seemed probable, already sold it to the Devil with whom he was reputed to be on all-fours.

The figures were all alive, but being "dummies", were not allowed to move. And there, before the "melancholic measly multitude" collected from Eventide and its vicinity, was the operating theatre, with *the* table, *the* patient (incidentally "Our Queen", the glassy Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam, who had offered her body as sacrifice for the occasion), and *the* semicircle of nurses, all with white cere-cloths over their mouths so that they should not infect the bystanders or the patient, and at the head, bending murderously over the recumbent Bedelia, Doctor Crab *in propriâ personâ*. He crouched there, scalpel in one hand, saw in the other, and as Buck Galanty truly said afterwards, "looked like hell".

For some occult reason, this *tableau vivant*, though goodness knows "dead" enough, was the success of the Parade. Fascinated, almost longingly the necks of the spectators turned in their sockets to watch the operating-theatre long after it had passed, drawn appropriately by two of Mr. Wodes' long-tailed prancers, heavily caparisoned, but muteless, for it was felt that what was inside the hearse did all the "muting" required, and it did, actually, dumbfound the onlookers.

"Give yer the fair creeps!" said Mrs. Ramsbottom of the Bourbon Lane, and aptly named, as she presented alternately her face and then her generous stern to the perambulating hearse as she positively squirmed in some horrid secret delight. She undoubtedly spoke for the *hoi polloi* about her.

Eventide was redeemed from all this blackness by the thing that has always been redemptive. Courage and sacrifice.

For here they come! Line on line of 'em headed by their band. The men who were ready to die for England and more than England—for the world that in it freedom might live.

What matters it that the band is playing two tunes, and two tunes only, and with maddening reiteration: the mystical "Boomps-a-Daisy" and its collaborator "Roll out the Barrel"? What matters it that part of that brassy tub-thumping band remained to the very end under the impression that both these psalms of triumph partook of the nature of one and the same tune? And what concerns anybody because in their eurhythmic efforts to amalgamate both tunes and times in a sort of paralytic lock-step, the trombonists and kettledrums did go a bit outside themselves, so bearing out the Mallorian injunction of their "outsides being their insides and wicey-wersa".

There they come the length of the village street, young and old. Young shavers who, as Elspeth McGluskie had "never known man", might be said never to have known barber. Old-young men who "had done their bit" in the last war, and who had failed to snoop into the "reg-lars", upon the plea that they "were twenty years younger than they had ever been", plus a singularly ingenious lying. And, "tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the

streets of Askalon" as Miss McGluskie might put it, septuagenarians who said "they had the wisdom of a hundred but felt like forty".

The Home Guard of England.

Local Defence Volunteers they had first been called. But as it came to the not overbright British brain that these men were heroes and guards of Albion, and of more than Albion, they were to be baptized the Home Guard.

Some of 'em had wonky looking rifles, and some of 'em had just sticks. Some of 'em proudly sported the khaki of the Home Guard, and some of 'em sported just nothing. Some of the newly joined, indeed, had the bad taste to turn out in trouser and sweater, and one incubus, who ought to have been ashamed of himself and wasn't, in a suit of plus-fours which howled to high heaven. . . .

Roll out the barrel . . .
tum-tum-tum
Boomps-a-Daisy . . .
see her hum. . . .

Grey hair held its head high. Bent shoulders stiffened. Old legs did their duty.

The Home Guard of England. God bless 'em!

But the high point of the procession at this mid-section was, without question, Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill, who sat in the "contraption" with their Jehu in his little perch at the side attired, and reluctantly attired, as a postillion of the early Georgian, even though he sat behind Toby, the cob, instead of riding upon his well-upholstered back. Perched high up there in their cabriolet on its "C" springs, "Punch and Judy" nodded brightly to each other and to the crowd, and every once in a while Mr. Punch would rumble behind in his voluminous coat-tails from which he would produce a bag of peppermints or the Turkish Delight which was one of Mrs. Punch's two weaknesses, whilst Mrs. Judy, on her part, would, from the depths of her bosom, hoist on its little silver chain a bright and shining object from which she would take a little nip every now and then.

As Mrs. Ramsbottom said afterwards to Mrs. Passover, both of the Bourbon Lane, "it was a fair sight for sore eyes to see her with her lips to the stuff that ruined Auntie Maria". And she said truly.

So passed the Grand Parade upon its splendacious if straggling way. The Boy Scouts "scouted". The Boys' Brigade "brigaded". The nurses, many of them still in their mufti, "nursed".

The twirler of the staff at the head of the "fifes and drums" made the spring sun twinkle again as with careful *abandon* he hurled that staff into the air, to catch it unerringly just as it seemed about to break against solid earth. The fifers fifed and the drummers drummed, and as they only knew the tune of "The British Grenadiers", that was the only tune they played the length of the procession. Also, as the only tune *they* knew, the nurses and the "Gas and Bombs", with the Eventide Sunday-school, sang repeatedly "Onward Christian Soldiers", "and if you didn't like it you had to lump it", as Mrs. Passover remarked to Mrs. Mallory, who, I regret to say, poisoned by the

Hollywood films, instead of replying in suitable English, did so in the unsuitable regrettable American of "*You've* said it!"

And an unparalleled success the Grand Parade would have been had it not been for those flies in the ointments of life which a merciful Providence has provided to prevent men and women from feeling too comfortable and complacent.

The first of these was the "gas-masks" section of the "Gas and Bombs", who, mercifully sheltered at least for the time from the gaze of a curious public by the Punch and Judy equipage, all at once showed themselves in all their pristine hideousness, with swine-like snouts and goggly eyes, and throat-tubes, to carry dismay into the youth of Eventide—such as it was. Seeing this awesome phalanx approach, Master Ramsbottom, who up to that moment, according to his ma, "as good as gold and better", and clinging to that part of his ma's anatomy from which she had doubtless her name, all at once got what his father called afterwards a fit of the jim-jams, and howling most dismally, hurled himself upon his belly and, chewing the earth, refused to be comforted. Which howling, spreading to a garland of little people who had gathered at that spot, and their attention being drawn to the phalanx of "googlie-wooglies", they proceeded to howl their little insides out and, like all children, being imitative, also hurled themselves upon their little tummies to howl their guts to the stars—at that moment of the day invisible.

This epidemic of fear, communicating itself in some secret way to the grown-ups, caused the gravest perturbation amongst the spectators, who, however, thank God! were restored to their dignity and their senses by the sight of the two other jarring elements in that Grand Parade of War.

This was no less than Mick Malone who, with some Guardsmen of the baser sort and all of the Irish Guards, had formed what he called "The Irish Brigade", in which at the head he carried an emerald banner, upon it: "TO HELL WITH ENGLAND!" Just behind him, darkly modest, Mr. Jark, with his little rag, but without his little lot, for he was quietly starkly alone as always—on the rag the encouraging: "HELL AWAITS YOU!"

As it transpired afterwards, and as the *Eventide Bugle* reported, that both Mr. Malone and Mr. Jark had, the one savagely, and the other with a "Christian to the lions" air, refused to part themselves from a Parade in which they obviously had no part, they had been permitted under the *force majeure* of the Irish Guardsmen and of the spiritual magnetism of our Mr. Jark, to remain attached to the tail—rather like a poisonous appendix, the usual operation for appendicitis not being possible under the circumstances. Although one is assured that if the "appendix" could have been carried into the hearse just ahead, Doctor Crab would have been only too happy to have had a shot at it.

So passed into the far away to the sound of drum and the tootle of fife and the whine of brass, the Grand Parade—a parade perhaps that was a microcosm of the macrocosm of the British People. A poor, rather pitiful thing, amateurish and ill-considered, which Adolf Hitler and the German army might be expected to go through like a knife through cheese, or rather, like a Juggernaut over the bodies of its victims, and "nice work when you can get it", Mr. Hitler. And O'Brien Leicester, looking on from the sidewalk,

wondered again what kind of a show this heterogeneous push of "Brave Poor Things" would put up against the fiery serpents of that same Hitler, who had told England that he would first put her to the ordeal of fire by incendiary bomb and then occupy Buckingham Palace by the fifteenth of August (he was quite particular about the date), and as England knew, so far had kept his appointments, which only much later were to become his disappointments.

Certainly, the Prussian Moloch would not have any difficulty with this tatterdemalion collection of "all-sorts". With such "Brave Poor Things", the banner under which they walked, and carried by "The Little Old Lady of the Curls" and the wee toddlers around her—schoolgirls and schoolboys and what nots. "New Contemptibles" to replace the "Old" of the last world war. For Moloch was going to make dead sure of it this time.

Yet in the mysterious dispensation of a Providence of which we are always talking and never understanding, it was this collection of rags and tatters, this tatterdemalion Parade of incompetence and sentiment, that, one day, was to pit itself, in Eventide and elsewhere, against the might of the German War Machine and, in the fullness of time, bring all its schemes and devices to naught.

XXIII

RETROSPECT

EVENTIDE met its first summer after the declaration of war with a certain amount of that complacency which the war had possibly come to cure.

"Here you were in July," as that hopeless optimist, Mr. Malone, pointed out from his favourite rostrum in "The Robe"—"and what in hell anyhow had that jumped-up Jumping Jack of a Hitler fellow been able to do to Ireland?" He left out England as unworthy of serious consideration.

It was, however, left to the man who was the recognized war leader of the village of Eventide to take serious though not pessimist view of the situation. The time was 8 p.m. The place the Parish Hall in which the first War Council had been held ten or eleven months before, for it was now midsummer, nineteen hundred and forty.

The place was packed, because, for some unknown reason, the man whose writings and opinions Eventide had hitherto sidestepped or laughed at in the mystery of things mundane had all at once become prophet and, in a sense, priest. King he had always been.

This may have been due to Leicester's war-novel of some years before, many of the forecasts in which had come to pass with alarming accuracy. Also, it had been chosen by the Elect as "The Book of the Month". Whatever may have been the reason, Eventidiana had gathered to listen with veneration to the pronouncements of its chosen leader whom they had made Chairman of the War Council.

The lecturer looked on not unbitterly, a certain pinch of gall mixed with

his satisfaction of a packed hall, to which even the proudest yield. For a full hall is as satisfactory as a full meal and the effects don't wear off so soon.

These were the snobbish middle-class and upper-class folk who had, like the Levite, "passed by on the other side" when he had tried to help them and their fellows by the written and spoken word. The very people who would smile patronizingly when his name was mentioned were now eating out of his hand. He was socialist and internationalist, but by Peter! he was no democrat. He knew what their favour, as their disfavour, was worth. He knew how they could, for no considered reason, slew round from "stormy" to "set fair" —just like their social inferiors, the Bourbon Laners, who crowded the hall —and then set back again.

How he despised and loved them!

He had chosen for his Lady of the Chair, Mrs. Kish Chicks, who had made a sprightly introductory speech, short and snappy, much as a perky tom-tit might have been expected to make if tom-tits had been gifted with the power of speech. Leicester respected "Kish". She was one of the unafraids. For all the rest were afraid of him and had always felt a sneaking fear of him even in the days when he was "unrecognized, unhonoured and unsung".

. . . . .

The speaker began with Mr. Neville Chamberlain's message through the microphone on that fateful September the third of the previous year, "which", he said, "I will read from my war-diary made at the time":

We are at war with Germany. When on this terrible day Neville Chamberlain broadcasts at 11.25 a.m. that "no answer had been received from Germany to Britain's warning that if she didn't at once withdraw her troops from Poland, Britain would carry out her guarantees to Poland", we knew it was all over—or, rather, beginning. The first Air-Raid warning comes as I write. A banshee howl, menacing.

He went on to say that his son and he had carried the boy's mother down into the basement of the Close where a refuge had been built, as Patricia, in her frenzy of fear and hate, had broken up everything about her with an axe which she had got into her hand. "Many felt like Pat in those days," he said.

His hearers shuddered with thankfulness still to find themselves alive, as he brought back to them the pasting of paper tapes over window and door cracks; the hanging of wet blankets over the doors against the gas which all then anticipated; and the taping of the window-panes to prevent splinters by bomb explosion. But, although he did not say it to them, he recalled "the most fateful meeting of his life", as he had described it in his diary. That great Queen's Hall war meeting where he had to face three thousand people, frightened and hoping little people, and give to them the assurance and the hope which maybe he did not possess himself. He remembered how, as always, the strength came to him from the Unseen Source which had never yet failed him, as with the memory of the starlings twittering in the Leicester Square Garden where he had gone to gather to himself power before speaking, he told his audience that "the things of the spirit spoke to us now as never

before—that it was the horrid threat of war which alone had opened our hearts to the message of the invisible".

So had the strength poured into him as though the angels of God were pouring over him from their amphoræ the balm of the world of spirit—and so had he gone out from that ordeal leaving behind him hope where there had been fear and with it a lifted vibration which had carried those poor doubting souls, fearing for their miserable bodies, on to planes of feeling which franked them from fear and from fear's twin—hate. And he knew that he had been speaking to more than mortals in that hall of memories. He had come back from his communings—communings which had flashed through him faster than thought.

And so he had told that little gathering in an English village the story they all knew of those eleven months. Of Russia and Germany in unholy alliance, after the opening of war by the invasion of Poland by Germany on that first of September. Then the Soviet-Japanese pact of non-aggression with the invasion of Eastern Poland by Russia at a time when it had looked certain that nothing could save little England from the jaws of the Nazi and the Bear. Then what he called "the dreadful lull", when nothing seemed to happen, and yet when, as in the banking-up of storm-clouds everything seemed to be about to happen and the lightnings and thunders to burst forth.

There it was—an *olla podrida* almost impossible to sort out. There were foolish cries such as "Digging for Victory" and "Business as Usual", followed by Hitler's first speech with his peace terms, impossible, devastating, which brought them to their senses out of their foolishness. Then a month or two after the Prime Minister had said: "*We are at war with Germany*," the first attack on Britain—the bombing of Grimsby, Bridlington and the Orkneys, when the German planes were first seen over the once Isle Inviolate.

Then, to hearten Britain, the picture "The Lion Has Wings"—a foretaste of those young men who were about to save England in the air, and, with her, civilization. The flashes in the night-skies, mysterious, disturbing. Everybody was praying for Finlandia's victory over the Russian Colossus. Then that evening when again in the Queen's Hall, the huddled audience cheers as he tells them the war will be over in about a year—and the foolish people cheer this foolish man—the man who was himself! Then the goggling public slews its neck upon a tiny pocket-battleship—the *Graf von Spee*.

The glass turns. A Christmas service at an occult fraternity, with presiding priestess before the shrine, where they are told by the presiding genius of another world that "the war will be damped down without any reason"—though the sandbag emplacements on the pavements outside belie. People rushing to the occult and to the darker magics. Those poor insects, caught in the web of life, with the Spider always waiting . . . and, thank God! the guardian angel.

It is as though he can hear himself speaking as he addresses the Eventidians:

"Then, my friends, that first Christmas Eve and Christmas Day when everybody is singing of angels and shepherds as the guns thunder and there comes the death-rattle of the tanks, ubiquitous, iniquitous—and 'Where is God?' we all ask. Perhaps, after all, God *does* use evil!

"Then, the last day of the old year, when war once more entered our world. I enter the Lyceum Club to listen to the Archbishop of Canterbury—fossilized. Yet this foolish, well-intentioned old gentleman manages, by grace of God, to get some life into his dying formulæ. He also commends us to *His* God. But Who is his God? Is it Jehovah-Jah?"

(The men and women before him stir uneasily. They still fear offending an Offended God—and maybe the Church to which they go less and less does really know something and has some "pull" with the Almighty.)

"Ladies and Gentlemen: we had become complacent—and that within four months of the outbreak of war. Now comes the Prime Minister to tell us from the Mansion House that the four-months' lull is about to be broken terribly. Head of those poor procrastinating Old Men of the Sea who have ridden us for so long to their and our doom." (Again the seats stir uneasily.) "Early January and we read on our posters: '3 submarines lost.'" He pauses.

"First signs of anti-Semitism in Britain." He waits as he completes the phrase. The hall beneath is tense and "queer". Are all these Paradisers anti-Jew at heart? he wonders. He goes on:

"Do you recall those awful stories of Jew-castration and maiming which began to come in at the end of January? Only five or six short months ago, when the snow lay heavy on the rooftops. Do you recall the declaration-stunt of some of the old women of both sexes who imagine they lead Labour?" (Murmuration: "Then Leicester wasn't really a Socialist after all!") "Do you recall the freshet of 'New World Religions' released by tuppenny-halfpenny prophetesses?" (Miss Gadfly and Honoria half rise to protest, but thinking better of it, sit down again.) "Then the 'Great Allied War Council' in Paris—which was a gas-bubble soon to blow itself to the stars. Then the I.R.A. outrages on the pillar-boxes—the inevitable damp squibs of my Elizabethan-Irish forbears. And through all, 'the gallant little Finns' hold out despite the 300,000 shells pumped into them by the Russian Bear. The story of the boarding of the *Altmark* by the plucky *Cossack*, that thrilled a public faint for success . . . 'the Nelson Touch' not yet dead! But shops are everywhere shut up and "TO LET" signs all over the show. And in his diary he finds the words, ill-considered, unfounded: 'PEACE IS IN THE AIR!' which measures the foolishness of your lecturer. A man named Tavistock is talking peace—but who the devil is Tavistock? Also still more extraordinary insertion, and true: 'NOT A BOMB HAS DROPPED YET ON LONDON TOWN OR ANY BRITISH CITY'. And we have been asking ourselves: What is Hitler at? Maybe he is not so wicked as we thought? We tremble at Hitler's threats—but we shiver at his 'lulls'. Then we are told by two world-authorities on war that Britain can't win this war, which will end in stalemate, and I find my note of emphatic disagreement. Am I right? Are they right?

"And through it all, the bleatings of the Church at the microphone—impotent."

O'Brien Leicester looked about him to see how the gathering took all this, much as he had recently done in the Queen's Hall. He played on them as a fiddler on his fiddle—and even when they hated him, not too often, they listened. They *had* to listen.

These were of that Great Damned Average whom he had come to despise in inverse ratio to his love for them. He knew that at heart they were unchangeable and that the fires of war might purify them, but would not change them or their mental and spiritual metabolism . . . no, perhaps, the "spiritual", not the mental. For their minds were moribund—not their spirits, which, by some incredible law, still lived feebly—but *lived.* Perhaps these English could not die.

"So we come to our first Easter Sunday after the coming of the Second World War. I spent part of that Sunday—only a few weeks ago, remember—in a Westminster sanctuary to find there that the gods had fled. The other part with my friend Jerry Coogan, handsome, gallant Engineer-Commander of the fleetest cruiser on the seas, as he shows me in technicolor the story of the arm for which you and I thank our God—the British Navy. The *Thunderbolt* shouldering the great seas off the north of Iceland in prismatic rain—shouldering them off, thousands of tons of crystal-clear green and blue, foaming and howling. There it stands in my diary. In those very Arctic seas where just before the war came I had been in my yacht. The sea—always the sea. And it may be that it is through the sea, in which the Isle Inviolate is king, that we shall conquer. *In hoc signo vinces.* In the sign of the sea shall Britain conquer. For the sea to the British is more than a physical medium. It is a spiritual. It is from the Navy and from those waves that we have been drawing what poor spiritual strength there may have remained to us out of the grievous things we have experienced. But it is that we may not again experience such things that we have come together today and that we have formed our Councils of War. So shall we conquer, first ourselves, then our enemies. May God defend the right!"

The speaker paused. The benches before him held themselves in close secret silence.

XXIV

THE CRICKET MATCH

THE dog-days were on Eventide. Mars might still bestraddle the world—but, thank God! there was still cricket.

Cricket could still be played to the glory of man, and even of that God in which England still tried to believe. But the God to which she paid tribute was the God of fair-play and of that cricket which was of fair-play the very essence.

Every Englishman and Englishwoman had tried to make the best possible of both worlds and so, quite inaccurately, had earned the title of hypocrite. And when Leicester, who was a cricket fiend, suggested a Grand Charity Match in order to raise funds for War Charities and for the God of those charities, there wasn't an Eventidian of them all who did not believe that he or she was much more concerned about charity and God than about cricket.

Though the fact of the matter was that every man-jack and woman-jill of them all was infinitely more concerned about hitting a "4" or getting a wicket or in the case of the eligible ladies, hooking a man, than all the charity of which the Saint Paul they also thought they worshipped had talked about so eloquently in the Epistle according to the Corinthians.

Leicester of course knew everybody worth knowing and quite a number who weren't. Now, hieing himself one day to Lord's to see one of those extraordinarily mixed war-matches, he had, upon entering the fabled pavilion, run into a little Yorkshireman who had made cricket history and who was slightly more worshipped than the Archbishop of Canterbury or beloved, even, than His Majesty, the King, regarded rightly by everybody as one of the best, as was his royal lady. And let it be made quite clear to the scoffer that this testimonial to royalty is given without hope of emolument or preferment.

The famous Yorkshireman who was worshipped by millions of men, not for his divinity or for his irreproachable conduct on and off the field, but for the divine off-break in which he specialized, plus irreproachable length, informed Mr. Leicester that he was "oop t' Lunnon" to speak at the mike for the B.B.C. for whom he was to recapture, at a fee of not less than twenty-five of the best and brightest, for brief halting moment the immortal past. And of that immortality, to recapture just the half-dozen hours in which, for the last time, he had strutted his hotted moment upon the green turf, recalled as he had been out of honoured retirement and once more "doing the trick".

Not the "hat-trick" but the taking of about half a dozen of the choicest and best of the Test wickets against the Australian brother, by miraculous "flight" and "spin", so winning the final Test for the Motherland. A feat by the side of which such trifles as the Battles of Waterloo or even Trafalgar were "just battles". For so is constituted and constructed the English mind.

Out of this talk came the bright idea to the war-leader of Eventide which resulted finally in the appearance upon the Old Stag Park, with its sunken ditch or "ha-ha", of the two white-clad elevens which on this hot day of August met to do battle for England, home and beauty—or whatever it is that the genus cricketer does do battle for when he ravens on to green grass with his little bat and his little ball.

Now an intensive and extensive propaganda, unscrupulous as to fact, and scrupulous as to detail, had been set on foot by the O'Brien Leicester some weeks before the Great Day, with the result that all of Eventide and most of the neighbouring town and villages went to bed each night under the blissful belief that the elevens which would appear on the Old Stag Park two-hundred-year-old cricket ground would be largely composed of eminent Test players, a pleasing phantasy to which a jesuitical Leicester contributed. Whereas, actually, and as the unscrupulously imaginative Leicester knew, only his friend, the Yorkshireman, and one of the men who used to open the innings for England, would be present—one on each side, so that genius might sublimate mediocrity. Above all, the Eventide Lucife "joshed" all and sundry and laughed at their own fun, when he could, for he knew, none better, that you may laugh at a man's politics or even religion and get away with it, but it was fatal to make fun of anybody's fun. Humour was sacred, especially to the Englishman.

For weeks before the match, the names and accomplishments of the players had been hotly debated, first at The Robe of Glory, the bar of which was hung with cricket prints from the time of Noah, and then in street and drawing-room. The men argued the finer points of what might prove "disappoints" with a knowingness not to be emulated by "the lesser breeds without the law", and balls that had been bowled forty years before and fours that had been made when Noah was a boy, were brought out from moth and dark into the bright light of noon. Buck Galanty, in particular, would insist upon telling how he had "hit that six" when the "Has-Beens" played the "Never-Wazzes" on this very ground of the Old Stag, and when, the youngsters would scoff, "splices hadn't been in cricket bats".

Eventide went into political session "for the duration"—that is for the duration of the breathing-space before the elevens were to meet in mortal combat. For cricket was "politics" in Eventide—and not alone in Eventide if only because in every Yorkshire village every Yorkshire baby is born with a somebody else's silver sixpence in its mouth and a bat and ball in either hand, as every Yorkshire mother knows, "and tykes was tykes, and all". And Eventide resurrected or dug up the old battle of the leg-theory and whether Larwood was right or the equally indomitable Jardine, the English captain, had or had not been *ultra vires* in the bowling of this foredamned leg theory, which had nearly led to international complications between the colonies and the Mother Country—and questions asked in Parliament "and all". All this was again chewed over. Chewing the cud, it was called—and they chewed.

All this artfully fanned by that devil of an O'Brien Leicester, as their more or less revered leader was so often referred to behind his back, though no wight was daring enough to do it before his face, as the genial Leicester had, at times, quite unaccountable reactions and a very dirty left. Which, however, sooth to say, he but rarely used, believing much more in the velvet hand in mailed glove than in the mailed glove itself.

. . . . .

So to the match, for, after all, "the play's the thing!"

Then in the far far distance, the temporary materialization from the pavilion of the two redoubtable captains—O'Brien Leicester and his presumed friend, but now for the moment, enemy, the Right Honourable Lord Lovem, sporting an appalling cricket cap of faded blue that seemed born and rested of accident. The spinning of gleaming coin in blue air. The picking of it up after "the call". And the gradual realization, more important than the fall of empires, that the O'Brien Leicester, captain of "The Duds", has "done it again"—that he has won the toss and naturally means his side to bat, especially as an ominous thundercloud may be seen forming in the distance—and as in "the glorious uncertainty" one never knows, does one? better the sun in sky and bird in hand than sun in cloud and bird in bush.

But "let everything be done decently and in order", as he who runs may read in the Book of Common Prayer, which was undoubtedly written by a cricketer. And as the eleven with the solemn ritual which is cricket, and

which masquerades only as a "game", waited to follow the two high priests, clad in their robes of spotless white, with the one in an outsize bowler and the other in a battered cap that had weathered many suns, every man and woman and boy and girl about that loveliest of cricket pitches, did look upon his or her programme which had been sold in the cause of sweet charity at the price of one shilling, which also did give admittance to the arena.

And this is what they saw:

OYEZ! OYEZ! OYEZ!

GRAND CRICKET MATCH

THE "DUDS" *versus* THE "DEAD-'UNS"

The former captained by O'BRIEN LEICESTER, ESQUIRE, *and the latter by* THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD LOVEM, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., etc., etc.

UPON THE OLD STAG PARK GROUND

to begin at 12 o'clock, midday, precisely

and to include various household names of Test Match cricketers who have kindly agreed to give their services in the cause of sweet charity, the proceeds to be handed intact to the Eventide War Charities

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COME IN YOUR THOUSANDS!

So behold the two white-clothed priests of the Game of Glorious Uncertainty, slowly, even cautiously, emerging from the red-tiled pavilion, as though they rather expected to find before them the lions of Nero. The breath inheld of the thousands assembled. The passage of the ghostly presiding deities over the green sward towards the high altar or "table", upon which the two triplets—in vulgar parlance, "stumps"—were pitched, standing there in all their awe-ful majesty.

One of these arbiters of destiny had a round head, like a pudding, with two pop-eyes which carried terror to incoming batsmen. The other, a saturnine devil, known as "The Bee Ell Umpire", from his happy little habit of giving non-existent "leg-befores", had a head like a hawk and two piercing orbs, set deep. And when he gave the wretched batsman "Out", he would bend down from the waist, fix the victim with the aforesaid orbs, and point an accusing forefinger at him like the Hawk-god of the ancient Egyptians who presided over the judgment of Styx-loving souls or something, and when you played against the side for which he umpired, you had him to play as well.

Then the careful fumbling in the pockets of the white jackets for the bails

and their shy production. The slow furtive approach to the triple stumps at either end, each high priest going to his own end to carefully crown the naked timber. Then the microscopic searching look at the stumps to see that they stood as perpendicular and upright as an upright England in an upright game. The passing of one of the priests to the other end to give a "line" to the other, who with mathematical precision moves the three stumps, with the bails upon them, the fraction of an inch to one side. Then, like souls confessed, the deep sigh of content from either umpire feeling that they had done a good deed in the light of day—and "let battle commence", as the Duke of Wellington has been reported to have said by his reporter of the period, a Mr. Stanley Holloway.

Then the slattern oncoming from the pavilion in the wake of the umpires of eleven stoic figures, withal passionate pilgrims, some of them old friends of ours, all more or less, and chiefly less, spotlessly clad in white flannel, and let the Rudyard Kiplings talk if they like of "flannelled fools" and all that, but flannel is flannel and cricket is cricket, and wasn't Waterloo won on the playing fields of Eton anyhow and jiggers to you! Leading them, the noble lord, with, behind him, the Eminent Batsman, as we shall continue to refer to one who, removed by god-like feats from the common herd, must not be expected to have an ordinary name but, like all the great, shall be nameless, and even though his own wife knows him as "Bill". He who, on stricken fields has put on three figures for England against the Aussie or Cornstalk.

So do we behold the essay or issuance from the pavilion of the "Dead-uns", more or less at their head, and chiefly less, the melancholic and pessimistic Lord Lovem, who, however, in his time had hit a fifty for Eton and then had retired on his laurels *in perpetuum*. Indeed, not to get too near the knuckle, he had never done anything at all ever since, for which a grateful country had permitted unto him the wherewithal to keep up a large stables, at least a couple of racehorses, and, in the later days, the "Wilderness", where we have already had the honour of visiting him.

Here, indeed, was an eleven worth recording. Not in their order of batting or issuance from the pavilion singly, excepting the opening bats who of course issued "doubly", but at the wild sweet fancy of the Recorder, as in recollection, he sees them once more "to draw them from the book of memory".

At the head, Lord Lovem. Immediately behind him, the Eminent Batsman, and behind him, again, Buck Galanty in a pair of excruciating "whites" which had seen service somewhere half a century before but which, like Lord Lovem but not like Buck, had shrunk in the wash of the years.

After Buck, came not youth after age but youth after youth, for the Buck never admitted to anything "much over fifty". Youth in this case being Sean Leicester, already a man of mark in the cricket field where he and his progenitor had a habit of putting up the hundred before being parted.

Then a rather mixed bag, amongst the "also-rans", with Mrs. Mallory's son—a flax-headed young devil with a hell of a cricket eye, a shock of hair, white teeth, and *such* a smile. The saturnine Doctor Crab, looking as though the Devil were after him, as he probably was, for behind him, again, there lurked his friend Mr. Jark, brought in at the very last moment in the

defalcation of Mr. Honeypot, who "had been called away upon that urgent business" to which Eventide had now become accustomed, and who had very rightly said that "business was business". As for Mr. Ramsbottom, fast bowler, I will let his deeds speak for him and themselves.

Finally, there were a Captain Arthur Kasterling, a tall, dark-eyed devil, with blood in the eye, of whom we may later hear; the Reverend Robin Hallowes, who "had not held a bat in his hand since he was up at Oxford and not much then"; and Joe Bings, the cracked gardener, who on occasion was rather a devil with the ball. The rear being brought up, more or less, by Clarence Lovem, hands in pockets and seemingly with no immediate prospect of his taking them out for cricket or, indeed, for anything short of an earthquake.

But I am forgetting! Forgetting the very *pièce de résistance* of the Lovem side—the redoubtable Thomas Outhwaite, Yorkshireman and mighty smiter in his moments, who could win a match in a couple of sixes and who exactly resembled that "round of beef" which my French dictionary tells me is the meaning of the preceding French, for which many apologies, but the chronicler's grandma, like that of Mr. Leicester, happened to be a La Fontaine, for which also many apologies!

Then following the fatal ritual, the two figures booted and spurred, or, if you be strainer after accuracy, which God forbid! padded and gauntleted, and with bats in hand, who are to open the innings for "The Duds", as the umpire with careless care flings to the bowler the glossy red ball. One of them, the O'Brien Leicester. The other, the renowned bowler, who also, in his time, has opened an innings for England. An all-rounder, *par excellence*, of blue eye, gull-gleaming, and that schoolgirl complexion so envied of the unfair sex, and if the girls, the minxes! had not learnt how to outpaint nature, so that until they retired for the night—the little night of death—neither husband nor sweetheart would ever see the true face of their true-love. A solemn, not to say grisly, thought.

The batsmen, colloguing colloquially as they advance, upon some nicer point of running between the wickets, or, perchance, upon still more sacred considerations, withdraw each into himself as they near the dread altar or "wicket", upon which they are to sacrifice and be sacrificed. One daring the dread ordeal of "the opening ball". The other, for the moment—but for the moment only, let it be said—passing to the other wicket, near which the white-coated umpire has taken his stand to give His Highness—I had almost writ His Holiness—"guard". Now in a game of this kind for sweet charity, but with plenty of "punch", not to say bitter-sweet behind the charity which as we know, "suffereth long and is kind, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly", and the year Anno Domini and all that —now, as I say, in a game of this kind with eminence on either side, anything might happen.

Either the famous bowler, now has a bat about to open the "Duds" innings, might "get on the job" if the wicket took spin, and when his hour came, later, bowl out the other fellows for a handful of runs, or the equally famous batsman, of the "Dead-'Uns", now in the field, of whom it had been immortally said by a fast bowler from whom he had taken 200 not out,

that "it was like bowling to God on concrete!" might also get on the job. A lithe dangerous fellow for all the twinkle in his brown eye, who might make a hundred or even a couple of hundred runs—each therefore washing out the other. Or again, to use the phrase once more even at the risk of irritation, in the game of glorious uncertainty, they might not!

The bowler for "The Dead-'Uns" who was to open the bowling was nobody less than the redoubtable Ramsbottom, with whom the Mrs. Ramsbottom we met at the Parade boasted relationship He, the hero of a Rundred fields, whose artillery was of the devastating kind and his speed as thunderbolts out of blue skies. Skies which, by the way, and like the hopeless optimists watching them, were looking bluer than ever as the thundercloud of which we have spoken developed a "belly", like Mr. Ramsbottom himself.

Now Mr. Ramsbottom was by trade or profession a butcher and a terrible slaughterer, whether in the killing-shed or on the tented field of cricket, whilst his terrific moustachios made him also a "killer" on the chancy field of love. Indeed, he had bestrewn Eventide with little Ramsbottoms.

His Highness prepared to receive the first discharge from the redoubtable one. Poised gracefully there, it was felt by each onlooker that majesty in him had writ its last word. How many of them, in the good old days which were so often, though they remembered it not, the bad old days—how many of them had not seen that graceful bat a little lifted, the wary azure eye beneath wide-peaked cap, the left foot advanced but with the weight of the body pivoting on pillared back leg—a support of substance, ah me! And here he was in the life, *resurgam*, in the living concrete flesh, ready to honour the Old Stag Ground and Eventide with livid stroke of lightning bat.

"*Play!*"

The word of fate has been given and even the cloud before mentioned holds its yeasty breath. The fieldsmen all crouched and ready for anything, with a "Blucher or night" air already settling upon their not undevoted heads, for the Redoubtable One had already solemnly paced out his nineteen long steps, had, with the heel of his cricket boot, made his mark on the spotless turf, and, so, now, taking ball in hand and working it up into his fingers a little, he had begun his fateful run.

Faster, and faster. Gathering speed like a human locomotive. Faster and still faster, like some village Jove, prepared to launch his thunderbolt. But, steady as fate at the other end, stood the Eminent Player, he also ready for anything—even for thunderbolts. He who had defied for three long hours on crumbling wicket the bolts of the fearsome Macdonald and the gargantuan Gregory, and with two ribs bended, "pricked his portion on the stricken field, to nobly do or die".

And as the circle held its breath, the giant with the ball swung the arm over as he came up to the wicket in freighted hurricane advance, and from out the hand of that arm did fly the ball, or "pill", straight to the mark.

And then, ye Powers! and then, in the silence, the breathless thousands saw the bursting of the stumps into a death-rattle that echoed in every heart there, for the batsman already to be on his way back to the pavilion. And of that thunderbolt it may be said, as George Francis Wilson, the poet, said it:

A half remembered thing it came:
It broke discordant from the ground,
Like other balls, yet not the same—
A half remembered thing it came.
There fell the shadow of a blame,
Dark herald of the coming sound—
A half remembered thing it came,
It broke discordant from the ground.

It was now felt by every sapient Eventidian there that anyth ng might happen in what was evidently an epoch-making game. "Like other games, yet not the same . . ." to paraphrase the lovely Mr. Wilson.

The Eminent Bowler was followed to the wickets by nobody less than Mr. Nicodemus, popularly known as Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber, who, Admirable Crichton, added the game of cricket to his other accomplishments. It was rumoured that he had even been approached by the Berksh're County Cricket authorities, as he not only had a nasty habit of collecting one hundred of the best and fleetest within the space of the hour, but of bowling a nifty ball which, as might be expected from a man who had obviously sold himself to the Devil, had the habit of swerving one way and breaking the other.

Mr. Nicodemus took careless guard, took also a lunar at the horizon and then a nearer one at the "field", and so prepared to receive the second of the Ramsbottian thunderbolts.

Once more the thousands held their breaths as the six foot four of the Ram gathered pace up to the wicket like an enraged rhinoceros, and then "letting go", and as those thousands awaited a second shattering of the timber, they saw the ball leave the Ramsbottom fist in the form of fatal full toss, only for the diabolical Mr. Nicodemus, with skilful foot-shift to sweep the bolt away harmless to leg for a lightning "4".

Once more the Ramsbottom gathered way, and enraged at memory, let fly once more, this time dead for the middle peg. But the slender dark-eyed Nicodemus, probably commending his soul to Satan, as the popular fancy declared he always did when batting, stepped out a half-step and catching the flying orb on the right spot, which is to say, a foot or so from the base of the bat, drove the agonizing Ramsbottom for another "4" and, to make it still worse, over the Ramsbottian head.

At no period of his life had the Jovian Hurler of Thunderbolts been what you might call a patient man. Now he was to turn into a Grovelling Idiot before his assembled admirers, and once more starting upon his "hurricane orbit", as we are still quoting from *The Bugle*, his teeth and mouth working, he hurled not only his orb but himself at the diabolic Mr. Nicodemus, standing calmly there, a slight sneer on his classic features. For delivering this ball from around the wicket, instead of over it, having informed the high priest at the bowler's end of his intention so to do or die, one of his meatplates, or feet, catching in the stumps, sent them flying, his ball flying, and finally himself flying, to change the high altar of green and velvet peace into one of mordant discontent and to the jibes of a now thoroughly incensed crowd who had just heard the impact of the leather on Mr. Nicodemus's ribs:

"Tike 'im off!"

"Now then, meatplates!"

"Kill 'im, Nicodemus, kill 'im! and get him bally well hung and be done and damned to it!"

Over the remainder of that over we will draw the "merciful veil" which *The Bugle* was later to draw when describing the classic struggle, "in comparison with which, the struggles of the Greeks and Romans, of the Trojan Horse and the First Battle of Britain, were as naught—indeed, were 'as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal'." (See *The Bugle* and I Cor. xiii, 1.)

Suffice it to say in less impassioned words, that the Ramsbottom having badly stubbed his big toe against the near stump at his end, and finding it impossible to raise himself from his native sward for a third "hurricane", had to retire as gracefully as possible to the incalculable metamorphosis of a crowd which, from one of admirers, had now become implacably hostile, and which cried:

"Ort to be ashimed of hisself, throwin' his little self abaht that way!"

"Wanting to murder pore old Nicodemus, I suppose, with his leg-slingers and Gord 'elp us if cricket's come to this!"

"Better get back to his slaughter-house and kill innocent pigs and calves!"

And the terse:

"*'Itler!*"

Then had ensued a wrangle as to whether the over had to be regarded as finished and complete in its murderousness and frustration or whether it had to be finished by another bowler. Finally, the slate was wiped clean and a twiddler of "slow curly ones" went on at the other end.

Tongue may not tell nor pen recite the remainder of that historic innings of "The Duds". Suffice it to say, that after Mr. Nicodemus had gathered or, rather, clouted a lightning 35, he, not getting proper hold of one of the "curly ones", put it into coverpoint's hands and so returned dapperly and even sprightly like some demon that had done its business in a dirty world and was returning to hatch out plenty more where that came from—but this time to do his stuff, not with the bat but with "the flying orb", when it came to his turn to bowl and to "diddle 'em out".

It is not for this veracious chronicler here to recite the tale of disaster which followed the exit of the diabolical Mr. Nicodemus, who seemed to bear away with him that "devil's own luck" which followed him everywhere. Suffice it to say that three "blobs" or "duck's eggs" were well and truly laid by three of the seven batsmen who followed, including that distinguished, but now extinguished, hero, the captain of the side. But upon his failure "to get hold of one of the twiddlers", I refuse to expatiate, knowing the man well and not wishing to hurt his feelings more than he reasonably could be expected to bear.

The incoming batsman after young Mr. Bull of "The Robe", who himself was No. 9 in the batting order, was one of the assumed "passengers" of the O'Brien Leicester side. For Mr. Michael Malone had not only informed his captain that he "had never, thanks be to the Powers! Above and Below, bemeaned himself by takin' a cricket-bat into his hand, and he a masther at the grand game of Hurling, that was the game of the Malones and the Kings

of Ireland in the Ould Ancient Times, and when 'three pucks of a hurley' marked out the domain of the incoming king after his predecessor had been conveniently removed by a knife in the belly or a touch of a blackthorn on the head, but that, so sure as God made Ireland for the Garden of Eden, and it *wasn't*, it was his intintion to show the dirty Sassenach how to play his own dirty, dir-r-ty game, and he wanted to go in early to show him how to do it, and there you were, and if you weren't there, why, then, the divil's skewer to yez!"

So afraid for his life, or maybe hoping that Mick might not distinguish, but extinguish, himself, as he, Leicester, incidentally was himself about to do, he sent in Mr. Malone as No. 10 at eighth wicket down, where he couldn't do any harm even if he couldn't do any good. And to speak gentle truth, Leicester had only included him in the team because at the last moment somebody else had fallen out and because he felt that if he did not so include him the Malone would probably murder him as "another injustice to Ireland".

Out came the redoubtable Malone, champing at the bit, in a pair of flannels six inches too long for him and a borrowed sweater, and he swinging the bat like a *shillelagh* and threatening the moon and sun and stars as to "what he wouldn't be afther doin' to that same moon, sun and stars when he got goin' wid the owld bat and God Save Ireland!"

It might be added that Mr. Malone came out from the pavilion not only in the pair of flannels mentioned but in what he called "an ould *caubeen*" of many winters and a single pad or leg-guard, he steadfastly, even blasphemously, refusing all offers to give him a second and so make a pair, and also rejecting gloves as what he called "immoral". Those who knew the one and only Malone therefore savoured something to come that should be worth the remembering—nor were they disappointed, for Mick Malone never disappointed anybody but himself, and that last he never admitted either to himself or to anybody else.

The mitigated but not by any means subjugated Ramsbottom having now returned to the crease, coming out of the pavilion only a few paces behind the Malone and gathering to himself the seven devils of revenge, saw in Mr. Malone the providential sacrifice, much as Abraham saw his son Isaac or the other ram or whatever it was. Here was his chance to get his own back from a now malevolent crowd who greeted his reappearance with catcalls and other rude noises, including the infamous "raspberry", which, as Buck Galanty opined, "only showed you the state to which the English morals had come and in my time, sir, not a whisper would have dared to make itself known at Lord's under similar circumstances—or, damme, sir! under *any* circumstances!"

Inscrutable are the ways of Providence, especially on the cricket field. Mr. Malone, coming in on the first ball of the "Diddler" and informing the umpire that he didn't care a tinker's curse for centre, as he never "took centre" or indeed anything but the real John Jamieson, he did smite handsomely at the curly ones of that tricksey twiddling bowler, but only did smite the atmosphere—the ball, in an age of miracles, missing the Malonian wicket by coats of paint.

How the Malone did survive that over will be told, and let it be said, wrongly told, so long as men speak together in their "Robes of Glory" of cricket glories forgotten. However, survive he did. But the last ball of the Diddling One's over, missing the wicket-keeper and going for a single, and Mr. Malone's *vis-à-vis* calling for the run, and finding Mr. Malone oblivious of time and occasion, did not unnaturally hesitate, Ireland finally tearing down the pitch, hurling itself full length on the green sward at the other end, bat, pad, and person, so running that *vis-à-vis* out, whereupon there went up from the spectators such lamentation as has not been heard since the days of the "Lamentations" themselves. So, incidentally, qualifying the Irishman to face the opening delivery of the now refreshed and gloating Ramsbottom, as No. 11, the last man, came in, his knees knocking together.

There being no known law, human or divine, to prevent the redoubtable Ramsbottom from once again taking up his wondrous tale, or "tail", for he was broad in the beam, putting down his massive head and once more charging up the pitch, his captain, taking off his successor, or, if you prefer "usurper", handed to him gravely the "pill", "orb" or ball, with which, grinding his teeth behind his terrible moustache, through which the aforesaid teeth white-gleamed, he prepared to do full penalty upon the rather flaccid shock-absorber who had come to the other end of the pitch—the Malone to wit.

The first explosion or delivery, just sang careless past the head of Ireland:

> A bee—or was it wasp upon the wing
> Without a head, and in its tail a sting?

something that caused the batsman to make threatening gestures with his bat, or club, in the direction of the bowler, who with the malign nonchalance of his tribe, deigned no reply but walked back to his "mark" or starting place, itself an invariable constant.

The next ball, delivered with exactly the same run and apparent speed of arm, left the hand of the cunning craftsman as a butterfly soars, and as the batsman, expecting death and desolation, as before, watched its flight, his poor silly eyes a-waggle in his head, his bat waving in all directions but the right one, he watched it nearly drop on the bails behind him.

Gripping his bat or club with a resolution terrible, the son of Erin now awaited the third delivery, which was that terror of every batsman upon first entry, a "yorker" on the leg stick. But Mr. Malone was no ordinary batsman, indeed, it being his first appearance on the green and worth the money, he was not a batsman at all. Which being, or not being, as you like, instead of being bowled neck and crop, with glutting crowd confidently anticipating, he stepped in and hit blindly at the rushing meteor, catching it just as it was about to drop under his bat, and sending it soaring into the empyrean over the bowler's head and out of the ground for the famous "6" which is still talked of in the village of Eventide, and will be so talked long after you the reader, and I the writer, and our friends the lads of the village have been gathered to our fathers but apparently never to our mothers, who probably are sick and tired of us.

The result of this heavenly hit was an Irish reel or war dance at the other end by the gifted batsman. Calling upon his gods, the Irish Ajax defied not only the unjovial Jovian Ramsbottom but any lightning that might happen to be about and heaven knows there was plenty of that same caught up in that thundercloud which sagged closer and closer, getting ready to discharge its content, like a woman who has reached her time.

The butchery Ramsbottom, feeling deeply in the most sensitive portion of his anatomy the ribald jibes of the "ring", here called upon his own gods to nerve his sinewy arm and to help him, if so it might be, to murder the vain-glorious Irishman at the other end and, generally, not to put too soft a pedal on it, to "out him for keeps".

Which prayer, the gods hearing, the fourth delivery against the earthworks of Ireland proved to be the last, for being a full pitch and as the empyrean-soaring ambitionist swung his body about in making what was to be another "6", the ball found the most sensitive spot of his anatomy, which happened in this case to be the place where he sat down. Indeed he, literally, bit the earth in his desolated rage as he contemplated the Brute who had struck him and who now pretended, because he had to pretend, that he also was desolated at what he had done to the batsman, and so tried to massage the injured part. Which feeling to be "the last straw that bruk the donkey's back", as he told the wur-rld, the injured player springing to his feet with an agility remarkable in a man who had just told that same world that he was "not dead but spacheless and at his last gasp owin' to the bloody cowardly murdering ruffian that had sthruck undher him in his innards", and grasping the bat from which he had refused to be parted, he took a swipe at Mr. Ramsbottom, by the luck of heaven catching him on the side of his napper or head and laying *him* out for keeps, and then having accomplished this, fell down again on Mother Earth once more to tell Eventide and all the world that he had died for Oirland.

This effectively closed the innings of the "Duds", who had accumulated by devious means a total of 53 runs, which it was felt didn't give them an earthly, even with the Eminent Bowler still to come, who had once bowled out three of Australia's best for "nowt". And if the Eminent One had done that to Australia, what would he not do to the "Dead-'Uns" when *their* turn came to bat? Yet it wasn't in sense or reason that on a more or less perfect wicket, even if the rain came to spoil, that you could get a side out for under 53 runs, especially when the opening batsman was the Most Eminent Batsman in the world, now at the very peak of his form, and behind him half a dozen centuries in Test Matches.

But, then, cricket is not a game of reason, as we quite sickeningly keep on pointing out, but one of glorious uncertainty, and lying as far outside all known laws, and even some unknown, as the now renowned theory of relativity of Mr. Einstein which tells us that the shortest distance between two points is not a straight line, and that a pestiferous little devil, called "Time", entering into our comfortable Three Dimensions and spoiling everything, makes 4 and 3 not 7 but maybe 8 or even 8 and a bit, and so leads grave and reverend seigniors out of their complacent Third into a Fourth Dimension. For truth to say, cricket is not a game of three dimensions, but of

four—and, for all I know, forty-four, always producing new bedevilments, as its dimensions expand, much as Eve came out of Adam, and Cain and Abel out of Eve, and murder and you and me out of Cain and Abel, and so into as many dimensions as you like. And as we are talking about "Eminence" in cricket, a game that has so much of that Woman it so much resembles in its stratagems and devices, its twists and turnings, its "twiddlers" and "diddlers", and to quote in *vers libre*, which is the verse of Four Dimensions, or verse of disarrangement, from the most Eminent Poet on earth, who for sweet modesty's sake shall be nameless:

When Eve did steal her way from Adam,
Who sunk in three-dimensioned sleep
frankly did not care a damn
And woke to see near him the Madam,
Who speaking silver did call to him—
You Dad man—
You mad man—
You bad man—
That soon I shall be making a Sad Man—
Now listen to me, you Father of Evil, you Cad Man,
Who so far have lived in a world of three dimensions,
Who will not play cricket
Because you are Wicked—
May I ask, your Highness, what might be your intentions?
So no more of your tricks and your traps and inventions,
But come to my arms without more dissensions
And I'll show you how Three
May become *Four*
Dimensions. . . .

(With apologies to all the *vers libre* poets of the world, and now that I come to read it, I am not sorry I have concealed the identity of the Eminent Poet, whom may God forgive and save!)

But how we have got ourselves out of the Third Dimension of Eventide and the Old Stag Park into the Fourth Dimension, I know not, but I leave it to you, Reader dear. So back into the comfortable "Three".

All that has hitherto happened on the stricken field, happened within the space of one short hour—an hour that to many there seemed an eternity and so entirely justified the Einstein contention that Time is not, and if he didn't contend it, then he ought to have done so. But Science having been now driven outside Time and Space and there being neither one nor the other, it is superfluous and unscientific to state that, with the weather threatening, it was decided to reduce the normal lunch hour to one of half an hour, Mr. Einstein assisting, and so get the famous match over before the heavens fell, and "with hideous envy of Man's happiness, discharged their load of hell from heaven's artillery". And talking about "hells", and "heavens", we may remind the gentle reader that many people's heavens are other people's hells, as Mr. Malone would insist when he told the story of the winebibber who, finding himself in a teetotal heaven, hurled ungrateful nothings at a St. Peter who told him if he didn't like the heaven provided he

could go to hell, where liquors strong would be his portion, which to his innermost satisfying, he did, crying: "Heaven for climate, but hell, thank God, for company!"

Alas for human calculation, which, as we have seen, in any case is unscientific—therefore useless. No sooner had the two elevens, minus Mr. Ramsbottom and Mr. Malone, the former of whom was now in hospital and the latter on his road to "The Robe of Glory" for a light lunch off two bottles of "Irish" with a double-gin as chaser—no sooner, did I say, had the two elevens of ten men each sat down to the sumptuous repast of the only idea of cricket lunch that an Englishman has ever had—that is roast or boiled beef fit to stop an army, massacred potatoes, and green stuff flung to the animals minus oil or vinegar, than heaven's artillery broke, and down came the thunders and lightnings and water of the God of Cricket whom in some unknown manner they had offended. Miss Gadfly, indeed, pointed out to Miss Honoria and one or two other true believers, that Jove had been offended by permitting the Irish incursion and the following deed of violence at a peaceful English cricket match. And if Miss Gadfly, who was now in almost hourly consultation with Jove, did not know this, then who should?

Then, at the very moment when with damp noses and dampened hopes pressed to the panes of the pavilion, each player there had cursed his own particular private god or gods and had privately given up hope of finishing this or, for that matter, any other match anywhere, anyhow, the rain stopped, the floods suspended, the cloud passed and the sun came out. Much as it had done umpteen years before when one Noah, doubtless a great cricketer in his day, had found the floods subside from our old earth, and, let it be said, without any detrimental reflection upon the Almighty Powers, much to its detriment. For if He had only decided that everybody, man and woman and child, should have been wiped out and a new start made, think what a wonderful world we might not have had today! . . . with accent on the "not". And cricket all day and into the night, maybe with suns in the sky all night, and nobody getting less than a thousand and taking all ten wickets every time they went on—and all the beer and whisky for the asking, and no work and no church and . . . But here Mr. Nicodemus's imagination failed him—for we are speaking of the inner ruminations of that gentleman, as with nose pressed to glass, hands in flannel pockets, and nothing in them or his head like a second Noah, he looked dolefully out upon a rain-soaked earth.

Then the rain-soaked crowds, as is the way of cricket crowds, apparently having nothing to do and all day to do it, drifted back from the holes and corners in which they had hid themselves during Noah and the Ark business and melancholically took up their places about the ring like toadstools as though they had grown there. Much as their foredamned predecessors had done at the time of the flood according to Mr. Jark, who had set up his little stand near the entrance prior to taking part himself in the game for reasons best known to himself and his God.

In those laws of the Medes and Persians of Cricket which prevent the crowd from showing any more appreciation of the fact that an eminent eleven with an eminent bowler is entering the field of the English Drama, which is

to say cricket, not a hand or a sigh escaped the reassembled ditherers about the ring. The Eminent Batsman, with the half-dozen Test centuries to his eternal credit, just moved over to the wicket with his partner, the noble lord and captain himself, stuck two nonchalant fingers into the air at the umpire to signify that he wanted "middle and leg", and awaited the first delivery of the Eminent Bowler who was his solitary peer, although not the solitary peer, upon this green turf and to have recourse once more to George Francis:

> Comes that long dreaded hour ayont command
> When fateful Silence overlays the land,
> Bodeful the Bowler starts upon his way
> The last ball of the Season in his hand. . . .

The crowd for the second time that day held its collective breath. Held it as his Eminence nonchalantly strolled up to the wicket upon which hot sun now beat upon wet clay, to turn it into a quagmire for unwary batsmen, and, as nonchalant, let the ball go from cunning hand with crafty wrist and fingerspin. And then in the silence of death:

> Linger no more, the ultimate bolt is sped
> And dealing death is numbered with the dead:
> Imperial Summer bows her golden head—
> The Wickets are laid low, the Bails are shed.

Yes, the unbelievable had happened. The Most Eminent Batsman on Earth, like his opening ball predecessor of that fateful day, when flannelled fools battled for sweet charity, was dismissed scoreless—dismissed for the "duck" the *quack-quack* of which could be heard from distant greeny pond as the Eminent Opener, cricket peak pulled down over one eye, moved funereally back to the pavilion, which swallowed him up, bat, "duck" and all, like the grave that yawns for every son of man, cricketer or non-cricketer.

But what shall be told of that day of deeds of derring-do, when, the sun blazing down upon quicklime pitch and the ball darting about like a thing possessed under the wiles of the Eminent Bowler, with Sean bravely backing him up at the other end with his "slows" and even filially shattering with a "shooter" the wicket of the "twiddling" gentleman who had dared to bowl his august Father for a duck! Who shall tell the tale? Not I. For to that task I am incapable. Only a Shakespeare or a Homer could do justice to it.

And who shall tell, for few were privileged to hear it, of how the Eminent Bowler, himself also from the Shire of the Broad Acres, more in sorrow than anger, as he watched one of his best balls smashed out of space and time for six as he pointed reproachfully at his fellow Yorkshireman, did cry: "Oh, Thomas, Thomas, but look at tha feet, la-ad—why, they're all cockle-orum!" For Thomas Outhwaite to reply, neither in sorrow nor anger, but calmly, victoriously: "Never you mind my feet—where's *bloody* ball!"

Think of it, and list, ye scoffers! But one hour and seven minutes, as it happened, to go before the heavens opened once more and the floods came to beat down upon that stricken sward and to anoint the greatest match ever played on the Old Stag Ground. Sixty-seven minutes of God's own time, in which the gallant "Dead-'uns" might do the trick and bowl their opponents out for under the fated "53" runs they had scraped from reluctant turf. One hour and seven minutes.

Overhead with hanging belly, the second great cloud, waiting to discharge its contents upon player and spectator alike, upon the just and the unjust, and once more only, having coy resort to the Most Eminent Living Poet, to regard those freighted moments

> When laggard sun did seem to hold his breath
> And o'er the land crept boding as of death,
> The birds did quiet, as the clock stood still,
> The silence heard, the very air did thrill—
> To cleave unbowled from "bowled", reluctant dead from live,
> Did swing his iron—the Old Man with Scythe.

That terrible moment when the Hope of his Side, reserved by his captain for just such occasion, having come out to the wickets to face the Demon Bowler on the sticky earth as though he were but facing, not one of the natural phenomena but an ordinary Bill Smith or Jack Jones—that moment when Outhwaite the Yorkshireman, foreign transient of Eventide, did take his stand. Take his stand, but to see the hapless Lord Lovem at the other end bowled for a blob by the last ball of the over and the last man come in.

Again, with that dreadful nonchalance, more terrible than artillery discharge of your Ramsbottoms or your Gregorys, the Eminent One strolled his two or three steps up to the wicket for the over-swing and sweet follow-through of the arm that in its time had wrought international disaster, and there, as nonchalant as his baiter, stood all Yorkshire, in the person of Outhwaite. The high loopy flight, with the sudden dismaying drop, the ghastly spin from pitch as ball bit sodden earth, and Yorkshire had stepped out to belt that ball over the leg boundary for that six of which I have already spoken, as the crowd roared.

Eight to draw and nine to win, and one more over to go. *One—two—three—four* balls bowled, a month between each discharge, and never a run scored, with the wicket-keeper deftly hosting each ball from cadging bye, as two ladies and one alleged male did faint 'neath the emotion unbearable, as the spirits of the Mighty Dead, for fated instant, did look down from their own Olympian cricket to see "if England did it still".

And then the second last ball of the over, as once more ere the high-flighted ball, this time air-hung, seemed to stagger towards him, and again the bat, in those enormous hands like a matchstick, "had swept the flying sphere ere it could make gross contact with the earth", as *The Bugle* put it in placid placoid plagiary, and had sent it to the outer deeps for another four all run. To come the freighted last ball of the match, with still four to get to tie and five to win, and the now utterly reckless Outhwaite, with mighty

sweep, as Jove himself might have cleared the nether heavens of their constellations, and the ball had again been met ere deadly spin could do its work, it had risen into the distant blue, and again with George Francis,

> An instant, poised in air,
> A rosy light delayed;
> Dropt, and a willow blade
> Flashed like a golden share,
> Flashed—and a throbbing star
> Waned to a spark-afar,

for the "Dead-uns" to defeat the "Duds" by one wicket in the last ball of the Greatest Match of All Time, and "God save the King!" as it was sung that August afternoon on that greenest of pitches as a song of the glory that was and is and will be England—the England who always starts slow, but who always hits a sixer in the last over, and, once more, God save the King!

XXV

THE LETTER

It was in the middle of all this pomp and circumstance, born of the alarums of war, that O'Brien Leicester found the letter.

He had always maintained a nice code of honour within the circle of his family, never doubting a word honestly given, never asking for proof. Yet, man being what he is, not to mention woman, it was this very individual who after he had discovered that the letter was for his son, Sean, and not for him, went on reading that letter.

Thank God, in these records, we are not a court of morals to be judges of any man or of any woman, and so we but record the fact.

On the envelope stood "Mr. Leicester", with an undecipherable letter after the "Mr." which might as easily have been an "O'B." as an "S.". It had happened before.

But he could not assume innocence, for the opening sentence undeceived him:

Listen Sean · you must not write to me as you have done, and you must not come to visit me until you have learned to control yourself and your feelings. (I am crying as I write.)

Listen, dear Boy, for to me you are a very little boy, boys like you have before written to Ella in that way—and, although I know you are not as others, you will one day do what they have done—forget Ella! You are very close to me, Sean—often I seem to feel you near me when I am lonely—and I am the loneliest woman in Eventide—and I care for you deeply. You know, just as a young mother, and *maybe a woman also, can care. I try to be an honest*

woman and so I say that no woman ever loves any man without the touch of lovership.

Good night now, Sean. I don't believe in a God—our world is too cruel to permit that—but I do believe (sometimes) *that a guardian angel stands behind me, watching. Watching a broken-hearted woman who is lonely for love—one who lost the man she loved more than death. And that is loving much for me, or death for me would be the comforter. We have our angels—and we have our devils. May you never find the latter.*

Ella Cattermole.

Afterwards, he never could say why he had gone on reading a letter that was not his—and reading without any feeling of guilt. Nor why he had closed the envelope again and carefully laid the letter there for his son as though it had not been opened.

Once he himself, in the long agos, had fallen in love with a woman six years older than himself. For four years he had loved her and it had nearly broken him up, body and blood and soul. There were worse breaks than "heartbreaks". Never had he laughed at his love for another Ella Cattermole, even when that day came that he found he had loved but an *imago*—someone conjured out of the imagination. He had fallen in love with love. Probably that was what Sean had done. He was very like his father.

One lesson he had learnt of life. Every experience, good or bad, was worth while, and no experience more worth while than any experience of love. It might hurt or even kill, but it was always worth it. Maybe, that fine boy of his, who was more a young brother to him than a son, would gain such experience.

But what of Ella Cattermole?

He had spoken to Aase about Ella—and Aase had instinctively hated her. Not actively—Aase was never active in anything—but potently. It was not what she said, for she said little—it was the way she did *not* say it! He knew.

Paradise Row thought of Mrs. Cattermole as of a woman of doubtful past and doubtful virtue, even though she was discreet in everything, but never of doubtful intelligence. She was of the world's adventuresses. He knew the breed and the type. Yet, somehow, Ella was different.

Working with her on his war executive, he began to discover new powers and new attractions in this rather splendid-looking young woman, who might be anything from twenty-five to thirty-five. He worked well with her. They thought along the same lines. She gave to him all that Aase had not been able to give. In a word, he was happy with her—and she with him.

It was all highly irregular though perfectly proper, for never a word had passed between them that all Eventide might not have heard. Yet, he felt things looming behind an association that was almost friendship. It inheld strange potencies. Sometimes he, the unfrightened one, felt a little afraid of what he was conjuring.

The novelist and storyteller in him was at work.

All at once, the strange, rather terrible, thought struck him: Supposing

he fell in love with Ella Cattermole? Supposing he was to be a rival to his own boy?

It was grotesque. But life *was* grotesque.

XXVI

CUPID AND MR. HONEYPOT

"GOD works in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform", runs the old hymn—and mysterious indeed are those ways.

The Battle of Britain, presumably one of "those ways", had poured out of blue skies on that never-to-be-forgotten eighth of August, when, although Hitler knew it not, he had not only lost the Battle of Britain but the Battle for a World. And the deeds of derring-do and passions released by this Armageddon of the Air had also released other and gentler passions, with unexpected results to the population of these islands and to the spraying of the landscape "with prattling babe". Always, of course, excepting our village, which, devotees of the Safer Ways, had gradually refused to reproduce itself.

War certainly had also released quite a lot of hate—and with it hate's other side of the moon—the intangible trifle we mortals call "love" because we don't know what else to call something so compounded of hate and adoration, of good and evil, of Man and Woman.

It was presumably War, the midwife of spirit, who set free in the heart of Elspeth McGluskie the lurking fires of love, or hate—call it which you will. That these tongues of flame settled upon the not altogether devoted head of one Alexander Honeypot was one of those accidents which the Calvinistic Body to which Elspeth belonged in her darker deeps would hold as "ordained". Perhaps Alexander was Elspeth's fate and Elspeth, Alexander's. But these things be too deep for you and me, unless you believe that you are of the stuff of the gods, knowing good from evil, as, sooth to tell, does every son and daughter of man.

The instant that Elspeth McGluskie fixed those marvellous darkened orbs of hers that day on the stairs of the Wilderness, when she came down to answer the bell to let Mr. Honeypot out, when she was actually letting him in, she set about first, making him love her whether he liked it or not, and secondly, educating him in the Three Pillars of her Wisdom—the Larger or "Longer" Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, and "The Song of Solomon" —the Naughty One!

As will later emerge, she also set about educating him in the art of love, an almost unknown art in Scotland, and even in England nearly extinct within the touching *naïveté* of the Anglo-Saxon who believes, poor devil, that nature teaches that art and that the study of the most profound of all arts and the one affecting our lives from birth to death is totally unnecessary. Of such *naïveté* is born the Long-haired Amalekite, the Back-to-Nature

Curer, Vegetarianism in its more exacerbated forms, the Plymouth Brother—and especially the Plymouth Sister who, because she does not use it, gives at least four-fifths of her spare time worrying about her body—and tormenting the soul it contains!

Nor was Alexander a slow pupil, for, from the moment that Cupid, looking out from those dark and splendid orbs of the Scotswoman, let fly with an arrow not drawn at any venture but dead sure of its mark and hit Alexander right between his own two orbs, which, being poetic, she would call his bul-buls, he was the willing captive of her bow and spear. That is to say, had she only learnt the gentle lesson of surrender, which she resolutely and religiously refused to do.

Alexander, like his prototype, was accustomed to command his surroundings. For him, to issue *ukase*—for the others, to obey. That is to say, until he met Elspeth. For right from the word "Go!" it was Elspeth who wore the trousers and Mr. Honeypot the petticoat. Yet, as we are punctilious in this veridical and sagacious record, it may be said here and now, it being literally the naked truth, that from the moment of ignition with Alexander, Elspeth wore "cutie-panties" instead of the substantial Jaegers to which she had up to that moment of illumination been accustomed. Stockings, winter or summer, she never wore, she having conceived, and to avoid misconception, her solitary conception let it be said, an aversion to them from her Highland days.

It was Mr. Honeypot, however, who thought he had made the first assignation with his beloved to be. Actually, as is nearly always the case, it was Elspeth, who let the poor fish think the idea came from him.

The time was midnight. The place was a grove by the side of the Thames. The moon veiled her light by friendly cumulus. All was just as it should be according to the best flub-a-dub recipes from Babylon, Egypt and India. And of course the Arabian recipe of the Sheik, the "Desert Song" and all that sort of thing.

Mr. Honeypot was accustomed to be a rather ardent lover, as he would say: "No beating about the bush but straight to the mark!" He started with his usual technique. He finished . . . but you shall now learn how he did finish. And why she herself finished as she did, was as much hidden from her as her reason for the adoption of the cutie-pants with the Shorter Catechism.

For Elspeth McGluskie, absolutely refusing to rest beneath the shade of a friendly oak upon friendly bracken, quietly but firmly repelled the proffered arm around waist, pushed away the proffered osculatory organ, and, generally, made herself most obnoxious to an ardent lover, who had had a lot of practice with the desultory and even flagitious female of the species.

Thereupon she plunged, not into the literature of love, not even into that "Song of Solomon" which for her had been her mainstay and upholder in virginity enforced, but into the history of the two Catechisms—the Larger and the Shorter. It appeared that not to know the contents of these two pestilences, as they came to be known to Mr. Honeypot, was to run grave risk of losing your soul for ever, even though she was bound to say that as in any case you were slightly predestined whether to hell and heaven, and

from and to all eternity, it didn't really matter very much what you knew or how you knew it.

Mr. Honeypot, a master of situation, instantly grasped this particular one. He saw in a flash that the way to Miss McGluskie's heart and even to something that for him lay deeper than the heart, was through the Larger or Longer Catechism and through that Catechism's smaller brother. Instantly he affected a profound interest in the "Solemn League and Covenant" which had held its first meeting only the other day, that is to say, on the first of July, 1643, which to Elspeth, as to her God, was but as yesterday, and which to these Longer and Shorter tomes had given indecent birth and with it, indecently rebellious thoughts to that Volcano of Love, Alexander Honeypot.

In the way that he had, Mr. Honeypot only permitted this interest slowly to emerge 'neath Miss McGluskie's ministrations, which, as we shall see, increased in ardour not only psychological but physical as time went on and which in the long run might be expected to bring to the enamoured Mr. Honeypot his due rewards.

So it was that within the next few weeks, Mr. H. developed ardent interest not only in the two Catechisms but also in "The Directory of Public Worship", "The Confession of Faith", and a certain damnable pamphlet, issued during this period, which showed peradventure beyond doubt that the great mass of the human race were most inhumanly damned to all eternity by a Jealous and Offended God, who was Miss McGluskie's particular private Jehovah-Jah. We were "predestined", it seemed. You were born either of the Elect or of the Damned, and there was no middle position and no way out.

She was dead sure about Elspeth McGluskie, who had been elected by grace from the heavenly dawnings over gross earth. She was not so sure about Alexander Honeypot. Indeed, it was to try out and prove Alexander that Elspeth now bent her not circumscribed will, and the trial procceded by the dual path of love and hate, as do all such trials.

I wish to be accurate as regards the chronology of the "Trial", and so may state here and now that when, after a month, Alexander found himself as far from the kingdom of heaven as he was that first night in the grove, he began to be melancholic.

To his earnestly asseverated statement, given as if he almost believed it himself, that he "loved" Miss McGluskie with a love enduring and pure, the answer would come like the crack of doom, if doom really "cracks", that "there was but one love enduring and pure and that was the love of God". To his concealed but burning desire to "come a little closer" to his *inamorata* than the regulation arm's length upon which she quietly insisted, there came back the "crack": "But, Mr. Honeypot, you can say all you want to say about my religious instruction at your present distance." And when that ingenious strategist would insist that "the grace of God was doing its work on him under the guidance of Miss McGluskie", that damsel would come back: "Then prove it by keeping your distance, Mr. Honeypot." The way she said "Mister-r-r" was formidable, with a roll of the Doric "r's" like the drum-rustle—a delight to the ear, but *not* to Mr. Honeypot.

But Mr. Honeypot, being a really great general in the lists of love, was

not without his own resources, and the way in which, after a three months' siege, he brought about the capitulation of Miss McGluskie, deserves a chapter to itself.

XXVII

STRATAGEMS AND DEVICES

Now our Mr. Honeypot, as fraction of other accomplishment, was a performer on the ukulele. On this mosquito-*ping* instrument, he had three outstanding performances. One, "The Hawaiian Serenade"; two, "The Dead March in Saul"; and three, "I'll love you in the moonlight—as I kiss, kiss, *kiss*!"

Being a man of stratagems and devices, he usually began with number one. This, in his view, and it was an experienced view, "woke up and stoked up the fires in the inamorata". Number two sent her into the depths of depression from the high excitements of love, so making her unsure of her fundaments. Number three, at the very moment when her defences already were crumbling through sheer misery, "cocked her frills again in her delight at coming out of the misery aforesaid", and so made her easy prey for his experienced arms.

He had produced his ukulele upon his seventh meeting with the virginal Elspeth—that is to say "virginal" save for that solitary encounter as a very young maiden with the amorous policeman who, she assured Mr. Honeypot presumably to encourage him, hadn't got very far with her affections before she had dotted him one over the napper or "bean" with a convenient fire-shovel. "It was a ra-*r-re* crack on the cokernut," she said.

She was very particular about her virginity. But it was quite unnecessary, for to the more than experienced eye of her One True Love, she was *virgo intacta*. It whetted his appetite, for he was a Wicked, Wicked Man.

So when he produced his ukulele in Astarte's—or was it Ashtorath's?—grove and without further ado began to play "The Hawaiian Serenade", with a view to undermining, he was considerably surprised to find that Miss McGluskie gazed before her into vacancy with a white blank face or "pan" and without any more feeling for music than if she had been one of the owls which hooted above her head.

And of Mr. Honeypot, indeed, in that despairing moment, it might be writ as Shakespeare or someone has writ it:

> The bul-buls sing, the player with cunning hand,
> Strainer of love, doth rear his horrid crest.
> All is but mirage, he doth prove—
> Points north, points south, points eastward and to west,
> Seeks to make conjunct with his chosen mate,
> Whose eager lips do part to meet her dear.
> The lightning flash, but still he cannot sate,
> Lifts but to fall, is daring but to fear. . . .

and as our Mr. Honeypot did rear his horrid crest, or face, to gaze down into the vacant eyes of his beloved, he felt cold despair possess him.

Then Mr. Alexander Honeypot made his mistake as will even the greatest strategists whether on the field of love or battle—really the same thing. In his despair at moving this human tombstone, he sprang on her the Number Three before the Number Two. "Kissing in the Moonlight", however, seemingly leaving her as stony as the Sphinx, to whom she was bearing increasing likeness as the freighted moments sped. Only then did he turn on his Number Two, and that in utter hopelessness. As the melting strains of the Dead March *ping-pinged* themselves like the sting of poisonous gnat upon the midnight magic, Mr. Honeypot was charmed to find that Elspeth McGluskie turned the white and vacant pan and allowed interest to steal into it. At last, as the final lugubrious strains tingled out upon the desert airs, she was sitting, hands clasped between shapely knees, and looking up at the fainted stars with a rapt expression.

He had "done it" once again!

"Play it again!" she whispered.

The talented and now excited *virtuoso* did play it again, and indeed, rushed the final bars in order the more quickly to take into his arms for the first time the ripe fruit which awaited him. He was about to fling the ukulele on the grass and spring to his heart's delight, when the Heart's Delight said dreamily:

"It was always my favourite tune. My dear Dead March. Makes me think of death and the grave. O Alexander Honeypot! how happy you have made me this night."

There was of course no accounting for tastes especially Celtic-Highland, but it seemed to Alexander Honeypot that there *were* limits. And I regret to say that on that night he made no further progress with his sappings and minings, being compelled to the ukulele and the Dead March until the day began to dawn and Miss McGluskie had to return to the Wilderness and her matutinal duties.

From that moment, Mr. Honeypot never talked of love—only of death, for as he would say in his artless way, he was "all things to some men and to all women", insisting that St. Paul had used these very words, and it must be all right. He had once seen a picture by Watts of "Love and Death"—now, for the first time he understood the conjunction. And the more he talked of death and the grave, with a few flames of hell thrown in to keep the pot a-boiling so to speak, the better Miss McGluskie liked it and him.

So became Mr. Honeypot more and more funereal, making his approaches, metaphorically speaking, draped as for one of Mr. Wodes' "extra-specials"—and there was no doubt, if they only could have been capitalized, that in such moments he would have made his fortune as a mute.

And so it was that "there came the night", as the films say, when there were undoubted indications that the walls of Jericho were about to fall—which is to say, Miss McGluskie herself. For the more lachrymose the approach, the greater the response, and now, night after night, Miss McGluskie would weep with joy or something into the tiny fare-thee-well which she was now affecting instead of the stout linen piece into which she had

been accustomed to trumpet. For the Walls of Jericho were falling, not to the trumpets of Mr. Honeypot but to the trumpeting of the victim, who, in her moments of *abandon*, had the habit of trumpeting through a red bandana like a circus elephant and which, as a prudent virgin, inside her placket-hole she reserved for such occasion.

Finally came the happy eve when instead of weeping into her "four by three", she was weeping into Mr. Alexander Honeypot's arms, arms which had been awaiting that blessed moment from the first blessed instant he had set upon her his small and shifty "gimlets".

And so it was that, for the moment, forgetting not only the Longer but even the Shorter Catechism, Elspeth McGluskie had whispered soft permission for Alexander Honeypot that night for the first time to visit her at the Wilderness, it appearing that Lord Lovem with Clarence had gone to some race-meeting in the North of England, leaving the Wilderness to her and the ghosts of the dead past.

And so it was that Mr. Honeypot, master of stratagem, did wait upon his mistress at the witching hour of 1 a.m., a much more effective hour in his experience than midnight, it being an hour when a woman's heart beats feebly and needs sustenance and her spirit turns to water within her. As I say, Mr. Honeypot did at the hour of 1 a.m. approach the Wilderness by devious ways from the back, armed with nothing more than a torch and a hopeless optimism, "like a blooming burglar", as he said afterwards, and, as per arrangement, precisely formulated by his inamorata, awaited the lowering of the rope-ladder of the standardized A.R.P. pattern, provided by a kindly council in case of air raid and fire, or, in case of desperate need, for the conjuncting of true lovers, the joint fire-watching of man and woman being "conducive".

There was no earthly reason of which I know why Miss McGluskie should not have descended the main staircase and let Mr. Honeypot in to his night's work, but, being of a romantic nature, that blessed damosel had insisted on the torch and the ladder. And Mr. Honeypot, wise in the ways of women, had known better than to protest.

Once more the friendly moon had veiled her light as our Adventurer of Love approached the fastness in which his dearest of the moment dwelt, much as a knight of old in tin trousers and pot helm would have approached *his* ladye-love. Twice, owing to the veiling of the moon and the practical fact that his torch wouldn't light when he wanted it to light, our ardent Honeypot barked his shin over concealed obstacles, tore his breeches, they *not* being made of tin, upon the barbed wire with which the Wilderness was liberally strung, stung a very tender part upon a bed of nettles and upon which he had suddenly squatted, and in a state not altogether suitable to the Planned Event, found himself at last beneath Miss McGluskie's window. Three times he flashed the torch, which had come into action again, as agreed—he heard the window open, a scraping on the ivied wall, and there before him hung the rope ladder.

Waiting once more for Luna to veil her light, as she doubtless blushed to see the goings-on beneath her, Alexander climbed the ladder, to find himself at long last in the octopus-like arms of Elspeth McGluskie, who had a grip

of her own. He could feel the warm hot lips against his, the seductive contours pressed against his hardened torso, as he heard his ladye-love recite in the way that she had in her more impassioned moments, from her beloved "Song of Solomon" which she insisted, with the more moral exegetists, was the song of Solomon to his bride the Church. Whereas Mr. Honeypot, at least, knew dam' well that it was not to any Church but to some warm-blooded houri that the Wickedest and Wisest of Men had addressed his dithyrambics —and more power to his elbow! The deep low voice, the lips luscious and close to his ear, came to him from the lady who lay in his arms in between the spasms of love:

". . . let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth . . . for thy love is better than wine . . . draw me, I will run after thee—the king hath brought me into his chambers. . . ."

And each time that the fair Elspeth pressed those luscious lips upon the rather small and moist lips which awaited them, she would burst into another dithyramb:

". . . by night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. . . ."

It was only when by the devious ways of love with a capital "L" that they had arrived at the inner temple of delight and Miss McGluskie had, so to speak, splashed her knight with the whole of Chapter V of "The Song", that this wicked man felt sure of his prey. Let it be said, comparing him with "the chiefest among ten thousand" and stating, quite inaccurately, the transports of love knowing neither measurement nor colour, that "his head was as the most fine gold", that "his locks were bushy, and black as a raven", that his neck was "as a tower of ivory", and, much more accurately, that Mr. Honeypot's eyes "were like the fishpools in Heshbon". For, truth to tell, his eyes were of the "fishy" variety.

It was when our Elspeth was reaching her apotheosis and Mr. Honeypot was ever more faintly struggling within her love-grip, and when, bursting forth into song as she, ecstatic, cried to the whole of Paradise Row, now, thank God! asleep: "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!" that a change came over the spirit of their love-dream, as a newly erected siren burst for the first time into its banshee wail:

"*Wow-wow-wowee-wow . . . oh . . . ah . . . eeeeeeee!*"

It was a chastened Mr. Honeypot who, ere the damnéd thing had ceased to scream, might be seen descending the rope ladder in foreshortened attire —for his Beloved, in her transports, had rather torn him up.

So ended Love's Young Dream ere it had properly commenced.

C'est la guerre!

XXVIII

IN "THE ROBE OF GLORY"

EVERY little boy and girl, and "some of them were very little and all of them were very few", as Mick Malone put it—every little boy and girl in Eventide

village had been properly baptized in the Parish Church font which was very old and holy, for it had come out of the sixth century. Every little boy and girl had been "turned up and rubber-stamped on their dear little bottoms or whatever they do with little boys and girls just out of the shell". (Here I am quoting the ribald Lady Lackplace who, as Mr. Jark would tell her whenever they met on the War Council, "was bound for hell and be damned to her", or words to that effect.) And no good their godfathers and godmothers promising to go bail for them until they had reached years of discretion, which, anyway, was a Popish invention according to Mr. Jark's anti-Popery campaign.

That was the first baptism of Eventide.

Eventide had experienced a delightful Hitlerian lull from that day of, as it sometimes seemed, many years ago, when Mr. O'Brien Leicester had seen the funeral cortège go past and the twentieth century had roared out of blue skies into the eighteenth century that was Paradise Row. For the beginning of the massed bombings of August had scarce touched Paradise, the bombing war being so finely compartmented that unless the bomb hit your own house or person, you hardly knew about it and neither fire nor bomb having as yet fallen upon Eventide.

Now Eventide was to have that lull rudely broken by its Second Baptism. It had had its baptism of water at the font—now it was to have its baptism of fire. And at last, O'Brien Leicester would have an answer to his unspoken question: "How will they take it when IT arrives?"

It was one of those love-sick and sweaty nights, this seventh of September, when Mr. Alexander Honeypot had ascended into the heights to his siren of love only to be cast into the depths by that other siren—not of the dulcet tones of Elspeth when under the influence of the tender passion, but the strident brassy note of menace.

And yet it may appear as our veridical chronicle unfolds, that Mr. Honeypot, who had believed himself to be on the very threshold of the ascent of the ladder of love on that autumn night, only to find himself sent down the ladder again, may discover that between the two sirens there was not perhaps so much difference after all. For oily and wily are the ways of women, strange or tame.

As he descended his ladder from the Elysian bowers, it was to find the whole of the eastern horizon aflame. First, in his despair and frenzy, he believed that he was "seeing things" and that the flame of his being had in some mystical way communicated itself to the earthly horizon. Then, finding that the horizon still persisted, Alexander, who was always quick in the uptake, determined upon hieing him to "The Robe of Glory", where, by having a couple of goes of gin, his favourite tipple, he might at once clear his brain and assuage love's frustration.

. . .

"The Robe of Glory" had, after a year of war, become at one and the same time "the cesspool of iniquity and the midden of filth" and "the lightsome social centre where a few light-hearted souls might exchange the time

of day with their pots of beer—one of the brighter emergences of the war". The former, being the considered opinion of Mr. Jark, who was a ferocious teetotaller. The latter, that of the Reverend Robin Hallowes, who following his invariable rule of being all things to all men and nothing to any woman, for he was a bachelor, and "running with the hare and hunting with the hounds" affected a *bonhomie* and a tolerance that at times was devastating. He might even be seen o' nights, and especially on this night, propping up Mr. Bull's bar with his third stomach. For the Reverend Robin was not as other men, having a portable belly, apparently made of indiarubber and capable of stretching illimitable, like the Reverend's opinions, which were also of elastic, he being a man upon whom the bishop could depend.

He was very popular with his Bishop, who was also of indiarubber, but rubber mixed with oil, and, after all, it takes all sorts of consistencies, and inconsistencies, to make a world.

As Mr. Honeypot, still slightly dazed from love's advent, entered the "Private" bar of "The Robe", it was to hear Mr. Malone, as always the life and soul of the party, as he stood treat to his private brigade of Irish guardsmen, "tell the wur-rld and be damned to ut!" that Hitler was only bluffing; that they'd never hear a bomb dhrop on the holy sod of Oirland and maybe not even any worth talkin' about on the pagan patch that was called England and that he was dead sure, having had it from the horse's mouth, who turned out to be his Holiness the Pope, who was in Mr. Malone's confidence, that what he called "peace poorparlours" had already started through the blessed medium of Mr. de Valera and the Isle of Saints that he ruled to the glory of God, and that we'd have peace for evermore and glory be! by Christmas with the baba lying sound asleep in his manger and the Green Flag of Erin or something waving over the Whole Boiling and the blessed light of Heaven shining over all and that "if there was a man among them that had the courage and the sthrength to deny it, he'd be very happy to see him outside and knock hell out of him! and could he say fairer than that?"

It was at this sainted moment that Mr. Honeypot entered to tell the enraptured "Privates" that the "Blessed Light" had already begun its beneficent work, as the whole of the Eastern Horizon was ablaze with heaven or something that looked very like the fires of the Other Place . . . and so called for a "double gin".

Out rushed the Boiling into the main street to gaze at the Eastern Horizon and, having gazed their fill, to rush back again to order "doubles" by the dozen so as to clear their feverish brains or to comfort them or indeed anything you like.

And talking about Popes, it was here there emerged the greatness of "The Little Pope," our little Mr. Wodes, the undertaker, who, already in his twilight stage, had steadfastly refused upon the exodus to be parted from his glass or from his counter to which he held much as Buck Galanty, the convert, held to his Church, trusting in it for his upholdment and salvation.

Holding on to his glass, with Buck Galanty doing the same, he requested the "Boiling" to tell him what they meant by rushing out like that into the street and then rushing back again as though they were afraid of their wretched

lives. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," whined Mr. Wodes. "Dust we are, from dust were we made, and to dust must we return." And then repeated dolefully and soulfully: "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust . . ." which Mr. Malone neatly capped by "and if God don't take you, the Devil must!"

"Take me, did you say, Mr.—*hic*—Malone!" said Mr. Wodes, loftily ignoring the interruption. "I—*hic*!—am discharging a public duty in my humble way. Am I troubling myself about fires on the eastern horizon or bombings or other nastinesses? Not me for fourpence! Isn't it to me, Wodes the Undertaker, Funeral Furnisher and General Embalmer, that the Eventide Council came to order their little *paper mashy*" (Mr. Wodes meant, it is believed, *papier mâché*) "overalls, a thousand of 'em, to receive the bodies of the bombed, *when* and *if* the bombs come, as they appear to have come over there on the eastern horizon? Am I worrying? Not me! For"—and Mr. Wodes paused impressively, as with a wandering eye he at last fixed his surroundings—"ain't it all good for trade? Now *ain't* it?"

With which impressive and deeply moving angle upon Mr. Hitler's fireworks, Mr. Nodes gradually subsided down the counter, then tried to climb on to it to bed down for the night "and call me if any mummy wants to be embalmed! for Wodes is always on the job—ready and willing to oblige . . . ready and willing. . . ." After which he was carefully removed from the glasses and laid to rest in the corner behind the bar, for there was no room in front owing to the enraged demands for "doubles" which had now risen to a *crescendo*.

Upon Mr. Wodes being laid to rest and Mr. Galanty, with extreme thoughtfulness, having chalked upon the public-house blackboard upon which "credit drinks" were inscribed, the letters "R.I.P." and placed it above Mr. Wodes' recumbent form, "The Boiling" burst into committee, in order to consider the next steps to be taken in face of a menace which had matured.

Nearly everybody present being a member of one of the War Committees, or "Councils", the august name by which they were always known, it was felt that the occasion was too precious to be lost. It was unanimously decided upon the motion of Mr. Nicodemus, the barber, "that this house here and now do go into a Committee of Ways and Means with a view to taking steps forthwith to consider the best steps to take against the fiery bomb and the arrow that flyeth by noonday". Mr. Nicodemus was a Wicked Man, as indeed are many barbers, the art of haircutting leading thereto, but like the Devil, his Master, was given to biblical quotation.

Mrs. Kish Chicks, perched on a handy cask—the "Chicks" never sat, by the way, she always "perched"—balancing her favourite Hollands, pertly suggested that it might conduce to the "Ways and Means" if the gents present yielded their glasses until the proceedings were over. The most popular lady in Eventide—that is to say as apart from the Row, here imperilled her popularity, as her proposal was met with, first, stony silence, then with thirsty roars as from lions enraged. "In-in-interfering with the principles of Englishmen, indeed," all in one word from Mr. Malone, who happened to be an Irishman, I think voiced the feelings—or was it the throats?—of the gathering.

Up to the war, it had been an unheard-of thing for any female in petticoats, or even in the forbidden "trews" which Mrs. Kish Chicks not so much sported as luxuriated, to enter the bar of a common public-house, the only ladies who had hitherto committed the enormity being "ladies of light", that is to say, of darkness. And it really was getting harder and harder to tell the difference, unless the weekly prayer: "Lighten our darkness we beseech thee, O Lord!" may have indicated it.

Now, even before midday, Kish would "drop in for a drain", Lady Lackplace, looking increasingly magnificently shabby, would also fall in behind her as though by accident, saying that "she had seen her enter and wanted to see her particularly about something special in connection with the Air Raid Prevention". Even poor old Honoria, up to that moment an "osophist" of the strictest "T.T." and a ferocious vegetarian and anti-tobacco fiend, would be dragged in at the tail of her august ma and had formed the habit of "a small glass of port", in a small voice. As for Lady Lackplace's hereditary enemy, Mrs. Pompadour, that lady would bounce into "The Robe" out of the street as shamelessly as one of the ladies of light and have, not one, but two or three or four, in one case completely losing count and being taken home in the privier hours by Joe Bings in a wheelbarrow, there being no petrol-driven chariot available.

Mrs. Jack Ketch with her friend Mr. de Burgh, who himself knew every hole and corner and every drink of "The Robe of Glory", which he would declare to be his spiritual home, would sneak in, the pair sitting at the very farthest end of the bar where they could absorb their alcohol in stealth. They did not speak to anybody, each being sufficient unto the other.

Even Lord Lovem, with Clarence, had formed the habit of dropping in democratically to hobnob with men and women who, before the war, he would not be seen dead with, and even Clarence, eyeglass and all, would sit convivially beneath Mrs. Kish Chicks' cask to gaze upwards into the twinkling eyes of his inamorata. For Clarence "had got it bad", but whether Mrs. Kish was playing with him or was beginning to "fall for" him, was known only to herself and her God—and even not then. For she was a tricksy puss.

As for our now old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Cocklepill, they had their own special two-seater right under the red, blue and yellow glasses in the frame just around the corner of the bar at the end. Where, indeed, they would sit and hold reception like royalty, dispensing mightily "doubles" and gin-slings, port and "pop", and that delectable beverage known as Mother's Ruin.

The only females who steadily set their faces against "The Robe" were Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam, who insisted that "no woman who was a lady and not a 'woman' would be seen entering such doors"; Elspeth McGluskie who, whatever she might be in matters of love, was strict T.T., and "the public-house is the antechamber of the pit", and, for some reason unknown, Ella Cattermole, who had a habit of keeping herself to herself. A habit, by the way, common to the whole of the Row until the red harrow of war ploughed the prejudice of Paradise Row under. But it took a world-war to do it.

The O'Brien, entering at this moment for his perfunctory evening "half

bottle of Whiteways", as still being most regrettably in the eyes of Mr. Bull, a strict "T.T.", an appeal was made to him to take an informal chair and generally direct a discussion which was rapidly passing from the impersonal to the personal.

Mr. Malone, it seemed, was still ready and willing for some reason obscure to "go outside" with "anybody that said the light in the East was bombs", he being dead set on peace and ready to ensure it with fist if needful.

Our Mrs. Mallory, who had had one or two, or even more than one or two, was launching into a touching excursion into her "insides" which, it seemed like the entrails of the Roman augurs, had prophetic tendencies and her "stummick had told her from early yesterday morning that bombs or somefink was coming and there you were"!

Mr. Jark, his little pinafore-placard dangling before him like an enraged *sporran*, was improving the shining hour, in this case the shining East, by stating that Ezekiel and Isaiah had both foretold that bombs would fall upon an impenitent Britain on that very eighth of August, he having worked it out to the last decimal and if you didn't believe him what did you think of Isaiah xlvii in which it was stated with an appalling clarity: "I was wroth with my people, I have polluted my inheritance and I will shew them no mercy . . ." and speaking of Britannia, had he not said in verse 7: "And thou saidst I shall be a lady for ever", instead of which, Mr. Jark indicated she had been not a lady but a witch, only he used another word, rhyming with "witch", that shall be nameless in these pristine pages.

And if you could get over Isaiah, what would you do with the Prophet Ezekiel, upon whose lips there lay a coal of fire, who, speaking of the British Israelites (Mr. Jark had got it horribly mixed, one fears), who were the true descendants of the ancient Israelites, had said in his opening chapter:

"And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of fire. . . ."

And if you didn't believe the Prophet Ezekiel or his representative, Aurelius Jark, into whose unworthy hands for the time had been committed the keys of hell and heaven, then you might take another look outside "The Robe of Glory" and see if the Prophet wasn't right about tonight, as the first look they had taken, in his opinion, had not only made full revelation of the Prophet but also of the Book of Revelation itself, in which it was set out to the last jot and tittle, with hell to the human race at the very end.

It was at this juncture, as before related, that Buck Galanty of all people, and he secure in the Only One and True Church, had dropped his double brandy and rushed outside "to take a look" as Mr. Jark had recommended. Nor could he get over Mr. Jark and the Prophet Ezekiel, for there was a great whirlwind of fire that seemed to stream out of the north-east, "a fire infolding itself, and with a brightness about it", and the colour of it was the purest amber.

Whereupon he had rushed back again to send the others out to take a peep, including Mr. Malone, who ran back again to refuge with Mr Galanty in spirituous liquors and to tell the ladies and gentlemen assembled that "hell

had bruk loose and the first contingent had gone down the main street, all the devils in hell with it, and they were setting fire to the wide-wide-wur-r-rld." He rang his "r's" most terribly and looked himself the dead spit of Ezekiel or of Isaiah.

Joe Bings, the cracked gardener, who had also "taken a peep", was converted on the spot, he bowing his head as he knelt before the temporary representative of the Almighty, Mr. Jark to wit, and asked for forgiveness of his sins, which Mr. Jark most graciously granted. Indeed, telling him in so many words, that it didn't matter what he did from that moment, that the Lord had plucked him from the burning, and that he was one of the Elect. Which indeed would have immensely gratified Miss McGluskie had she been present, although one imagines it might just as easily have resulted in that terrible young woman committing assault and battery upon the persons of Mr. Jark and Mr Bings, at their invasion of her prerogative of Election and Predestination. But one never knows, does one?

And all this might have passed if Mr. Jark had only been satisfied with his solitary victim. But "feeling the spirit of the Lord and of Ezekiel upon him", he began to rage up and down the bar of the "Robe", seeking whom he might devour or save, and in his excitement and what he called "lustfulness to save souls alive before the Lord and from the amber fire", bursting into a pæan of praise and exaltation over the recumbent figure of his solitary convert, who grabbled in the dust with Miss Gadfly now by his side. She also having "got it bad", although later it was to appear that it was her stomach and not her conscience—that is to say the infernal not the supernal regions, which had "gone back on her". Thus Mr. Jark as he let himself go into Solomon's Song. "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman . . . Thy navel is like a . . ."

At this pointed reference, scandalized protests arose from young Mr. Bull, who, for all his name and appearance, was an extremely proper bull and who was quite legally and properly mated with a very nice young cow, or heifer, and who said that he much regretted, but "if Mr. Jark who, anyhow, had never been any good to 'the House', he never having spent a penny in alcoholic liquors within the memory of man, did not desist from his remarks about Miss Gadfly's thighs, he would be compelled to put him outside." Whereupon, Mr. Jark, with all the fire of the martyr, ran round in circles like a decapitated hen and went on and on:

". . . thy navel is like a round goblet, *which wanteth not liquor* (and from that you see, Mr. Bull, Solomon, the wisest man of all, was a teetotaller) . . ."

Mr. Bull here had begun inimical approach to Mr. Jark as Mr. Jark burst into his peroration prior to immolation, giving novel pronunciation to his "thy" (not to be confused with Miss Gadfly's thighs), which he pronounced as "they":

". . . *they* two breasts are like two young roes that are twins . . . *they* belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies. . . ."

"Lilies" suitably constituted his last word, for Mr. Bull having taken him by the scruff of his lean neck and the slacks of his patent portable trousers, he

had found himself shooting through space and the swing doors of "The Robe" under Mr. Bull's experienced chucker-out hands, there, if he wished, to continue King Solomon's beautiful address to his Church or his sweetheart or something, as from verse 3, chapter seven, which he proceeded to do from his rest in the gutter.

Miss Gadfly came out of her virginal swoon and was given extreme unction in the shape of a glass of port, she explaining that the moment before she fell on the floor by the side of Mr. Bings she had not the slightest idea of doing anything of the kind or of following Mr. Jark or becoming an Israelitish Ancient Briton, "and it was the heat or something that overcame her, and she had been digging again and had nearly been immolated outside at the back of Number Four and had dropped in on 'The Robe' for a refresher to pull her round, and it was all too much for a maiden lady and it wouldn't happen again".

A confession which it was generally felt under the influence of the "doubles" did the lady credit, she receiving absolution from such widely differing intelligences as Mr. Malone and Lady Lackplace (who in these stirring times was always "having one" herself), from Mrs. Mallory and Buck Galanty, and even from the fruity Mr. Hallowes who was just in the middle of his thirteenth or whatever it might be.

And the remainder of that night at "The Robe of Glory," and the result of the deliberations of the Councils—and as we are becoming biblical, are they not writ in the records of Eventide? For it was generally agreed and resolved that something must be done now that Mr. Hitler was himself doing something, and that the sooner the fire-watchers and preventative councils got together the better it would be for Eventide . . . and anyhow they might as well make a night of it and forget all about the amber light in the eastern sky, for what couldn't be cured must be endured and there would be plenty of time tomorrow or next week to decide upon the work of these Councils and to apportion this work to the individuals composing them. In a word, Eventide was very like the England about it and the leaders who had left The Isle Inviolate weaponless and helpless in face of a ruthless enemy, because it was all too much trouble to arm and if you frightened the people you lost the votes, which were the be-all and end-all of English party politics.

Really, Mr. Hitler was having it all his own way and it was all Lombard Street to a China orange that this little scrubby scrub-moustached gentleman would be sitting pretty in Buckingham Palace by the seventeenth of that very month "or call him" (Mr. Galanty) "a very pestilent, and pernicious fellow—and, mine host Bull, another foaming double of the same!" For it was the one and only Buck speaking.

"The Boiling" then went for the last time into Committee of Ways and Means, and to such good purpose that when Mine Host cried "Time, Gentlemen, please—*please*!" in a voice that would have melted one of Mr. Hitler's "specials", the contents of "The Robe" discovered their ways to be so devious that dawn still found some of them on the road to their homes. Whilst their means of getting there became more dubious as the night drew on and, in the true and topical words of Buck Galanty, who by his guardian angel,

had been delivered outside the Wilderness, under the impression that it was his own little cottage at the right-hand bottom of the Row:

" 'Tis now the very witching hour of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world."

XXIX

MR. LEICESTER'S PRIVATE TROUBLES

"THE amber fire in the East" had perhaps begun to bring Eventidiana to its senses. People even began to believe that England really was at war and that this war was not to be a walk-over, and even that Mr. Hitler, despite "appeasement" and the soothing syrup of Messrs. Baldwin and Chamberlain, meant business.

It was a most regrettable awakening and Paradise Row in particular quietly resented it. You see, it spoiled its tea-parties and its going up to town to shop at the Stores and, even greatly daring, to catch the last train home from a theatre or, "tell it not in Gath!", one of those wicked twenty-four hour revues which sounded so much better in French than in English. As the one and only Irishman of Eventide put it: "Britannia had commenced to sthrip and to trip and to take her petticoats off of her dirty legs and that was the naked truth! and here you had prices going up and petticoats coming down, and it was his private belief that if the fashion decreed that the ladies —God bless 'em! but *you* knew what he meant—should career about the pavements in beads and a figleaf, they would do it, literally, without turning a hair!" All of which was perhaps truer than even Mr. Malone knew, and which was especially true in his concluding sardony, that "there was a roseate good reason why Mother Eve tuk the figleaf to entice the poor deluthered Adam, and every Eve of them all dam' well knew it, for what you don't see you imagine even if it wasn't ever there!"

It had also released another cargo of devils into many of the hitherto undisturbed homes of this English village, thirty miles from London. Leicester couldn't make it out.

For Theophilus had been found one morning with his eye nearly cut out lying on the doorstep of Number Five, on the top storey of which Ella Cattermole had her flat.

He couldn't account for the eye or for his condition, and so it was charitably presumed that Theophilus Tombs had been round to The Robe of Glory to look on the wine when it was red. But there were some blue welts across the side of his face and head for which he also could not account.

Serena Gadfly knew of course what it meant. It meant that Fifth Columnists were loose in Eventide and that this attack upon Mrs. Cattermole's butler was but the prelude to a general advance of the German armies upon the unhappy village. However, she was "prepared", having dug another trench

and on an entirely new principle on the little plot across the road from Number Four. She had also nailed some of the plywood, now so fashionable for blacking out, over the iron platings of her hall door—for all the doors of Paradise Row were armoured against blunderbuss from the days of the Georges when footpads were plentiful. She had also tinkered round with one of these old blunderbusses which for a century had carried its load of mischief without discharging, and nearly shot herself through the chest, after which, she had just set up the "blunder" on a sort of gun-carriage made out of the back of an old chair, pointing it down the passage in the full belief that the mere sight of it would daunt any Nazi that ever stormed a defenceless dwelling and raped the female inhabitants thereof. For Serena was always thinking of that virginity which, through nearly half a century, she had defended from male assault, even though each night she did look under the bed in the faint but fervent hope that there she might find something in trousers to attempt it again, according to the malignant Lackplace, but never "seemed to have any luck".

For "there had been a commercial traveller once", as she would whisper to her special friends . . . but on what this Naughty One did or attempted to do she did not expatiate, leaving the violently anticipated *dénouement* to the inflamed imaginations of her cronies.

Leicester also knew that Lord Lovem and the Alexander Honeypot who now imperceptibly dominated Eventide were thick as thieves, for Alexander was always at the Wilderness, whence he would leave in the wee sma' hours and not always by the front door either. It was all very mysterious and, like so much else, must be put down to the mounting debit account of Mars, whose business it seemed to be not so much to lower as to raise the population, and with it to break out Mrs. Britannia Grundy from a hoary immemorial *morale* which critical youth was now finding to be so unmoral.

Also he had his own private troubles.

First of all, there was Patricia, who, at fourteen and for the fourteenth time, imagined herself to be in love with a man she had never even spoken to —the writer and musician, Emil Bloch. It seemed that "Pat", the name to which she never responded, had seen the great Bloch at a Queen's Hall concert conducting his own work and thereupon had made up her mind, as she had told her mother with striking originality, that he was her one and only love and that she would never love anybody else. Also, strangely enough, for Patricia Leicester but rarely confided in her father, she had told him, Leicester, the same thing. Yet did he secretly find comfort in the contradiction that his young daughter often came to him in her more grievous troubles. She only ignored him when everything went well with her.

One of those child-loves, of course, and it wouldn't last—only he didn't make fun of her, partly because he had once loved a girl when he was twelve for six weeks, and another girl for four years who was six years his senior, and these two "loves" had affected the whole of his life and work, and in the case of the second had been the fount of his famous book, *The Love Story of a Little Boy*, a study in adolescence.

He knew, none better, that these boy and girl loves had their part in the

economy of spirit, that they were very real whilst they lasted, and that their after-effects were often subtle and persistent. He did not laugh at "Pat", because he did not laugh at himself, and like all really wise grown-ups, he treated all children, even babies, as if they were grown-ups in potency if not in actual being.

Bloch was a tall, distinguished-looking Jew—and God knew he, O'Brien Leicester, was no Jew-baiter or Jew-hater, but all the same you couldn't get over the fact that the Jew was his own problem—a problem he never tried to solve—and that he was almost invariably materialist, the world's most profound sceptic, and, of all men, the man most set upon "the root of all evil". Yet it was the Jew who had given to our world some of its greatest musicians, composers and scientists. He was often impossible but always interesting, with a quick, lively and sometimes glowing intelligence. Only, somehow, he couldn't say why, he didn't want his son-in-law to be a Jew.

Not that he ever really thought of Patricia as his "daughter". He thought of her as his "young friend", as he would call her, and as he felt himself to be what the *Daily Telegraph* had once called him—"The Youngest European", and he always took certain malign pleasure in telling his ribald young daughter that "he could knock cold" any of her various and varied young men, now buzzing about her like wasps about honey. For Leicester had been a boxer of parts and still packed a venomous "left".

But the Patricia "case" was nothing compared with the case of Patricia's brother. There you had a witches' pot a-brewin' if you liked.

And the devil of it was that it was not only becoming the "case" of Sean but of Sean's father.

Even now he, Leicester, could not understand how he had got into it.

He had always been a one-woman man—that woman his wife, Aase, who apart from those two boyish experiences with women, had been the only woman to whom his heart had "flamed". Only, was it a "flaming"? Was it not rather something else—something deeper, less emotional?

Then Ella Cattermole had come out of the blue, in the beginning scarcely for him to take note of her. Her presence and being had grown like the "fading in" of a cinema picture. One day, she had not been there. Then, with the incoming of awareness, there had been an influence rather than a person. Then the person. And now . . .?

He had had to call on her in connection with some public work in which he was interested. That was the beginning. What would be the end?

Even now he did not know if he were anything to this lovely creature of *svelte* body and *svelte* mind, who, with her blinded look, had come out of the nothing. Sometimes he even suspected that she had given her heart, and perhaps herself, to some unknown man . . . not to any "Mr." Cattermole, for if that husband had ever had existence, nobody knew where or who he was and Mrs. Cattermole never spoke about him, beyond once hinting that she had married into the Cattermole family.

Then he had found himself going ever more frequently to the top flat of Number Five. Sometimes about that "public work", sometimes about advice on some trifling matter, and then, at last, frankly, for no reason at all save that

he liked to be with her and to listen to her Chopin, for she was a pianist of subtlety.

Although she spoke little and never said anything particularly striking or original, and though he valued intelligence even beyond beauty in a woman, she comforted him in some queer way. In a way, at least, that Aase had never been able to do or, indeed, had ever tried to do.

Even if Ella would have let him make love to her, he had never had any such idea in his mind . . . at least apart from the fact that, as he knew, to a woman every man was a potential lover, for women were all rakes at heart. As for being physically unfaithful to Aase, even though Aase and he had not lived together as man and wife for many years and had had but irregular love-making at any time during their nineteen years of marriage—that idea had never come to him as a possibility, much less probability.

He had his seasons and his rhythms, as had all strongly sexed men—times when he most terribly desired the warm embrace of the flesh and of the spirit it enclosed. But, once more, as the Irish poetess had said: "O'Brien Leicester drove lions where other men drove horses. The lions tore him but he held them."

Now he was not quite so sure of himself and his lions as he had been. And there was this further complication of Sean, the boy who was closer to him and, in some ways, more a part of his being than even Aase, the boy's mother, or anyone else in the world.

For between him and Sean there existed a complete understanding which never necessitated definition. They worked together and they played together. They loved the same kind of music and, usually, the same kind of people. Patricia was her mother's, but Sean was his father's.

He believed with Sean that they two had been together in many other lives, and that they would always be together.

And now, O God! was it to be that they two were to be rivals for the same woman?

But there was that other woman lying down there in the Long Room. She was the woman he loved—really, *truly* loved. How could he even for a moment think of any other woman as her rival? She was unique, impenetrable. He believed he had fought and loved her for three thousand years. Maybe they would fight and love, life after life, to the end of earth-time.

He wanted most urgently to see her at this moment when his mind was running upon that other. Often would he go back to Aase, to look at her and to seek to understand her secret—or was it their secret?

He went down the stairs from his working-room on the first floor, where he also slept. Knocking at the door, as he always did, he waited the low murmured protest which told him when entrance was not permitted. Standing there a few seconds, he opened the door.

Aase was lying there gazing up at the ceiling from the book she had been reading on the portable bed-stand. She did not look towards the man who had entered. She never did.

"I only came in to see if you wanted anything, darling," he said, using his usual term of endearment to a woman who never during their married life

had called him by his Christian name and never, even when he knew she loved him deeply, spoke any term of endearment. The woman on the couch did not move. "I was only running down the Row for a moment," he said lamely, feeling himself having to speak as he so often did in face of her compelling silences. Still the woman on the couch did not reply. Then, turning her eyes away very slightly, she said in a rather low, pleasant voice: "And why should you not go to see Ella Cattermole? As you know, you are always free to do as you like."

It wounded him as a sword-thrust, those low pleasant tones. Aase—Aase always knew everything.

XXX

ARTHUR KASTERLING AS FIGHTER

HERE comes injection to the now more or less disordered life of the village of Eventide. It is most regrettable to have to record it, but as it is to have strange consequence later in our story, it must be set down.

I don't know if the Gentle Reader, as I still dare to call him, or even her, has any clear comprehension of the medley that was the O'Brien Leicester, who was a man of many parts and partings.

On the whole, O'Brien was a man of quiet tact and understanding. That was the English side of him. There was, however, another and usually unsuspected side—the Elizabethan-Irish.

I don't suppose that this side showed itself more than once a year or so, but then its effect was devastating. For at heart the O'Brien was a Drake, Hawkins and Frobisher in one, and if he had not been on the whole a decent man of good intent and discretion, it is probable that he would have been a gun-runner, a freebooter, or even a pirate. So little separates the saint from the sinner—but which is "saint" and which "sinner" becomes for the Chronicler, as it had always been for Leicester, harder and harder to define. He would often say that if, like St. Paul the hater of Woman, he hadn't been a saint and with it, the lover of one woman, he, also like St. Paul, might have been the Greatest Rake in History. In despite of that holy man's theory of the redemptive, he, once again like Paul, was himself irredeemable. Or so he would say.

It all came out of nothing, as, indeed, is true of nearly everything that matters. The things we fear never happen—it is the things we don't expect which hurt, and in the place unexpected, as Mr. Malone told "The Boiling" the evening he kicked one of its vulgarer fractions through the swing-doors of The Robe of Glory, almost conferring that robe upon the recipient of the kick, beautifully timed, for the recipient was in the local hospital for fourteen weeks and, indeed, had had the extreme unction administered by the good Father O'Halloran, but being a Kerry man, he refused to die, and so recovered. For, as they say in Ireland, "neither God nor devil will receive

he sowl of a Kerryman, which is the reason there isn't a Kerryman t'other ıide the bar of heaven nor this side of hell neither". But this is mere digres-ıion, and let us now see where we were.

. . . . . .

Leicester, as we have heard, was an ever more frequent visitor at Mrs. Cattermole's flat, where he would often forgather by chance with his boy, Sean. There had never been any confusion when father and son had met before, but now, to his grief, Leicester noted that the boy seemed a little shy of him. The blood would come into his dark olive skin, he would flush to the roots of his wavy dark-brown hair, and he would make some excuse to leave as soon as possible as though he felt he was not wanted.

But Ella Cattermole was not the first woman to come between two men, even though, to put it in an Irish way, one of them was a boy and the son of his father.

Leicester had got the habit of coming in of mornings to drink a cup of coffee with Ella, who made divine coffee in a sort of glass egg over a blue flame, over which she brooded like an enchantress. It ate into his writing time and had already caused trouble between his publishers and himself as he was engaged on a war novel which they wished to publish in this second year of war. Usually, he was prompt with his manuscripts. Now he began to put them off.

It marked declension.

This fine Friday morning of October, finding the street door open, he had come up the stairs, without ringing the top flat bell. As he came up, he heard the sound of Ella Cattermole's Blüthner, the piano which Sean would declare to be the only piano worth playing, and then Ella Cattermole's dark contralto as he sang to the unseen accompanist what he would call "The North Queen" or "Reincarnation" song which he had written partly in the Scandinavian his mother had taught him:

"I wait for you, dear, where golden dusks fall
Calling you out from the North—
I wait you, my dear, where the night-shadows pall
'Twixt the gates of the beckoning Forth—
Come out of the ice and out of the snows,
Come to me, my Queen, as the North Wind blows—
Come to me, come to me, out of the dawns,
As I hang on my cross—feel the prick of the thorns. . . ."

A little pause and then:

"I called you as Viking, I called you as Dane,
I called you in Egypt and in Greece once again,
And back in Atlantis with joy born of pain
When for a short hour in your arms I had lain. . . ."

He waited outside the half-open door, not wishing to spoil the melody,

which he guessed was played by his son, who with the singer was screened by the tall Japanese screen at the door.

Another pause as though the singer were gathering strength.

"Come, come to me, dearest—O dearest of all!
Come, O my Woman! where the sun-shadows fall,
Wait not for the morrow, but come on the call
As you list to the echo, *mit Lyn og mit Sjæl*!

The notes came vibrant, strong, assured:

"I list for the hush of thy piniony flight
O fly to my heart my *Snee-Dronning* tonight—
I've waited the Thousand Years, the Now or the Never,
To call you from memory, *for ever, for ever*!"

It was as the words died away that he heard a voice, *the* Voice. It came harsh, sarcastic:

"Never heard such rot in my life, Ella. Mush, I call it."

There are some voices which we instinctively hate upon hearing, just as there are faces we dislike upon seeing. For Leicester, this was one of those voices. He waited, not exactly knowing what to do.

"I don't know that anyone asked your opinion, Arthur." It was Ella speaking.

"But I am giving it . . ." and again the little harsh laugh.

Leicester, waiting outside that door, could *feel* Sean listening. He knew that feeling and he knew the possibilities which lay behind it.

Sean Leicester was possibly the gentlest youth in Eventide. Ridiculously sensitive himself, he hesitated to hurt anything, whether man, woman, child or animal. But behind this sensitiveness lay something else. Like father, like son, people would say.

So the father waited.

"It is mush, isn't it, Mr. Accompanist?" sneered the Voice.

Still the father felt Sean listening, without speaking.

The silence seemed to grow. He could see Ella looking at the two males, even though she was hidden by the screen.

The duel down the ages. Two men for one woman—or was it three, for he instinctively felt that this other invisible person was in love with Ella. People just know those things, unless they have no sixth sense—and if they haven't, then anything they think matters little.

"If I had my way I'd tear up all that beastly flapdoodle love twaddle. 'North Queen' indeed!"

Leicester heard the soft spring across the room, the sound of grappling, the grunts of a surprised man as he felt the white hands at his bull throat.

But Ella Cattermole had said nothing. She just watched, as the woman has always watched.

He wanted most damnably to steal his way down the stairs and let these two males settle this business in their own way, but he just could not. Nor could he move from the spot to enter the room.

The struggle went on in a sort of baleful silence, with every now and then the crash of a piece of furniture or a vase, as the combatants fought their way around the small room. The woman still looked on, as though unconcerned.

An experienced fighter in the ring, where for two years and as a very young man, "as a spiritual experience", he had fought the professional boxer, O'Brien Leicester instinctively knew that his boy hadn't a chance against the weight and experience of this unseen bully. He could hear the boy's labouring breath as he sought to clinch and avoid the blows of his opponent. Then, as he heard a choking cry, he felt himself released.

Removing his coat as he plunged into the room, he saw fleetingly a tall, red-faced youngish man facing him from the corner into which Sean, in final despairing effort, had forced him, his hands groping for the big man's throat. Sean, under his father's ægis, had done what of course all decent young men should do, he had taken lessons in "catch" from an ex-professional—"amateur teaching is useless", his father would say, which gives you the key to another side of O'Brien Leicester. But the boy's amateurish jejune knowledge was useless against the blows of a practised fighting man, who coolly sought for a six-inch uppercut to knock him out.

The boy scarcely troubled Arthur Kasterling. It was a game for him, and, indeed, more than once he deliberately pretended to miss the point of the jaw as Sean would hurl himself upon him.

On the other side of the room, standing near the green silk curtain, which she held in one hand, was the tall figure of Ella Cattermole, immobile, searching towards the contestants in her blinded indifferent way, seemingly neither pleased nor shocked by this horrid grapple which was wrecking her beautiful room. She made no attempt to interfere or to protest by voice or hand.

All this, O'Brien saw as he, always in training, sprang over to the corner, hauling Sean off with his left hand down on to the floor as he went into his man, as he used to do in those dear old days beyond recall in the Blackfriars Ring, that Ring which had once been a meeting house of the Brethren.

This apparition out of the circumambient seemed to astonish the big man, who, for a moment, dropped his hands. There was nothing "nice" about the O'Brien's fighting. He was a fighter by instinct and like all really good fighting men was ruthless and a "killer". He fought to knock out and for nothing else. "Nothing of the giddy amateur about him," Dick Burge used to say in the old days—that Dick who, ex-lightweight champion, was one of the gamest and best and his friend.

The first thing which brought Arthur Kasterling to his senses nearly resulted in his losing those senses. It was a terrific uppercut with the right made almost simultaneously with the pull that had flung Sean out of danger. It just missed that fraction to the side of the "point" which would have meant going into dreamland for Arthur.

Now the big man, though no professional, was a boxer of parts and had been the runner-up at his 'Varsity in the "heavies". It was the instinct of the experienced boxer which, as his man came in, made him attempt a similar blow from where he had dropped his hands. And it was the instinct of

avoidance which caused Leicester to shift his head so that the blow, given with all the weight of the body behind it, slid harmlessly over his head.

Sean had picked himself up and had gone over to stand by Ella, watching fascinated his father doing what he had to do and what he knew how to do. "It's not enough, Sean, to want to do anything—you must know *how*," that father would say. His father knew "how".

Leicester had stepped back a pace and then, as he steadied himself, had sent in a left hook which landed a shade too high to do real damage. Kasterling countering with a left to the nose which stung O'Brien, who always hated to have his nose punched—the thing which finally had made him give up the ring except for exercise.

There was blood in the eye of the big man, who was a fourteen-and-a-half stoner—at least a stone more than the "light-heavy" that was Leicester. But the O'Brien had been used to fighting odds in weight when he had fought his way into the heavy class, and more than one fifteen- or sixteen-stoner had been knocked cold by his infamous left hook to the "point".

He knew that this big fellow was in poor condition. Flushed and fat. So he instinctively went for the body and the "mark" or solar plexus to see if his man could "take it". There was little room in that flat for ringcraft, but keeping his man pinned in a corner that was now a disaster, he weaved as he came in for the body, landing a right and left on the mark as the big man above him grunted like a hog. He had discovered what he wished to know, that the big boy *could* take it, for the right-left to the mark would have put out any man less well-conditioned and resilient.

The male fighting animal is a curious combination of sportsmanship and brute. Never once did it occur either to the O'Brien or to the hoggish, handsome Arthur Kasterling, to kick or bite or do any of those things abhorred of the Marquis of Queensberry of revered memory, who had laid down the laws of the modern prize ring. At any moment, nobody knew better than Leicester that a well-directed kick on the kneecap or shin could put out the greatest champion of them all—yet he never thought of resorting to any of the tricks of the ju-jutsu exponent even when opposed to the pretty vile combination of bull and something not so bullish that was Arthur Kasterling, on whom, up to that freighted moment, he had never laid eye, and about whom he knew no more than Sean himself. Theirs was the hate instinctive which perhaps nothing but physical combat may appease. After all, the human being was still atavist. He was always returning to type.

Now the bull had broken out of his bars for a half-arm jab for the stomach which in his turn had forced Leicester away from his man, who, sidestepping, had come out, for them to fight in the middle of the low-ceiled room.

Leicester felt the lilt of battle run into through his veins—that glorious unconquerable feeling which in his ring days had always heralded victory, save in that one case with Battling Sayers, who had "k.o.'ed" him when on the threshold of victory and when the blood was running most strongly through brain *and mind*. For until you *knew* you could and would defeat your man, you were never sure of him. And no fight was won until it was lost.

But he felt this certainty with the tall handsome brute before him. He

was getting his measure, avoiding his best blows by that fraction which makes the lightning counter possible.

O'Brien was bleeding freely from that punch on the nose, but blood meant nothing, except to the light Persian carpet which made so excellent a "ring-canvas". He had already planted a fierce "pecking" blow, delivered with the knuckles down and pointed exactly between the big man's eyes, which was helping to close them, and now those heavy counters were slower and more uncertain and he was able to avoid them with ridiculous ease. In fact he felt so certain of himself, an old fault, that he left himself open to that whirlwind of a right hook which, catching him right on the point, sent him down like a felled log.

Now the man who was Arthur Kasterling, as it happened, had become a very great blackguard—one who possibly would not have stopped at murder, given the circumstance and condition. Yet it was this handsome scoundrel who instinctively drew back like the trained boxer when his opponent went down, waiting for him to rise . . . if he could. He would not hit a man when he was down—not even Kasterling would do it.

The man at his feet was writhing feebly as he sought to get back senses temporarily obliterated. But he could not. Sean, watching, did not move. He was like a boy in a dream. Nobody moved. The O'Brien Leicester, for all his skill and courage, was "out"—not "on his feet" but on his back, for he had fallen backwards instead of making the usual forward fall, as he went down.

It was at this moment that Ella Cattermole let her curtain go, and with a swift, almost feline movement, she had taken the great glass vase of autumn roses, plucked the roses out of the vase, and emptied the contents over the head of the man on the floor.

The effect was magical. As he felt the shock, Leicester rolled over on his face and began to get up, his opponent chivalrously enough standing back until he was on his feet again, when he came in at his man, dead set on finishing him this time for good. Rocking him with vicious left and right swings, which only the instinct of the old boxer enabled the O'Brien to survive by "keeping his head moving", as old Dick would advise, he tried vainly to knock his man out.

Nor was there any blessed minute interval as between three-minute rounds to give Leicester time to recover. After a few of those swings to the head, he was almost out on his feet, only that his old miracle was happening once more —the miracle of recovery out of despair.

Do what he would, the big man could not finish this fight *à outrance*. Leicester felt the strength steadily pour back into that depleted sumph which he could always see in his mind's eye.

It was when Kasterling, now at his wits' end to stop that recovery, had come in with a short heavy uppercut to Leicester's stomach, making the recipient grunt even though his arm had half stopped it, that he left his throat open as he flung up his head with the impetus of the blow. In a flashing moment of timing, beautiful and true, as exquisite as that of a Kreisler on the "E" string, Leicester's left had come round like the sickle of Death to land f air on the Adam's apple of his opponent—a pip of a blow. The big man had

thrown both hands into the air and then had crashed on his face at the feet of the Elizabethan.

. . . . .

It was then that Ella Cattermole made her second interference into this extraordinary scene.

Turning to Sean and then to his father she said quietly, pointing to the body on the floor:

"Take it out of my room, please—I don't like it."

XXXI

THE HEART OF A WOMAN

AT this moment, Leicester was troubled by many things, not least the way in which things were going between Sean and little Snow-White, who had begun to look more and more like her name as, also more and more, the boy she so deeply loved found his society, and perhaps his happiness, in the company of Mrs. Cattermole, who also seemed to delight in his son's society.

Always was Sean running into Number Five to try over a new song with Ella or to play to her one of his own sonatas, and whether he, Leicester, liked it or not, he felt that his boy was completely in love, not with Snow-White, but with Ella. Yet, through it all, did Ella and Snow-White remain devoted to each other. Women were strange! However, up to the entrance of Ella upon the Elizabeth Close scene, Sean had cared only for Snow-White, who, as Sean began to fall away or even to forget her, would pathetically seek out his, Leicester's, society and go about with him to his lectures and to his cricket. As for him, he loved the little maid dearly and had thought of speaking to Ella Cattermole about it all, but Ella was not one of those women to whom one could speak easily about such matters and so he had given up the idea. Nor could he do anything to comfort the girl. A man felt such a fool on those occasions. And it was perhaps characteristic of his relations with Aase that he had never thought of speaking to her about it all.

I wish I could help my friend, the reader, to some understanding of this woman, Ella Cattermole, and of her heart, if she had a heart, and of her reason, of which it was fairly certain she did not possess a particle, which is true of all really interesting and especially of really great women. When reason enters the woman's soul, then she ceases to be woman and becomes a compounded-male.

It was some such understanding that O'Brien Leicester sought after his fight with Arthur Kasterling. For the life of him he could not decide Arthur's relation to Ella and, what was much worse, he found himself, despite himself, unable to accomplish any reasonable hate towards the big, rather dissipated handsome blade, Captain Arthur Kasterling, V.C., a V.C. which he won in some incredible fashion of his own, he having just

"outed" three German machine-gun nests in the present war, accomplishing the third with his hand grenades although badly wounded. Then he had held "an untenable position" for a day and a half, so making it possible for the P.B.I. (*anglice*: "Poor Bloody Infantry") to advance, and, as it was said, saving all that section of the British front.

He had hated the Voice, but he found to his surprise that he couldn't hate the man behind the voice. For on his next morning call upon Mrs. Cattermole and finding the big man there, with both eyes partly closed and a very nasty cut over the left eye, to his astonishment the scoundrel had come forward to shake him by the hand and to say: "Well, Leicester, it was a fine fight whilst it lasted and I only wish I had knocked hell out of you instead of being K.O.'ed. But I'll do it yet!" he had added in a sort of genial depravity.

Ella had not even referred to the fight, and in some remarkable way had managed to wipe out the marks of the battle, except for the split panel where Kasterling's good-looking head had crashed when he had run into Leicester's last counter.

She had just introduced them as if they had never met. "Captain Kasterling—O'Brien Leicester." And that was all.

"Mrs. Cattermole and I are old friends," said Arthur, genially. "She knows that I'm a bad egg and I know . . ." he broke off . . . "well, it doesn't matter what I know." He laughed abruptly.

"I knew Arthur some years ago, before he—er—got his V.C. For he is a V.C., if he will forgive my mentioning it."

"Of course I'll forgive it. Any damn' fool who doesn't care for his life, as I happened not to do, can win a V.C. if he only tries hard enough to get himself killed and goes on trying!" There was something enormously attractive about this scoundrel—and Leicester had no more doubt that the man before him was a scoundrel than that he was a brave man, and, perhaps in his way, not such a bad fellow after all.

"I suppose you wouldn't care for a drop of this . . ." Arthur indicated the whisky bottle at his elbow. "Too early in the morning, eh?"

"O'Brien Leicester is a teetotaller," said Ella quietly, almost proudly. "He doesn't smoke and he doesn't drink."

"What a blessed Puritan. Come off your perch, Leicester!" The dark-faced man laughed. There was good-fellowship but not rudeness in his words, which from another man, O'Brien might have resented.

"You see, Leicester, a man with a peach of a blow like the one you landed on my Adam's apple must be a hell of a fellow at heart. Bet you're a fair devil underneath and that the ladies are all in love with you. I'm sure Ella there is!" He roared like a bull in a teacup as he sat rather squashed in his semi-circular chair.

Really, it was impossible for Leicester to feel offence.

"It was the blow that nearly knocked out Joe Louis when he met Schmelling for the World's Heavyweight Championship. I was at the ringside that night. Joe was out on his feet for about eight rounds and had to be taken out of the ring by Blackburn, his second, in the twelfth. But the 'Brown Bomber' made no mistake in the return match, any more than you did when I was dam' fool enough to let you get to your feet the other morning, and

finished off the big German in a round or two. What an explosion! But tell me how you do it."

"Well, Captain Kasterling, you see it was like this. When I was a youngster with designs on the World's Light-Heavyweight Championship, and as much chance of winning it as I have of winning the Paradise Stakes and a robe of glory in heaven, I fought always with professionals, which of course made me, technically, a 'pro' myself—and I learnt it from one of them—the Dixie Kid, world champion, long after he had retired from the ring. There's only one way to learn how to fight—to stand up against the pure pro. I'd have made you into a potential champion at least, if I had had your training—but you would have had to turn pro in order to do it. That is a remarkable right hook of yours, by the way, and it doesn't travel much more than a foot, does it?"

The O'Brien Leicester could be magnanimous when he chose.

The two males seemed to have forgotten their hostess, who was looking out over the park before the Row as though none of this concerned her—as, in a way, it did not. Men never really concern women, except in their emotions.

"Well, I might have done worse than become a professional fighter," returned Kasterling. "It 'ud have kept me out of mischief, anyhow. For you know, Mr. O'Brien Leicester, I may as well confess that I *have* been in mischief."

"Don't you think, Arthur, it mightn't be so bad if you kept your tongue well back in your throat?" asked Mrs. Cattermole, suddenly entering the conversation. The words came from her oddly.

"Always been my weakness, Ella, pet. Never could hold my silly tongue. But we're all friends here—why, Leicester, feel as if I'd known you for years and years. By the way, do *you* know him, Ella?"

The woman smiled a little. A tiny wry sort of smile. "Do I?" she asked, turning to the man of whom they were speaking.

"I don't know, Mrs. Cattermole. What woman knows any man? And above all, what man knows any woman? Why, I know very little about myself." He said it a trifle proudly.

"Oh, come off your high horse, fighting-man!" said Kasterling. "What is there to know in any man—or in any woman, for that matter?" He turned to look a moment at Ella. "We're all the same underneath—as the old couplet goes: 'Why, the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are both the same people under their skins.'"

"I don't believe any of that," said Ella quietly, almost ominously.

"Well, I do—and that's that," roared Arthur, who had evidently been having one or two, early though it was. "Here goes for another little drink." And he poured himself out a pretty stiff finger of whisky, and drank it off in a gulp, throwing it down the throat as though it had been a sink.

"I'm going to take the whisky away," said Ella quietly, almost maternally, as she took the bottle and placed it in a sideboard most marvellous—one that had come out of an Italian castle. Wherever Ella Cattermole had been, and whatever she might be, she had excellent taste and as she would say, "had picked up her little bits all over the world".

"No vices, eh?" laughed Kasterling with his horse-roar. "How Ella will love you for that. She hates coarse ruffians like me who drink before twelve of a day and after twelve of a night." Suddenly he turned to look at Leicester: "But maybe you want her to love you, eh, Leicester?" He said it indifferently enough, but Leicester, listening, wondered if there were not something else behind.

"*Will* you be quiet, Arthur, please?" The woman was pleading but insistent.

"All right, I'll go quietly, darling," came back the man she addressed.

Who was this coarse ruffian who called the dainty Ella Cattermole "love" and "darling" and "pet"? The O'Brien couldn't make it out.

What were they? Were they lovers or only just "friends"? They obviously knew each other very well—perhaps too well.

"Damned good thing I never married you, Ella," grumbled Kasterling. "What a mess you'd have made of my life and what a tyrant you'd have been! I believe, 'pon me life! I'd have murdered you in the end." He laughed genially, but there was a certain malignance within.

This big boy looked like a fool and sometimes talked like a fool. He was a drinker and probably a cardsharper. Yet every now and then there would emerge, as a moon from behind a cloud, some queer statement or even original observation which seemed to show him as two men. That such a thing as "thought" could exist in that great bloated body seemed nonsense. But the world was full of nonsense, because the world was full of men and women.

Ella Cattermole glanced from time to time at Arthur with a quiet disdain. Yet who could interpret her real feelings? When she had taken the whisky away, and once, when she patted a cushion to put it behind Kasterling's head when he had gone over to the wide divan to lie down as he said he felt "headachy", there was something more than disdain in it. Did women sometimes love the men they despised? Perhaps.

But who knew anything about women—especially the women themselves?

He, O'Brien Leicester, had known many women, and, as he would say with Mr. Bucket of *Bleak House*, "there was scarcely a move on the board which could surprise him". Yet was he always being surprised. That women often hated the men they loved, he knew. That women of refinement and even culture could live in the hog-sty with men who were human swine, and go on living there, he also knew. That lovely creatures like Elspeth McGluskie could passionately love little horrors of men like Alexander Honeypot, who however had his parts, he also realized. Yet was he always being astonished.

He remembered a beautiful and intelligent young woman coming to tell him one day that she loathed her husband, especially when he tried to make love to her. "When he has had his way with me he leaves me as though I were something to be picked up and thrown away—a light-o'-love—and I could murder him. Yet, when I have tried to leave him, I can't—for I love this filthy little beast who knows nothing of the beauty and joy of comradeship and reciprocity in love. Why do I love him?"

More than one woman had come to him, or written to him with such confession—one of those confessions which came through his letterbox almost day by day. Why did such women love such men?

But you didn't find men loving such women. Queer.

As he looked at these two people, there came to him in one of his "flairs" the feeling that these two at some time or other had been very close to each other. That there was some terrible secret attached to them, and that in this secret even murder itself was not inhibited. But whether at that moment Ella Cattermole loved or hated Captain Arthur Kasterling, V.C., or did both, he knew no more than when he had first seen the big man in the corner with Sean trying to fasten his hands round his heavy throat.

He glanced again at the soldier, if soldier he now were. Somehow he wished he could get his own hands on that throat and finish off this man.

If one could only hate him!

But one couldn't.

There were laws unknown which lay behind our minds. No man could really control his mind. He wanted to hate intensely this human brute—but he just could not.

He rather liked him.

Perhaps it was that way that the woman in the room also felt to him.

XXXII

"BOMBS!"

So ran the current of Eventide at war with the German Empire. Currents within currents. The main stream of war might run fierce and fiercer as time went on, but it is safe to say that these tiny streamlets of the personal tragedy and comedy meant more to the inhabitants of Eventide, and not only of Eventide, than the murder of millions on the battlefields of the continent.

Eventide meant more to Eventide than the Milky Way.

Man, and especially his partner, Woman, is intensely local.

When he grows out of his personal tragi-comedy, he will grow into the fuller stature of the impersonal. That day is not yet, nor will it be for centuries—perhaps for æons. Yet may it be that in the Galactics the Milky Ways themselves mean no more to the Galacticians than the tiny earth itself, in an evolution that is not local, but universal. Yet, every now and then, something would come in from that maelstrom of world-war to drag away the attention of the Eventidian from his or her petty affairs. Each one of them resented the intrusion—sometimes bitterly, sometimes in dull apathy.

I think the first of these intrusions had come about a month before the happenings we are now about to record—came that night of the eighth of August, nearly a year after the declaration of war. And in the British way nobody noticed it! Yet was it to go down in history as "The Battle of Britain" and as the most vital battle ever fought on our planet.

Leicester remembered that day. He had been to see *The Grapes of*

Wrath at the local cinema. Then, in an orgy of escapism, he had gone into town to see a play of the worlds visible and invisible—*Thunder Rock*—where in an overpacked gallery he sweated the guts out of himself on this torrid night on which history was to be made, for it was the opening of the mass raids which were deeply to shock not only Eventide but England.

"It wasn't fair war." Though what was "fair" war, who could say? He despised the English he loved because of their sickly sentimentality, and because they never thought anything through. Why, on that very day of the Battle of Britain, not one in a hundred realized that a determinative battle was going on over his head. He knew that it had not been sufficient to disturb his own enjoyment at the theatre and till long after he never knew what had really happened above him.

Had he, O'Brien Leicester, had his way, he would have declared total war on every man, woman and child in the Fatherland until they had cried "Enough!" Actually he could not hurt a hair of the head of a single German child . . . but war was war, and this was not only war, but mass murder. You couldn't have any two ways about modern totalitarian war. Either you killed or were killed. The first thing in war was to break down the will of your enemies to resist—and to do that, you had to hurt their women and children.

That was what he had told "The Boiling" at a hastily convened meeting in the school hall to meet the regularized bombing of the Nazi, as demonstrated that night of the seventh of September by "the amber fire out of the East"—now but a week or two ago. It had aroused deep protest and hissing, and Miss Honoria, in an unexpected fit of passionate pacificism, had sprung to her legs, rather than her feet, standing even on the form on which she had been sitting and "begging to move with all the passionate indignation I can command, the removal of our hitherto revered leader, Mr. O'Brien Leicester, from an office which he has proved himself unfitted to fill as a modern Torquemada". Having said which, she had fallen off the form, showing an extraordinary assortment of underclothing, which had rather spoiled the effect and, indeed, prevented the resolution being put to the gathering.

Whereupon Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam had got on to *her* little hind-legs, but without the spring, and, staring like a glass image in the direction of Leicester, then occupying the chair, had been understood to mumble in her throat that "such sentiments were un-English—even un-British—and 'be British!' whatever you are, I always say to people, and I'm not sure that we have not been harbouring an Irish traitor in our midst even though he does call himself an Elizabethan-Irishman or whatever he *does* call himself, and I am also sure . . ."

Here she was simply stopped in her tracks by the Irish Contingent, now of increasing strength as the war progressed, but of varying composition, for it was recruited weekly from the detachment of Irish Guards who, much against their will, had been billeted on sundry Eventidian farmers. For the tutelary chief of that contingent, one Michael Malone, had fallen out of the gallery which was his invariable vantage point at all these councils of war, coming down hand over fist and taking off his coat as he climbed on to the platform as he shouted:

" 'Harbouring'. What the divil, ma'am, do ye mane by 'harbouring'? What is it that yerself harbours down there in 'The Bowels' or 'Bowers' or whatever you call it when your husband's sober, which isn't too often—and isn't it that same ould 'Knock-em-Back', that is the name we have for the poor wretch that goes to sleep under your bed it is tould, and tould correctly, isn't it that same ould 'Knock-em-Back' that you are harbouring yerself in that disorderly house—and if ye think you can shut up Mick Malone with your teas and your spacious and specious invitations to them same teas and fillin' that same Malone up wid tay and brandy in it and——"

How long Mr. Malone would have continued upon his serpentine way may not be assessed by this chronicler. He was in the midst of a flowery period, "and no flowers on it neither", as he said himself afterwards, when he found himself flying into mid-air "like the cock-angel" to which he afterwards likened himself, propelled thereto by his presumed fellow-countryman, the chairman, who himself had a very nice little "back-heel" which sent him on to his head on the hard, hard floor and into a Saxon world bitterly hostile to an Ireland about which the Malone had been crying the injustices, in the practised clarion voice of an Islander who had specialized in injustice for many centuries.

Now ensued one of the more regrettable incidents of Eventide and Europe at war. As the *Eventide Bugle*, that fierce defender of privilege and tradition, which, in virtue of some Royal charter long forgotten had the right to print upon its title page two crocodilish lions fighting over the proud device "*Fidei Defensor*", was soon to write:

"The decay of our established institutions and the privy entrance of lawlessness and disloyalty in an age of licence and buffoonery was never more clearly demonstrated than at the Emergency War Council called to consider the measures to be taken by the people of Eventide against what may be termed without disrespect or blasphemy, the hellishness of the Hun. This meeting which had opened so peacefully and, indeed, encouragingly, was soon to degenerate into a spectacle of what may be rightly termed 'bear-baiting' by a traitor to England who dares speciously to plead that he is—think of it!—loyal to Ireland, as if anybody can be loyal to anything but England and her King . . . we repeat 'bear-baiting' and open rebellion against constituted law and order as exemplified in the person of that defender of the faith, as he may be called not inappositely, Police Constable Jorkins. Such vile happenings could not have taken place in the reign of our Good Queen Victoria, whom so many of us recall with respectful admiration, or indeed in the much earlier reign of that other great monarch, Good Queen Anne. But now, in these days of anarchy and scarcely veiled red revolution under the specious guise of a Whiggish Socialism, we have indeed reached bottom. And when we find our Chosen Leader himself advocating the wholesale murder of women and children by Poison Gas, we may indeed cry with the prophet: '*Ichabod!*' For the glory has departed from the England that was and no more is. . . ."

The above, it may be said actually mercifully veiled that "decay in public manners" which had been so noticeable during the later years. For the fall of Mr. Malone out of his gallery in his bitter impeachment of "another

injustice to Ireland", had been but the opening to what the *Bugle* called an "exhibition" of deplorable manners—and worse. *And* worse.

Devils seemed to have been loosed into that peaceful gathering brought together to consider war. For throughout the hall, individuals were seen to be arguing together, and, later, indeed, to be beating each other with anything that lay handy. Nor was it that they had taken sides for or against Ireland. They became embattled together because they had to become embattled—for battle was in the air.

In some peculiar way, Miss Honoria had become inextricably entangled with Serena Gadfly, first, dialectically and then physically, for these two perfect ladies could be seen to have got their fingers in each other's back hair as they scratched to the glory of God or Devil. Mr. Galanty was having an "argument" with our Mrs. Mallory over some wretched "one and six" which she said he had "done her out of and she'd have the law on him", for she was Buck's occasional "char". Mr. Wodes' very red proboscis was even redder than usual, certainly too encarmined for a man known as The Little Pope, some gent, or lady, having punched him thereon, although to the end he never knew who had hit him or why he had been hit, he having only dropped in on his way back from The Robe of Glory where he had been having a taste of something short and so had become entangled in the general devilment.

Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam was telling another lady that she was no lady but "a woman", which is the worst thing you can call a lady, but so far had been one of those who had restrained themselves from actual physical protest. Aurelius Jark was also engaged in desperate encounter with Lord Lovem and his son Clarence, both of whom he was trying harshly to "convert" to a belief in an eternal hell, and had even dared to lay hands upon the noble person of his lordship in his anxiety to convince him, something which had only resulted in Lovem, for the first, and possibly the last time in his life, taking his hands out of his vasty cross-pockets and giving Mr. Jark "such a oner" upon his breathing apparatus, which, in its turn, had instantly resulted in Mr. Jark showing the noble lord the back of his head and begging him, even with tears in his eyes, "to 'it 'im again on the other cheek". Which itself had resulted in the noble lord, forgetting all his blue blood and his *noblesse oblige*, with his toe hitting Mr. Jark not on one, but on two cheeks, and accomplishing the impossible by doing it in one go.

Mr. Hallowes was to be seen, standing on a form, his little mouth-hole opening and shutting as he said something to the stars of heaven, for nobody could hear a word or, indeed, cared a damn what he said. Under his lee, the gigantic Miss Buzzard, whose orifice also might be seen to open and shut as she presumably helped the Reverend gentleman in his protest to the Almighty, if protest it were.

Superior to all this sat Ella Cattermole, who scarcely troubled to turn her fine head upon the foray. And also superior to all this was that indomitable pair, the Cocklepills, the "Punch and Judy" who, from their seats on the platform, monarchs of all they surveyed, laughed heartily at the fights on the floor as they exchanged peppermint and ju-jube bags, as though they were watching a fight from the gallery—as indeed they were.

When matters had reached their apotheosis, anybody who might be looking might have seen the entry of two figures, one of them bearing a sheaf of papers. They were our now old friends, Alexander Honeypot and Elspeth McGluskie.

Taking in the situation with the lightning eye of the born commander of men, and of some women, Mr. Honeypot made a dash, not for an opponent, but for the school blackboard at the side of the platform. Scrawling something on this, he hoisted himself on to the platform by rolling himself, blackboard and belly, thereon, and coming to the centre of the platform before O'Brien Leicester who had been sitting there immobile for the previous ten minutes, he displayed the following announcement, banging on the board with a school "pointer" as he did so, to attract attention by a series of whacks which came off the board in a series of explosions that sounded like the bombs the advent of which he was announcing in one of his more explosive efforts of the imagination, there not being a bomb that night within a mile of Eventide:

BOMBS !—BOMBS !—BOMBS ! ! !
MASS ATTACKS ON EVENTIDE
STOP FIGHTING !

It acted like a charm. First one, then another, took a look at the "explosive board". Within a minute or two there was not a sound from the body of the hall—only strained curiosity, and fear. And very well it would have gone had it not been for a little *divertissement*, which may be entitled "The Engorgement of Mowgli", which is worth a little bit to itself and with it a little retrospection.

The war had not only caused a certain loosening up of such trifles as murder wholesale, in the external world, but also murder in the world internal and stomachic, as shown in a certain urgent desire to "have one" at any old moment as an aid to fortitude under stress.

People who had been strictly "T.T." all their lives now began to set the tips of their virginal tongues to the wine when it was red, or, rather, to cocktails and spirituous liquors. In Paradise Row, Lady Lackplace had always been "addicted"—the word which was a delicate way of saying that she was a persistent consumer of the gin-slings which were her "particulars". The only difference made in Lady Lackplace's alcoholic morals being that where, before, she would have lucid interval in which all alcohol was abhorrent to her, as she did not hesitate to tell her world when the abstinence was on her, she was now increasingly varying between inebriation partial and inebriation entire.

Phtah, I regret to say, had participated in this declension of morale. For his mistress, increasingly feeling the need of company in her gin-slinging, had begun to give the Egyptian devil a drop of gin in a spoon—something that had turned him from an animal possessed of only one or two devils, to a possession whose name might be called "legion".

How little devils cling on to one another's tails as they hook their devious way into the hearts of pussies and mortals! For this possession, in its turn, had led to a thirst for blood by this fiend in the form of cat, but who, as

everybody in Eventide knew, was really a human, or inhuman, being under feline guise and who, beneath his yellow striped skin and green eyes concealed not only inordinate arrogance but a scheming brain of inordinate cunning.

This blood-drinker assuaged his vile thirst with sundry thrushes and blackbirds taken out of Lady Lackplace's mulberry tree, where the aforesaid demon would lie in wait for hours in order to get some juicy songster between his diabolical paws. And the worst of it was that he had now taught Mowgli, the Siamese, who certainly had the face of a naughty boy and who as certainly was not a pussy but a lost human disguised, how to lie in wait behind the thick leaves and then make that deadly crouch and spring which ended in the scream of the victim, to be followed by the vampirish sucking of that victim's blood. For Phtah never ate the flesh of his fur or feather, he always sucked their blood, leaving the seemingly intact body lying there as though it had died a natural death.

He would then lick his chops, make particular toilet—for he was the most particular pussy—and then lie in wait for the next fluffy ball of life, in order that he might extinguish it like the maker of magic he was. After which he would retire to his mistress's shoulder, whisper horrible incantations into her ear, and perch there, unapproachable.

Here let us watch the Power behind evolution in action.

Now on the evening of this Emergency Council, the opposite "Pomp" faction had taken up strategic position on the extreme right of the front row, accompanied by the usual phalanx of Peke and bulldog, lately reinforced by a bull-terrier bitch of most evil and whitewashed appearance, who was credited with "murdering anything on two legs or four", and who had insisted upon bringing with her her pup, still seemingly innocent sausage. Indeed Lady Whitepatch—and what a name for a lady!—had already to her credit half a dozen canines, one horse, and a motor bus. The motor bus, it may be said, weighing some eight tons and having been met by her ladyship when walking behind her mistress, the other ladyship, down the main street of Eventide and, taking offence at the turning of the near wheel of the bus, had hurled herself at the tyre, set her terrible teeth in it, and then hung on as it turned despite the banging of her steel head against the road. Finally she had been prised loose by a crowbar or something and had retired to her puppies, seemingly none the worse for wear.

Early in the proceedings, General Pompadour, her five daughters following her in *échelon*, had ensconced herself with her flock of Pekes, Buldger, the bulldog, and Lady Whitepatch on the right-hand corner. To all attempts, first by the Vicar and then by the funereal Mr. Wodes, who, being sober for a wonder, was now in his funereal phase, to get her to remove her menagerie, she had but one word, and that word: "Rats!" Accompanied, let it be said, in order to fortify it, by a protrusion of the tongue and once a preliminary waggle of the firm round buttocks which, as the Vicar knew, was the preliminary to a flirt of the short skirts to reveal enormities—but, once more, enormities well-laundered let it be said.

Finally, "the Pomp" was allowed to have her own way, she obviously having "had quite a lot" before coming in, and "carrying a load of it",

sapient observations culled from the viler rows of the proletariat. However, during the first part of the proceedings, it may be said that her conduct, as that of her assortment of four-footed assassins, was exemplary, the poor dear lady going peacefully asleep in her chair, dog-whip in hand, with head thrown back, from which, time to time, a gentle snore was issuant.

And all would have continued to go well had it not been that Satan, who had always found Paradise a happy hunting ground, this day walking down the Row seeking whom he might incite and subsequently devour, entered into Number Three and into the mind of Lady Lackplace, inciting that lady to strip and then to strap herself into her "straight-fronts" and send her round the corner to see if a gin-sling might not set her to rights—she, poor lady, not having felt herself since a little turn-up with Honoria about the vital and urgent problem of whether one Madame Blavatsky had, or had not, been "a damned crook and twister" (Lady L.'s version) or (the Honoria version) a sainted woman who with one Annie Besant had been grievously misunderstood and indeed, not to be too backward in coming forward, was the first female saviour of the human race. Into this there had also entered exegetical questions as to whether Adam and Eve ever existed, or, for that matter, the Garden of Eden itself, whether Adam was his own father and whether it was Cain killed Abel or Abel, Cain. As for Lady Lackplace, she had declared to the shocked Honoria that she herself didn't care a tinker's curse how it was and what way it went. To which, her usually dutiful and frightened daughter, instead of "getting the wind up", as was her custom with her formidable ma, got up a temper and called that ma "an old cow", which indeed was not perhaps without an element of truth.

So out of such domesticities came the visit of the great lady, straps and all, to The Robe of Glory where, his Satanic Majesty still assisting, she was informed of the War Emergency meeting in the schools, to which Mrs. Pompadour, after also calling in for a drop of short, had just gone with her Pekes and "bulls".

This, in its turn, roused her ladyship to the remembrance of her cat's wrongs at the teeth of those "bulls", something which sent her round flaming mad, with Phtah as usual on one shoulder and Mowgli, the Siamese devil, on the other. For Phtah had taught his pupil how to crouch there.

Mr. Alexander Honeypot, whom we have left all this time, had just begun his tattoo diabolic upon the blackboard and had already secured something like a pause in hostilities, when Lady Lackplace entered. Searching for her enemy, she found her at last, fast asleep on her chair, her pop-eyes no longer popping, inelegantly relaxed, with the dog-whip slipping from her grasp. Going up to this doll-like figure, Lady Lackplace, remembering those wrongs, and without warning, gave Mrs. Pompadour a backhander which knocked her off her perch, and then, with thoughtful consideration, another from the other side which brought her back again.

It may have been the quick movement which dislodged Mowgli from *his* perch, for nothing could have unhooked the murderous fangs of Phtah. Who, dropping upon Lady Whitepatch's pup, Lady Whitepatch had promptly made one gulp and had bitten the head of the Siamese clean off, as their mistresses clinched, Buldger and Phtah doing ditto, and the Pekes, floating

around the chief protagonists, setting up such a snapping and a snarley-yowing that the Hall became a fair representation of the good old times when, in the adjoining and now disused dog pit, the enlightened and Christian Gentlemen of England backed their fancy and their bulldogs to fight to the death.

It was this which finally broke up the Emergency Council on that night of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and forty. In vain did the chairman ring his bell. In vain did his deputy, Mr. Honeypot, beat his board and then his breast like the Ancient Mariner himself. No power of earth, certainly not of the heaven which seemed so far away, could that night have brought peace out of pandemonium. But it was only when the latter gentleman, with one of his "specials", got the bright idea of calling in the local Fire Brigade by the simple expedient of running out to break the fire signal glass and setting fire to some straw which had been left in the school yard, that he got the hall cleared and peace restored, as the crystal jets from the firemen's hose brought solace and extinguishment to the fires which raged within the breasts of the Councillors. The only result of the "Emergency" being a series of actions for assault and battery and that well-known issue "Pompadour versus Lackplace", with the cross-action of "Lackplace versus Pompadour", which had made its opening rounds in the law-courts and which, as it happened, was to drag its wriggling length for many moons.

For so went a world within a world, and so went evolution, like the nebular systems, planets, suns and all, which the despised scientist told Eventide in vain, had existence within the molecule, the neutron, and even the proton—to all of which Eventide was blandly contemptuous.

As it happened, at that very moment over the unconscious heads of the Eventidians there was being fought out in the upper regions a battle which was to decide the empire of the world and the fates of millions of all colours and races for perhaps half a thousand years. Of this struggle, Eventidia was as ignorant as it was of the "silly scientists" and their nebular-molecular theories. Of greater import to them, the battles of the Lackplaces and Pompadours and the resumption, one day, of its dividend warrants than all the wars of hell and heaven.

Magnificent, indeed, only that it was not war!

It was Paradise Row. Perhaps it was the Planet Earth.

XXXIII

"THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN"

It is sardonic comment upon the human things that as we have already indicated, Paradise Row actually never understood what was happening over its undevoted head in the empyrean for at least two or three months afterwards—and not then. All it knew from these highly organized and organizing organs of public opinion, the newspapers, from the equally highly

organized "air" which was their rival, and from "The Pictures", democracy's mental pabulum, was that in some funny way Germany had lost about four thousand of the flower of her aerial manhood and perhaps a couple of thousand bombers and fighters to an English loss of anything between 3 and 5 to 1 in England's favour. All of which only showed what God was after and how He was still an Englishman.

All that O'Brien Leicester remembered of this muzzy time in the days that followed was a talk with a banker, who assured him in the deep mysterious voice of his fraternity that "all this Socialist nonsense would pass and when the war was over they would return to the Gold Standard and the Good Old Days of Banking and Divvies". With this Mr. Hitler's asseveration that he would be taking dinner with King George in Buckingham Palace exactly on the seventeenth of August, whether his Majesty liked it or not. And his first air-raid warning in mid-August when supping with some damned vegetarians in Kensington, he remembering the "wittles" much more than the siren. In fact, nobody turned a hair, although the daughter of the house, a wild girl, to his secret indignation, took the opportunity of kissing him when they, for form's sake, went down to the cellar of the house in the dark. However, he felt flattered only he would die rather than admit it to himself.

Then that spate of heavenly visions—of Angels of Mons and celestial guardians coming to help "Saint George for Merrie England" in her hour of need. An editor friend rings him up to say that "the war will be over by mid-September, and Fleet Street doesn't make mistakes in such things as he well knows", but doesn't. Also the strange fact that all this time not a sound of gun or bomb had been heard in Eventide, war being a strictly local and compartmented affair, so that a thousand airmen might be dying in the next street so to speak and nobody know anything about it. As for bombs, they seemed soundless, although he knew that some were falling out of the sky, and with them the Nazi airmen, at the rate of one a minute.

When Mr. Malone, whose politics seemed slightly fuzzy-wuzzy and haywiry, rushes in one morning to tell him, newspaper in hand, that the "dirty, dir-r-rty Nasties have sunk two and a half millions of tons of British shipping and that these Nasties have begun bombing of civilians by dropping some 'pills' at Eastbourne and at Malden and wot-are-ye-goin'-to-do-widthim?" the O'Brien doesn't turn any hair at all of his luxuriant and distinguished crop. Not even when Mr. Malone, becoming violently illogical, calls down the wrath of God on the roseate flag of England for some ill-considered reason "and hopes she'll be wiped out from the seas and stamped into the ground and the divil's skewer to her!" But it seems to emerge that it was because some "widdy-woman" had lost a hundred pounds owing to a legal action that had begun somewhere towards the end of the last century, a thousand years being to the godlike Mr. Malone but as yesterday, "and it all due to the murdering myrmidons of absentee landlords, and they under the blanket of England's cruel red" (i.e. the Union Jack) "and though they were all now sizzling in hell wasn't it England's fault in the first instance and another injustice to Ireland—the Isle of Saints and the Land of the Free, and if only Oirland could free herself from Oirland it 'ud be damned quick that she'd

free herself from the Ould Whore of the Nations and wasn't that Britannia herself . . . and anyhow he wouldn't stand for it and 'Up the Rebels!' "

In fact it was only long after that he realized that up to that mid-August, he, Leicester, had never heard a shot fired over Britain.

Then there was Winston Churchill, always a bone of contention and only the other day the accursed of Paradise Row as a turncoat from Conservatism, now being worshipped by that Row and every day taking several cubits to his stature in the public estimation. But Honoria and her ma had developed a secret feud with each other over Winston, Lady Lackplace having blasphemously named Mrs. Pompadour's new and peculiarly hideous bulldog, "Winston", and even so perspicacious a damsel as Elspeth McGluskie had cut off all relations, diplomatic or other, especially the other, with Mr. Honeypot because in this feud he hadn't gone anti-Winston, Mr. Churchill, it appeared having committed at birth the heinous offence of not being born a Scot, and therefore being "no good".

Indeed, amongst its other rows, the Paradisaical Row had split into "Winstons" and "anti-Winstons", the latter basing their antagonism to the Prime Minister upon the "fact, my dear—though I wouldn't wish it to be known—that he has privately arranged to sell the British Empire piece by piece to those awful Yankees". And it did eventuate that there had been pourparlers between Uncle Sam and John Bull over the leasing of the West Indies and Newfoundland for a period of 99 years.

Leicester wouldn't forget that morning when he heard his first shots in Britain. It was in those "still sma' hours" when conscience and fear, so often the same things, hold power, that the rumbling was heard, and from the outside of the Close there came a confused sound of noises by night, proceeding, as it afterwards appeared, from the throat of Serena Gadfly who, with a little bell, believed that at last invasion was at hand and so had run up and down the houses in the Row under the mistaken impression that a gas attack was imminent, as, instead of "Muffins!" she shouted "Gas—GAS, GAS!", of which she herself appeared to possess an inexhaustible quantity.

As he looked upwards out of the basement to which the Leicesters had refuged, Mr. Leicester was gratified to see the Coffees, Morgana armed with a bucket and sand and Morgana's appendix with a strange implement of wire and iron, as they followed Miss Gadfly, ready for any emergency, and the war-cry of "Come on Coffee!" came strident to the ear.

On this, its first baptism of fire at the end of August, Mr. Leicester regretted to recall that an epidemic of apprehension had seemed to run along the Row and to set fire, not to the houses, but to their inhabitants, who now poured out in desperation, not to say *déshabillé*, revealing qualities hitherto unsuspected.

As an artist of words, he still rejoiced in the memory of Lord Lovem, clad only in the riding-breeches in which he was reputed to sleep, but with a pale pink pyjama jacket above, crowning all, a top-hat doubtless as protection from bombs, for he had been heard to declare that "a top-hat, sir, has often saved the neck of a rider—why not save it from bombs?"

He had been followed by Elspeth, unclad and disordered in manner and

clothing, with Mr. Alexander Honeypot suspiciously close, also disordered, for upon his person he had at that moment nothing but his undershirt and a pair of trousers which he vainly sought to hold up as he ran, for it was but too evident that, as Mrs. Mallory opined afterwards, take it or leave it, Alexander had been caught with his trousers down. And as Lady Lackplace was heard afterwards to remark, his coming out of the Wilderness instead of out of his modest room in the village at 3 a.m. would take a hell of a lot of explaining, especially when you considered, as you were bound to consider, the disarray of Miss McGluskie, who, as she ran, was heard to recite, beneath her breath, with interpolations, verses 4 and 5 from Psalm xci: "Have ye got your gas-mask and panties, Alexander darling ? . . . pray, pet, and keep on praying, and make God tired—it's your only chance . . . 'he shall cover thee with his feathers . . .' and, Alexander, hold up your panties for they're fallin' doon . . . 'and under his wings shalt thou trust. . . .' look out for the gas, Alexander ! . . . 'so shalt thou not be afraid for the terror by night . . .' that's the bombs, little man . . . 'nor for the arrow that flieth by day . . .' and keep your trews and your courage up—I'm right behind ye !"

Also considerable cackle had been raised not only in the Pompadour's hen-roost, Phtah having chosen this night of bombing-fear to scratch his wicked way into that place of refuge, but also in the tongue-talkers of the Row. For Mrs. Jack Ketch and Mr. de Burgh, both of them imperfectly clothed, had suddenly emerged from the door of Number Twelve for, indeed, as Mr. Jark acidly commented, "the graves were giving up their dead and Judgment Day was at hand and hell gaped. . . ."

He had also seen rush past on that fated morning in the half-lights two of the most lightsome creatures in the Row, Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill. Both laughing heartily and enjoying themselves to the limit—and beyond. "Punch" in an appropriate nightcap with a tassel and "Judy" in a mob-cap and a petticoat, both of them doubtless sucking the invariable peppermint as they went like the wind down the Row for some destination unknown.

But the *crème de menthe* of the irregular procession were the Lackplaces and the Pompadours—the mamas at the head of their offspring stringing out behind, and exchanging mutual objurations about "cats" and "dogs" as they ran.

For everybody believed that the only escape from immolation by bombing in their houses was to get out of those houses. Also if Mr. Hitler was using gas, then they all felt that they could breathe better—even if it meant only breathing gas—in the "open air". For Eventide, despite its persistent studies of Pamphlet No. O, which Sir Samuel Hoare had sent with his compliments, and the Lord Privy Seal's pamphlet, full of wisecracks and piety, was still slightly muzzy as to technique. The former fulminated: "The gassed patient must not drink alcohol or smoke", but he must "keep calm and act quickly", which caused Buck Galanty to foam at the mouth and to enquire "how any varlet could be expected to 'keep calm and act quickly' without a tankard of the best"?

But the shooting had quickly died away, and then the procession of devilment and dishevelment had returned dejected and rejoicing.

All this Leicester remembered.

The drone of the German bombers, as it lifted and fell, would be with him as long as he lived. Labouring through the sky, like a woman in labour, seeking to bring forth death and desolation as the bombs streamed down the blackness, howling as they came. The distant detonations in the horror—flaming skies—silence. Worst of all, the silences.

And the Nazi bombers tumble out of the skies at a ratio of 3 to 1. Downfalls like rotten apples with flaming guts and screaming men. But this, Eventide has to imagine, for it sees nothing of them.

Every now and then, *the* Voice. Raucous. Compelling. Dark and quiet at the beginning. Then the harsher tearing note. Then the bark and snarl. Then the threat—menace inheld. It is Adolf Hitler speaking.

Eventide listens in to a language of which it only understands two words: "*Heil Hitler!*" For the strong point of Paradise Row is not languages. Why, for that matter, even though many of its scions have been up to Oxford and Cambridge and before that to those preparatory schools of the unoriginal—Eton and Harrow, and as the O'Brien often tells them, they can't speak either the Queen's or any kind of English! Nor is it at all certain, he says, that queens do speak good English, for living in strait-jackets and running one-track in blinkers is not conducive to any sort of expression. None of which makes Eventide love him, although they find it quite impossible to answer back this terrible Elizabethan, who insists that one Will Shakespeare would have agreed with him! Leicester was always unanswerable, and if Paradise Row still succumbed to his blandishments it was only because there was available no other natural or unnatural leader during war.

Of course, like all leaders, he had revolts against his authority—an authority he had never sought. One of these was led by Buck Galanty, who, secretly, "never really could stand Leicester", who "never really could hate Buck". In fact, one of the queerer things about O'Brien Leicester was that he never could manage to hate anybody—perhaps because, as he said, "it wasn't worth while", perhaps because there was in this strange man's heart a streak of love for all things human.

Buck's challenge arose over some question of buckets and sand, a challenge which for some weeks split Eventide into two parts. One half wanted more buckets and less sand. The other wanted the sand. Leicester offered "to toss 'em for it", which Buck insisted was "an insult to a Royal Borough and anyhow they didn't want any ruddy Irish-Elizabethan telling *them* what to do".

There were revolts also led by Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam upon a nice little question of precedence at a Borough dinner, when she had been placed on the left instead of the right-hand of the visiting bishop. One by Mrs. Pompadour, because Leicester, unlike the rest of the Row, refused to take sides in the cat-and-dog struggle Lady Lackplace's Phtah versus Mrs. Pompadour's dogs and chickens, although it was generally felt when the doggy lady, cut-lash in hand, had stuck out at the O'Brien a piece of red flannel tongue to a miraculous distance from her rather pretty mouth, that she had lost a certain amount of prestige, as on this occasion she had broken all world's tongue records by "going a bit too far".

Serena Gadfly also with him had "taken up the question" of the right or not the right, not only to dig in her own front garden and over the road, but to begin excavations upon the road itself. Honoria, who was a poor sweet subdued creature in the ordinary way, had become ferociously "outraged in her insides", as she expressed it, "her gorge rising within her", when she had heard through a dear friend of some remarks Mr. Leicester had made, also to a select circle of friends and in the strictest confidence, on Honoria's spiritosophy, Honoria being now on "speaking terms with the devil". That is, if Mr. Leicester *had* said what the dear friend had confided to Honoria, also in the strictest confidence. This last led to what was known as "The Three Days' Revolt" when the *ukases* of the local Czar were ignored by the Honoria lot, she having gathered to her some other desperate spookish females who had been touched by the prevailing tendency to a dishevelled spiritualism but not perhaps to the spirituality with which they were apt to confuse it.

All these Scyllas and Charybdises the legitimate descendant in time of Drake and Raleigh managed to negotiate by extremely fine steering, until there came the "One Man Rebellion" of Mr. Jark, who would not be negotiated at any price, he having a personal date with the Almighty.

Mr. Jark having had a private communication from his Jehovah that Judgment Day was at hand, nothing on heaven or earth could get out of the dark self-contained and semi-detached flat, which he called his head, the belief that the O'Brien Leicester, who was even playing cricket on Sundays, was the personal representative of his Satanic Majesty upon this earth, or, if you like, *Gauleiter*. Also that he was an emissary from Mr. Hitler, and that he was the "Anti-Christ". Mixed theology, if you like, but then Mr. Jark, like so many other theologians, was always slightly "mixed".

Having arrived at which, Mr. Jark, calling unto him a legion of other demons out of "The Sons and Daughters of Jehovah", had laid siege to Queen Elizabeth Close, under the impression that it was the abode of the devil, and, to use his own words, "to drive out and expel the demon even as he was expelled into the Gadarene swine".

And Mr. Jark becoming still more mixed and indeed "loco", had borrowed a dear little pig or swine which he tethered to his little preaching stand, so that when the devil was expelled he might find Anabella, the swine, ready for his reception.

In early morn and late at night the voice of Aurelius Jark might be heard coming out of the distance calling upon the personal devil now resident inside him, Leicester, to "come forth and show himself", as Anabella stood expectant. And sometimes it would be 'neath the silent moon and sometimes it would be in midnight black that the saturnine Mr. Jark would make his presence felt. But, the thing that mattered, he was always there or thereabouts. So was Anabella.

Now all these cogitations of our strange and interesting friend Mr. O'Brien Leicester were coming to that gentleman in one of those Black-Outs, he, at this point, running his long nose into a lamp-post, so putting an end to his retrospective musings and leaving his Chronicler to take up those musings and carry them to the end.

Finding that Mr. Leicester's personal demon refused to be cajoled into presentation by prayer and supplication, Mr. Jark, who himself was an ingenious devil in his own way, hit upon the idea of the relay-singing of the hymns or curses, whichever you liked to call them, of the "Sons and Daughters", including the touching little hymn:

"Come forth thou spirit black and dark
Come forth thou wicked one and hark!
Come forth beneath the silent moon—
Come forth to meet thy dreadful doom—
For we're the sons and daughters of Jehovah,
The sons and daughters of Jehovah-Jah—
We have the ear of the Almighty
Ya-Yah! Ya-Yah! Ya-Yah! Ya-Yah!"

the last line being given as it sounded to the doomed and damned Mr. Leicester, as he cowered in his bed.

In vain did he appeal to Mr. Jark's better nature. Mr. Jark hadn't any better nature. In vain did he threaten him with the interference of the Law in the person of Mr. Jorkins, the constable. Mr. Jark's reply was simply that he gloried in his martyrdom and would Mr. Leicester please bring forth his myrmidons of Satan and his cohorts of hell as he would be deeply obliged to him or words to that effect, as he had quite a lot of personal soul-scouring to do and this could only be done by the torturing and scarification of the mind and body and if he could get Aurelius Jark a sentence of six months' hard he would be more than grateful.

And the prayers would arise on the night airs, and even when, in the later period, beneath the *hough-hough* of the drooning Nazi-'planes, Judgment Day was at hand, and according to Mr. Jark, helped out by Messrs. Isaiah and Ezekiel, a day in which only the Sons and Daughters of Jehovah would be saved from the burning—and not all of them.

And if one records such tribulations and mystifications, it is only that the reader may understand the infinite complexity of a simple English village when faced by the tremendous trifle of a world-war. Sometimes, Mr. O'Brien Leicester would conclude that perhaps Honoria Lackplace and Serena Gadfly were not so wrong after all when they said that this earth was a school, to which we returned again and again for the purpose of that "purification" and "sanctification" of which Mr. Jark spoke so freely and knowingly and that possibly war was one of the fires that purge—and perhaps that these two crackpots were not mad, as he had always believed. Perhaps he, Mr. Leicester, also was mad—perhaps all the earth was mad. Possibly even he, the great O'Brien Leicester, didn't know so very much more about it than did the Honorias, the Gadflys and the Jarks. And, anyhow, what was God doing?

In his pre-war novel he had written: "It's easy to forgive humans—but who will forgive God?" Yet the Power Behind *must* know best. But *did* It?

In the dismays of war our Mr. Leicester was becoming increasingly perplexed, as was his world.

XXXIV

PARADISE ROW MEETS MR. HITLER

In view of the subversive sanctification activities of Messrs. Jark & Co., of the private feuds exacerbated under the stimulus of world-war, and of the rather peculiar manifestations of the War Councils, the revered leader of Eventide and of the Paradise Row which was its heart, might be excused for certain sweet doubts as to the possible behaviour of the inhabitants when the Real Thing struck the village.

With the British people you never really knew. The denizens of this particular neck of the woods might as easily show themselves poltroons and incapables as anything else. The point was: how *would* they show themselves when Mr. Hitler visited Eventide, *en route* to Buckingham Palace?

Already, as he knew, the inhabitants had evinced a certain trepidation, not to say cowardice, about their worldly possessions which argued ill for their risking their wretched lives, upon which they doubtless set higher store than was justified. Already, as he knew, for he had seen her at it from his perch in the William pear where he had been gathering the Williams on a fine September day, Miss Gadfly, with her genius for excavation, had buried all sorts of things in her Pets' Churchyard at the bottom of her garden. These included several tin boxes, three services of Dresden, without boxes, and larger bundles of blankets or furs or something which for some occult reason she had sepulted within several editions of *The Times* (always the foundation of Paradise Row thought and now coming into a new role) and a personal "mack" or macintosh.

Honoria Lackplace had followed her example, and had placed all her own earthly possessions in the plot where the Lackplaces for some decades had buried their defunct felines, she, with the greater knowingness, having placed upon the cross of Pixie, the last deceased of the tribe of Phtah, the words painted in white on the black cross:

HERE LIES
"P i x i e"
a faithful friend
and treasure
(and nothing else)

the remark in parentheses being intended deftly to mislead any prowling Nazis who might imagine that treasure there lay.

Well, he was soon to have his answer on that fateful night of the twenty-ninth of November, nineteen hundred and forty. We shall see what that answer was.

The Row, whatever its internal feelings, had held itself in entire urbanity under the massacre at Coventry and the Nazi "Coventration", a word which looked like passing into the language. Hour after hour the Nazi bombers had loosened their loads upon the doomed city. The people had

died where they worked or slept. Their poor mangled bodies had been taken out and laid in a common grave. All this may have profoundly stirred the deeps of Paradise Row, but if it did, Paradise Row did not show it by the turning of a hair. And, then, this was a "local" war. What the eye did not see . . . Coventry when all was said and done was only some remote manufacturing city in the Midlands.

Lord Haw-Haw, who was the evening recreation of the Row, had informed the Row personally that he had his eye on them, that the clock on the church tower was five minutes slow, and that they would receive a visitation of hell on the lines of Coventry upon the evening of the twenty-eighth day of November at midnight sharp.

He was perfectly correct about the church clock, and presumably his hearers trembled in their trousers or panties or whatever people do tremble in at such moments, but whether through guile or something else, the heavenly visitation did not take place on the twenty-eighth but on the next night and then at 6 p.m., when hell certainly did break loose and contingent after contingent went down the main street of Eventide.

By some dispensation of that Providence in whom the Eventide inhabitants were beginning to disbelieve in view of the persistent disasters to God's favourite isle—"and that isn't Oirland", Mr. Malone opined bitterly and sarcastically towards his Maker—the hundreds of houses which that night met their end were not in Eventide but in the adjoining parishes and villages. Doubtless due to the wickedness of those villages, for God was very partik'ler according to his interpreter on earth, Mr. Jark, who day and night, it seemed, had his ear to the divine mouthpiece.

By one of those providential ministrations, the only incendiary bomb to fall upon an Eventide dwelling happened to be upon Queen Elizabeth Close. Why his Satanic Majesty should have singled out Mr. Leicester's dwelling-place to Mr. Leicester seemed incomprehensible, but not to Mr. Jark, who said quite nicely, and kept on keeping on saying it out of the darkness as the bombs fell in the adjoining park and on to the houses of "those Sodoms and Gomorrahs, Little Hardwicke, Easy Blowsdon, and Thamsey" (I quote Mr. Jark).

It seemed that the Lord had chosen the Leicester household as "Target for the Night" because Mr. Leicester and his son Sean would persist in playing cricket on Sundays, and though Mr. Leicester might think He had forgotten it, the cricket season being over this three months, the Lord had not! And let him look out, for the next warning would end in his waking up in the Bottomless Pit which even he, Mr. Jark, had failed to fathom.

The twenty-eighth, to the surprise of the Eventidians had passed without a murmur from the skies. The church clock was still five minutes late, but as it always *had* been five minutes late, it still remained immutably set at that period of time. "And you see, my dear, what a terrible untruth-teller that Lord Haw-haw must be," Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam had said over her teacups to a select gathering of the Row. She seemed quite indignant that the German bombers had not kept Lord Haw-Haw's word, and she said, not once but several times, that she would never trust the word of a German again—"not if he went down on his bended knees". When Lord Lovem,

who was just absorbing his fourth cup—he was very partial to weak tea—was understood to murmur that "that Haw-Haw fellar was paid to tell lies—just like the damned revolutionary socialist press—but that as-matter-of-fact, he happens to be one William Joyce—had it positively from a fellar in the War Office—and that he was an Anglo-Irishman—just like that O'Brien Leicester chap—and that he wasn't a German at all and the bally old British Empire would soon put all that to rights and, take his word for it, never another bomb would fall on the tight little, right little island and . . ."

. . . And it was that moment, Providence, or is it his Satanic Majesty? chose for the dropping of the first bomb.

"Gor bless my soul!" said Lord Lovem in his beard, or where his beard might have been had he worn one. "Goodness gracious me, and what is that?" (the hostess). "Dear, dear, I do wish those Germans would give up that nasty habit of dropping things" (Serena Gadfly). And the robust and out of the side of her mouth: "Why, damn 'em! they're at it again" (Lady Lackplace). These few remarks will, one thinks, represent the tenor of the tea-party at Bedelia's.

But nobody seemed to be troubled in any way. Indeed, Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam, turning politely to Lady Lackplace and with implied condemnation of her Rabelaisian outburst ("and if it had been anybody else, and after all she *is* the wife of a knight and she *ought* to know, but what is one to do?"), the glassy Bedelia enquired genteelly: "Would you like another cup—I am afraid the last cup was a trifle *squeezed*, dear Lady Lackplace, but the next will be better."

After all the great thing was "not to take any notice", as the hostess appositely said as, seemingly outside the window, although it was actually in the village of Thamsey, many miles away, three crashes were heard, followed by the smashing of her beautiful conservatory glass. Indeed, Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam had put into a sentence the ruling passion of the English people—"not to take any notice".

If you didn't sit up and take notice, the whole thing would blow over sooner or later, whether that was a broken teacup, a smashed conservatory, or the dropping of four hundred bombs in the adjoining park and villages, bombs which had now commenced to fall with a certain sickening frequency. Indeed, when you came to think of it, the "bally old British Empire" of the noble lord had been built up upon "refusing to take notice".

Clarence, at this juncture, was heard to murmur something about "the cheek of that fellar Hitler", his solitary contribution to the afternoon's conversation. After which he had faded out and, in a sense, had become invisible. He was one of that sort.

As Leicester, feeling like a man who has indecently broken away from a funeral, made his apologies for leaving the gathering, pointing out as he did so that this was the first great occasion upon which the War Councils could show the stuff that was in them, he noticed that nobody had even thought of going out into the street to see what really had happened, or, rather, was happening. Certainly none of the members of the War Committees had as

yet shown the slightest indication of "functioning". This he faintly indicated, feeling horribly apologetic as he did so. Horrible thought! Perhaps they never would function. Glory! Would Paradise Row be a Paradise Lost?

XXXV

"PARADISE REGAINED"

As, doubt griping his heart, he passed along the Row, above which a tornado of noise and the *thrud-thrud* of planes had broken, it was to see Miss Gadfly at Number Four peacefully watering her fuschias, on her head the saucepan she habitually used as armour, with the handle gracefully at the back. She seemed blissfully, not to say balmily, unaware of the tornado overhead and of the fact that it happened to be the end of November, she having a theory that the "poor dears of fuschias" needed water in winter-time just like us humans. A theory, incidentally, which projected itself to cabbages and her conviction that we were cruel to what she would call "these great green hearts" when cut with a knife, for she, like Honoria, was a ferocious vegetarian as I have said, being prepared, if necessary, to murder in the cause of the carrot.

Really this indifference to his *Schrecklichkeit* would have been extremely annoying to Mr. Hitler, who himself was a vegetarian and like so many devourers of what may be termed "green hells", was himself ferocious. But the biological or anthropological reason for some of the greatest torturers and killers of history turning with disgust from steak and kidney pudding and ravening upon radishes is, thank the Lord! not for this chronicler to solve.

Number Three, the residence of the Lackplaces, looked like a tomb, although he thought he could see Honoria inside working over her invariable crazy-quilt and every now and then peering out to see if Mr. Hitler would permit her to finish it. Out of Number Five, on the other side, he found the first evidence of a sense of awareness that Mr. Hitler was knocking at the front door—this in the person of Ella Cattermole, who came out in the steel helmet in which like some Pallas Athene, she looked remarkably distinguished, with its brim shading the fine dark eye and the strap under the shapely chin. But Ella, to Leicester, often seemed the only really finely bred woman in the Row, although he was careful not to tell the Row.

But already Mrs. Kish Chicks was racing down the street from her house, blowing her whistle and carrying in her hand the bucket and shovel for incendiaries. He saw both women disappear into the houses as they ran the length of the Row to call forth the inhabitants, who he was to learn afterwards had in some cases bitterly and even acrimoniously protested at "the unseemly disturbance", especially the lady upon whom he, Leicester, had called at the opening of the war and who had informed him that "she and her husband had no intention of coming into this war, as they had been in the last".

But the sight of those two women had sent warmth to Leicester's heart and wakened confidence in his cohorts, still untested and unknown.

Above, in the night, he could hear the drone of the bombers, labouring for their monstrous births as they prowled towards London, thirty miles away. Then the detonations in the districts about, with the sullen crack in the heart of them, and the dead crash of bricks and mortar—and then the silences and, once more, the drone. The procession endless.

Black Parade.

It seemed to him as he hurried along the Row that none of this concerned him or his house. Never had he felt more lonely—never more detached from Aase and Patricia and all except Sean, who was never closer. There was in the warm dark-faced boy great comfort. Never had he loved him so much as this night.

He let himself in by his Yale key to find Queen Elizabeth Close as it had always been. Neither Hitler nor hell could shake the quiet of the centuries that brooded over that dwelling.

The night-lamp burned in the hall as he knocked at the door of the Long Room in which his wife lay. Then he entered to see her, unmoved in the horror, reading a book—reading as though a world were not falling about her. Snow-White, lying back asleep in a *chaise-longue* near her, looked wan enough—for a moment he thought she was dead . . . and then she had opened her eyes to smile to him.

Patricia sat near her at some needlework, and again the beauty of the child came to him—the wild dark eyes, luminous, as they followed her needle—the masses of tousled red—the slender beauty of the body clothed in its Liberty green. But she did not look up at her father. She never did. It was part of the behaviour of the House towards him—perhaps its "technique". Not to notice his presence. To ignore him when possible. To act as if he were not there. Yet, how he loved her! And once had he said to her when she had told him she hated him: "But you can't prevent my loving you." But did she really hate him?

It was daunting. But he was used to being daunted. And as he would say, wasn't it splendid experience in the school of life? and how easy it would be one day for him to run his planet in his later reincarnations! For Leicester never lost the whimsey which had come down to him from the Irish side of the distaff.

There was a rather dreadful silence in the Close, with the distant detonations coming faintly through the shuttered windows from time to time, shot by flashes from the skies. O'Brien Leicester stood there as though waiting for them to cease or for his womenfolk to say something. Surely on a night like this, with the dark wings overhead, and the scream of the falling death, these two females might say something to him—something to give courage—some common friendliness.

Then, deep down, there came to him the old elation in the face of frustration and coldness. There came pouring into him that electric fluid which always seemed to await such moments—and as it did so, he thanked his gods, whatever they might be, for he was increasingly unsure of them, that they had not burdened him with the love of women, which only weakened. It

made it easier for him to await the screaming death. And then, as he stood there waiting, he felt a little hand slipped into his to press his fingers. It was Snow-White who in some way of her own was always his comfort in doubt.

Those other two, woman and maid, had never weakened and therefore had never weakened him. They had always been in league, with the dark mystery of the mother-love that had hate as well as love in its heart to hold them together. There had been those odd moments when Patricia had come to him, now to tell him that she had fallen in love, now to run to him out of the childish storms which overwhelmed her young body. But those were the "odd" moments only. As she had once said to him: "I have never listened to what you say and I never will."

He had not answered, but he knew that the day might come when the child, awakened by the stroke that comes out of the darkness, would listen —would have to listen. And once he had said to her gently enough: "When the day comes that you will find you will have to listen, Patricia, don't take it too much to heart that you never listened to your father, who, remember, never claimed any rights to be heard *because* he was your father. He has always left you free—even free to your own undoing." He had left it at that, but it had sometimes seemed to him that the cold, capricious girl, remote from him, had begun to listen—and once, only once, had he heard her whisper to her mother when she had been cold and stinging, not to be so hard on her father.

That had nearly broken his heart.

But there they sat, aloof as always. And now the whole house was shaken to its foundations by a dull cracking explosion quite near. They had listened to the whine of the bomb, increasing as it came, menace in its howl. He had instinctively ducked his head, calling to Pat to get under the table, and then had run over to his wife to place on her head the helmet he had bought her and which lay unregarded on her couch. And then had come the crash.

His wife made no motion save a little impatient gesture as he placed the helmet on her shapely head, with its dark red braided from its centre parting. She just went on with her reading, and so she continued for the rest of that fateful night.

It occurred to him that any other woman would have looked ridiculous in that helmet which crouched upon her head and came down to the eyes. Not so Aase. She might have been the helmeted Greek goddess herself. The dark eyes gleamed as they read from beneath the helmet rim. The hand and eye were steady. "Steady as death", it came to him.

. . . . .

But he had his work to do as leader.

He wanted to see how the Row was "taking it", or, rather, if it still were taking it, or, instead, had vanished into its Georgian fastnesses.

To his surprise, he found awaiting him little knots of men and women, collected by some mysterious attraction down the Row at equal intervals.

Even the middle-aged lovers from Happy Shadows stood timidly enough behind the others, in their hands buckets of sand and their stirrup-pumps and on their noses the regulation eye-protectors. Timid though they seemed, their leader felt he could rely on them.

There was Miss Gadfly, still with her watering-pot and saucepan, at the head of her band—which is to say the Council of Fortifications, each of them with a spade in his or her hand. The "spade" often being a coal-shovel or, in one case, a child's wooden trowel—relic of those dear far days beyond recall, when the Row went to the "select" watering-places but *never* to Brighton or Margate.

It is true that Miss Gadfly, for no considered reason apart perhaps from habit, had begun excavations inside the garden wall of Number Three, until invited to "desist" by her friend and enemy to the death, Honoria. Also, that in a last-moment effort at "training", Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam had squirted some water in the eye of Buck Galanty, she having dipped the "sucker" of her fire-pump in a convenient bucket and then "let go". Buck himself appeared in rubber "tops", but, thank God! with the invariable topper on his head and which gave confidence.

Lord Lovem and Clarence, both slightly "sketchy", came along carrying nothing but their hands in their cross-pockets, and asked "what was up?" as though one couldn't hear what was "up". "And it isn't what's up, me noble lord, but what's coming down that ought to be throublin' you this night!" This of course was the Voice of Ireland.

Paradise Row on this fateful November-night positively seemed to breed stirrup-pumps, sand-buckets, leather gauntlets (for no considered reason) and rakes. What the rakes were for, nobody seemed to know, but they were "for it". It may be that an incautious remark of their Leader to the effect that "when the thermite bomb falls, the first thing to do is to rake it into a convenient bucket", was the origin of this tendency to "rakishness".

The "Come on Coffees" had excelled themselves, Leicester was pleased to note. Morgana, armed literally *cap-à-pie*, although she would have been much surprised had you told her so, had swarmed out into the night in full fig. Helmet and "blinkers" ("against the horrible dangers of the exploding thermite, which would burn the eyes out of you as soon as look at you"—Doctor Crab speaking); corduroy trousers; and what looked like sea-boots which seemed exactly to suit her, and giving her that "piratical air"; gauntlets up to the elbow; gas-mask on back ready on the approach of gas to be whisked over snout and eyes; a belt about her waist equipped with jack-knife, axe, and "First-Aid" bandages. That was Mrs. Coffee in this moment of test.

Mrs. Mallory had also made belated appearance, as she apologetically informed the assembled Good Companions that "she had been a-finishin of her supper and as she was very partial to cow's heel neither 'ell nor 'Itler could ever hurry her—and 'arf a mo., 'IT!" or words to that effect. She had incidentally brought nothing but her own abundant and fluffy self, her fair curls afloat in the night airs, her bosom very much in evidence, for it kept popping in and out at ill-considered moments, her front being unlatched.

Mr. Nicodemus, the barber, looking like the devil, had just come out from his lair and brought with him three other devils with whom he had

been playing that delightful game known as "Cut-throat Crambo". With him, a positive armoury of scissors and razors, perhaps under some hazy idea of the days when barbers were surgeons and the feeling that you had to have scissors to cut bandages and razors for something else—perhaps performing the last offices upon the dead, for their presence he never explained.

But I think we may say that *the* success of that first ordeal by fire was the appearance of Mr. Valentine Windermere *in* his brougham, and his statement to a wondering audience that the brougham was full of invalid luxuries, calves-foot jelly, sherry and brandy, "in case Jerry did the dirty on us", for Mr. Windermere despite his augustness and age, could at times drop into the vernacular. ". . . and if my son, Valentine, hadn't made such a fool of himself and dropped off just when he was most wanted and at the ridiculous age of seventy odd—no age at all!—why, he would have come in handy tonight to tend the wounded, and God bless his soul! and he didn't mean it for he knew perfectly well that there wasn't any old God but it was just habit—God bless his soul! but if the Row wanted any more stuff or wine, they had only to ask for it!" This from a gentleman who was supposed to be "rather near" was one extraordinary example of the alchemy of war upon the human mind.

A triple appearance, also belated, was that of Mr. Wodes, without his hearse but with his funereal face and his boon companions, Mr. Jark and Doctor Crab, who all three seemed to have turned up on the offchance that something else also might turn up—that something being Death.

After all, you couldn't get over the fact that war was good for trade, even though Mr. Wodes wasn't at all sure as to whether he might not be asked by the Local Council, who had now extraordinary powers conferred upon them, to tuck up the masses of corpses which might be expected if the bombs continued to come down, and with them the prices. For retail, not wholesale, murder alone was in his line, and where Doctor Crab, by his knife and black purges plus his black tongue, might with luck kill his dozens, Mr. Hitler was able to murder hundreds.

Mr. Wodes, who was very talkative to himself when in his cups, and only then to himself, and in the norm as silent as one of his own graves—Mr. Wodes knew that already in the back of the Parish Hall, the local Council had stored some hundreds of *papier mâché* shrouds, for emergencies, and had even begun on a mass-grave, which, of course, in the British way, was never finished, for the British, and especially the English, are hopeless optimists and everybody who wasn't a blithering idiot knew that the war would be over any day now. The question actually at that moment agitating what Mr. Wodes called his "mind", being whether the local authorities would expect him to "do" into their little paper-bags the coming corpses at so much a dozen, or whether the market rates for "solitaries" would still obtain and be obtained.

There also ran through that organ, if organ it were, certain woolly prospects of a General Strike of One, or at the most Three, with the object of "cornering the market", and the refusal of Messrs. Wodes, Jark and Crab to save life or to bury life unless their terms were agreed to . . . "and, Gentlemen, believe me or believe me not, but what with the cost of labour, the price

of the utensils of my profession, the feeding and upkeep of the black-tailed prancers and the cost of the materials of embalming and general putting-away, make it impossible for me to accede to your demands for wholesale rates—I should be doing myself and you also, not to mention the poor 'stiffs'—I mean the unfortunate victims—of Mr. Hitler, themselves not in a condition to protest, if I quoted less than a couple of pounds a head for performing the last offices . . . and take it or leave it . . . but if you insist on so much a dozen and at wholesale rates, I will point blank tell you to save your mouths from telling me anything more about it, and I will take my bloody cerecloths and go . . . that is to say" (for Mr. Wodes in his reverie did regard the last as a bit too strong) "with the deepest regrets it will be my most regretful duty to take my gravediggers and mourners and hearse and leave the precincts of Eventide, and I know I shall take with me my splendid embalmer, Mr. Jark, not to mention my good friend—and *what* a friend he has been to me!—Doctor Crab, who also can't be expected to work for nothing . . . and gentlemen . . ."

How long our "Little Pope" might have remained in that whispered reverie with himself one may not say. What we can say is that in a moment Mr. Wodes, "Funerals and Cremations and Everything at the Lowest Possible Cost consistent with quality", was found to be standing within a regular aurora borealis, as though about to be translated. For a nice young gentleman, of the name of Fritz Schwarz, a member of the "Partei" and of dear Mr. Göring's Luftwaffe, had chosen that instant to release a "stick" of incendiaries above Mr. Wodes as he stood there ruminating, which descending and exploding, Mr. Wodes had not only been nearly translated but obliterated.

It was this which broke up not the "Partei" but the party—the one party we all hate to break up—the party of self with self, and the only time, let it be remembered, that we are absolutely honest, when the Lower speaks to the Higher Self.

Weaving his predestined way in and out of all this was the indefatigable Mr. Honeypot, behind him, his indomitable Scot, Elspeth McGluskie, shepherding him like some suppressed, persistent hen who will mother her lone chick when it has strayed from the true fold.

It was Mr. Honeypot who organized the groups. It was Mr. Honeypot, note-book in hand, who noted how many "stirrups" were available, how many buckets of sand, and how many shovel-rakes. Mr. Honeypot, it was, who in his own miraculous way prevented the groups from that tendency to coalesce, born of a common danger and the insatiable desire for gregarious "jaw". And always, as he passed his revered leader, he would shoot out at him the latest news from the Western Front.

Behind Alexander Honeypot, again, not so much a person as an influence—Ella Cattermole, who although she scarce moved from her place opposite her own door made her presence felt the length of the Row, standing, calm, aloof, as though Mr. Hitler's doings up there were no business of hers, and that, anyhow, he really couldn't do any harm. Like some actresses who achieve their triumphs by immotion, by only standing and waiting, so did Ella, who was perhaps herself an actress, something, however, we are to discover if we can. She pervaded Paradise Row—and Paradise Row knew

it, submitting its unredeemed head to an authority Ella herself never sought to wield. Paradise Row might have lost its head, though not its heart, on meeting Ella Cattermole—it had not lost it on meeting Mr. Hitler. Here, indeed, Leicester realized, was no "Paradise Lost"—rather "Paradise Regained".

XXXVI

ORDEAL BY FIRE

THE O'Brien Leicester, like a second Robinson Crusoe, but on a by no means desert isle, stood there, monarch of all he surveyed, and like his Maker, "found that it was good".

Paradise Row had come up to the scratch in a surprising way, and although Mr. Hitler had not yet actually dropped a real live incendiary upon the Row, only upon the "village lot", which might look after itself, for Eventide was sternly divided into two fire sections, the "Village" and "the Row", he even dared to hope that, if the Row were struck, the spirit he saw about him might once more "come up to that scratch".

He had not long to wait, for at that moment there appeared hanging head down out of one of the upper windows of Queen Elizabeth Close the tawny head of his own daughter who, crying "Fire! Fire!" had then suddenly withdrawn herself from the world.

As the novelists say, to get into his own house was "the work of a moment", behind him some rag, tag and bobtail which had been vomited out of "The Robe of Glory" where they were holding high festival in celebration of the coming of "the real thing" or something. And if this veracious Chronicler continues to use the words "and something", even at the risk of reiteration and irritation, it is only because "and something" alone may describe the indescribable that was Eventide at war.

It seemed that Patricia, looking out into the Elizabethan garden of the Close, had seen "a pyramid of fire fall out of the sky", had heard the crack of slate, and then running upstairs to see what might be seen, had found over her lovely head in the attic above, the trapdoor to which had been kept open in case of emergency, such a pyrotechnic dream as might have made Mr. Brock pale his 'minished fires. A greenish-white mist, its creative centre or fount a beautiful big bomb as a present from the Luftwaffe, which, in the mysterious way of bombs, had struck one of Mr. Leicester's chimneys, bounded into the air, and then had waltzed light-heartedly through the attic slates, steeple-chased across the attic floor and taking a downward course, because for bombs it is a case of *facilis est descensus averni* as it is for humans, then had impenetrably fixed itself between the juncture of two wormeaten joists which for two centuries had held up the Close.

Now was displayed the mastery of the Row over its surroundings—even

over death, the thing by which, like the ether, we are all surrounded. Instead of lying down to Mr. Hitler, so to speak, and to the gay young Nazi gentleman who had pushed the button which had released the ill-considered incendiary, and who at that moment, having left his visiting card, was already twenty miles away, the Row rose to the occasion—first in the person of Miss Gadfly.

For Serena Gadfly, saucepan on head but with the handle now forgivably awry, had been prowling in her own peculiar way about the Close when the incendiary came through. As she said afterwards. "I had one of my blindey-fits as if I knew that Mr. Leicester's house would be struck, and so I was on the spot and had climbed in through the ground-floor window before he arrived." And possibly Miss Gadfly's "blindey" was not an entirely unscientific explanation of an unnatural phenomenon, in these days when science really seems to be going to the devil and like Mr. Albert Chevalier's coster, "dunno w'ere 'e are", what with neutrons and protons and now with photons which, like chariots of fire, have carried the cool, cold, but now cock-eyed materialist science out of time and space into the irritating flusterbation of a spirit which had no business to be there.

From which pardonable digression we may return to our Miss Gadfly, whom Mr. Leicester found in his excursion to the upper regions of the Close to be making scientific advance upon the bomb and the attic.

For, holding in her left hand her manual of fire-fighting, and turning to page 13, paragraph 4, she followed the instructions with avidity—but avidity restrained, for from first to last Serena Gadfly never turned a hair.

So it was that she held before her an ill-considered dustbin lid and over her eyes a celluloid pair of goggles—the former in the event of unforeseen explosion, the latter, as protection for the eyes, which, incidentally, had a spark struck the celluloid, would infallibly have burned out of or into her head. But the Lords of the Flame look well after their own, and, gazing backwards coolly and concretely, it is the considered opinion of this Chronicler that no power out of hell could that day have singed a hair of the whiskers of Miss Gadfly, who carried quite a little collection just under the chin—incidentally a source of personal perturbation and experiment over many years. For this "bunch" had turned away the only male man who had had "serious intentions" towards her, he being an elder of a delightful little sect with which she had flirted during her association with Frasmus, known as "The Brethren", and no more bones about it, and so she had been left within the insoluble fastness of her virginity instead of one day, perhaps, producing a real, true, "stamped on the B-T-M" babby. Which, by the way, she very nearly did, because after Erasmus had given her the go-by, she felt what she called "birth-pangs" which the doctor, to quote Serena's own words, was "man-beast enough to call imagination". And although it has nothing to do with our story, it might be said for the benefit of the reader that a slightly imperfect gynæcological knowledge and the fervent conviction that the approach of the male person, even without a kiss which had never matured, was sufficient to produce a more or less miraculous birth, had led to this conviction. And from that conviction, as it happened, Serena Gadfly never had been divorced, and, in defiance of all known laws of obstetrics, had for

years after felt these "pangs" or what she termed "growing pains" of a fœtus which, like its spiritual father, Erasmus, also had never matured.

But to return to Serena's shield and goggles, there he found her crouching on the ladder to the attack, moving step by step, book in left hand, dustbin cover in right, saucepan on head, her eight-foot stirrup-pump strapped to her back, and faith in her heart, as the thermite burned above her like merry hell.

Leicester literally passed over the body of Miss Gadfly as it crouched like a monkey on a stick, to hurl himself into the fray in an endeavour to extricate the bomb from its nest. The attic was full of stinks and light, very much as was our little war-torn planet at that moment in time, and as he dashed into it, it was to fall full length over the body of his daughter who lay there, the sand-bucket unheeded by her side and the rake with which she had tried to get at the bomb in her lifeless hand. For Patricia, like all true women of an older growth, had fainted.

It was Mick Malone, who had by now run up through the house with the "Robe" contingent, who took Patricia in his arms and handed her down into the presumably willing arms of Miss Gadfly, who by now had forgotten her little book of the words, and who had slid to the bottom of the ladder, her mouth open, her eyes gazing upwards, and awaiting anything the good Lord, or was it the Devil, might send down the ladder. She got it

For down upon her fell the body of Patricia who carried her, pots, pans and all, down the next flight of stairs on to the landing where they lay inextricably in the way of all saviours, Miss Gadfly with her body over Patricia after some foggy remembrance that this was what heroines always did in fire-fighting and rather hoping than otherwise that another incendiary would come through and immolate her—for she had the passion to death and service, so often one and the same thing. And there she lay as there poured over her Mr. Malone, Buck Galanty, and the "Come on Coffees", even Mrs. Mallory using her body as a convenient springboard or *point d'appui* for the rescuers.

In vain did the "Robe" contingent, still slightly fuzzy-wuzzy from the fumes—I refer to the fumes of Mr. Bull's whisky and not to those of the bomb—seek to get at the still merrily blazing fireball, which by now had begun to corruscate brilliantly and to send up to the rafters thousands of little sparks, which, adhering, began to burn out the house of the Leicesters.

Miss Gadfly, having now completely recovered, being helped thereto by a timely but unpremeditated kick in the solar plexus by one of the odd passers-by where she lay at what may be called the traffic-lights, had reached the conclusion that as "they serve who only lie in wait" (her version), it wouldn't be a bad idea to blow the little whistle which she carried concealed in her otherwise barren bosom—as she recalled the instruction (No. 5b, page 16 of "Leaders' First Things"): "When in doubt blow your whistle."

So from that landing, as the thermite cast its garish glare both up and down, Miss Gadfly blew and blew, though, thank God! what with the crash of the bombs, the scream of their falls, and the distant explosions, nobody heard it.

Nor was this all. Feeling that her eight-foot spray, with the rubber attachments of which she had become inextricably entangled, ought not to be left

out of the general dishevelment, she pulled out her special "Instructions for Use of the Lightning and Niagara Sprayer", to find herself faced with:

". . . On no account permit the expulsion of fluid in cases of wounding of belly" (here, Miss Gadfly blushed). "Patients who have injuries to the belly" (blush again) "must not be given anything by mouth . . . not even sips of water. . . ."

Carefully following the instructions to "READ THIS CAREFULLY SEVERAL TIMES" she recited it as though it were the "Dearly Beloved Brethren" to which, when in love with the Reverend Hallowes, she had once been addicted, but at last reluctantly reached the conclusion that possibly she had got the wrong pamphlet—which, indeed, proved to be the case, she having imbibed "FIRST AID IN BRIEF" pamphlet instead of "INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE OF THE NIAGARA FALLS" pump-spray, and which she now found to include, as the thermite blazed above her head, the unscrewing of top cap and the oiling of valve leather, and a highly complicated description of "lug caps", "packing rod", and the priming of the infernal machine, which, however, she was gratified to learn "could also be used for green fly and general disinfection". (It may be said that it was much later in the war that our Miss Gadfly, having acquired the pamphlet on "Evacuation", had taken it to Mr. Dethley, the local chemist, insisting that, although she "had most carefully followed the instructions as far as humanly possible, they had had no effect of any kind upon her bowels", Mr. Dethley, the kindest of souls, pointing out that she had only mistaken the nature of the pamphlet, which was official, not medicinal, and related to the evacuation from London of those wishing to flee the flying bombs.)

Disentangling herself from "strainer valves", "barrel washers", "lug caps", and "angle-bend lumpends", she once more went up the ladder, carrying the "Niagara Falls" with her, for, by the indulgence of a benign providence, she had found at the foot of the ladder one of a relay of buckets being filled from the bath below. With this, her little sucker dangling in the water, she had begun to let go from her 'vantage point at head of ladder, catching Mr. Malone, who at that moment was bending over and away from her, in the seat of his intelligence, which startling, sent him headlong on to the top of the flaming bomb and into such a volley of bad language that Miss Gadfly, appalled, had again fallen head first down the ladder into the bucket of water at the foot and was not again seen.

It is not for this, or any other, Chronicler to attempt the impossible by describing the rest of that fateful night, when Paradise Row "came up to the scratch", for is it not written in the tablets of memory of the surviving Paradisers? Not for him to sufficiently and efficiently tell of "Bubble and Squeak" whose identities have not, as yet, been disclosed to the Gentle Reader, because of the retiring nature of Squeak and the ebullience of Bubble, who not so much lived as "bubbled and squeaked" in Number S x. Yet may it be said that it was Bubble, the male portion of the entanglement, who, ebullient with orders, all of them contradictory, could be heard fizzing on the other side of the partition which separated the attics of Numbers Six and Seven, the latter, as we know, being Queen Elizabeth Close, as he kept "going off" like one of the old-fashioned basketed soda-water arrange-

ments of the Row, telling Squeak, the female portion, what ought to be done and wasn't, whilst Squeak, a little darling by the way, very old and sweet like lavender between sheets, would from time to time, as opportunity offered, coyly poke her little stirrup-pump nozzle through a mousehole in the partition, and in her view provided by a bountiful providence for the purpose. Then would come the never-failing gush of water which, like God's fountains of blessing, fell both on the just and unjust and even sometimes on the hole where the bomb was now comfortably working out a little fiery nest for itself.

These things, as I say, may not be recorded, because they, like all good deeds, are beyond the written record. Suffice it to say that when, by the combined efforts of "the Boiling" from the "Robe of Glory", plus the Nazi young gentleman before-mentioned, the whole of the attic flooring with the ceiling below had been brought down in ruin irretrievable and a pretty steady Niagara of water had been established on the stairs for any goldfish who might have wandered out of the garden pond, but certainly not for Mr. Malone, who to that fluid had a rooted objection, the fiery peril gradually subsided and that Villain of the Piece, one Adolf Hitler, once more was foiled.

One other thing may however here be set down. During the whole of this fiery interlude, with the bombs of Germany shuddering about her and that night, indeed, bringing down in the neighbouring districts some thousands of houses, Aase Leicester lay on her bed entirely unmoved by the moderate certainty that if the fire reached her couch she would be burned alive, as she read out of one of the old Sagas of her Northern home.

XXXVII

"KULTUR"

In all these flusterbations and perturbations of war it must not be imagined that "*Kultur*" was forgotten in Paradise. Mr. Hitler and his Nasties plus Mr. Göring, who said he "always reached for his gun when he heard anybody use the word", might be trying to smash up culture and the arts. Not so Paradise Row, who, however, up to that moment, being truly British, as Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam advised, cared a little less for all the arts put together than a well-boiled jam roll or a hundred by Hobbs. But the moment Mr. Hitler tried to bust up the *Kultur* which the Paradisians had so far despised, then that body of stalwarts determined to keep it as a going concern and so set their wits, such as they were, to work.

Now this is a funny world, the phrase beloved of Leicester, who didn't think it "funny" at all, and in it if there be "plan", it must be the plan of a Lunatic. Yet things do hang together somehow, and I suppose as pretty an example of this haphazard "hanging-together" may now be set down in this chronicle of death in the face of death . . . and life. For the poor *Die-Hards* of the Row were facing both, and if truth be told, they feared the

life now showing itself from beneath the fires of war more than they did the fires themselves.

The British have always feared life more than death, one reason why they are so brave.

Now read, mark and inwardly digest the following and learn how the chance association of Leicester with the famous not to say notorious Bensa Brains Trust led to such trifles as experiments in Thuggery, the flux of the atoms, and, something much more important, the violent parting of two females over a male man. But let us proceed.

The idea of the Bensa Brains was to force culture or "*Kultur*" down the necks of the helpless service men, who, not knowing what they were letting themselves in for, strenuously demanded it.

O'Brien Leicester had been invited to join the Trust as a representative of "Literature and the Drama" thereon.

In this work it seemed to O'Brien in his more peacocky moments that he had rather distinguished himself, having a dazing and amazing vocabulary and a seeming encyclopædic knowledge of everything known or unknown, and in one of those moments of weakness when the proud male 'neath the gaze of adoring women, sees stars, all this the O'Brien had confided to his worshipper, Honoria Lackplace, adding his belief in the beneficence of Brains Trusts, of course when illuminated by his, the O'Brien's, serene terrene imagination. And if the little devil that stands nudging men's, and especially women's, elbows, had left it there, it would have been all right, but this particular personal devil one morning, when she was in her bath, her soul full of hope and her mouth full of soap, put something into the head of Miss Honoria Lackplace who at that moment had slipped on a piece of the carbolic soap which she affected, and so had knocked the aforesaid headpiece. With the result that, full fledged, as Athene sprang from the helm of Jupiter, there rushed, still speaking of that same head, the idea of an Eventide Brains Trust, all to its little self. Why slipping on a bit of carbolic should give rise to such slippery imaginings is not for the writer to say, because he just doesn't know and is modest enough to admit it, but give rise, or rather a fall, to them it did.

As at this particular moment in her variegated meandering life Miss Honoria had also been studying Indian *yoga*, or what she conceived to be Indian *yoga*, 'neath the ministrations of one Professor Ramswaddle, "who had been in the East and therefore knew all about it", and from that had naturally run on into examination of the fakirs and the Thugs, the train was laid for the violent explosions which were to follow. For thus does the Divine Lunatic arrange, or disarrange, our destiny. And how all this "thuggery" is one day to be linked with a Christian Conclave, we are later to see, though at the moment, thanks be! it is mercifully veiled from us.

And if Honoria had only kept it all to her little self, even then all would have been well. But over the loosening up of a cup of good strong Indian tea, as we are talking about India, she had to Serena Gadfly confided her views upon deep-breathing, withered arms, beds of nails as comfortable couches with all the nails turned up the wrong way, and, finally, upon that Thuggery of which we have spoken.

"You see, my dear Serena" (they happened to be in the Serena-Honoria stage at this time), she said, "in these days of Nazi invasions it is essential to be ready and to 'be British' "—who, incidentally, once had a king called Ethelred the Unready, and they have been unready ever since. "And so I say that it behooves—'behooves' I said—it behooves us to protect ourselves and not expect our men to do it for us, as we must release every man-Jack of them for the front. And so, strictly between ourselves, I have been studying slip-knots, which those dear, interesting and much misunderstood people, the Thugs, use when, ahem! . . . that is to say, when getting rid of their oppressors." This was a delicate way of introducing the unpleasant fact of a sect who lived upon strangling and who had made a science of it.

The manner in which Serena Gadfly received this information was eager, not to say alarming. Without interval, she sprang to her feet and ran upstairs to her bedroom to get the apparatus for murder out of the lavender drawer, this being a silk handkerchief, long and lithe and sinewy. And for the rest of that fated afternoon did these two dear ladies perform wondrous and coyly murderous feats upon each other's throats and, indeed, even more delicate parts of their anatomies, with "the oiled silk" which "that greatly misunderstood people", the Thugs, regarded as their *pièce de résistance*.

Nor, if this had been all, then these words would not have been written. But it was not all. It never is.

Honoria and Serena ran to the O'Brien Leicester with Honoria's bright idea of a Brains Trust "to counteract the demoralizing influences of war". Leicester demurred. Whereupon Mesdames Honoria and Serena got up a "round robin" demanding that forthwith their now rather less revered leader should call a Brains Trust meeting in Mrs. Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam's drawing-room, Mrs. Bass-M. herself having no brains that one could notice and so inevitably becoming the proper person to sponsor the request.

All this was being carefully watched by the Particular Devil of whom we have spoken, who thereupon put it into the head of Leicester "to kill two birds with one stone"—if they did *have* to have a Brains Trust which, privately, he thought "a dam' silly idea"—and so get something off his chest which he had been trying to get off ever since his recent lectures at Oxford upon "A Layman's View of Modern Science", where he had been rather maltreated by some of the professional heavyweights. Being a human being, he was burning to get his own back and here was his chance! As we have seen, he was a combative animal, was the O'Brien Leicester.

So, the "Particular" still nudging, he suggested that Eventide, and especially Paradise Row, should go one better and invite the visit of a full dress Bensa Brains Trust as a kick-off for the local Trust which should get its ideas from Big Brother Bensa. This was rapturously hailed at the meeting called to consider the matter.

But this was not enough for Leicester, or rather for his invisible Mentor. The Devil egging him on, and the idea coming to him at that instant out of the blue, although he pretended he had been cogitating upon it for months and months, he suggested that they make the Bensa the nucleus of another

idea which originally, by some freak of imagination, the Reverend Robin Hallowes had promulgated, that gentleman having a brain wave for the first and last time in his glutinous, oleaginous career.

Being, as we have already indicated, almost anything you like to all men though nothing to any woman, the Reverend Robin had conceived a Conclave of all the Christian sects of the district with a view to their putting their "ological" heads together in an attempt to perform the impossible—i.e. translate Christianity into practice. "He had felt," he had said in the sermon in which he had launched the idea, "that the war had brought about a union of human hearts and a recognition of the trifling nature of the things which divided Nonconformity from Conformity—and although he was bound to confess that the ancient 'Mother Church' might be a bit of a stumbling-block to this Conclave of the Christians, in view of her insistence upon her unique prerogative of inspiration and interpretation, and although he thought there was a good deal to be said for that point of view, he believed that now was the golden moment when Christians might even be brought to love one another . . ." and so on and so on.

This proposal that Christians should work together and love one another had naturally raised the very devil in the ranks of the Christians who heard him, Mr. Jark, who had come prowling in and snooping in his usual fashion ever since the Reverend "went High with his candles and his incense and his popery", darkly hinting at the possibility of the Reverend gent. doing a turnabout any odd moment you liked and "going over". Miss Gadfly, who had long since abandoned the unabandoned reverend himself, being quite certain that he was a Jesuit in disguise, for so does the unfair sex form its opinions. And her rival, Miss Honoria, now, like her in full blast after Mr. Honeypot, being quite as certain that "before long, this wolf in sheep's clothing would come out in his true colours"—which were full black, white choker, shovel-hat and a kind of petticoat-coat, these, as it happened, not being colours at all.

Yet was it from this sermon, plus his recent experiences at Oxford, that Leicester got his fell idea of getting the Reverend Hallowes to invite some of his, Leicester's, recent tormentors to such a conclave and with them some of the Roman Catholic prelates of the neighbouring districts "with a view to harmonious joint working in the common cause of education and social advancement, it being so vital to the affairs of state that all parties and all sections of Christianity should put their heads together and their hands to the wheel 'for the duration', and, if possible, after". This rather involved sentence being the joint product of the Reverend Robin, Misses Honoria and Serena, and the O'Brien, when he could get a word in edgeways, which, incidentally, he had failed to accomplish, he at last "giving it up".

So was the train laid by the Villain of the Piece, still invisible. So was it that after much backing and filling and much story-telling and many fairy tales on every side, certain of the black-coated fraternity, both Conformist, Nonconformist and the Great Outside, did agree for this occasion "to leave their guns at home and to come clean". This last, it may be said, being the sardonic interpretation of Mr. Nicodemus, the barber, who had been wasting the oil in the small hours in secret passion for the Chicago gangsters and who

had just been reading the touching account of the burial of their revered Chief, Dion O'Bannion, King of the Bootleggers.

But out of such a gathering of peacemakers, and knowing his men, Leicester hoped much, and being in his moments a Bad Boy, sent up to the heavenly throne an effectual fervent prayer of an unrighteous man that out of the Conclave there might ensue battle, murder and sudden death, and that, like the Kilkenny Cats, there might be the mutual deglutition and discomfiture of his enemies.

But the results of that Conclave, of which we are later to hear, will not be told at length in these meticulous but, hopefully, not meretricious pages—for are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of Eventide, in *The Bugle*, to wit? And so may we leave Mr. Leicester at his "effectual fervent prayers", sending up our own prayers that the "Particular Devil" to whom we have referred may not catch him bending.

XXXVIII

THE "BRAINS TRUST"

FOR a long time, the idea of, first, a local Brains Trust and then a visit from the Bensa, hung fire, and several times a day O'Brien Leicester cursed himself and his surroundings that such an idea had ever grown like a fungus of the night. Eventide itself, what with "Brains" meetings held daily and mutual recrimination as to whether the local Brains Trust should first be established and only then the invitation issued to Big Brother Bensa, or whether, in order to crib Big Brother's ideas and experience, the visit should first be invited, had led to subtle disintegration of brotherly, and especially sisterly, love in Eventide village. And all this was further devilled and dishevelled by the fights over the Leicesterian notion for an "All-In Christian Conclave", a most unfortunate title and subject to misunderstanding, owing to the "All-In" wrestling, which, at the moment, was the favourite tickle and pickle of not only the Great Unwashed but also of the Washed.

If however you imagined that in the alarums of local war, Paradise Row neglected what it called its mind in its more absentminded moments, you would make a mistake. Nor did it neglect "the old bod.", as Buck Galanty called the corpus or body. As the Reverend Mr. Hallowes, who once possibly had had a mind when up at Oxford but had since mislaid it, would lachrymously quote: "*Epicuri de grege porcus*". "*Eheu fugaces labuntur anni.*" Which may be very freely translated as "Alas! how the giddy old years gallop past", and "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we kick the bucket." And then had added, as he looked inconsequently down upon his Little Mary, the product of his own motto, "I have done a bit of the eat, drink and be merry in my own time, and I think I know what a good dinner and good wine are, and when you talk to me about a 'Brains Trust', instead of a Belly Trust, why *de gustibus non est disputandum*—for it is no

good arguing about questions of taste and I believe in keeping my feet on solid earth even though my head may professionally be in the clouds."

Which was a delicate way of indicating to the man who had come to see him about following the fashion of the time by the establishment of a local Brains Trust, that he had been digging his grave with his false teeth for donkey's years but that this had not interfered with his growing tendency to what Mr. Jark would call the "Peppery-Popery stuff", for the Reverend Robin took to incense and candles as some men take to tobacco and whiskey.

Ultimately, decision was achieved. Instead of a completely public Brains Trust to be held in the Parish Hall, as Leicester had desired, the Paradise Row lot, who had the say so, decided to hold a strictly "private-public" Trust, to which only the *élite* should be admitted, and then, if it was "a go and a do", perhaps to hold one to which the proletariat might be suffered. But Leicester shrewdly guessed that the real reason behind this resolve was the fear of exposing their barer places to the ribaldry of a Rising Democracy, happily expressed by Mr. Malone in the delightful quatrain:

> The higher up the mountain goes,
> The greener grows the base—
> The higher up the monkey goes,
> The more you see his face.

The "Village", however, getting to hear of the Trust and of the proposal to keep it private and quiet, decided, first individually and then collectively, to be present or die. This was delicately conveyed to Mr. Leicester, who conveyed it to his fellow-trusters, by an ultimatum, actually conceived by Mr. Malone, which threatened, in the event of exclusion, "to paralyse the proceedings". In the long last, Leicester got the "Privates" out of a jam by suggesting a Machiavellian compromise, namely, to permit the entrance of the Proletariat *after* the Privates had had a go at the comestibles and cleared the remnants away before what Mrs. Masseyton called "the brutal and insatiable appetite of the Lower Orders" could also have a "go". Mr. Malone, only, was to be excluded, as Satan from Paradise. And so it was.

The result therefore at the end of a month of consultations, conversations, combinations, conciliations and consternations, was the first *Private-Public* "Brains Trust" ever held anywhere. The time eventide. The place, our Mrs. Masseyton's magnificent museum—it was not a home—and I hope you haven't quite forgotten the three hundred pounds of the most formidable lady in Eventide—or for that matter perhaps outside Eventide—the lady who so seldom materialized but who always "loomed".

War or no war, the looming lady managed in some way of her own to retain the devotion of her retinue of servitors or slaves, if you prefer the older title, all of whom loved her—for on our earth apart from the desire to make love and to eat there is no human passion so enduring and so immanent as the desire to be enslaved and so save the slavery of thinking. Her butler, a fruity, sacramental product of the past, adored her. Her personal maids, who tired and combed and washed the three hundred pounds of her fair white body—and let it be said a lovelier hide had never adorned the body of

a woman who in her time had broken hearts as cooks break eggs—all lay at her feet, literally and metaphorically. Her page boys, of whom she possessed a half a dozen mannikins mercurial and impish who awaited her lightest wish, would have done anything except, perhaps, die for her. Her secretaries, of whom she had three and a half (the "half" being an ancient gnarled piece of goods who had now reached the mature age of twenty-one and looked like his own grandad), would on her behest have joyfully impaled themselves or thrown themselves over a cliff, if there had been one adjacent, which there wasn't, or, indeed done any of those selfless deeds of the passionate *entourage* of a Mussolini who at this moment was holding Europe by the ears.

With the magnificence peculiar to her, our Mrs. Massyton had invited not only the whole damned Brains Trust but with it, specially invited guests, for attendance was only possible by invitation, to a sit-down-stand-up supper afterwards. At which "Feed", war or no war, there was everything that flew or swam or crawled upon a Lucullean table attended by the slaves aforesaid, all of them powdered and coated and knee-breeched—again, war or no war. So would the "Privates" get two feeds and the "Proletariats" only one.

In the chair, or, rather, more or less over and exuding on either side, sat the hostess like some magnificent broody hen upon her eggs, though the only eggs the Masseyton ever sat upon were of gold and, like all such eggs, addled, a Brooder who had been nominated by Mr. Leicester as the proper person to preside in her regal way over the first Brains Trust ever held in Eventide. Before her were many of our now dear old friends, from Mr. Wodes to Miss Gadfly, and from Lady Lackplace and Phtah to Mrs. Pompadour and her Pekes, and as we speak of brooders, with Messrs. Wodes and Jark brooding behind the sardonic Crab, who, so to speak, rode the hostess with a heavy rein, for he periodically frightened her to death, he being the only human being capable of that feat.

And if we enter into the minutiæ of this historic Brains Trust, it is only because the questions asked and the answers given may be taken as a fairly faithful reflection of what and how England, though not Ireland, was thinking in this time of war and its effects upon the life personal and public.

In that gorgeous Venetian chair sat the magnificent Masseyton, her masses of black hair crowning her gipsy face, with its oriental setting of eye prominent but piercing. Before her on the gilded table, for everything was gold or gilt at "The Palace", the "Questions" sealed in their envelopes, for all questions had to be sent in beforehand and their envelopes were not to be slit until the time of the meeting. However, in order to keep the proceedings lively, Leicester had decided to permit anybody who "liked to take a shot", in addition to the written questions to ask questions from the body of the ballroom, where the Trust was held.

Apart from an unwarrantable intrusion of one Michael Malone of the County Waterford, Ireland, who with half a dozen of his buddies or Irish Guardsmen had compelled the "Jeames" at the door to yield to *force majeure* in the form of first, gently spoken and even sugary words to the effect that they had forgotten to bring the invitation with them, and secondly, by the production of a knuckleduster and its almost caressing application to the

aforesaid Jeames's earhole—apart, I say, from this unwarrantable intrusion I think we may say that the opening of the proceedings was orderly and even ceremonial. "A proper preparation and rehearsal, indeed," as Mrs. Masseyton pronounced rather than said, "for the Conclave of Religions and of Science so soon to grace our doors". And the *ex cathedra* nature of her pronouncements lost nothing through the fact that she had a permanent and interesting catarrh which gave to her voice in such moments that adenoided *timbre* so beloved by clergymen and professors and one so impressive.

It was only when the "Trusties", as I suppose we may call those with cards, began to realize that their president or hostess had been talking to herself about herself for the previous half-hour, that a certain movement, first of faces, then of feet, began to make itself manifest even amongst those overawed ranks. For, to speak truth and ruth, Mrs. Masseyton was a passionate egoist, who never listened to anybody but herself and who, with or inside herself, sometimes held underground rumblings the full round of the twenty-four. Also there was the trifling disadvantage that she had obviously nearly forgotten what the gathering was about as she expatiated lengthily upon her views of divorce, of Mr. Churchill (whom, as a fellow-egoist by the way, she couldn't stand), of what she would have done to or with Mr. Hitler, and of the iniquity of a government which, through its exactions, was fast driving her into the workhouse. In the Malone version, which "prevented honest millionaires and millionairesses from earning a dishonest living". For Mrs. Masseyton was Tory of the bone, a "force" in "The City", a power on the Stock Exchange, and, as everybody knows, the Stock Exchange is High Tory and "God Save the King".

It was at this juncture that the O'Brien Leicester, with his famous *suaviter in modo*, not to mention the *fortiter in re*, intervened, gently indicating that time was flying and that "whilst they could not fail to be interested and even educated by the deeper thought of their distinguished hostess, it mightn't be a bad idea to get down to business and brains . . ." Something which made that hostess his implacable enemy for the rest of the evening and the rest of his life. For she was that sort of female woman.

Upon which and retiring within herself, where, indeed, she had always been, the Lady of the Chair réluctantly opened the first of the envelopes to read out the first question:

"Did the Brains Trust think that Mrs. Pompadour was quite right in what she called her head?"

This the president read out with entire urbanity, not being quite clear as to what the whole thing was about, she not being interested. And as she couldn't quite make out the name which she read as "Pom-pom-Pom-pom" and finally as "Pompadour", thus arousing the gathering to a high state of anticipation, things in general were not especially helped.

"And may I ask who is this 'Mrs. Pompadour'?" asked the "Charwoman", the name by which Mr. Malone, who was no respecter either of the Queen's English or of persons, had addressed the Chair, he hating her on principle, "because she lives in a palace and not in a poorhouse". For Mrs. Masseyton never remembered names, again not being interested, and if

Mrs. Pompadour had existence, that was no business of hers, she being usually hermetically sealed within "The Palace" and her own august thoughts. Really, Mrs. Masseyton did need a tin-opener or something.

The effect of this indifference first, upon the gathering and then upon Mrs. Pompadour herself, may be more easily imagined than described, if one may be plagiaristic. The former "getting the giggles, and the latter the hump", as Valentine Windermere, senior, expressed it afterwards, for that old devil was also present. The Pomp herself, her nose snubbed unto the air, made an effort to arouse herself from her chair in protest at the insolence, when, unfortunately, or rather fortunately, for her, Petronius the Peke, who had been nesting between the little curved thighs which, as always, she carried as wide apart as possible to show her contempt for a contemptible world, fell on to the floor at the very feet of Lady Lackplace, who sat on the chair behind with Phtah. Which devil--Phtah, not Lady Lackplace—seeing his natural enemy within his grasp, shot down from the Lackplace coign of vantage and fastened himself inextricably into muzzle and side of the imperial gentleman, the result also being more easily imagined than described, as the Eventide *Bugle* was later to say it in strikingly original phrase.

When the shimozzle was past, so was a question which everybody had by that time forgotten, although it was generally felt that the fight alone was worth the money with the promise of something more to come—especially as nobody had paid a farthing to get in and was half a dozen drinks and grub *ad lib.* to the good.

Mrs. Masseyton, deeply shocked, and whose bosoms had been working a generous overtime through emotion, here turned over the next envelope to O'Brien Leicester who, literally, "supported" her on the platform and who, opening it, read out to the assemblage:

"What is it that a woman has that a man hasn't?"

This was regarded as distinctly cryptic, so much so that one-half the gathering burst into immoderate fits of laughter, whilst the other half tried to look as shocked or impressed or as understanding as possible, according to temperament and religion.

As no member of the Brains Trust so far had attempted to reply to anything, the gathering determined to take the answers into its own hands, and from that moment, like Mrs. Masseyton herself, answered their own questions.

Miss Gadfly, it might be charitably said, took a physiological or, at the best, biological view of the question, of which, incidentally, she was the author. But the details into which she, being apparently entranced, now entered, proved so embarrassing, that, the "Charwoman" being incapacitated by shock, Leicester, so to speak, put a bag over Miss Gadfly's head and stifled her further scientific investigations. It was at this juncture that it was unanimously felt that the subject was too dangerous and therefore had better be dropped.

Then came the question which Leicester himself had heard at every Bensa Brains Trust upon which he had served and which still, one supposes, is the standard enquiry of the troops who, in their way, have also a passion for physiological research, despite the inferior instruments of the amateur.

"Why does a woman always close her eyes when she is kissed?"

Here, indeed, was a question in which Miss Gadfly and her friend Honoria could revel. But, for that matter, nearly everybody present revelled.

Mr. Cocklepill, speaking as he said for Mrs. Cocklepill, seemed in what might be termed a high state of cockleorum at the opportunities offered by the enquiry. He begged to say that every night—and even in the very middle of the night—when he kissed the partner of his joys, but not his sorrows, for he had none, he could aver that, when he could see her, which was not often in the small hours, she positively kept her eyes wide open beneath his affectionate ministrations. He then rather spoiled the seriousness of the question and the answer by roaring with laughter, in which Mrs. Cocklepill joined, and feeling amatory, exchanged a resounding kiss on the platform where they supported the Trust members.

Buck Galanty, who was also in high feather, he having made a little call at "The Robe" *en route* to "The Palace", and having had one or two within that palace, "on the side", averred that in his experience, which ere he hurled himself on to the bosom of Mother Church, had been distinctly varied, although heaven knew it was not for him to boast, most of the maidens—or alleged maidens—he had kissed, had always kept both eyes open—one lot of them wondering if this was the real thing or merely another summer flirt, and the other, how much money the lover was worth, or even, when far-seeing, calculating the alimony. As Sheridan had written: "Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen" who, again in his experience, never closed her eyes because at fifteen all maidens knew a thing or two, and to take a trope from Byron: "Maidens like moths, are ever caught by glare, and Mammon wins his way where Seraphs might despair." Also he still had vivid memories of a widow-woman whom he had attempted to kiss some years agone—ahem! it didn't matter how long ago, but they *would* be surprised—who, when he had kissed her and in the same breath had asked her exactly the condition of her fortunes, instead of closing her eyes had closed one of his, he being thrown out of the house, and he might say with the poet: "Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love, but why did you kick me downstairs?"

As it didn't seem that the Brains Trust had got any forrader with Mr. Galanty's memories, it passed on to the next question:

"If an elephant and a flea were both dropped together to the bottom of a well a thousand feet deep and without any air in it, which would get to the bottom first?"

Here was seen the cloven hoof of the O'Brien, who took upon himself to answer what was his own question, *nem con.*, although had he seen the result, he might have paused on the brink of his well. When he told his sceptical audience that both would reach the bottom exactly at the same moment and that if you dropped a ton of lead and a feather the result would be the same, he was greeted with a certain derisive howlery. This was, indeed, a bit too thick, even from their leader:

"Oh, shut up with your science, and for the Lord's sake let's have a little sweet commonsense instead!"

"Howld your whisht, sor, though it breaks poor Mick Malone's heart to say the cross word to his ancestral chief, whose brains is gone wool-gathering on him."

The Trust was going acid.

Mrs. Bass-Marjoriam was perfectly certain that such a reply was blasphemous as contradicting the Almighty himself who always made an elephant fall faster than (and she regretted to have to mention the word even in these degenerated days) a flea. And even Lord Lovem, echoed by his offspring, mumbled something about "those scientific fellars—why they'll tell us next that an elephant is smaller than a flea as that fellar Einstein or wotever-they-call-him or somebody said". Mr. Jark, who had got himself invited by devious stratagem and had squeezed in edgeways, opined that the mystery was that the Lord God Almighty hadn't struck down the questioner and the answerer, whilst his pal, Mr. Wodes, remarked that all he could say was that when they planted—he meant buried—Artemus Elderberry, who weighed twenty stun if he weighed an ounce, he had flopped much quicker into the clay than Mrs. Elderberry, who didn't go more than six stone six, who, getting tired of supporting Artemus, had died at the same moment of time and who was buried in the same grave.

What the funereal Mr. Wodes, who was a little "lit-up", did *not* say, was that Mrs. Elderberry had gamely fought a losing fight which had begun at the altar thirty years before, and then had taken her last dip, she having at last succumbed to the elephantine ministrations of Artemus who was very hard on his little wife, making demands upon her of washing up after he had devoured his sustenance, of mending his sixty-inch waisted breeches, and of bearing him at least one child, and better still, twins, at regular intervals, and other demands nameless.

A question and answer, by the way, which tells what the Yankee would call "a whale of a story" about the outlook of Paradise Row, and more than Paradise Row, in This England.

It was at this point that Miss McGluskie, who had insisted upon Mr. Honeypot getting her a ticket of admission and who had been sitting almost fiendishly intense with her boy-friend, suddenly burst into flame, as she cried:

"And what for should we be makin' fun with fleas and elephants when what we ought to be doin' is to be down on our marrow-bones beggin' the good Lord to forgive us our sins—and it is I that have many to forgive this very minit" (here she took a glance at Alexander as though by chance). "If some of you would read the twenty-third of Ezekiel, maybe you wouldn't be so complacent in your fleas and your elephants, or your elephants and your fleas, doting on them as Aholibah doted upon the princes of the Babylonians, of whom it is written: 'And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them . . . and the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom . . . for she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses. . . .' "

Here, the boy-friend was seen to whisper something into the outraged ears or "lugs" of Miss McGluskie, it being but too evident that the Ezekiel explosion had its origin in some obscure battle between Elspeth and Alexander, she having actually accused Alexander Honeypot of wasting his sweetness and his honey, not upon her, Elspeth McGluskie, but upon some hussy or hussies unknown.

The next question was as to the exact meaning to be attached to the new appellation for the unions, regular or irregular, of the boys and girls of the war period. It had been coyly inserted in its envelope by Honoria in the hall itself and it ran in this wise:

"What is the meaning of the word 'boy-friend' or 'girl-friend'? Is it unchaste in its origin or is it merely platonic?"

This led to entirely unawaited and unsuspected phenomena, the back benches for the first time insisting upon taking part in what had so far been a strictly preserved game between the intelligentsia. Mr. Galanty, as a devout son of the Church being "fair acid-drops", as Mrs. Mallory would have said had she not been shut up, just in time, upon the immoral "consortings, concurrences and connections of the age, sir, and if we don't keep up the moral barriers we shall find ourselves in a sink of iniquity, and I ought to know, for in the days of my sinful youth I fell into that sink, and as Crabbe has cried:

> Ah! fly temptation, youth, refrain! refrain!
> I preach for ever; but I preach in vain."

Unfortunately for the Church unities, Mr. Malone, who as we know was present in great force and in greater form, although a member of the same Communion, "told the wur-rld if it liked to listen to him, and anyhow, *told* him, that if they weren't a dirty lot of spavined ould cesspools of minds, they'd see that there wasn't any harm at all, at all, in boys and girls havin' a bit of kissin', or maybe worse than kissin' if it came to that, down undher the threes in the park and wasn't it the shame that the local Council didn't provide nice quiet little Cupid's cubicles which he had heard they were thinkin' of providin' for the darlints and where a boy-friend and his girl-friend could exchange the time of day and a couple of kisses and . . ."

This advocacy of free-love by a very free-lover might have continued *ad infinitum*, had not the speaker suddenly been pulled down on to his hinder-quarters as though he had been blasted by the finger of God.

As for most of the other questions, the replies to them showed a nearly lordly disdain of the questioners and especially of what they wanted to know, thus carrying out what one day was to be the almost invariable rule of the National Brains Trust, the brains of which, Leicester would aver, had to be taken on trust and might the Lord have mercy on that trust!

Some of the other questions were also liberal indications of the state of England's mind, which was, so to speak, "snipetty-snippish", whether of Old England or Young. For what with the newspapers with their "scoops" and "snippets", and the air with its B.B.C. (and "B.B.C." was right, for the minds of some of those poor devils immolated within Broadcasting House were obviously of a date prior to the birth of Our Lord, as Leicester, the Wretch, had the temerity to say, so cutting himself off from all further access to the Air, or Atmosphere), and what with the "Pictures" with their caricatures of High and Low life (and this last will probably do the same for this veracious Chronicler as regards having any of this book Hollywooded or steamrolled)—the mystery was that the Mind of England was still a mind

and not a blind. The Printed Word, the Air, and the Pictures being the three founts from which that heroic sap, The-Man-in-the-Street and his potty but devoted partner, The-Woman-in-the-Street, sucked their mental pabulum—and "sucked" is right, for, in the vernacular, they were just "suckers". What with all this, I say, and original thinking being now unfashionable and ever more strictly rationed together with cheese and beer, the brains of the British Public had got into a nice state of congestion and indigestion—if the digestive and sucking processes can be applied to the brain in an age when the physiological is becoming the psychological, despite the trinity above mentioned, and the brains of Science "dunno w'ere they are", as has been elsewhere indicated in these pages.

And, in order to protect myself, the Recorder, may I say that in nearly all of this I am quoting from my uncandid friend, Mr. Leicester, and not myself, who in these pages must perforce remain neutral in face of life and even of death, like the Recording Angel himself.

However, gentle Reader, here are the questions of which I have spoken, with the enormous advantage of being able to set down in italics the identities of the concealed questioners, and, with them, in pathetic parentheses, the muttered and even almost unspoken comments of some of those who heard those questions, you and I, like that Recording Angel, being privileged to see into the hearts and even the livers and gall, from which so many of those questions proceeded.

The enquiries were opened by the unsealing of the one question which enlisted the almost virulent attention of every female on the floor of the house:

"Why does a woman look old sooner than a man?" (*Serena Gadfly*).

To which, our Mrs. Mallory, emboldened by a bag of peppermints, which she breathed upon the beholders, did make answer, and *not* by request of the Question-Master either:

"She looks older when she 'as 'ad twenty years' hard labour with my old man, who, thanks be to the Lord, got horned by a cow in the stummick and never came back to worrit me, his lawful wife."

It was felt by every woman there, that Mrs. Mallory had spoken up like a woman and a wife, and if there were any secret dissentients, those were only the weary virgins who had been unable themselves to "horn" a husband.

The next question, apparently taken out of the bag, was handed by Leicester to the Lady in the Chair, who had apparently dozed off during the preceding, although anybody quick of eye might have seen a *finesse* about his palming that might have made the observer suspicious of the origin of the question—a collateral to the first question:

"Why are women like alcohol—and why do they like it?" (I will not insult the reader's intelligence by writing down the name of the questioner, who was also the answerer.)

"Women like alcohol because it cocks their tails and their tales" (pause —but not so good)—"and they are like alcohol because they first elate you and then make you sick."

This led to a deadly silence and then to a storm of booing from which Leicester sheltered himself by placing his hands over his doubtless blushing

face. "Ort to be ashimed of hisself! It's the likes of 'im wot makes us pore wimin sick!" was the comment of Mrs. Mallory, who, again, spoke for every woman there.

"What did Mr. Churchill say to President Roosevelt when they met—or did they say anything? Or had they anything to say? And when they meet next time, what *will* they say?" (The sardonic *Crab.*)

The Question-Mistress, after first passing this over in a majestic silence, finally said that "savouring as it did of High Politics or *Weltpolitik*, it was not seemly that it should be replied to in an Eventide which might set Europe by the ears". (Incidentally, Mrs. Masseyton had got the German out of a book before she came to the Trust, and everyone present shuddered, as they heard the word, at the narrow escape that Europe had had, and you couldn't be too careful. Mrs. Masseyton went on to say that she trusted they would avoid such questions in future and that "they would now return to what she might term the 'domesticities'," which they did.)

"What are the Heavenly Twins and have they anything to do with Mrs. Mallory's 'misconceptions'?"

The Mistress of the Ceremonies, as the evening wore on, becoming increasingly fatheaded, here blandly smiled for the first time upon the assemblage, and not understanding anything at all about the innate wickedness of the question, said that "as the whole object of the Brains Trust was to prevent misconception, for her part she could not imagine a happier question". This so stupefied the audience that they could not even laugh. They didn't dare.

Into the imminent deadly breach stepped the undowithoutable Honeypot, doing a deed of which it may be said that many men have won the Victoria Cross for less:

"As this, Madam Chairman, is, as you will know, a question for the gynæcologist rather than for the layman, I am sure you will agree, and with due deference, that it had better be postponed or prorogued?"

Leicester, waving violent and, as he hoped, secret signals to Madam Chairman, managed to get her into at least an elementary state of awareness, as she hadn't understood a word of Mr. Honeypot's interpolation, and so saved and waived the situation.

". . . Oh yes—that is to say, of course—of *course*!" came from the lady at the long last.

"Next question," whipped in Mr. Leicester, and adding: "*What* a question!" which might be taken any old way.

"*What is love?*" (I will not insult the reader by revealing the identity of the questioner, who actually invented it on the spur of the moment out of a piece of blank paper which he took out of his pocket and stared at most earnestly.)

This universal question, stirring the grey matter of everybody there, made them anxious to let off steam:

"Some of us know a bit about that." (Mr. Nicodemus, the Demon Barber, slyly coy.)

"I've *had* some—and that's that!" (From some pessimist unknown.)

"The only thing I love is meself!" (A frank confession which it was felt did honour to the also unknown confessor.)

But to this simple question there was no simple answer. In fact it was never answered, either in the Eventide Brains Trust or anywhere else, the same applying to the next simple question of

"*What is religion*?"

which brought in the embittered Mr. Jark and with him his Roman Catholic friend, Mick Malone, who very quickly "set about each other", first with their tongues and then with their fists, something that boded ill for the Christian Conclave yet to come.

However, Mr. Honeypot, aided by the O'Brien Leicester, "intervening", collected a special hit or "puck" on the nose from Mr. Malone and, from Mr. Jark, who was no boxer, he apparently specializing in tooth and claw, and a bite in the neck. Blood having been drawn and honour presumably appeased, the antagonists, or rather protagonists, suffered themselves to be led away to instant execution by the Female Rhadamanthus who presided, who of her mercy sentenced them only to binding them over for the duration of the Trust, and so avoiding scandal by their evacuation. At which there were murmurs of surprised approbation from those assembled at such clemency, especially as in the background the slaves could be seen putting on another meal. For there is nothing like food to make people mellow.

It was felt by everyone there that the next question of Court Procedure relieved the tensity of atmosphere:

"Is it true that when you leave the Throne Room you have to walk backwards from the Presence?" (This, of course, from dear old Bedelia, who was a regular little devil for "proper procedure".)

And of course it took that implacable fighting man, Malone, to spoil the graciousness which had now entered the proceedings by replying without leave, he not being even a member of the Trust: "Of course ye do, until you fall on your *ora pro nobis*!—and if you don't know what that is, you've only got to turn round and look behind yez!"

"Which came first, the hen or the egg?" (*Old Windermere*, who didn't even believe in himself.)

No ornithologist present offered to answer this, something which also applied to a question asked by Mr. Buck Galanty, who had been looking on the wine when it was red, and who, seemingly, momentarily "forgot himself and where he was" as Bedelia Marjoriam was heard to whisper to her next-door neighbour. This Rabelaisian question was: "Did Queen Victoria wear the breeches or did the Prince Consort—and when and *why*?"

There was a stony silence, relieved only by another Mallorian question, asked point-blank not to the Question-Mistress but *at* the *fons et origo* of the previous question, asked, not on paper, but so to speak, *viva voce*, and I regret to say, prompted thereto by the diabolical Leicester, who always liked to add to the gaiety of nations:

"When am I goin' to get me extra bob an hour?"

The look she gave to Buck, with whom she had had some slight difference of opinion upon the question of her wages, was of a Medusa-like description, and the wonder was that it did not, as it was intended to do according to the lady herself, "fix him to the spot".

Then, factually rather than gynæcologically speaking, marriage triplets:

First, "Should engaged couples trouble to marry or go without?" (*Honoria*, of course being the questioner, and Leicester answering the question indirectly by stating that he trusted the enquirer referred to the ceremony). It was at this point an acid voice drawled from the back of the hall, inserting: "Is your honeymoon *really* necessary?" this being an obvious parody of the "Is your journey really necessary?" now appearing over the railway booking offices. Secondly *and* "palmed", "When in love, why marry?" (*Leicester*, one fears), and remarks, *sotto voce*, such as, "I always knew that man was immoral!" "And, my dear, do you think such a breaking up of the home question could come out of anyone but that brute in Elizabeth Close?" And this time from Bedelia, who had never had a day of real married happiness in her life and never a child, "Mark my words, such questions mark the destruction of the happy married home and the production of beautiful, *beautiful* babies!"

The *sotto-voce* comments were considered sufficient answer, the third question of the "triplets" also leaving the assemblage completely dumb:

"What is the difference between a married and an unmarried lady?"

Leicester, upon seeing Honoria opening her mouth to answer her own question, with great presence of mind pushed down the great vase of flowers upon the table before Mrs. Masseyton with a careless elbow, unhappily sending the water it contained into the lap of Madam Chairman, who before their eyes turned into a sort of dripping Niobe.

Taking no notice of the water, the O'Brien with continued presence of mind, read out the Einsteinian query of the evening:

"Why is a mouse when it spins?" (An old classic, introduced by the naughty *Mr. Nicodemus*, the answer to which he himself gave: "Because the higher it goes, the fewer," so of course enormously adding to the General Knowledge of the gathering, some of whom for days after, debated its esoteric meaning.)

I think I will leave it to the sapient reader to decide the authorship of the following final questions, most of which, as is the way of Brains Trusts —insistently nomenclatured "Brains Busts" by the Malone throughout— were either answered in such a way as to leave the fog surrounding them slightly denser, or, as is the way of all such Trusts, not to answer them at all, which is still more in the tradition of radiant radio. But here they are, and I think they also show something of the brain of the average Britisher and Britishess in war-time—or, indeed, in any other old time you like:

"Do men and women know anything at all about one another, and if so, then *what*?"

"Why does God love the Irish?—or does He?" (To which question a sepulchral voice came from behind: "God knows!")

"Is God an Englishman?"

And (the dawning of incipient science): "Why don't babies come from eggs?" to which the leader, who at this moment had taken the question in hand, read out an entirely imaginary question by himself laying an egg on the spur of the moment:

"Why don't eggs come from babies?"

Leicester, feeling that the Brains Trust had gone long enough, once more palmed a poser which he hoped would prove full-stop to the deliberations of the august local parliament:

"Talking about Brains Trusts, what *is* the brain?" the answer to which was given by Leicester himself, deeply shocked at his own levity, who informed his audience that he had always been under the mistaken impression that everybody knew this with the Oxford Dictionary, which apparently knew everything and nothing, that the brain was the convoluted nervous substance in the skull of vertebrates and the centre of sensation and thought, although he was bound to admit that it usually made itself felt by its almost complete absence in the skulls of his Oxford friends, the professors who professed to know all about it, "sensation" and "thought" also being strangely and curiously absent from these erudite domes. And he deplored the asking of such obvious questions before an audience which, as everybody also knew, found their mental pabulum in a certain woman's illustrated daily and on Sundays in *The State of the Earth* and the *Conserver*, and during the week in the daily rags which fluttered their sad, mad, bad portents in the wind of public opinion beyond which they dared not venture a millimetre. (This reply, it may be said, coming from the man who had sent in the question, and giving to the complacent audience a feeling of gratification at the erudition, whether Sabbatarian or daily, as ascribed to them, they not having then or at any time the faintest idea at what Leicester was driving.)

This last concluded the consultations and consternations of the first, and let it be said, the last, Brains Trust ever held in Eventide, it being felt that so much knowledge had been imbibed that it would be a shame to add to it and so give that fated village mental indigestion and swelled head. What this Chronicler does not, however, do is to set down the highly complicated and anatomical reply given by Miss Honoria to the penultimate question, she appearing to suffer from a combination of a certain hypostatic "ovumology", if one may coin a valuable contribution to the Oxford Dictionary, and from her earliest years to have been concerned with eggs in various forms, from the fruit of the hen to that ovariotomy which seemed to haunt her lighter hours, for, as it might be said, are these *not* set down in the records of the First and Last Brains Trust? In fact, so earnest and introspective did she become that, falling into the throes of a passionate faintness in the end, she had to be carried out kicking.

Perhaps, however, the view of our Mrs. Mallory may be said to nicely sum up the general feeling that "a good feed and a good time was had by all".

So endeth the chronicle of the Eventidian Brains Trust, itself a preparation and paving of the way for the doubtless excellently intentioned Conclave of Christians soon to make its appearance over the horizon of time—and talking of paving and good intentions, I think that most of us know the Place which with them is paved.

Nor shall we be disappointed.

XXXIX

LOVE AND SERENA GADFLY

I AM sure I don't know what these characters of mine are going to do with me and with themselves, and I also don't know what the world is coming to 'neath the pressures and stratagems of war, not to mention post-war peace with all these Nasties about. Mrs. Mallory's solution for the Nazi-boy that "they ought to be jugged in a Consternation Camp", may perhaps fill the bill.

However, the backwash of the Brains Trust kept Eventide going for many weeks, taking its attention off the wretched war and off itself. But there were three inhabitants of that village who could not be weaned from their passion for the Other Sex by any Brains Trust of them all. One was Miss Gadfly, one was Honoria Lackplace, and the third was that Passionate Pilgrim, Alexander Honeypot, who now as it happened had his eye on Mrs. Masseyton and on Mrs. Masseyton's moneybags, and the Lord alone knew what the upshot might be.

Alexander Honeypot was one of those men who not only make hay when the sun shines but when it does not shine. Out of the terrors of war he drew new strengths, and where lesser men and smaller company promoters would have been satisfied to abate their 'minished heads until the storms of war be overpast, Alexander, on the contrary, saw within the whirlpool new opportunity and adventure, and that not only in the field of finance but in what he would lightly call the field of "matter-o'-money". Not that Alexander meant to marry anybody at any time.

Things were flourishing with Alexander. The new teashop which he had opened in the main street of Eventide was proving an assured success under the ægis of Miss McGluskie, who gave to it, whether for love or money is not certain, all the time that she and the "puir wee laird", Lovem to wit, could spare. Also her beloved was now having most of his meals and many of his pleasures at the Wilderness.

With the eye of the born opportunist of money, Alexander had seen the crying need for a place to cackle. So far, only the private drawing-rooms of Eventide had offered such refuge, and what with the growing difficulties of provisioning and chandlery, and the gradual vanishing of cooks and "generals" to whom the siren voices of the new war factories called, Eventide in general and Paradise Row in particular coyly yielded to the blandishments of "real Scotch scones and real butter, home-made jam", and the generous pots of tea now being offered by Mr. Honeypot, whose pots were, indeed, overflowing with milk and honey.

Realizing, also with that "born eye", that the Paradisers would wish to have a sanctum separate from the Vulgar and General, Mr. Honeypot had given over the front room of the little cottage he had rented to the "Masses" whilst keeping behind it a "holy of holies" for the Classes. This latter was carefully screened off from what the Classes were wont to call "The Vulgar Herd", and although there was no known law, save that Unwritten Law

which still ruled the Eventides of England, to prevent any of the "Herd" from invading the privacy of the tabernacle behind, only one of them, so far, had had the temerity to seek entrance, and that one, our now dear old friend Mick Malone, who, after a call at "The Robe", had, literally, fought his way in over the recumbent bodies of Mr. Honeypot and Miss Elspeth McGluskie, the former of whom, being softish, had succumbed to the first poke in the jaw from the irate Irishman and the latter to an accidental backhander from the same source and intended for the former's "wame", it catching instead the McGluskie in that sacred portion of the female anatomy.

It was at a time when our financial Alexander was contemplating opening a private cinema of his own on novel lines that the Complications started.

These Complications in the first instance were due to an unfortunate passion conceived, her only conception let it be said in justice, by Miss Serena Gadfly for the owner of the "Kosy Corner" teashop and the prospective owner of the new "Newsreel" cinema, which he had floated upon capital borrowed at enormous prospective profits from Lord Lovem, and, I regret to say, also from Elspeth McGluskie, who took it out of a stocking which she always wore next to her "wame" in a tick bag.

Miss Gadfly had in her time passed through a series of such infatuations, beginning with the butcher's boy of her youth, whose strong red and shiny hair, macassared or, if you like, massacred, with the mutton fat from which he was said to draw his strength, had brought Serena to his swelling feet and swelling chest. Fortunately, being frightened or gentlemanly, nothing worse had come of this pristine passion, Serena at this time also being in her earliest teens.

Then there had been a new apothecary, a pale-faced, cadaverous young man with a lantern jaw and a predatory eye, who it seemed to a Serena who wanted to mother the whole world if that might be possible, had been specially brought into that world by a benignant Providence for her care and protection. Unfortunately, the lantern-jawed apothecary had made a slight mistake in confusing bicarbonate of soda with arsenic, and had been found nice and tight and stiff one Sunday morning behind his own counter. Considering that he had been backing horses and hadn't a penny in the world outside the £1 15s. 4d. found in his till, Mr. Wodes had done his best for him and had put him away also nice and tight into his little wooden overall one cold December day. It was when the shades of that December eve were drawing down that a forlorn and woeful figure, heavily veiled, was seen to approach the newly made grave and lay gently upon it a bunch of Christmas roses. Nobody had recognized the donor, the identity of whom, however, you and I, from behind the scenes, may be forgiven for guessing.

This young man had been succeeded by a Mr. Alphonso Dethley at the "Medical Hall" with a tendency not to death, like his predecessor, but to love and, at that, love in Italian, a language to which he was addicted, and which in his lighter moments he taught to Serena "because her name was Italian, and he would educate her not to what he said was *innamoracchiarsi*, or to be just touched by the tender passion, but *innamorarsi*, or the "head over heels" condition, into which Serena proceeded promptly to fall, positively spouting Italian as she did so. From this perilous condition she was

only relieved by a confused dose of Epsom Salts, administered by her Dethley lover in mistake for that bicarbonate of soda which had been also his predecessor's undoing. For from this dose, destructive of the tender passion, Serena never recovered.

There had been sundry other *innamorati*, including one of those Wicked Commercial Travellers with the glossiest of black whiskers and one of the dearest pets of an *ora pro nobis*, for Serena would rather have died than translate the Latin. This Wicked Man, who had not one wife but several, with a rare stroke of originality in a single-sentenced appeal, had assured the innocent Serena that he was still a virgin himself and hoped that she also was one and that she was the only girl he had ever loved and if she would run away with him romantically for some reason not quite clear and, at the same time, bring with her her little fortune for investment in a gold-mine in the Witwatersrand, which, indeed, *was* a regular little gold-mine, their fortunes would be made and she would become the wife of a knight or even of a baronet as he fully intended to purchase such nobility at the usual market rates from one of the Party treasurers, this being a perfectly understood transaction in modern politics. The only part of which was true, being the last statement.

And Serena Gadfly had only been saved out of the jaws of this lone wolf by one of those acts of providence which are still inexplicable by any known law. For packing up her belongings into the Gladstone bag which the Commercial Gent had lent to her, with a nice tidy little sum at the bottom of the bag plus her Post-Office Savings Bank book, she had taken the train to Paddington and there had been met by her, what Mrs. Mallory always called, *financé*, who taking her to one of those nice little "Private" hotels which infest the purlieus of Paddington and the ground rents of some of which are, I believe, payable to certain ecclesiastical institutions hopefully unaware of their nature, he had made violent love to the lady without going through the trifling preliminary of marriage as per contract with that lady. Who, finding herself in imminent danger of losing not only the treasure of her bank balance but of that "finer than fine gold", which is a good woman's virtue, she had, in the words of the coarse-minded Commercial, "raised such a hell of a shimozzle", that he had to "give over" or desist from his contemplated banditry and defloration, and had had to fly for his misspent life through the back window, nearly breaking his ruffianly neck in the descent down the waterpipe clad in nothing more than nightshirt and air.

So, still in one of those inexplicable ways of Providence, our Serena had found herself back again in her virginal bed in Eventide, safe and sound, the very next morning, with bank book, banknotes, and her *virgo intacta*, as we are speaking Latin, not to mention a brand-new Gladstone bag to the good, once belonging to the wicked Commercial, and which only shows you how wonderful are the ways of Providence.

But in these war-chronicles it would be impossible for us with all the will in life to follow the Love-Adventures of Miss Gadfly, step by step, and lover by lover, for our Serena was of a devouring disposition, and so, perforce, must come to the last two gentlemen upon whom she, now in the vinegary and leather stage, had bestowed her chaste affections, she always being careful

to assure them, presumably as added inducement, that she was still *virgo intacta*—which, indeed, you and I, being privileged persons, happened to know to be technically if not spiritually true. For our Serena was that strange Muhammad's coffin hanging 'twixt two worlds—the demi-vierge which Lady Lackplace had once plumped out and no bones about it, at a rather exacerbated war council of Excavations or Fortifications, I forget which, resulting in a series of fainting fits and of general offers to be "examined".

However, over such proceedings we draw a merciful veil, with the tact which we hope by now has become a byword.

It was when Miss Gadfly, tactfully and tearfully forgetting the Honeypots, set her roving but strictly proper affections upon the Reverend Robin Hallowes that, as the Shakespearian Galanty sang, "the band began to play —with a hi-hi-hi and a nonny-nonny-no!"

She could not have chosen a more unfortunate receptacle, for truth to tell, the Reverend Robin, to put it delicately, was not exactly a marrying man, he coming into the famous Pauline category of one of those who have maidenhood, or, in this case, bachelorhood, thrust upon them. Still almost sickeningly to follow a Pauline paraphrasing, he was "all things to all women but nothing to any one of them".

As indeed several housekeepers, designing females of sorts, had discovered after fruitless attempts to rouse the slumbering passions of this Lion of Judah. For instead of being torn to pieces, as they doubtless desired, they found before them an innocuous lapdog who gazed slightly bewildered at their peregrinations and perturbations, not to say tergiversations.

None of which innocuousness of innocence had the slightest effect upon Serena, who, perhaps unfortunately, never could understand what people meant when they called the Reverend Robin a "Cissie", something he did not deserve, for his morals were impeccable, but Paradise Row never really "took to" the reverend gentleman who had been foisted upon them, as reverend gentlemen will be foisted, by a paternal and fatheaded bishop, and so was able to give its full spiteful attention to his male lacks, which lost nothing, or rather everything, in the telling. . . .

". . . And you know, my dear, but I wouldn't wish it to go any farther, the Reverend You Know Who is a what they call a 'Cissie-boy', something one never even heard of in one's young days, but indeed we are breeding—if you will excuse the vulgar word—of *breeding* strange things in these days of the Third Sex when the boys look like girls and the girls like boys—and you know, when you come to look closely at You Know Who, you will find it difficult to decide whether he ought not to wear petticoats rather than trousers —if it is a 'he' . . . and, my dear . . ." And so on and so forth through four cups of good hot strong tea at the "Kosy Corner", with the rotund gentleman with the tiny mouth, himself seated all unconscious in the corner, absorbing his fifth large piece of seed-cake with butter on it and his fourth cup of tea as he looked four ways for Christmas, now approaching.

And a certain flavour of probability had been given to all this by a recent performance in the Parochial School of "The Vicar's Warning", defined on the bills as "a religious Morality Play", in which the dear Vicar took the title-part, the warning being conveyed to him by his housekeeper who had got it

from a visiting spook in green face and black tights, whom, it seemed, according to the plot, the Vicar had done away with in a fit of temper when a giddy young curate. Not of course the Reverend Robin himself, but the Reverend Gentleman whose part he took in the play,

None of which would have mattered, had it not been that the part of the housekeeper had been taken, or rather "pinched", by the Reverend Augustus Rohan, his curate in real life. Who, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, though much against his will, as is the way with self-sacrificing people, had sacrificed his long doleful blond moustache on the altar of service and had made his appearance in petticoats and *déshabillé*, the green-ghosty one having, it appeared, surprised him when making his toilette, and what with "Maria", as the Reverend Augustus appeared on the bills, being a woman and what with other things, tongues would wag and dreadful things were hinted at as to the relationship of master and servant in real, as opposed to unreal, life.

All of which it may be said was without a shadow of substance, the Reverend Robin being as innocent as the Robin Redbreast he resembled about such things and the Reverend Augustus being, if that be possible, still more innocent.

Which only shows you what awful things can go on underneath the calm of an English village, and if it be said that all this seems to lead nowhere, this chronicler would gently point out that that is exactly where life so often does seem to lead, there being in real life, as opposed to the life of books, often no beginnings, no middles and no endings. For we turn the Book of our Lives page by page, and the last page nearly always finishes not in the blaze of pyrotechnics beloved of the novelist, but in the middle of a paragraph. For Life is the Unfinished Symphony.

Up to the time of her falling in love with the Reverend Robin, Miss Gadfly in matters of religion had been distinctly "Low" Church. The Reverend Robin, on the other hand, had a distinct tendency to "High" and had, rather sneakingly, introduced three extra candles one by one on to the originally candleless altar, and with it showed increasing tendency to orientation, and finally, the fever of ritual taking possession of him, he had begun to genuflect in unsuspected places and even, on the sly, to cross himself.

He had, however, been careful to sound the formidable Mrs. Masseyton before attempting the more violent posturings, as it happened that the "living" was hers and it wouldn't do to offend the *fons et origo* of St. Barnabas. That magnificent Personage, who occupied the pew of honour slap in front of the high altar, graciously and religiously indicated that she rathed liked "It" than otherwise, and proceeded to donate a new reredos, an altar cloth, and two sentinel-like candles which stood on either side of the altar in their tremendous candlesticks to light the faithful to glory. Which resulted in the Reverend Gentleman bursting out into a perfect efflorescence of candle and at the end, of incense, the latter introduced with immense circumspection first as a concealed smell, then as the real thing in a censer with an acolyte, Joe Bings the cracked gardener, to swing it under the noses of the faithful. And, let it be said, the faithless—for the "Low" lot had begun to kick against the pricks and to demand the abolition of all "this

High flummery-jummery and jiggery-pokery" (I quote Mrs. Pompadour, whiplash and all, verbatim).

He had then approached the redoubtable Lady Lackplace, who fulfilled her name by practically never putting in an appearance at Church, and when she did, she appearing to regard God as a Policeman, only to prevent lawlessness in the Lower Classes, she informing Robin, in her coarse, downright way, that "she didn't care a tinker's damn what he did, and if he liked he could appear on the altar in a nightgown—and take it off if he liked!" All this out of the side of her Rabelaisian mouth.

All of which, and even though to him they were all Poison, was meat and drink, whiskey, tobacco and snuff, to our Mr. Jark, who, giving up the O'Brien Leicester and his Sunday cricket as a bad job, had now shifted his little portable pulpit to a strategic position just a hairline outside the Church boundary, whence his voice could be heard, dark and foreboding, hurling his denunciations on "that Sodom and Gomorrah and the Scarlet Woman"—by which it was inferred by the congregation within St. Barnabas to refer obliquely to the Reverend Robin. Some of them, let it be said, squirming with delight as they listened to the threats of hell, and all of it being good for religion, for many went to church for the first time in years just to hear "the Voice off". Which again only shows you how wonderful are the ways of Providence and the truth of the hymn to which the Sons and Daughters of Jehovah were at that moment giving voice before the Lord:

"He moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform. . . ."

. . .

Now even none of this would have "spilled the beans", had it not been for "the flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la!" madness of Miss Gadfly, with which we started, who choosing, as we have said, for her sparring partner that spring of nineteen forty-one no less than the Vicar himself, had insisted upon falling in love with him, and it being entirely his own fault.

For scenting in her a solitary convert to his "High" notions, he had inveigled her into the vestry after service and there, as he unrobed (one refers, of course, to his church vestments *only*), had "pitched her a yarn" (here enters Lady Lackplace) about the inner meaning of his "rickety ritual and corpse-candles", as her ladyship would call them.

He also entered into esoterically minute details as to miraculous births and the miracles of the saints, including the dear old gentleman who had been seen running about the desert with his head under his arm. But it was I think the story of the "Lilywhite Maid", an idyll of the fourteenth century, to whom had come a little baby out in the desert to which she had taken refuge from the assaults of male-man, which finally "put the comether" (Mr. Malone) upon Serena's more than devoted head.

From a protestant "Low Church", Serena Gadfly, in a night, went "High"—higher than Mr. Hallowes, higher than anything that had ever been

high—higher than the stars above her. To quote the still ribald Lady Lackplace, "Serena swallowed it all, hook, bait and sinker, and would have swallowed the Reverend had he not let go in time." But who would listen to an agnostic like her ladyship!

Unfortunately for Saint Barnabas, whom Miss Gadfly was increasingly confusing with his earthly representative, the Reverend Robin, Miss Gadfly, went so "High" that she began to develop visions in that spiritual stratosphere which she now haunted, or, at least, in which she had taken up impermanent residence.

These visions came fast and furious, and the more that Mr. Hallowes tried to stifle them by timely advice in the vestry, a very dangerous spot, the faster did the fertile—in this sense only—the fertile Miss Gadfly produce more! and More!! and MORE!!!, as Mr. Honeypot's screen was now beginning not so much to announce as to howl at its audiences. As for Miss Gadfly's announcement, it was simply: "I am about to bear a babe—a miraculous birth—and to prove it I am prepared to submit to medical investigation."

But the persistent vision or "revelation", as she called it, and which she insisted "was as plain as the sun in the sky", was that from the beginning of time she, as one of the Lilywhite Maids, or perhaps the original "Maid" (of Orleans), of whom she began to think she might be the reincarnation, had been destined to bear a Wonderful Child to no one less than the dear Vicar . . . if he would only do the needful. "The needful" being the publication of holy banns of marriage between them, or anything you liked or he liked, for she became increasingly unclear as the "revelation" drew new power unto itself.

This, so to speak, and to quote Lady Lackplace out of the side of her mouth, "put the kybosh" on the Reverend. In vain did he point out to "The Blessed Damosel", as she was beginning to call herself, the error of her ways. In vain did he appeal to her better nature and to what he was careful to name the "spiritual" love which she doubtless bore to him. The more he protested and the more he appealed, the vastier became that Blessed Revelation, until at last it began to assume Unworldly Proportions which shall be nameless in these careful pages.

When he did not invite her into the vestry, she invited herself, and even though he was careful to keep the door wide open and always to have Joe Bings within call if the worst came to the worst, it did not help—for Serena would politely but firmly shut the door. And when she had shut it, she would resume her "revealings" in new forms not provided for in *The Lives of the Saints*. And, not to put too fine a point on it, the Reverend Gentleman, thinking of the Sunday newspapers and the unhappy stories of vicars in vestries, gave himself up for lost and, only that he knew it was physically and morally impossible, would have been afraid of being taken by frontal assault and battery.

And, for the last time, even this might have blown over—"might," I say, because I think it extremely doubtful, if into this witches' brew another lady had not poked in her nose, and with her, another gentleman.

Honoria Lackplace, who for many years had also developed the harmless habit of taking as invisible lover some sweetly unconscious male, I mean,

unconscious of the honour done him, in this opening of the third year of war, and the sap of spring also rising in her veins, had fixed her affections this time upon that passionate pilgrim, Mr. Honeypot, now forsaken by her dear friend and enemy, Serena Gadfly.

Why "Mr. Honeypot" will never be known, but winsome-strange are the ways of true love, even when it changes the object of its attachment from year to year, as is the habit of the tired virgin.

Still loyal to the memory of that Bad and Wicked Man who had deprived her of her money and her virtue in the long years before, Honoria, in the wild and woolly way of her sex, saw him within the gently swelling curves and fat face of the Honeypot, and sometimes got herself to believe that Mr. Honeypot was really a later incarnation of the Bad and Wicked, who, unhappily for her theory, still passed his devious paths and trampled over the hearts of females half his age, as is the way of such "fiends in human form". (This last is Honoria in her moments of abnegation and wrath—in the other moments the Bad and Wicked became transformed into "that much misunderstood creature, and if only I had met him when he was younger, what a different man I would have made of him". For here, we are dealing with facts, not with fancies.)

Now, Mr. Alexander Honeypot had acquired the excellent and confidence-creating habit of presenting himself at church, outsize watchchain, outside stomach mid-section, and all, at regular intervals. Indeed, he became such a regular attendant and such a "model and beautifully behaved parishioner", as the Reverend Robin called him as though he had been a tame baboon, and maybe he wasn't so far out, that, the office of Vicar's churchwarden falling vacant at this time through a chance shot by Mr. Hitler upon the head of Mr. Franckinsense who had gone up to the City to receive it, this had been offered to Mr. Honeypot. Who, with his customary modesty, had refused it again and again, but perhaps unfortunately for St. Barnabas, with gradually decreasing vehemence, he at last accepting under protest "because he was not worthy of such an honour".

So now behold Alexander installed in the left-hand No. 4 pew with the wand of office, with its little brass ball, stuck in its bracket in the pew corner to tell the world that here sat Alexander Honeypot, model parishioner and now churchwarden, who now, possibly knowing something about "crooks", carried a crook in the Church procession on Sunday afternoons. The Reverend Hallowes, also, at this time going "mad on millinery" according to one of his "Low" enemies, had been taken "in full fig.", crook and all, for a presentation photograph to his leading female parishioners, who promptly propped it up on their dressing-tables and fell in love with it every night before forgetting the dear Vicar's arms in the arms of Morpheus. Also, it might be said quite in passing, Mr. Honeypot had let it drop by accident that he was about to launch a chain of sixpenny stores which would pay "not a thousand per cent, my dear sir, for one cannot be too careful when speaking of figures, especially to a man of the world like yourself, but, shall we say, one hundred?" The person addressed was the gentleman who had conferred the office of churchwarden upon him. This, when presented to the ponderous Mrs. Masseyton, whom Mr. Honeypot was now courting,

or something, took the form of: "a sound safe ten to twenty per cent, my dear madam".

Now, for wild are the ways of women, it was this installation which, as it happened, changed the course of Miss Gadfly's dream and of this history.

Up to that moment, even during his frequent appearances at the Committees and Councils, Mr. Honeypot had meant no more to Serena Gadfly than "an impertinent buzzer of a man, always getting up and sticking his nose where it was not wanted and anyhow, how to goodness did he come to Eventide and what was he?—probably an escaped convict." And there's many a true word spoken in earnest. But this, of course, was following her former rejection of Alexander for the reverend gentleman, whose church millinery had seduced her aesthetic soul.

Now, with that delightful *insouciance* of her sex, and especially of the frustrated virgin of that sex, Miss Gadfly saw in the little round, pot-bellied man beneath the wand of office an entirely new individual, with whom she proceeded to fall in love a second time.

Mr. Alexander Honeypot at this time passed through a series of phases and appearances in the eyes of Miss Gadfly. First, as an ill-considered unit of St. Barnabas. Then, as "an interesting man" with a knowledge of the wide and wicked world that was fascinating. Finally, she could see with her own clairvoyant eye a halo developing about the head of the churchwarden as he marched up the aisle with his fellow churchwarden—a much lower knave, being only the "People's Churchwarden"—with the collection plate. (And it might be said in parenthesis, that there was absolutely no foundation whatever for the base insinuation from "the Voice" which all this time has been hurling denunciation and accusation from just over the safety line outside the Wych Gate of the Church, that Mr. Honeypot, as a prominent representative of Gomorrah, always dipped his fingertips in pitch and with that pitch managed to pick out of that plate odd shillings, or even half-crowns, at opportune moments. For whatever Mr. Honeypot might or might not be, what he did, he did on the big scale, or not at all. For as he would artlessly tell the world, that world was big enough and good enough for him, Alexander Honeypot.)

It was at this stage of the nimbus and after Honoria had seen the same, but long before, that Miss Gadfly without even a "by your leave", forsook the Reverend Robin and the vestry and the proposal "as plain as the sun in the sky", when he had mortally offended her by refusing to oblige, and fastened her impellent affections once more upon Mr. Honeypot. It was, in fact, as the sportsome Lady Lackplace said, "a dead heat between the two fillies for the Honeypot Stakes and the Devil himself only knew which would win them".

So now Eventide and the "Kosy Corner" in addition to the perennial struggle between Lady Lackplace's cats and Mrs. Pompadour's dogs, not to mention the trifling affair with Mr. Hitler and Berlin, had a neck-and-neck race for the affections of Mr. Honeypot between "those two well-known fillies, Honoria and Serena, and may the best girl win"!

When, at this juncture, it is recalled that in the background hovered yet a third member of the inconstant sex, a dark-eyed, white-faced devil, and a

Scots devil to boot, it will be seen what pleasing prospects are opened up in this story of Eventide—a Paradise which was not serpentless, and a few snakes do certainly add interest to the landscape. One would really like to shut down the record and seal the book, only that records cannot be shut down or books sealed until the last page is writ . . . even if that page end in the middle of an unfinished paragraph.

XL

"OILED SILK"

Now to return to our muttons, which is to say, to the Misses Honoria and Serena and their "oiled silk", and the silky oiliness upon which they are now to try their prentice hands.

It being decided that this being a great occasion, and Mr. Leicester as it happened having business at Oxford, he should personally escort the distinguished eminences of that seat of learning to the Conclave. This instantly caused Miss Gadfly to demand at a final meeting called to consider it that, so that the other gents should not be jealous, a deputation should also wait upon the puissant priestly representatives of the Ancient of Days to escort them to the assembly, and that those escorts should consist of herself and her, at the moment, very dear friend, Honoria Lackplace. And the meeting being by this time completely addled, as is the way of meetings, this was carried unanimously.

It was only then that Miss Honoria timidly put forward "an idea which only that moment had occurred to her", although actually she had been thinking of nothing else for the previous ten days. Would it not be an excellent idea to ask a gentleman to whom they owed so much and whom they all respected and even admired, to accompany the deputation as chaperone or something?

She became increasingly stuttery as she tried to explain Mr. Honeypot's *raison d'être*, although Mr. H. was always his own and sufficient *raison d'être*. The picture of two or more less forlorn females sallying out into the wilds unchaperoned to face the imposing dignitaries of the Mother of Churches, so worked upon the audience that this also was carried instantly, it being the belief of Mr. Leicester that if it had been suggested to ask the Arch of Canterbury to accompany the two ladies, this also would have been carried. Yet it was this "carriage" which later, and to put it plainly, was to raise hell.

So it came to pass on the third day of the next month that a first-class carriage on that notorious and now pious railway, the Great Western, might have been seen upon its dizzy way at the regulation thirty miles per hour perhaps. Within it the Misses Honoria and Serena gallanted by the smiling Mr. Honeypot, as guides and friends to the three large and smiling prelates who sat there, nursing their *ora pro nobises*, except one who suffered from acidosis and so had none to nurse. And everything in that carriage was harmony until . . .

Well, until Miss Honoria, what with the emotional atmosphere and the Church, obeying a not unnatural call (her calls to be alone coming at frequent intervals), found it incumbent upon her to retire for a moment, leaving Miss Gadfly in charge. Who, feeling it the right and natural moment so to do, informed the rotund eminences (except the acidosis one) that it was "incumbent upon all good citizens in these stirring times, when at any moment we may find the Nazi bloodhound sniffing at our door, to learn the gentle art of self-defence by strangulation". Here she gazed about her with an engaging smile, as she fumbled in her reticule, quite oblivious of the looks of apprehension which had begun to show themselves upon two of the Pilots of the Skies (for the third was incapable of assuming any such look, it being his natural condition, he suffering, as we have indicated, from acidosis, to which babies, priests and tired virgins are peculiarly liable). It was at this point that Mr. Honeypot, who had gradually been getting more and more uneasy about his charges, made agitated signs to Miss Gadfly to desist, which that lady instantly interpreted as to go right ahead with the good work.

The prelate in the corner, which it may be said he overfilled, here tried to creep within himself, a feat impossible, for not even in his tremendous carcase could there be room for his own avoirdupois. The lantern-jawed acidosis next to him, who at that moment was suffering agonies from indigestion and so really wanted to die, never turned a hair. The third gentleman, like the departed Miss Lackplace, found an urgent call, whether of nature or art this deponent sayeth not, as the expert fished forth from her bag a nice long thuggish piece of silk together with a small bottle of oil, with which she began to oil the silk, as she smiled benignly upon the two gentlemen who had, one the courage, the other the misery, to stick to their guns or seats.

Mr. Honeypot made protestant and even catholic murmurs in his throat, which being primarily "Protestant" perhaps, had no effect upon the Catholic portion of the carriage and none at all on the operating lady, who thought he was talking in his sleep.

Finding her natural prey or victim or subject in the gentleman with the bovine neck, she gently, almost caressingly, made approaches to him, saying as she did so words of comfort. "It won't really hurt in the least, only please don't move your head when I draw the knot tight as Professor Ramswaddle has shown me, as it is rather apt to lead to an apoplectic stroke or a broken neck." The only result was for the gigantic gentleman, who happened to be an Irishman from the County Meath, where they run big in clerics, to come out of his shell, so to speak, and putting his dumpling or head within his ridiculously feminine hands, he leant forward. To prevent himself from fainting, as he said afterwards, for "I thought me last second was come and me thick in me sins and I thryin' to catch up wid a prayer for remission".

Feeling that she had said all that was essential, as the head came forward she deftly flung the oiled silk about his neck and with her free hand ran the knot of the oiled silk up against the cleric's Adam's apple, or where the Adam's apple would have been in a man who hadn't got the twenty-two inch neck which he had, and so getting the knot nicely under the ear of holiness, she tightened it, what time the lantern-jawed cleric looked on as though but

mildly interested at this display of scientific thuggery. Upon whose recumbent body, the humanitarian Honeypot, with the idea of resuscitation, though it looked very like murder, hurled himself as he cried to Serena to "come off it!"

As the lady novelists say, we will draw a veil over the subsequent details, beyond indicating the deathly sickness which overcame the man with the knot who was, one might say, all knotted up, the resultant volcano releasing the knot as the big man fell upon the floor upon his stomach, which was the softest and best place upon which to fall, it being what the diplomats call a "buffer-state".

But the Church, like the slippery whale, is in its way tough and resilient. Even this most unhappy introduction to the "Conclave" did not prevent the attendance of the "subjects" (excepting the gentleman with the acidosis who finally found his stomach too much for him and the "gentleman in the corner" who found the same but from a different cause—that cause being the "oiled silk" of Miss Gadfly's thuggery). "Subjects" of whom it might be said, as it was said of The Ten Little Nigger Boys—"and now there was one".

Now there had already during the progress of the "deputation" been various trifling differences between the two females who each wished to wait hand and foot, and, indeed, more than hand and foot, upon the mutual *inamorato* or *appassionato*, Mr. Honeypot. For whilst each lady had pleasantly conjured a picture of her, and only her, waiting hand on foot on that mormonistic gentleman, actually, both, so to speak, had together hurled themselves at his feet, and, metaphorically speaking of course, had begged him to walk over their dead bodies. Resulting, as such things will result, in each lady keeping a very sharp eye upon the efforts of the other lady to serve, and of both it might be said that "they also serve who only stand and wait". With the further result that Mr. Honeypot, who in the days of war was getting positively *blasé* with fond females, he always keeping half a dozen or so "on tap", first tolerantly put up with the affectionate tendencies of what I regret to say he called "the two old cats", and then became irritated and "cagy".

Each of the "cats" naturally blamed his reluctance to diversion upon the other, with the result that "Honoria" and "Serena" became *awe*fully "Miss Lackplace" and "Miss Gadfly". Indeed, it was only the presence of "the Cloth" which prevented them from breaking out into open defiance and even scratches, for more than once these very dear friends had found "a good scratch" excellent corrective, invariably leading to a mushy make-up and good hot tea and scones, this being the food of reconciliation. For, like many of the other "cats" of Eventide, young and old, they, like the seasons, passed from spring through hot summer to cold winter in their mutualities.

All this as naturally as the seasons themselves led inevitably to each being afraid to leave the other alone with the joint object of their affections, and, in the present instance, as inevitably, to Miss Honoria curtailing her exile from the presence as far as possible and even at the risk of exhausting not only Miss Gadfly and Mr. Honeypot, but also that nature who is so often, as we know, "exhausted".

So, rushing back at speed into the carriage with what we may term its human *déshabillé*—which is bad French but excellent English, if one may put it in an Irish way—and with her former very dear friend lying full length upon the *ora pro nobis* or *multum in parvo*, as you wish, of cleric, with Mr. Alexander Honeypot lying upon *his* multum by the side of the clerical gent, trying to loosen the knot, Miss Lackplace jumped to the conclusion that, in a fit of scientific accuracy and skill, Miss Gadfly having strangled both the gents on the floor, was seeking to escape the scene of her crime. For she was seeking to find what Mr. Malone would call "the exit out", in order to relieve her feelings or something in the place from which Miss Honoria had just emerged.

Upon which, with intelligent readiness, Miss Honoria flung herself upon Mr. Honeypot and kept on asking him if he was dead, to which that gentleman, to her relief, faintly whispered: "Not dead but unconscious."

And now we really *must* draw a veil over the subsequent details, which led to the most poisonous feud in the history of Paradise Row, filling it with hissing of poison tongue and poison pen and the rockety reverberations of the final breach between Miss Honoria Lackplace and Miss Serena Gadfly. Including also cross-action for slander and the inevitable "taking of sides" by the other inhabitants, who had the time of their lives in adding their mite of war to a world at war. For Miss McGluskie accused Mr. Honeypot of having "made eyes" at Honoria and Serena, as it happened perhaps the solitary accusation without foundation which the angry Scotswoman could have made against the mormonistic Honeypot and one which he, with full consciousness of innocence, not only rebutted but even harped upon, so as to make capital out of it as a possible set-off one day to accusations which might not be without foundation.

It was at this moment that the "Particular Devil" to whom we have already referred, chuckled like an enraged blackbird.

XLI

FIRE-DRILL

Of Serena Gadfly at this moment of war-time, it might be said that being filled with several devils, she raged up and down seeking, not whom she might devour, but whom she might save. Like many other saviours, she was in a highly complicated condition. Also, it was still unclear as to whether the Reverend Robin or Mr. Alexander Honeypot was supposed to be the "spiritual father", as she called him, of the still unborn child. In the meantime, Eventide watched her outlines and hoped for the worst, as is the way of villages.

Her approaching "miraculous birth", of which she was always hinting to anybody who cared to listen, and to many who did not, was also, literally pregnantly, mixed up with her battle to the death with that "detestable limb of Satan—that Jezebel—that seducer of souls", as Honoria had now become, for the body and soul of Mr. Honeypot, who, in his turn, was being carefully

watched by Miss Elspeth McGluskie. And what with the general bedevilment the Conclave of United Christianity had loosed, as such conclaves have had a habit of doing throughout the centuries, Miss Gadfly and with her, Eventide, had their hands full.

It having been felt ever since the coming of the bombs to Eventide on the nights of the Twenty-ninth of November and the Twenty-ninth of December, which is to say some nine months before, that "really something should be done about it", it was finally decided by Miss Gadfly that this "something" should begin with two things. First, a letter of challenge or defiance to be sent through the Red Cross to Mr. Hitler, to the effect that if he would only listen to the voice of sweet reason and turn his soul to the light of spiritualism *cum* theosophy *cum* vegetarianism *cum* anything you liked to mention, Eventide would graciously refrain from spifflicating him and his bombers. The second, that they should begin practising fire-drill. The former she regarded as eminently practical, marred only by the fact that Mr. H. was already spiritist and vegetarian, the latter as a *pis aller* or a *sauve qui peut*, of which she had the gravest doubts, as it seemed to imply certain disability to the Lord of Hosts to do Eventide's dirty business for it and so save it from "the bomb that flieth by noonday", as she would, slightly inaptly, quote.

This fire-drill proposal was made by the "Maid", as she was beginning to refer to herself, with hazy reference to the Maid of Orleans, one Jeanne d'Arc, of whom she declared she was the reincarnation, the only difficulty about Jeanne being that "so far as was known", which Miss Gadfly underlined, "she had never given any baby to save our earth, whether with or without a father", the great point, however, being *without* one. Also, at the moment, Serena was dead set on linking up the "growing pains" which she said she was increasingly feeling in what Elspeth McGluskie would call her "wame", with Alexander Honeypot, but of course only in a spiritual manner. In fact, that unfortunate individual now began to find his chickens, or, if you like, eggs, coming home to roost and that from a quarter least expected, for he discovered that he was both suspected and expected to be at one and the same time the spiritual father of the unborn and also not to be its father. A remarkable position for so careful a man.

It was naturally to the prospective parent that Miss Gadfly ran with her views upon Fire-Drill, and despite his Pontius Pilatean wish to wash his hands of the whole matter and of Miss Gadfly, he found that she stuck closer than any brother or, for that matter, any sister. It seemed it was a case of "pay or be paid". Either Alexander would sponsor the proposal, or if he didn't, why then Miss Gadfly would tell the world about his prospective fatherhood, something that placed him in the exquisite position of yielding to innocent blackmail for something which, as he would explode, he dam' well knew he had never done. So does righteousness come to its own and so does the vengeance of the Lord, with whom Serena was in hourly communion at this time, fall upon the Wicked Man. In all this Mr. Jark cordially agreed, or as cordially as such a religious devil could accomplish.

It was at this juncture that Miss Gadfly, going a bit potty, put her head together with Mr. Jark's for the purpose of steadily demoralizing the reluctant Honeypot. So did Mr. Jark remove his little preaching stand from the

corner near the Leicester domicile to the corner nearest the fourth floor back where Mr. Honeypot hung out over his teashop. The result being splendid business for the teashop during the first few weeks of the "Terror", as Honeypot called it, the public rushing to drink tea by the gallon and to have the delight of listening to Mr. Jark's croak, with possible repercussions by Mr. Honeypot who began to take in his waistbelt and to look a little bit blue about the gills.

Finally, Eventide getting tired of the Jark croak and looking for new diversions, boycotted the teashop. It was at this delicate point that Mr. Honeypot capitulated. A non-conditional surrender of the type now being talked about in the newspapers as the only conditions to be offered a defeated Germany, now that the shadow of the Battle of Britain was overpast and the sun was shining again on "the bally old Empire", once more a going, not a "gone" concern.

So did he, carefully preparing his approaches with the help of Miss McGluskie behind the scenes, approach Mr. Leicester and the Chief Executive with a view to holding regular fire-drills, which nobody wanted and which everybody believed to be completely unnecessary. For the Hated Nazi having been defeated in the Battle of Britain and "the silver sleeve" having made the White Cliffs of Dover, one day to give England one of her more touching battle hymns, invulnerable to the assaults of the flesh and the devil, the war was as good as won and everybody wanted to be damned well let alone and turn over and go to sleep again, as is the manner not only of the Eventidian but of the Britisher everywhere, unless he be Irish, when of course, as everybody knows, and especially Ireland, that he is not British. For the English at least, God bless 'em, never forget and never learn. But having the nasty little habit of always winning in the end to the tune of "Soldiers of the Queen", being revived at the present moment of this history, it might be that even now the Lord of Hosts to Whom they were offering daily and nightly prayers not only by the mouth, but by the radio as reaching farther and "you never knew", would save them from themselves and so from their enemies.

Leicester believed in fire-drills, but he mildly and wildly wondered who was to drill the people into the requisite frame of mind to fire-drill. For already Mr. Malone had thrown down the gauntlet, threatening to bring in a few friends from the Guards' contingents to bust up the show, they being sick of drills; Mrs. Masseyton, who was strong upon personal rights, declaring that rather than come out of "The Palace" they would have to bring up field artillery; and Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam simply saying "over my dead body", and leaving it, the body, there.

Finally, Leicester, after one of his confidential talks with Ella Cattermole, also, like the other Alexander, capitulated to what he privately called "the petulant, pestiferous persistence" of Miss Gadfly.

. . . .

So behold the first fire-drill to be held in Eventide.

"The whole caboodle," as Leicester irreverently termed it, was prefaced

by the issue of a circular headed "THE DUTY OF A FIRE GUARD", on which some wag had written—"And you can only die once!" This was supposed to be the work of the malevolent Doctor Crab, who had volunteered "to do" the circulars.

The high points of this handbook of fire-fighting were that "each Fire Guard should appear in helmet, respirator and with his or her armband upon his arm", and that if he or she couldn't make up his or her mind to be present and to risk their lives in defence of their country, they could send a sacrifice or substitute. Each Fire Guard was to be ready at an instant's notice, or sooner, to "convey messages", and, generally, "to show the (silly professional) National Fire Service the best way to do things".

When this list instruction was read by certain National and silly professional Fire Service men, the result was blasphemy of a highly variegated and refined order. Miss Honoria, getting a brain wave and accompanied by her august ma, had called on the local Fire Brigade with a cute little idea of laying in some tons of salt which was to be flung on the flames, if flames appeared, and if they didn't appear, why "it could of course be used for the Fire Brigade's domestic tables".

The head of the Brigade at this point asked Miss Lackplace and Miss Lackplace's ma "to take their clothes and beat it", adding that where they would probably find themselves before long, neither salt nor water would be able to subdue the flames. He then retired in high dudgeon into the dungeon of the Brigade and started a drinking bout to help him to forget both Miss Lackplace and her ma.

"Each Fire Guard, prospective or factual, is expected to bring his or her stirrup-pump with them, the water being supplied on the spot at the front garden of the Head Warden" where the drill was to take place, and "DON'T FORGET YOUR AXE!" "Each pump issued will be given a *wet* drill test at the fire-drill."

What "prospective or factual" really meant and what a "wet" test really meant, was debated most earnestly and indeed wetly by the "prospectives and factuals" at the "Robe of Glory", and to such effect that the unhappy cry of "Closing time, Gents and Ladies, please!" arrived, the debaters found themselves more or less speechless. Some gallons of good hot tea, "and none of your wishy-wash China stuff", were also drunk over the meaning of this cryptic ism. "And you can only die once!" also afforded much food for thought . . . and tea.

Under the head of "Personal Liabilities", whatever *those* meant, was the magnanimous announcement: "If Ladies prefer to come in bifurcated garments rather than in the dress associated from time immemorial with the female form divine, they are at entire liberty to so do, if they can find it convenient to their conscience and their feelings of propriety."

This last paragraph was the joint lucubration of the brains of Mrs. Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam, Miss Serena Gadfly and Mr. Buck Galanty who, "dammit, sir! wishes to cast his widow's mite in the path of the approaching Juggernaut of morals and with them the castigation and elimination of *Woo*man, lovely *Woo*man, in all her purity and petticoats from our planet and the rush of the Bolshevik creature in trousers and without skirts or

morals and God save the King!" Unfortunately the wag aforesaid had cunningly changed "castigation" to "castration", with untoward results.

Behold the Bowers, the scene of the drill, upon this grey October evening at the hour of seven, "which might be any old thing from five o'clock to nine o'clock, in these days when we've put back the sun or pushed him forward—and the irreligiousness of it all, too! and another injustice to Oireland where, thank God! they were doin' their damnedest to fight for the sun time and for the good old days before the Saxon and England's bloody red thried to send the wurrld to desthruction and disthraction by turning back the sun in God's skies and couldn't thim that thinks they're runnin' that same wurrld do something better with their time than close the pubs. two hours before—or is afther?—the right time—and the right time for me is all night and all day and to hell wid thim that would filch and pinch the liberties we won at Fontenoy and the Battle of the Boyne, not to sphake of Waterloo which was won by an Irishman and by Irishmen to save the cowardly English from thimselves and up the Rebels! and he'd be damned if he'd walk an inch to any sanguinary fire-drill and . . ." This was the one and only Mr. Malone at his best afther three hours' strenuous debate upon the meaning of the Fire-Drill Instructions "and you can only die once".

The fog chose that particular October evening for stealthy approach so as to make already befogged proceedings still more befogged. And through that fog, in infrequent straggling line, there wandered from time to time the "Fire Guards" into the forecourt of The Bowers, where Mrs. Bedelia stood statelily in the forefront to receive what she persisted in calling her "guests", she herself attired in helmet and armband and carrying in her good left hand an axe with which she appeared to make distant chopping motions as each "guest" approached as though she were about to decapitate them. But as each guest, with of course the inevitable exceptions, wore the respirator as ordered by the "Instructions", conversation between the Lady in the Respirator and them was strictly limited, each side making signs in Indian language.

It appeared also that Mr. Honeypot had been up to town to headquarters to obtain personal and particular instruction in the manipulation of stirrup-pump, axe, respirator, helmet and "any old-damned thing you liked", according to Malone, who, by the way, had after all turned up without anything on at all. Please don't misunderstand me, for like all Irishmen, Mick Malone was the most modest of men, I don't mean without any clothes upon his person, but without his fire-drill equipment, he sneering and "making remarks" upon the appearance of those who came fully equipped. Remarks which fortunately they could not hear behind the respirators down which most of them seemed to be blowing rather than breathing. "And a pack of dirty gurgling grampuses with accent on the 'pusses', that they had the dacency at laste to hide behind their ould gasbags—and 'ould gasbags' is also right!"

Behold the "Fire-Captain in Charge of Operations", as it stood on the Instructions, Mr. Alexander Honeypot himself, now emerge from the house where he had been having one with Mr. Bass-Marjoriam, who, as usual, was invisible, Mr. Honeypot, looking in his respirator like one of those Sons of

Belial of whom Miss Gadfly was always talking, with pendulous snout, helmet, rather cockeyed on head, axe clasped in right hand, stirrup-pump in left, and in a pair of seaboots up to his hips for some purpose unknown.

From behind the respirator there came a gurgling sound, from which it afterwards transpired as *The Bugle* wrote, that "Mr. Honeypot, our expert leader, forgetting that he had his mask on", had begun his address from the Book of the Words which, in some miraculous manner and developing a third hand, he managed to hold before his goggled eyes. With the brilliant intuition of genius, he had then torn the what our Mrs. Mallory, also present, knew as "the refrigerator", from his countenance, made signs to the masked and spoke to the unmasked, that all should remove those "refrigerators" and show themselves as they really were, and not as they thought they were, not in the light of day, but in the fog which had now begun to enwrap the proceedings in an impenetrable mist, physical and mental. It seemed he had been trying to say that, according to the genius who had compiled that "Book", you ought to "read it once a day" and carry it in your pocket or bag or round your neck . . . "or under your blinkin' 'eart". This last from the back of the spectators, a remark received with the contempt of silence it deserved.

He said he would call upon Miss Gadfly, who, we might say, had insisted upon accompanying him on his thirst for knowledge to headquarters, with Honoria in close attendance, "to demonstrate to the unimitiated" (Mr. Honeypot was always genteel and fearfully fluent) "the first positions for dispositions for attacking the fiery monster, with Miss Honoria Lackplace" (also now an expert) "in support".

This support was complicated by that old battle between the two ladies over the very vexed question as to whether Ella Cattermole's butler, Theophilus, had or had not purloined the Air Raid Protection funds. For Serena had headed her own pro-Theo faction, whilst Honoria had "sicked on" her legions against the unfortunate man, she having so far forgotten herself on one occasion as to smack his face. Just now, the ladies were not on speaking terms, whilst Theophilus, displaying unexpected moroseness, had threatened Honoria with an action for slander.

Now, however, appeared the real strength of Serena and Honoria, who, so to speak, and as we are using strategic terms, "deployed" their resources, at least in relation to Mr. Honeypot.

Fearfully and wonderfully arrayed in respirator, leather gauntlets, Russian jackboots, and foreshortened skirts, themselves regrettably enough showing a slight fringe of the red flannel to which Miss Gadfly was affected and probably exciting the male beholders outside themselves, although with admirable control they refrained, the two dear friends, now dear enemies, came modestly forward.

Miss Gadfly lay down upon her stomach—if the term may here be permitted and, let it be said, used purely medically, strategically and anatomically and not lecherously or lasciviously—with her little stirrup-pump, whilst her coadjutor placed the "sucker" in the bucket of water conveniently held by Mr. Galanty and began to pump.

Unfortunately, her erstwhile very dear friend also began to pump, for

she was conveniently and quietly "sick all over the shop", as Mrs. Mallory's small nephew was later to convey to the neighbours.

In order to give Serena time to recover behind the wall which was later to be used in the inflammable bomb drill, Mr. Honeypot, Honoria Lackplace in close attendance, with that adroitness which characterized him, took command, crying in as stentorian voice as he could summon on call, for truth to tell, it was by natural substance rather squeaky:

"*Fall in, Fire-Fighters!*"

The sickly attempts at "falling in" by a straggling thin black line of men and women, most unhappily led in the initial stages not to a falling in, but to a falling out, with interjaculatory "Who're you a-shoving of?" by the Bourbon Lane lot and "*Really*, Mrs. Pompadour, I *am* surprised at your tendency to push!" of the Paradise Row brigade. However, take them or leave them, there they stood, as poor a Maginot Line as even Mr. Hitler might desire, and one which might justify the title "Imaginary", as the original Maginot had been baptized by Leicester in his letters to *The Times*.

There they stood, variously and vicariously arrayed in top-boots or slippers, goggles or home-made helmets, whilst they waited for the recovery of Miss Gadfly, who, still rather pale about the gills, valiantly took her place at the end of the line, by the side of Snow-White, who, the colour of her own name, had pluckily turned out, only at this moment of tension to disgrace herself by sinking to the ground in a faint, something she had been doing lately. Whereupon she was mercifully excused further drill by the "General".

Having done this and "formed threes", not "fours", in a division into working crews, one to lie down on stomach and hold the nozzle, one to pump, and one to feed the bucket with another bucket, Mr. Honeypot, now quite a martial figure despite his om-bong-pong, cried:

"*Squirt!*"

Instantly, the thin black line broke into a thin white line of water, whilst the pumpers pumped, and the "feeders" fed, and the squirters squirted. It was magnificent, even though it might not be war—a magnificence marred only by one of those inevitable squirtings into the Leader's eye, which, doubling him up, rather spoiled the martial nature of his appearance as he stood there, supported on either side by his coadjutors, the mesdames Honoria and Serena, who held a watching brief on each other, until a premeditated "chance" squirt from Serena's nozzle into the optic of Honoria, put an end to Miss Lackplace's Watch on the Rhine.

And magnificently did they anticipate the demands of their Leader. He had only to make a distant chop in the air, and almost before the chop had fallen, Miss Honoria, or it might be Miss Serena, had divined his meaning as though they had been sybils. They even fell over each other in their sacrificial efforts, Serena, I regret to say, having been distinctly seen by Honoria to push her, Honoria, into a bucket of water, which led to perturbations, and "explanations".

"But God bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Honeypot, striking his forehead, "if I've not been and forgotten the opening instruction—that referring to signal by whistling upon the approach of the bomb: 'If you have lost your

whistle, an excellent substitute can be obtained by puckering the lips to as minute an orifice as possible and then blowing out of the orifice.' Now then, folks, wait for the word of command." Fixing the thin black line with the eye of a born commander, Mr. Honeypot cried: "*Pucker !*" The line before him tried to screw their mouths together but catching sight of one another, began to laugh, resulting after an unavailing struggle in the abandonment of the "Pucker" regulation, one lady going so far as to accuse another of "deliberately making faces" at her.

"General" Honeypot, to which rank I think we may now promote him, in order to bridge the hiatus, here read out again from the official instructions from his little book of the words, which he held before his dot of a nose, giving out from time to time the following rather contradictory orders, the first of which nearly caused incipient rebellion, it being interpreted as "Stop Flirting!", the Honeypot command voice being squeaky rather than honeyed, and "squirting" being intended:

"Stop *squirting*!"

"Lay down on your abdomens!"

"Get up!"

"Lie down again!"

"Get up again!"

"Lie down—get up—lie down—get up—lie . . ."

But at this point the whole line politely but inexorably refused to move from the abdomens upon which they had lain close to mother earth. Our Mrs. Mallory said "it cot her insoides and she wasn't goin' to have a twisted gut for nobody—not even if it was the Pope of Rome or the King himself"! She had aptly expressed the feelings of the now recumbent fighters, who remained in what *The Bugle* later described as *status quo ante bellum*—"with accent on the belly", Mr. Malone ribaldly added when he read the account to an appreciative bar at "The Robe of Glory".

Finding that like the camel, *and* with the hump, he could not get his regiments upon their feet again, Mr. Honeypot, adroitly pretending not to notice their recumbencies so to speak, took the opportunity of saying in parenthesis out of the Book of the Words:

" 'The following instructions must be adhered to under any or all conditions:

" 'First, under no circumstances whatever must the Fire-Fighter turn his or her back upon an approaching bomb. It is also strongly advised that the Fighter do not look up into the skies as by so doing he or she might become disarranged.

" 'Secondly, if a house has fallen in upon bodies still living, it must be removed at the earliest possible moment.' " (This Herculean feat, it was felt, was past most of those present, but as Miss Gadfly called out bravely: "We are but Brave Poor Things, but we will do our poor best." Having said which, she got up upon her little hindlegs and going once more behind the wall, absorbingly and as quietly as possible made another "clearance"—and so emerged to take her place once more upon her belly by the side of Mr. Honeypot as though it were the most natural position in the world and back to nature and all that sort of thing.)

"Thirdly," remarked the "General", as his small eyes regarded the recumbent form of the Gadfly with intense moroseness, "thirdly, I say, keep cool —and, once again, '*keep cool*'. When the bombs begin to fall about you, remember your instructions, stand up or lie down—ahem! on your abdomens —pump, and pump, and again, PUMP! and keep on pumping until the heavens fall or the fire goes out." (This last was sheer "gagging", as there was not a word of it in the Book of the Words, which, incidentally, had been issued locally and not nationally.)

"Fourthly, may I, as your momentary Leader in the Fire-Drill, and at the request of the Committee for War Morals, the president and vice- of which as you know are the two ladies lying on either side of me, may I point out that when two members of the opposite sexes are on duty upon the rota, this is not to be regarded as an incitement to the making of amatory advance, however innocent, Miss Blank and Mr. Blank, who shall be nameless, having been found inextricably locked in each other's arms beneath the elderberry tree at the end of Paradise Row, at the very moment when the bombers were overhead and the shriek of shell might have brought even more impassioned couples to their senses. A dereliction of duty which cannot again be overlooked and which will have to be reported to the War Office or other body appointed for the purpose, with a view to indictment and, if necessary, castigation, the whole object of that august body being to secure, and at any cost, national co-operation and consolidation." ("Constipation," croaked from the back—probably Crab again.)

This "fourthly" caused quite a stir in the otherwise half-alive or even moribund ranks of the fire-fighters, the mention of the elderberry tree causing the gay Mr. Galanty to take out what he would call his "tablets" and to make a note therein, but for what purpose this Recorder refuses to indicate. More than one there, however, suspected that all this came, not from the Committee for War Morals, commonly known as the "Nosy-Parkers", but out of the fertile and sardonic imagination of the O'Brien Leicester himself . . . and, "really, you know, that man is a danger to society—a perfect atheist and, for all you and I know, dear, a Mormon on the side."

To all this one of those present, who had come in late, Ella Cattermole, listened with that suggestion of quiet contempt which you felt more from her pose and poise than from anything she ever said, for she was disdainfully silent upon the views of the Row in regard to public morals.

It was at this point that Honoria, called upon by her leader to deliver her lecture on bandaging, more as a diversion from proceedings which had become painful than anything else, took over the proceedings as one who had touched the hem of the sacred garment of Authority and therefore knew all about it.

Standing rather shakily upon her legs, on a chair as rostrum which had been placed for her, she opened with a lecture upon anatomy, she having a tendency that way.

She said that she hoped her audience would excuse her use of medical terms which she would use in a strictly anatomical sense, but without which her little lecture would be meaningless.

It was at this point that Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam was found to be holding

up a hand like a small girl anxious to withdraw. Gracious permission being given to Bedelia "to shoot off her face", in the coarser phraseology of the sardonic Crab, she opined that "she hoped, even in the stress of war, that the proprieties might not be forgotten, as already there had been too much, *far* too much licence in such matters" and so on and so forth.

Full assurance being given by the lady perched on the chair like a staggery tom-tit, the lecturer went on, sometimes reading from her "First Aid in Brief", sometimes out of her own head, as wild fancy led, that "after an air attack, First Aid Parties will reach the wounded within a few minutes, and that the great thing to remember, upon reaching the fallen, was to 'be courageous', brave and to be British!" and to plug any holes observable in the human form divine, at once, if not sooner. Above all, not to "drag" him or her.

"Having, in her anatomical researches, been reluctantly helped by one who should be nameless and who once pretended to be a very dear friend" (*sniff*), "one to whom she would not demean herself by referring" (*sniff-sniff*), "and having made a speciality of slip-knots" (here several of the members of the audience repressed shivers of horror or unruly mirth, just as they happened to be made), "she would read from her little Book of the Words, which laid down the rule as: 'pass a bandage, tie, handkerchief, elastic or fabric belt round the limb as close to the wound as possible at a point between the limb and the'—if they would excuse the word—'the trunk. Knot the fabric so that the limb is closely encircled'—and they would notice the extreme delicacy of the words employed by the Ministry of Health—and then you had to pass a stick through the slack loop and tighten it and tighten it until the blood stopped.

"She would particularly draw their attention to the comforting of the patient, 'loosen the clothing at the neck or waist', but the words ran: 'of course being careful not to expose the body of the patient in any indecent manner'. She could not find it, but she had a distinct feeling that you had 'to slip something gently under him'. Possibly an arm, or even, in extreme cases, two arms. This, she might remark, could be done quite impersonally. AND ABOVE ALL (let me see, now, where it stands . . . oh yes, here it is): 'Do not give fluid to cases of wounding of belly', and she blushed to use the word, but you couldn't get over the fact that there it stood in the Book in her hand. . . .

"Finally, the invaluable leaflet concluded with the heart-rending—no, she meant, heart-warming, words: 'Lives are at stake. Play for safety. Be British!' At least she had an idea that it finished with 'Be British!' and what better could it finish with, for that finished everything, as they all knew."

It was at this juncture that our Mrs. Mallory, who had just been to the local cinema of Mr. Honeypot to see a nice juicy murder in "The Loop", Chicago, and whose mind was therefore naturally, or unnaturally, filled with anatomy, as was that of the lecturer, interjected her vehement desire to know "somefink more abaht the *insides*". It being only with difficulty that her passion for knowledge was restrained by those nearest, but certainly not dearest, for she looked upon them as if she herself would have liked to murder

the lot, "and didn't it show folks what come of trying to know something about nothing and if we women didn't find out, then who oughter?"

This last unanswerable argument left the spectators silent.

In the meantime, Miss Honoria had got off her perch by falling off it into a dead faint upon the interpolation of our Mrs. Mallory and her passion for "insides".

As all this time, Miss McGluskie from the background where she not so much stood as lurked, had held a watching brief upon the beloved Mr. Honeypot and the ministrations of the damsels on either side of him, and it looked as if at any moment what the strategists call "intervention" might be attempted, the atmosphere at this period in the proceedings was not too happy. Which especially applied to Mr. Honeypot himself, who seemed to be suffering from a guilty conscience or something, as his little eyes darted from side to side looking for the help that cometh from the hills or, indeed, any old place.

In the background, Snow-White and Patricia, with her bull-terrier, White Satan, stood side by side, also holding a watching brief, the one upon Sean, now about to go to his camp, the other upon Snow-White whom she dearly loved—with Leicester, from time to time, looking upon all three and at Ella, who held her own watching brief with time. And perhaps it may be that the Dark Queen was at that moment rearing her dark head over this little group of wayfarers behind the tragi-comedy of the Fire-Drill and of life as it is lived not only in Paradise Row but probably in paradise itself, or even upon that Other Side of paradise which we know as Another Place.

But as to whether the queen of tragedy rears that head of boding beauty in the ranks of the Saved and of the Damned, remains to be seen by you, the Reader, and me, the Writer, when we shall one day find ourselves upon that Other side, does it not?

XLII

THE DARK QUEEN

GENERAL ALEXANDER, at this moment, feeling that the McGluskie eye was upon him and that at any old moment she might break into the proceedings, stated, definitely, that the lecture had gone far enough, even too far, and that the time had come for his phosphor-bomb demonstration.

It had seemed for some time past that the Nazi brother might take it into his dear little innocent head to use an incendiary bomb of phosphorus rather than thermite. References to this new bomb kept on creeping into the newspapers, and Mr. Honeypot, or rather "General" Honeypot, taking time by the forelock, had been experimenting with certain chemicals, out of which he fully intended to make his fortune after he had taken out letters patent and submitted it all to the War Office. Believing that he had now

overcome the horrid threat of a phosphor bomb, he thought the present an excellent occasion for demonstrating his new fire extinguisher, even though it might, or might not, make a little *auto-da-fé* of some of his nearest and dearest friends.

Mr. Honeypot was not, however, the sort of man to consider his nearest and dearest when "on the job"—that is the job of making money, and especially in this case when propelled by what he called patriotism. Also, in his more roseate moments, when impelled or propelled by the blood rushing to his brain, he could already see a-dangle in the distance the words: "Sir Alexander Honeypot, Bart "—and in his still more sanguinary moments, the magic word "Lord" before the "Honeypot". In all this he had a predatory and amatory eye upon the millionairess Masseyton, with whom he was going strong.

Calling for attention, he informed his audience that he was about "to save England", vociferously but engagingly explaining to them what he intended to do. He then called for volunteers to act as his aides. Strangely enough nobody volunteered, with the exception of Privates Gadfly and Lackplace, who simply hurled themselves forward, seeming, indeed, to be about to commit assault and battery upon his sacred person.

It appeared that phosphorus was utterly impossible to extinguish save by the "Honeypot Mixture". "Even if buried a mile down in the earth, and even after a thousand years," said Mr. Honeypot, letting himself go, and fluency outrunning discretion, if exposed to the air, the diabolical engine would burst into flame, and, if he might be permitted to employ a biblical expression, was of that nature of "the fire that is not quenched"—in other words—*hell.* Not that for a moment would he wish it to be understood that the hell, which as we knew from the Pauline Injunction, hung over each one of us, could be mollified or nullified by "The Mixture" . . . for even that mixture had limits, like all things earthly. But despite those "limits", he might modestly claim that only "The Mixture" could save civilization from the phosphorescent Mr. Schicklgruber, or Hitler.

From behind the neighbouring wall, like a conjurer taking a rabbit out of a hat, he then produced a model of a guillotine, with a hollow seemingly for the reception of the neck of the person about to be decapitated, and so sending a shudder through the beholders, some of whom had vague dreams about "a traitor in their midst" who was to be tried and then summarily executed. Above the guillotine, a gleaming sword was suspended by a cord and pulley at the side.

At this point the demonstrator produced, apparently from the seat of his trousers and in error, a broad silver flask, which he hastily replaced in the seat aforesaid, substituting therefor a large black bottle for which he had found miraculous room. Upon this bottle was inked "The Mixture" upon an imperfectly obliterated label of a dear old friend at "The Robe", Johnnie Walker to wit. This, adding Poison to Decapitation, if anything also added to the suspense.

The gifted inventor, however, quickly set their minds at rest by placing the bottle in the *lunette* or hollow. After which he gathered to him some quantities of wet sand, putting in the hands of his now frantic

coadjutors shovel and scoop, and calling upon everybody present to stand back!

Then taking the lifting cord in his small white hand, he lifted the sword or "chopper", which fell with a sickening crash on the neck of the bottle, breaking it, the bottle instantly bursting into flames, and sending out showers of sparks as though it had been a miniature pyrotechnic display of the late lamented Mr. Brock, of Crystal Palace fame and blazing memory.

The idea was now that the coadjutors should heap the wet sand upon the burning phosphorus, sprinkle the heap with "*The* Mixture" or quencher from the black bottle, and watch "the fiery monster take his departure", as Mr. Honeypot, in an unusual burst of poesy, declared to the circumambient.

Now this would have been all right had it not been for that variety of circumstance which so often in our little planet makes "the best-laid schemes of men and mice gang aft agley", or cockeyed, to quote Miss McGluskie.

The first of these circumstances was the covering of several yards of ground with the flaming mixture. The second was the escape of Mrs. Pompadour's flock of Pekes who appeared to have taken a positive dislike to the Mixture and to its gifted inventor, whose person they instantly attacked, this resulting in rendering him for the moment *hors de combat* and incapable of using the Mixture or "Quencher".

The third was the escape of Patricia Leicester's inseparable companion, White Satan, the white bull-terrier and a noted winner of prizes, who believing his beloved mistress to have been attacked by the Mixture, hurled himself at the mixer, Mr. Honeypot's, throat. Nor would any of this have mattered, including the early demise of Mr. Honeypot, had it not been for the accident of White Satan running across the flaming ground and getting phosphorus on his feet, which led to hell all round.

The fourth circumstance of these was the sprinkling of the mixture diabolic upon the body of one Patricia Leicester, who had run in to try and save her beloved bull-terrier, with the result that in an instant her dress was wrapped in flames.

All these things had happened so quickly that nobody had moved. It seemed as though they were watching something that was part of the demonstration.

All except the tall pale woman who, hitherto, had held herself a little away from the rest. In an instant she had moved, and acted.

Flinging Patricia to the ground, she had snatched a shovel from the outraged Miss Gadfly and had begun to cover the writhing body of the girl with the wet sand, calling to the others to help. Which at last hearing, they unanimously gathered fistfuls of sand to throw them on the girl, who was screaming, but, as it later appeared, more frightened than hurt.

But Ella Cattermole had set herself on fire as she had thrown down the child. And now it was she who had to be treated in the same way, the flames finally subsiding and then going out, without the aid of the Quencher, of which nobody had thought and which Mr. Honeypot himself, engaged with White Satan, had not touched.

So ended the famous Fire-Drill, which will be spoken of as long as Paradise Row is Paradise Row.

XLIII

MAN AND WOMAN

LEICESTER had that feeling of "the morning after the night before" when comedy had turned into tragedy within the turning of a tap. Leicester felt it incumbent upon him to call on Ella Cattermole. "Just as a friendly enquiry as to how her burns were progressing," he put it to his Second Self, who promptly told him that he was a foredamned liar and that this was not the reason at all for the prospective call. Something he was very soon to discover himself—that himself which is the "Self" that masquerades through life beneath the Second or Real Self.

He found Mrs. Cattermole in her bed in charge of an elderly nurse, who discreetly removed her person upon the approach of the O'Brien. Nurses have intuitions but no feelings.

Ella was sitting up in bed, "arrayed in disarray". In that disarray which has so often carried havoc to the male imagination, and, in this case, unpremeditated, unless Ella by the Seventh Sense that is woman had known of his coming.

It was some *négligé*, in the deep Mary blue that was her favourite colour. Beautifully it set off the tumultuous hair gathered up from the neck and the curve of throat and jaw, framing the dark blinded eyes. And perhaps it is a matter of millimetres whether a man falls in love with a woman or merely "likes" her, so that, indeed, it might be said that "marriages are made by millimetres". The slant of an eye. The turn of a nose. Even, sometimes, the scent of a breath or a body. These are the things which in Paradise Row as elsewhere lead to babies and divorces, to misery and happiness, to joy and despair. And also, maybe, it is all one and that all these things are one, if life and love and death would only let us mortals see straight, instead of always through a twisted mirror held up to experience.

(But, dear, dear! what are we doing in a chronicle of this kind letting the darker philosophy intrude its heavy head. It shall not occur again.)

Whatever it might be that is behind life and the death which is life's brother (there we go again!), it did on that morning arrange that the elemental thing in the bed should on this morning look extremely lovely, and, much more vital, extremely interesting. Not only the set of the head as Leicester entered but the blinded look—all this might have turned a colder head than the Elizabethan's.

Not that Leicester had the slightest idea of having his head turned. So far as his ordinary Self knew when the two Selves entered Ella Cattermole's door on that October morn, he, Leicester, loved but one woman in the world —his wife, Aase, who, at that moment, was lying upon her couch staring upwards at the ceiling, also with *her* look of blinded Sybil, and it may be that she sees her husband as she stares, and it may be not. However that may be, as Leicester entered Ella's bedroom, he felt a little shiver run down his spine and as he felt it, he could plainly see his wife lying on her couch a few houses away, and yet so close. So *dreadfully* close. He often felt her like that.

Then he had forgotten his wife, to remember only the other woman in the bed.

. . . . .

Leicester never pretended. In that he was like the woman in the bed. This gift of non-pretence is the rarest of all human qualities. This woman and this man had it. Out of such quality, anything might come.

"I thought I had come to ask after your burns, Mrs. Cattermole, but I find that it is something else."

Ella did not reply, but just turned that veiled stare upon him, as though she were seeking to know something.

"I suppose it is silly, but that 'One Night of Love' which your wireless is playing always moves me strangely. The academic musical critics are blithering idiots. It *can* be that an Irving Berlin melody may move more millions than all that Beethoven or Wagner or Bach ever wrote. I say it, even though I love them all."

Still the woman on the bed made no reply. Nor did Leicester seem to expect it.

"We are all compartmented, segregated, in music," he added.

"We are all compartmented in everything," said the woman before him. "From birth to death, as I think. Birth to death and beyond."

"You believe in a 'Beyond'?"

"How can I help it? In these days of psychical research, only a very ignorant or a very stupid woman would refuse to believe something that I think is as clearly proved as any of those 'ineluctable, irrevocable facts of science' of which you are always talking." She smiled a little.

Never did Ella address Leicester by his first name of "O'Brien". Always she used the neutral "you". But that was how most people spoke to Leicester. For some hidden reason, few ever called him either by his first or second names. "He's a kind of ruddy god," someone had said. "You don't call the gods by their Christian names, and surnames have they none."

"You have been reading up psychical research, then?" asked O'Brien.

"I have been 'reading it up' ever since I was a girl of sixteen when I lived at . . ." She stopped, flushed and went on. "Oh, but that was so long ago. It was not so long after I began to read books on psychical research by Lodge and Conan Doyle—and finally yours. I think I have read everything you have ever written—both on this subject and others. Your scope and imagination are mazing." She had paused again and then had said, almost shyly, "I think I have loved everything you have written although especially when I have disagreed with you, as I often do."

Leicester stared at this surprising not so young woman, who every now and then would lift the veil a little to show to him a soul of courage and originality. She was usually slow to speak and when in the drawing-rooms of the Row was nearly always silent. But her silence carried a certain weight. You always felt Ella Cattermole present whether she spoke or not. It was another of her qualities.

"I also believe in a Beyond and, as you will have read from my books, that memory and identity survive the death of the physical body. How

could it be otherwise? All the deeper truths are self-evident, elude *proof*, that, at times, most dangerous of all intellectual jugglery, and are felt, not 'thought'. But, Ella . . ." he had stopped, for it was the first time he had used her Christian name, "you are always surprising me. I did not know you were interested in these matters, although I *might* have known."

"In what else could any serious person be interested? If this were the only life and the only death, then God help all us poor women and poor men! The thing that makes life worth the living is that it goes on, gives us hope for better things to come, and even, at times, makes the earth-life in matter take on its own loveliness—but only a loveliness ephemeral. We are all *ephemeræ*—are we not?"

Once more it came to the listener that this young female creature used English with extraordinary fluency and word-choice. Every once in a while she would betray knowledge of things unexpected—facts of science, problems of religion, and with it an almost piercing knowledge of the hearts of men and women, especially women. "And when a woman knows her own sex, that woman is dangerous," he would always think.

Ella was a trifle uncanny.

"Look here, Ella, I have the feeling that all this is a game—that you and I are playing a game with each other this autumnal morning with the fog thick outside. What *is* the game that we are playing?"

The woman on the bed glanced at him, again shyly. Then she had said in a low voice:

"It is the oldest game in the world, Leicester." She used his surname for the first time without a "Mr." Perhaps that also was characteristic of her—and of him.

He did not press her to tell him what that game might be. He did not even know to what she referred. In that 'chanted fog, he was satisfied to let everything drift to its appointed end, whatever that end might be.

He had been standing all this time, and now the nurse had knocked on the door to say that she was going out to do her morning shopping and so had gone.

There was a chair by the woman's bed, but Leicester did not take it. Instead, he sat upon the edge of the bed without asking permission. The woman made no comment.

As he sat there, the door was opened slowly to show Captain Arthur Kasterling, V.C., standing there looking down on the couple.

"Sorry if I intrude," the big, dark-faced man said, "but I found the hall-door open and walked up. 'Morning, Leicester! Here, you, Ella, what's the matter?" he asked as he looked at her bandaged left arm. "And why are you in bed?" There was concern in his voice, almost proprietorship.

"Only a trifling accident yesterday at the fire-drill," she answered. "I'll be all right in a week or two. Mr. Leicester was there when it happened and had called to ask after me."

"Now then, Leicester, why the hell didn't you look after her better? Eh? Tell me that." He said it good-humouredly, did Captain Arthur. Not an atom of grudge against the man who had knocked him out.

"I did my best," returned the man addressed, apologetic, as though he

really owed an apology to this big brute. "It was pure accident. Those things will happen . ."

". . . Just like half-arm jolts to the jaw will happen, eh, Leicester? Quite a peach of a blow. Congrats! . . . I must fight you again some day when I'm in better condition. Shocking condition, amn't I? Lift my elbow too much. If I'd met you when I was in training I'd have knocked merry hell out of you."

"Would you?" retorted O'Brien Leicester with a good humour not inferior to the man to whom he was speaking. You couldn't help liking Arthur Kasterling even when you hated him, he would think. All the women fell for him. All the children. And all the animals from horses to dogs and cats. Queer devil—but a great fighting man, too.

"I say, you two. Why the devil don't you tell me to sling my hooks? I feel I am not wanted here only you are much too well bred to tell me so. I've got a hunch that you two have quite a lot to say to each other, and I ought to feel horrid jealous. But I don't, Leicester—and by Jimmy! when I want Ella, I'll take her from you whether you like it or not. So long!" And he had slipped through the half-open door like a ghost, with strange ease for so big a man.

There was a little silence, as the woman and man looked at each other. Then a little smile between them—the first smile of understanding that had ever passed from one to the other.

"He has always been like that," whispered Ella, still smiling.

"He's one hell of a fellow, anyway," said Leicester admiringly.

"He *is*. He fights and makes love with equal facility. That was why I fell in love with him."

A chill ran round Leicester's heart. It frightened him. What did it mean? What the deuce did it mean to him that the woman on the bed loved this great bully of a man? It had nothing to do with him, Leicester. But hadn't it?

The woman was looking at him as though she did not see him but something behind him.

Then it had come to the man before her that perhaps it did matter to him. But what was it that mattered?

He puzzled his head for knowledge. It was something enormously important. Vital to his present and his future.

A knock at the door. They were not to be left alone this morning of autumn, when so much seemed to be in the balance, and he still seeking what that something might be.

"I have come to say good-bye, Mrs. Cattermole." A voice outside the door. A voice very still and small.

It was Sean.

The boy came in, his head held high as was his habit, his face with a pallor unusual.

"Oh, is that you, Father?" he said as he saw him. "Maybe I had better go and return later, Mrs. Cattermole." He was curiously shy. Never had there been this strained shyness between father and son until the coming of Ella Cattermole.

"No, come in, Sean," said Ella, holding out her hand to him.

"I am called up, Mrs. Cattermole. Just heard this moment. I am to go into training for the Signals at once. I have chosen the Royal Signals Corps"—he said it with a certain pride. "I thought my piano-playing might help me with the Morse and so help the war." He flushed.

"But you're not going to the front at once, Sean," said Leicester, still searching for that other "something"—something also with which he felt his son had to do.

"It may take a year or two, they tell me, Father," replied the boy. But he was looking at the woman in the bed, not at his father.

Anybody watching could have seen how it was with Sean Leicester. His father saw it. Perhaps the woman herself saw it.

"So I'll—I'll . . ." he hesitated painfully, "I'll say good-bye, Mrs. Cattermole, and thank you for all you have done for me and with me"—he flushed again heavily—"and for helping me with my music. I won't forget it—or *you*."

"I know you will not, Sean," she answered easily. "Come here."

The boy came over to her.

"Bend down your head, Sean boy."

He bent it down, as the woman on the bed had slipped both her arms about his neck and pulled his face down to hers and kissed him on either cheek and then on the forehead—and so had released him. In it, something of blessing and farewell, the father felt, as there came again to his heart that little chill.

The boy looked terribly at her, as he lifted his head again. Then, his face white, he had run out of the room.

They could hear him running down the stairs and then the opening of the street door, but not its closing.

Leicester looked at the woman, catching sight of his own face in the mirror at the side. He was himself as pale as the boy who had gone out. Why? Surely he wasn't jealous of his own son? He, who loved only Aase, his wife and the boy's mother.

Again he searched for a solution of the puzzle, as he found Ella's eyes on his.

As he saw them, something broke in him.

And then he had found himself in Ella's arms and his hot cheek laid against her cool cheek, and the hands behind his head fondling him.

Neither of them said anything.

XLIV

LOVE AND FILTHY LUCRE

EVEN war-years draw on, despite their strange quality—for time has quality —of seeming at times to be each of them a decade and at others, of a few months. Mr. Hitler was doing his damnedest towards the end of the year of our Lord—or was it the year of the Devil?—one thousand nine hundred

and forty-two. Nobody could understand how it was that Paradise Row still stood, and once it had to endure seventy-eight days and nights of Blitz. But stand it did as Stalingrad was to stand. These things are not to be understood. They either are or are not. And through it all Snow-White refused to get well. For some time, letters had come from Sean at the front—then they had ceased to come although the boy still wrote to his mother.

Mr. Honeypot went on from strength to strength or, as his enemies would say, from weakness to weakness, and so much does depend upon the point of view. For even churchwardens have enemies.

He was now engaged in a highly involved series of mathematical calculations—Higher, not Lower Mathematics. These calculations involved a nice appraisement of the minds, bodies, and bank balances of the following ladies and gentlemen. First of all, his ladye-love of the moment, Elspeth McGluskie, who was becoming increasingly inconvenient and pressing, not least because he just couldn't help himself being really in love with her. That is to say, if a fierce and fervent passion for Miss McGluskie's person comes under the term "love".

Yet there was something more than "body" behind his affection for Elspeth. There was "soul". "Bodies and Souls." This was something with which Mr. Honeypot had never reckoned, he being a man of convenient passion. Inconveniently enough, he suspected he was really "in love" with Elspeth McGluskie. It was a damned nuisance, especially as it tended to cramp his style with the Masseyton, to whom he was now thinking of popping the question, only he feared he "didn't have an earthly". Many a woman had sold herself for a pot of money. Why shouldn't a man do the same? Unfortunately, he loved Elspeth.

Next he was fighting off in the clinches two other females, who also, as time went on, became increasingly pressing. Which is to say, Miss Serena Gadfly and her now deadly enemy, Miss Honoria Lackplace. And when these two female horse-flies had settled upon Mr. Honeypot's person, as such insects will settle, Alexander Honeypot, after first trying to escape, ultimately decided that if he really *had* to bear such advances, he might as well make a bit out of it for his trouble, and so had designs upon the purses, but not the persons, of the two ladies mentioned. This last had led to further complications, not least of which was the realization that neither one nor other had a brass farthing in the world, and that if he ever gave in or caved in to either he would probably have to support her for the rest of his unnatural existence. For suffering their transports with a view to the acquiring of their fictitious bank balances, he had given both ladies what is called "encouragement", and though he was careful not to put anything down in writing, each, unknown to the other, felt that she had now sole proprietorial rights in the popular churchwarden and financier.

Nor was this all. Amongst his calculations, as we have seen, was the supreme calculation of all—one of high mathematic and high finance.

By one of those freaks of fortune, or misfortune, which will at times come over the wariest of women, Mrs. Masseyton, after being approached by Mr. Honeypot with a "scheme" for getting something for nothing, had finally fallen not only for the scheme but the schemer.

Whether it was the seductive smile with the little eyes turning in the head, or the comfortable pot-belly which Mr. Honeypot himself always asserted "gave confidence" to what I regret to say he called "the Sucker", or whether it was his beautiful behaviour on Sundays 'neath the ministrations of the Reverend Robin and his staff of office—this deponent knoweth not. He only knows that it *was*.

It may have been the physical fascinations of Alexander, or it may have been his financial fascinations, but the fact was that the Mrs. Masseyton, the whole three hundred pounds of her, was oleaginously in love with Alexander the Great, as we may now call him. With the result, however painful it may seem, that Alexander now found himself ready to throw in, or off, not only Mesdames Gadfly and Lackplace but even Elspeth—the last, however, not without a struggle, not one of conscience, of which Mr. Honeypot had none, but of reluctance. For truth to say, he was now very much in love with Elspeth, and even in the earlier transports with Mrs. Masseyton on the reinforced divan in "The Palace", he could not quite put out of his mind the black eyes in the white face, certain passionate contortions, and, above all, the Song of Solomon and the Shorter Catechism.

Especially, for so does the human mind work, he could never quite put out of that mind the memory of Elspeth one wet Saturday afternoon, suddenly turning her back on him, doubling herself in two like a hairpin, and staring back at him between her superb legs in high abandon. This, for some obscure and Freudian reason, had completely won Mr. Honeypot's heart. It made him tremble in his trousers to think of it. And how fatally true it is that the turn of a hand, the tilt of a nose, will sometimes fatally seal the knot of love!

But I think before we enter into the filthy lucre side of Mr. Honeypot's love for Mrs. Masseyton, we might introduce the gentle reader to the palatial home of that lady, and to a little domestic scene which had taken place a few months before, just after the Fire-Drill.

Mr. Honeypot, having expatiated to his hostess on the by no means exiguous qualities of what he called "a corner in cinemas", that lady had fallen into a fit of admiration for the little man by her side and for that little man had conceived a great passion. Here is the conversation, verbatim, as it was in the long afterwards recited by Mr. Honeypot himself to one of his lady friends:

Mr. Honeypot: And that, my dear Mrs. Masseyton, is the whole bag of tricks. You can see it is simple as falling off a log. If you and I corner the whole of the "flicks" trade, beginning with the provinces and gradually working up to and eating up London. Millions, my dear madam, millions. . . . MILLIONS!

Mrs. Masseyton: Oh, my dear Mr. Honeypot, what a genius you are! I thought in my simple way, after cornering the market in the Cocklepill Corn-Curer and the Cocklepill Yoga Ointment that I knew something about finance. But you really do take the Peek Frean! (She gazed upon the little man crouching under her lee with large and liquid eyes, out-popping.)

Mr. Honeypot (rapidly becoming Americanized under the baneful

influence of the Hollywood films he was now daily showing): Madam my dear *dear* Madam! you've said a mouthful.

Mrs. Masseyton (absorbing gluttonously the financial genius under the aforesaid lee): I really think, my dear Mr. Honeypot, that if you and I put our heads together, we might corner the earth.

Mr. Honeypot (a light bursting into his flickering eye): Madam, you've said another mouthful . . . (coyly) and not only our heads, dear lady.

Mrs. Masseyton (who was always quick on the uptake and still more like a serpent about to swallow a rabbit): You mean, my dear Mr. Alexander Honeypot . . . you mean?

Mr. Honeypot (suddenly becoming careful as well as coy): Never you mind what I mean, my dear Mrs. Masseyton. But I mean it.

Mrs. Masseyton (in best Victorian fashion): Oh, dear, dear Alexander, this is so sudden!

"And believe it, or believe it not," as our Mrs. Mallory, who was deputizing behind the door at "The Palace", said afterwards, "what should I see with me own eyes, but 'er ladyship a-leanin' over pore Mr. Honeypot and a-takin' of 'im in 'er warm soft arms and a 'uggin' of him to her bosom—and 'e, pore dear, lost thereon."

For that was the way of it, so poetically expressed by our Mrs. Mallory. And although only ten minutes before, and in his wildest nightmares, the shyful Mr. Honeypot had not had the faintest idea of proposing to the ungetatable Masseyton, he now found himself enfolded in those gigantic arms or "hambones" as he was later vulgarly to express it, of that lady, whose bosoms working overtime like bellows, flung the little financier up and down as though he had been a bubble of lightness and goodness knows he was light enough in his own way!

Mrs. Mallory, secreted behind the screen covering the door leading to the conservatory where she was hiding, was now witness to a still more interesting conversation between Mrs. Masseyton and Mr. Honeypot:

Mrs. Masseyton (suddenly unfolding and "giving Mr. Honeypot the air", with a dramatic and haunted gaze from the aforesaid optics): "But, Mr. Honeypot, rumours have reached me . . . perhaps your affections are already engaged? Perhaps you have made love to other poor forlorn abandoned females like myself? (There was a sort of elephantine piteousness in the millionairess's appeal.) As you are strong, be merciful! (The Masseyton had got it all out of one of the "Ouida" novels she *would* read.)

Mr. Honeypot (stung to the quick, but indignantly recovering himself): What? Me? Me? What base female has dared to spread such libels upon a man who up to this moment has never given his heart to any female of them all? Aspersions upon the reputation of a man who is a moralist and a churchwarden and one who, when he sojourned amongst the Mormons in Salt Lake City, rejected with contumely the advances of the female Mormons who were so very *very* pressing, that his soul turned to water within him, but did not yield. No, my dear Madam, strike, and strike again if you must—but cast not such aspersions upon my purity! It was at this point that the lady addressed succumbed to the Honeypot

glamour and with a faint "Take me, take me, Alexander!" subsided softly upon his chest, what there was of it. But finding it insubstantial as angel's wing and but the baseless fabric of vision, she reversed positions and throwing herself, as far as she could elephantinely accomplish, upon her back, pulled the little man down to her capacious bosoms (still working overtime) whence, as she smothered him with glutinous kisses, he found himself once more flung up and down like a bubble or fairy, and giving our Mrs. Mallory, still behind her screen, what she afterwards called "the willies".

Here was a pretty kettle of fish for Mr. Honeypot. The problem of keeping apart Elspeth, Serena, Honoria and Mrs. Masseyton, whose first name was Sophronia, would have been enough even for the tact and diplomacy of any British Prime Minister. But when on the top of that he had to arrange a quick union and marriage with Sophronia before she got wise to something else which will later transpire, and his "claws on the dibs" (I still quote Mr. Honeypot in a later transition), before some other people also got wise to it, was enough to send any remaining hairs grey upon his so far undiminished head.

Like the Lesser Alexander before him, he saw within his grasp the empire of a world. The empire of the "Movies", or "Flicks", with him sitting on the throne and Mr. Samuel Goldwyn and the Hollywood imperators far below him in the gulf. By his side, it is true, Sophronia Masseyton—but all prizes have to be paid for, and, who knew, that three hundred pounds of her might blow up one day and free him for the arms of Mistress Elspeth McGluskie who still continued to haunt him and, let it not be forgotten, whom he still continued to haunt.

In the meantime, Sophronia, usually as near as ninepence, had melted in these early days of ardent affection to the tune of a cool fifty thousand, with which Mr. Honeypot was on the highroad of acquisition of a chain of provincial cinemas, so ultimately leading him for the first time in a variegated life into the secluded haunts of the Leicester Square Olympians, causing him to become director of half a dozen film companies, and, generally, setting his flabby feet on the road to Fortune, and, who knows? to her sister, Misfortune.

XLV

MR. HONEYPOT SEES THE STARS

ALEXANDER the Great's ambitions soaring not so much on the wings of love as on the darkened pinions of what so often in our day is love's dark sister, filthy lucre, now again set in motion the wheels he had started at the beginning of our story when he had displayed before the narrowing sceptic eyes of Lord Lovem the gentle art of getting a hundred per cent for nothing at all. The decaying lord at that time had "stalled", but now, what with rising taxation and the disintegration of the British Aristocracy, and the urgent necessity of getting rid of the Wilderness at anything you could get for it, Lord Lovem once more listened to the siren voice of the Honeypot,

when he permitted to emerge his magnificent scheme of a Corner in Cinemas.

Now, however, with the magic name of Mrs. Masseyton behind him—a lure that no salmon of them all could resist.

What Alexander had in mind at this time, nobody can really say. There is no doubt, however, that believing himself to be infallible in love as in finance, he really did contemplate becoming a king in Wardour Street and, ultimately, in Hollywood. The stepping-stones to that kingship might be over the bodies and bank balances of many females, but he was generously disposed to sacrifice the lot in the one and only cause in which he believed—Alexander Honeypot.

His had always been a lucky star. Always, with one trifling exception, had that star shone for Mr. Honeypot when Mr. Honeypot was in one of his perennial tight corners. Well, here was the tightest corner of all—a corner in cinemas! He would trust his star.

But it wasn't all velvet and caviare, as he would say. For not only was he embarrassed by keeping the four females mentioned apart, but he had also, in his all too few spare moments, to make fierce love to all the whole three hundred pounds of Madame, who was a fierce demander and, indeed, not to put too fine a point on it and despite her general flaccidity, a man-eater. It was a great strain upon a little man who also, in various ways, had to keep at least half a dozen other females on the string, as he elegantly termed it. But he did his best—and which one of us can do more?

In Sophronia, Alexander was finding his match. When she would issue a ukase for his immediate attendance at the "Palace", in order to satisfy the demands of a passion which grew upon that upon which it fed, it had been Honeypot's first inclination to refuse "so as to keep the old girl guessing". The result had been so frightful and unexpected that he had never attempted it again.

Alexander was now rapidly getting between the devil and the deep sea. The devil being "that female Satan", as he called her in his more abandoned moments, and the deep sea—the latter being, quite frankly, the police. For, again not to put too fine a point upon it, Alexander Honeypot was "wanted". Yet was it not Alexander but a gentleman of another name who was wanted most urgently and even affectionately.

What he had to do at all costs was to bring Sophronia to the halter or the altar, whichever you like, before the authorities could find out that Mr. Joseph Botty was Mr. Alexander Honeypot. That was all. For, like all his tribe, Mr. Honeypot believed that money talked, and that Sophronia Masseyton had the "pull" with the authorities of which she was always boasting. Once married, and he was safe. Until then, he was a "gone coon".

Now if he refused to satisfy the needs of love, he believed that the amorous Mrs. Masseyton was quite capable of throwing him on the discard, as she sometimes said she would, after a moment of recalcitrance. If, on the other hand, he granted those needs and, as he was compelled, put aside all other work for that of Cupid, then there was more than a chance that the sated and sainted Sophronia might tire of him, and refuse to be united to him in bonds of most unholy matrimony, or, as he put it coarsely, "matter-o'-money".

However, he had "a way with the women", as Mike Malone would often opinionate, in "The Robe of Glory", and in that optimistic organ, his heart of hearts, he believed that he "could keep the old geezer on toast until they'd 'clicked' before the altar and under the hammer". I still hold to the Honeypot phraseology, frank and free like the man himself.

Already, about eighteen months after the fire-drill and the proposal and Lucretian Rape on the divan, for that is what it was, Mr. Alexander Honeypot was director of five thriving film corporations, in which Mrs. Masseyton had placed her millions both before and after the delectable meeting with Mr. Honeypot, and was now about to be appointed Chairman of Provincial Movies, Limited. So the skies were roseate, not "bloody", for Mr. Honeypot, who frequently exchanged the latter for the former adjective.

Also he had been through the Row with a fine-tooth comb, and in the careful combing and always keeping the magic of the Masseyton behind him, although their betrothal had not been publicly announced upon the urgent desire of Mr. Honeypot for his own private particular purposes, had managed to comb out a comfortable series of nest-eggs from various houses, and pockets. These included not only the Wilderness, but also the pockets of Mr. Valentine Windermere, senior, whom I hope, like the Man with the Scythe, you have not forgotten, Mrs. Bedelia Bass-Marjoriam, Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill, and those of the Reverend Robin Hallowes, who was not averse to a "flutter", and what was left of the Lackplace fortune, not to mention a fruitless attempt upon those of Mrs. Pompadour, who, displaying unexpected qualities of acumen and shrewdness, had set her Pekes upon him and set about him with her dog-whip. The only prospective inhabitant of the Row he had not ventured to approach being Mr. O'Brien Leicester, who "had something about him" which fought people off in the clinches.

It was at this hyphenated moment, balanced upon the very apex of his pyramid star-ladder, with the possibilities of either going higher into the heavens of finance and being lost to sight of the vulgar herd, in which he included all the forlorn females mentioned except perhaps one, that our Mr. Honeypot, most unexpectedly, found himself face to face with that "one". But this will need a chapter to itself.

Our hero, Mr. Honeypot, "has seen the stars". Let us piously hope that he does not, instead, "see stars".

There is a difference.

XLVI

MISS MCGLUSKIE WANTS TO KNOW . . .

WILD and woolly are the ways of women, the philosophers have told us, including that Saint Paul upon whose feelings about the unfair sex the Churches are so largely founded. To this rule, Elspeth McGluskie was no exception.

Alexander Honeypot, conqueror of her affections, was at this time like

some conjurer of finance, balancing his coloured balls in the airy phantasies of his being. So long as he could keep them all going, well and good. But let only one of the balls fall, and the whole chain of circumstance came undone, and with it, Mr. Alexander Honeypot.

The ball which was giving him most trouble, owing to what conjurers call "bias", was Elspeth McGluskie. Over and over again, she had betrayed a tendency to leave the 'chanted circle of Mr. Honeypot's ball-play and go her own way. But through long and varied experience, the conjurer of female hearts had, sometimes in the very last fraction of a second, managed to keep her within the magic circle.

He had done this by the same methods he had been employing towards his new mistress, Sophronia Masseyton. That is, he made love, and went on making love, even though, as he would say to himself, for he never confided in anybody else, "it was playing hell and all with his constit*oo*shon". But, always an ardent lover, with plenty of "punch" and "guts", Mr. Honeypot went on doing his stuff, if not to the glory of God, why, then, to the future glory of Honeypot.

At this time, it being necessary to keep an eye upon the increasingly restive and even malevolent Elspeth, he was spending his time between his private flat over the teashop and the Wilderness. The former in the light of day, the latter in the dark of night.

It was one wild December night, when receiving from both Elspeth and Sophronia a *ukase* at the same moment, he was not able to make up his mind which to honour, that he felt even Heaven was not playing the game with him. "It was all very well to keep half a dozen wild women going when you could give temporary undivided attention to their minds and bodies, not to mention their souls, but what about having to be in two places at the same time? It was enough to make a fellow give up religion and churchwardenship—it really was!"

So ruminated Mr. Honeypot, as he climbed up the well-remembered ladder which was now his usual means of ingress to the fair Elspeth and the Shorter Catechism, having, in such affairs, a deep antipathy to front doors and staircases. And as he had only an hour or two to give her at the most, for he had later to minister unto Sophronia, who had a tendency to late hours, at midnight, he had as he said "to look slippy".

Unfortunately for Alexander, Elspeth that night was not only in an amatory but also an examinatory mood. She demanded "explanations", in between bursts of the Shorter and Longer Catechisms, with an occasional dash into the Song of Solomon.

At the beginning, like the frozen streams in her own native highlands, she was reticent and careful. Upon which, Mr. Honeypot quietly congratulated himself as, frankly, with what he had to do at midnight, he did not feel himself in a position to do Elspeth justice, had she demanded that justice. He was, however, to find that this reticence was a mask.

When he had taken her in his arms, she had not resisted, it is true, but she had not "come on". Being wise to the ways of women, Alexander had felt this lack of come-on at the first go-off. Nor was he reassured by his ladye-love bursting all at once into the opening passages of that delightful

Creed of St. Athanasius, which has given rise to so much heaven and so much hell on our tiny planet. From old experience, he knew that he was "in for a wet night".

Vainly did he try to calm her, but he might as well have tried to calm the frozen becks of the Highlands when, 'neath the caress of returning sun, they burst from their icy embrace into the spates and freshets of spring.

She expressly expatiated upon the damnatory clauses, and especially upon Faith, a commodity nearly unknown to the man in her arms. "Which Faith," as she asseverated about nothing in particular, although it seemed to have some reference to the man upon whom she was at that instant raining kisses, "except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly". It sent quite a trickle along Mr. Honeypot's spine, or where a spine should have been, for Mr. Honeypot, in his way, was the Boneless Wonder.

Out of Saint Athanasius the Blaster, Miss McGluskie took short frenetic excursion into Revelation, from which it appeared that Mr. Honeypot was getting each day more and more to take the face and qualities of the male portion of the Scarlet Woman, who Miss McGluskie also associated mazily with a certain Mrs. Masseyton. And it gradually eventuating, as her passion or passions took possession of her and the black eyes blazed in the white face, and she burst into Revelation, that her beloved Honeypot had a face like those of the Four Beasts and that he came from a star called Wormwood and that to her, Elspeth, he was not only Wormwood but Gall, Mr. Honeypot knew that matters were reaching a crisis.

It was at this more than critical moment that his *inamorata* transferred or switched her attentions from her "Beloved sprayed with Milk and Honey", as she would call him in between the Athanasian bits, to Sophronia Masseyton, Serena Gadfly, and Honoria Lackplace. It seemed from this that Mr. Honeypot was a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having no fewer than seven heads and ten horns, acting as the support or steed of Mrs. Masseyton, who it also transpired was "the Mother of Harlots and abominations of the earth". Also it appeared that both the rider and the steed were "booked", she, Elspeth McGluskie, having it all out of Revelation xvii.

It was at this hotted instant that Mr. Honeypot realized for the first time what he was up against, and that someone or other had "blown the gaff" and informed to Elspeth upon him, Alexander Honeypot. Such a situation needed all his resources of strategy and, frankly, of prevarication. He had been in many tight spots in his time, but this was the tightest. And, as it happened, Mr. Honeypot himself was also more than a little tight through a hurried call at the "Robe" to keep up his spirits by putting them down.

Fortifying himself with a surreptitious pull at the big thin flask he carried in these days in the seat of his trousers, making himself still tighter, he opened rather shakily in one of the very few pauses for breath of Miss McGluskie, who seemed, in such pauses, to be getting up more steam for the hotted occasion.

"Some enemy hath done this," he began, feeling a quotation from scripture to be more in the mood of the moment as set by the biblically efflorescent Miss McGluskie.

He had no sooner got the words out of his mouth, which the McGluskie for some secret reason instantly closed with a red-hot kiss, than in flowery paraphrase from her favourite "Song of Solomon", she burst forth again like the aforesaid Highland freshet:

"Let me kiss him with the kisses of my mouth for my love is better than wine!" She continued, still more inaccurately, for reasons already set out earlier in our chronicle:

"Because of the savour of thy good ointments . . . therefore do the virgins love thee." And when Elspeth cried in transport: "I am black, but comely," she departed still further from fact, for, though comely enough, as one knows, she was also very white. It may have been, however, that she was referring to her temper, which certainly to the affrighted man in her arms seemed blacker than ever.

She also certainly was not quite accurate in still further transport, as Mr. Honeypot, accepting the invitation, covered what in a moment of poesy he called her lips of honey, with his succulent embraces, so causing the enamoured or embittered woman to cry out: "Oh, it is the voice of my beloved . . . behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills . . . his left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me!" At which juncture, the fair Miss McGluskie sank her small, white sharp teeth in her Beloved's neck, but whether in love or hate this deponent sayeth not, he not knowing and in females like Miss McGluskie, love often looking so very like its sister, hate. For the queer thing about Elspeth was that the more amorous and ecstatic she got, the more hateful and inimical she became. It was a phenomenon which had often puzzled the crafty brain of a man who thought he knew everything about women there was to know . . . and now was perhaps not quite so sure as he had been.

As the white teeth sank into the empurpled neck, there ran through the mind of the owner of that neck a verse often on the lips of his *innamorata*: "Thy teeth are as a flock, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them." This, in a fit of despair or malevolent humour or something, he conveyed gently to the lady in whose arms he lay, trying to laugh as he said it.

The response was everything that could be desired, for instantly the fair Scot again sank "the flock" into the neck of the speaker, "whereof every one bore twins" and more than twins, and it seemed to Mr. Honeypot, the prey, that if Miss McGluskie did not soon see fit to desist, he would very shortly find himself eaten alive piece by piece, much as the female spider doth eat her male, and then find himself, as remnant, spewed out into the discard, as he secretly "conveyed" to himself.

Once more the mood and the Song changed, and with it the Singer, as she passed from the flowery passages of Solomon to the statement direct, with the punctuation marks set deep in the neck of Mr. Honeypot at the end of each period, so constituting what I think may be termed a record in the sweet agony of love.

"And so you thought, my dear, that you had hoodwinked your Elspeth, did you, darling" (*teeth*) . . . "for indeed it may be said of you as Solomon

said of his spouse, 'a garden inclosed is my spouse : a spring shut up, a fountain sealed' (*teeth*).

" 'His mouth is most sweet : yea, he is altogether lovely . . .' I *don't* think (*teeth*). For 'whither is my beloved gone, O thou fairest among men.' I can tell ye whaur he is gone !

" 'He is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies' with the Scarlet Woman. He's gone into Queen's Palaces, and note the name—into 'The Palace', or that's whaur he meant to go if he had thrown dust into the eyes of Elspeth McGluskie. (*Teeth.*)

"But no, my love, but no, and again no ! For it may be said of me as it is said in the Song : 'But I found him whom my soul loveth : I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my house and into the chamber of her that conceived !' and let him go, I don't and *won't*, so sure as my name is Elspeth McGluskie ! But to those other mistresses, Mistress Serena Gadfly" (*teeth*), "Mistress Honoria Lackplace" (*teeth*), "and now Mistress Masseyton Moneybags" (*teeth* again), " 'I charge you, O ye daughters of whoredom, by the roes' that I'll tear out of the lot of ye severally and together, that ye stir not up, nor awake my dear *dear*" (*teeth*) "love, till he please, for you are all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee ! and can the leopard change his spots !" (*teeth*) . . . "but I'll change them for him.

"And you were going to walk off with the Masseyton moneybags, were you" (*claw*), "and give Elspeth the dirty kick-out, were ye ? And you were going to be a great man in the wur-*r*ld of finance, were ye ? and you riding the world, for of you, my Beloved, it may be said as it was said of your Maker and mine :

> He moves in a mysterious way,
> His wonders to perform—
> He rides upon the whirlwind,
> And he directs the storm.

But *I'll* dir-rect ye !" (*Teeth and claws.*)

"And it was for *this* that Elspeth McGluskie's bowels were moved. For this dirty, dir-*r*-*r*-ty froth of Satan that she gave her virgin and her pride. For this two by one, that, as I said, her bowels were moved.

" 'My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him . . .' but now, so sure as bonnie Scotland is bonnie Scotland, it is me that will put in my hand and pull the bowels out of him." (*Teeth.*)

Mr. Honeypot by this time, as they say in the annals of the "ring", was "bleeding freely". All this was, however, but the beginning. For the Beloved One was now adding claws to her teeth, and had begun upon Mr. Honeypot's little eyes, as she cried :

" 'Thou hast ravished my heart, my spouse : thou hast ravished my heart with one of thy eyes' " (*claws*), "and it is one of those same eyes I'll have out of your head this minit."

With one eye nearly out of his head and the other staring the same way,

the valiant lover thought that it was perhaps about time to take his clothes and go, as, if he didn't, he might find himself taking his departure not only from Miss McGluskie and love but from this life of death, and as Alexander was of the earth, earthy, this would not suit his book.

Bleeding freely, but still keeping cool as only the Alexander Honeypots, or in this case really the Joseph Bottys, of life do keep cool in heated moments, Alexander—or is it Joseph?—was already scheming how "to make his get-away" and still keep his battered taggered appointment with Sophronia at "The Palace", and still keep Sophronia and Serena, Honoria and Elspeth from getting together and undoing him. He that was already in a state of *déshabillé*, physical and mental, he having at first pretended to spend the night with his fairest or, as she called herself, "his dove, his undefiled, her head filled with dew, and her locks with the drops of the night".

It was at this fated fraction of time that Mr. Hitler once more took a hand in the game, doubtless under the guidance of his gods, for as Alexander sprang from the arms of his Dido, the first of the phosphor-bombs was already rushing earthwards out of the night skies to fall unerringly upon Elspeth McGluskie and Alexander Honeypot as they made love and hate in the Wilderness in Paradise Row, Eventide, in the island of England, itself no longer an island.

XLVII

PHOSPHOR-BOMB

GOD's rains fall on the just and the unjust, and so His phosphor-bombs, unless we assume that these come from the Arch Enemy whom we have met so often in these chronicles and Who therefore remains apart from his Maker.

These matters, however, I think we had better leave to the theologians and doctors who have been fighting over them for thousands of years and who will probably continue to fight over them long after they have been forgotten by honest men and honest women. That is if there be such, as we are now beginning to doubt in this chronicle of peace and bloody war, the adjective, let it be at once said, being used literally and not explosively, so that we may continue to keep up those *convenances* or unities which, so far as we know, are the solitary religion of the English people.

Mr. Hitler once more had caught Mr. Honeypot with his trousers down—a phrase which may be taken literally or figuratively as the reader will. For the phosphor-bomb, a most lively fellow, cavorting down through the roofs of the Wilderness, and through the ceiling above the couch of roses and thorns which we have been investigating, left the contents of that couch in parlous condition.

Always ready and active, Miss Gadfly and Miss Lackplace, who through malign circumstance found themselves most reluctant companionate fire-watchers on that night, instantly set their whistles shrilling on the signal pre-arranged. Up and down the road they ran, shooting off their little whistles

until they had gathered in greater or less *déshabillé* practically every inhabitant of the Row.

Then was seen magnificent effect of four years of fire-drill and of discipline as organized by the indomitable O'Brien Leicester. For within a minute or two, all the "squads" had fallen in, instead of, as at the beginning, "falling out", and amidst the showering of Hitlerian pyrotechnics out of the night skies, gradually concentrated upon the Wilderness, now a flaming oven, inside which, as you and I know but not Paradise Row, Elspeth McGluskie and Alexander Honeypot (*né* Joseph Botty) at this moment were comfortably cooking.

But not unprotestant. For upon the fiery visitor coming through the ceiling, Mr. Honeypot, with the adroitness which characterized him, sprang off the couch of loving-hate and shirt-tails flying, made for the window where the ladder was, leaving his ladye-love to incinerate. All this in spite of the fact that he had once, in a moment of temporary aberration, subscribed himself in a solitary note to that damsel: "Yours to a cinder." For Mr. Honeypot was always careful about putting anything in writing.

Now you never know what heroes or villains will do in moments like these. By all the book, Alexander Honeypot should have magnificently abandoned a woman who had nearly torn his eye out and chewed him up, and so ridded himself of a very inconvenient love at this time. Once out of the way, and he, Alexander, would find the way clear to the Masseyton millions and to fame and glory.

All these things ran like monkeys through the Honeypot head as he made for the window and the ladder where lay safety. He had even placed his hand on the top of the ladder and had made an effort, shirt-tails still flying. and trouserless, to get out of that window to the cheers or jeers of the crowd —one could not be sure which—when that still small voice which he had kept under so successfully for so many years began to whisper to him:

"Listen, Joseph! Can't you see the white face—the staring black eyes of the only woman you have ever loved? She's lying unconscious back there on that bed. You just *can't* leave her to her fate. You know you love her —in your own way. Go back!"

Alexander fought with the Still Small, and the Still Small didn't fight with Alexander—only whispered. But in the end, Alexander came off his ladder of stars, again to the cheers or jeers of the crowd, and went back into that furnace to grope for the body of Elspeth McGluskie.

But he did not reappear. For the gases from the bomb were now filling the chamber where love so recently had been more or less victorious, and Mr. Honeypot was stifling in the smoke.

And once again, it was a quiet, tall, dark woman who, attired in fire-fighting gear, ran up the ladder and vanished into the smoke. She also did not reappear. It was Ella Cattermole, who, it seemed, was that queer thing so much beloved of film-fans, a heroine.

Then blushed forth in all its glory the courage which, like charity, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, but hides itself in the breasts of Brave Poor Things like those who followed Ella Cattermole up that ladder, no longer one leading to the stars but to death, which perhaps is another route to stardom.

For up the ladder, without, perhaps, any very clear idea as to what they were doing or going to do, went first Serena Gadfly, and after her on her heels, her friend the enemy, Honoria. They also vanished into that inferno of smoke and gas and flame.

They also did not reappear.

All of which, of course, is sheer melodrama—that melodrama feared and hated by the Higher Critic because, as it unfortunately happens, life is melodrama and, as the O'Brien would say, "there is a hell of a lot of melodrama in life".

In the meantime, some of the other squads had broken their way into the Wilderness through the Wilderness's front door, and had fought their way through ever-thickening smoke and flame to what I suppose we may now call, in the fullest sense, "The Abode of Love", under the attic roof. And there in their respirators and with all their pumps and sand going, they found the following: First of all Honoria and Serena lying across each other near the window to which, it was evident, Honoria had done her best to drag her hated friend in order to get her on to the ladder. Then, on the bed, Ella Cattermole senseless, beneath her the bodies of true love—first that of Mr. Honeypot and then that of Miss McGluskie.

And now I think, like all expert chroniclers and story-tellers, I will leave the curious though hopefully still gentle reader wait outside what is a closed door—the door of death—or is it life?

For that is what we are now going to see, as at the moment, even this chronicler does not know exactly what happened behind the Closed Door.

XLVIII

THE HILL O' DREAMS

As in all properly constituted stories, it happened to be the O'Brien Leicester, heading his rescue party, who found the body of Ella Cattermole, and with it, her soul, still in that body.

Leicester had a government permit for an infinitesmal quantity of petrol as Warden Chief, and with it his car. The sardonic doctor, himself displaying quite unsuspected qualities of a mercy that was not strained, had instantly got to work over the senseless woman and had partially restored her in the hall of the Wilderness, whence she had been carried. There were, however, scores of calls upon him, and he could not do more than give First Aid, he telling Leicester that, it being a matter of life and death, he should take Ella with him to the hospital at Reading, where alone she could have the necessary appliances and care. Doctor Crab, now a dark-faced angel of mercy, opined that possibly she was only gassed a little. She was not burned.

So it was that a few minutes afterwards, with Mr. Hitler's pyrotechnics still showering down out of the night skies casually to set alight all sorts of ill-considered homes and people, or just to fall not only on the Wilderness but in the wilderness, Leicester and Ella found themselves in his car takin

the road to Reading. Ella in the back of the car wrapped up warmly in rugs. O'Brien Leicester driving.

He did not dare to turn his head to look upon the white-faced woman who lay there behind him, because he did not know whether he would find a woman alive or dead. Yet from time to time, he would turn his head, to see the slender form hunched slightly in the back of the car, and taking no more notice of him than of heaven.

But as he was driving round the shoulder of that great sweep of hillside, thicketed and forest-crowned, which surveys the fair land of England and which he knew as "The Hill o' Dreams", he saw the eyes fixed upon him out of the white face. He stopped the car, and went round to open the door, and then, as he bent over her, he knew that she was alive. He also knew something else, something he had guessed that morning of long months before, when he had visited her after she had saved Patricia. That he was looking at the one woman in the world to whom he felt in this way. But what "this way" was, he did not know.

The woman looked up at him, and he looked down on the woman.

"Are you better?" he asked lamely.

"Yes. I feel all right. I am not in my body—but apart from that I do feel all right. What are you doing with me?"

"I am driving you to hospital. Doctor Crab's instructions. He says you might have died from gas-poisoning."

The woman smiled a little, then laughed, that low chuckling laugh which he knew.

"I am not going to die. I am not going to any hospital . . ." and then she had added timidly enough: "Dear."

Leicester bent down still closer there on the side of the great hill which looked out over the landscape to the horizon. There under the dark stars, moonless, with the white fingers of the searchlights indexing the starlit heavens for enemy 'planes, with every now and then the crash of some distant bomb dropped on the Ack-ack defences.

Then he had slipped his arm under the white neck and had placed his face against hers.

He felt her hand steal up about his neck and the soft pat of her other hand on his cheek. And he was at peace.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

And the woman, as the woman always will, took the matter into her own hands and said quietly but resolutely: "We shall spend the night together under the stars, dear—here, on 'The Hill o' Dreams'."

And so it was that going to the rear of the car which they had run off the main track into a copse that lay there, he had taken out of the back the waterproofed pack which he always kept for emergency and when, in his travels, he found himself in these days of war without hotel or bed. And this he laid out on the hillside under the stars, between two "shaws" or thickets, sheltered from every side but able to look right up into the dark starlit heavens and through a channel which opened before them, out over the ranging countryside of England, with the long white fingers always ranging. Superb pyrotechnic for their entertainment.

He would not let her help him. And finding his thermos and the box of sandwiches he always kept for emergencies, he fed his woman, bit by bit, and when she had finished he gave her a sup of coffee out of the flask, and took some himself.

And there on that hill, the O'Brien Leicester and Ella Cattermole laid their bridal bed, and there they made love under the stars, as they watched the pyrotechnics of war, flaming bombs and white index-finger of search-light, criss-crossing the heavens. And later the half moon came up to flood the hillside with her chastened glow.

And O'Brien Leicester and Ella Cattermole found themselves at peace with each other and with all the world of earth and stars.

XLIX

LEICESTER SPEAKS WITH AASE

LEICESTER had a rule invariable in his relations with Aase. He never had secrets from her. In their earlier days together, she had always opened his letters, if she wished. Secrecy to this Elizabethan was at one and the same time the breath of his life and to him hateful! Such are the inconsistencies of those with the seethy, contradictory blood of the Irish. The bitter-sweet Irish.

Now, despite this highly moral tale, I am not concerned with how things *ought* to be, or rather, how the Paradise Rows *think* they ought to be, for such Rows live not on morals but on *tabus*. Here I am concerned with life as it is lived and will be lived on this planet lost in the immensities. Of course it was highly immoral, this affair of Ella Cattermole and Leicester—or, was it? After all, what do you, the Reader, and I, the Recorder, really know that should give us the right to constitute ourselves a Court of Morals? Not the Recorder, at least . . . and those who think differently . . . why, let them "cast the first stone".

Leicester's love for Ella Cattermole was the first thing he had ever kept from a wife with whom he seemed to have everything and nothing. He could only speak of Aase in terms of paradox.

But he loved Aase. Loved her uniquely. If he had a spiritual twin, it was this strange, lonely soul on her bed of thorns. But what was it in her he loved?

He did not know.

Was it the Woman behind her? That Woman and that Man who is behind each one of us, shrouded in our flesh?

Ella Cattermole and O'Brien Leicester met many times after the night on "The Hill o' Dreams". They were lovers and they made love. Strangest of all, in this, Leicester had no conscience. He would not have minded if his wife had known. He had even thought of telling her. Nor did his passion for Ella make his love for Aase any the less. It rather accentuated

it. All of which, of course, was very wicked of Mr. Leicester. But, again, we are dealing with life, not with the moralists, who specialize in death.

And once Ella had said something to him as she lay in his arms, at rest—calm after tempest. She had said it in that quiet, inbitten way to him:

"You know, Leicester"—she always called him by his surname—"it is your wife you really love, not Ella. And yet you love me too—after your fashion . . . and after mine. And your fashion is to love more than one woman and each of them in a different way. And mine, God help me! is to love but one man—and that man is you. Yet is it also true that for you, as for me, there can be but one woman whom either of us can love in the one way—*one*, I said."

Leicester had looked down at the girl lying in his arms and then he had said:

"You say that, Ella. But have you not a short memory? Was there not another man whom once you loved, as I sometimes think, although you have never spoken of it?"

"You mean Arthur Kasterling?" She spoke with her usual directness.

"Yes, I did love him once. Loved him rather terribly. I wanted him more than any other man in this world, if you like—wanted him physically and his physical presence. In a word, I was 'in love' with him. I did not love him. But, Leicester, I never wanted him spiritually. And that is the way, though it is not the only way, I want you." She paused a little. Then:

"Arthur is no more to me today than the Theophilus who hates him, as he hates you." And she had smiled a little in her shaded way at the man looking down on her. "You make enemies, for you are neutral to life—and humans will forgive you anything except neutrality, because with life, whatever they pretend, they are passionately concerned, it being the only hing they know—for of death they know nothing."

"I believe you. You have always spoken the truth. Even your enemies admit it, Ella. But why does old Theophilus hate me of all people? I have been kind to him and I have tried in my poor way to help him. People generally give themselves to me when I act in that way—to my wish to help, which, and God help me myself! with all my shortcomings I have."

"My butler is one man whom neither love nor hate can either cajole or antagonize. Theophilus loves only one person in the world, and that is the woman who is speaking. But he hates you, Leicester, and I think he would kill you as readily as he would kill Arthur Kasterling if he could."

"But, again, why?"

"Because he is jealous. Have you never heard of jealousy in a man for other men? This old man worships me—and as for me—well, I—hate him." She laughed, but yet it seemed to the listening man that she meant it, too.

"But there must be something more behind all this."

"Perhaps there is, dear. But this is not the time or place to tell you about it. Maybe some time—some day . . ." Then her brows had drawn together and her face had darkened as though she could see something to come—perhaps that "some day" when she would tell O'Brien Leicester her secret—if she had one.

And then, womanlike, she had drawn his head down to hers and had

snuggled into his breast, and had kissed him in a sort of wild abandon as though she were afraid.

He could not understand Ella at times. Some days it seemed to him that he did not understand anything about her. Rarely did she let herself make passionate love to him. But when she did, she was adorable—and, as at this moment, rather frightening.

. . . . . .

It was that midnight when he had left her peaceful and content with the peace that is beyond understanding and which she, alone of women, could give to him, that he let himself into the Close.

As always, he opened his wife's door to see if she were asleep or if she wanted anything. Right or wrong, he had absolutely no conscience at what had passed once more between the woman he loved and himself. In a way, it appeared to him to have no concern with Aase or Aase with it. Nor could he, with his sensitive misery to conscience, understand this. But so it was.

Sometimes it seemed to him that he knew nothing at all about his real self—that Self who he believed stood behind him and watched *him*—watched his second self as it walked its little day and night on the earth. But whether this was reality or imagination—who could say? Yet did it seem to him that anything imagined *always* had something behind it of truth.

Aase was lying there on her couch, her eyes staring at the flickering shadows which the night-light flecked on the ceiling. She did not look at him as he entered. She never did. So he waited a little, standing there in the shadow.

At last it came. "Thank you—but I want nothing, need nothing." A pause. "You should always go upstairs to your bed as I have told you all these years. Never bother about me. I like to be alone. I am the happiest woman alive. I have my radio and my books and my music . . . and my thoughts," she added after a moment. "You cannot imagine the unimaginable peace it has been to me all these years to lie quiet and to say nothing and do nothing."

"You are a very brave woman, Aase," said he, not reluctant to pay homage. Always did he pay homage to her, a queen without a crown—but a queen.

"And I know where you have been, and whom you have seen, and what you have been doing," said the woman on the couch resistlessly, quietly. She said it with indifference, but with knowledge.

"Where you go, I can go," she added. "I go with you in thought. Sometimes, I can almost see you, so you do not need to be surprised."

Nor was he surprised. He had always felt something of this.

Her husband stood there for some unknown terror to seize him. A little chill ran down his spine. He had never felt this chill before—this terror. But terror of what?

"You see, O'Brien Leicester" (it was the first time in their joint lives she had used his name), "I know everything about you. I have always known everything, as it seems to me. It need not frighten you. You—you look

at this moment as though you had just seen a ghost in this old room." Again she waited, her eyes still looking up at the ceiling. Not at him.

"You have been with Ella Cattermole. You have been with her many times. Many times have you made love to her." The words came quietly enough, but again he was seized by that terror.

"Well, what about it?" she enquired gently. "What does it matter? I think it is good for you to have made love to such a beautiful woman—and a woman with courage and brain." Then she had added, still more quietly:

"That is what you should have done this past score of years. Often did I wish to tell you to do that. I was not jealous. I am not jealous. Indeed, in my way I am grateful to Ella Cattermole for having taught you the art—or is it the business?—of love."

It seemed to the man listening that someone else was speaking. Somebody outside Queen Elizabeth Close. And yet in a way it seemed also enormously familiar. As though it were the echo of things that he had heard the woman on the couch there say to him in the years that were gone, even though she had never spoken to him about such things with her voice—only with her mind. Perhaps it was with the subconscious that women said such things. Perhaps it was only in the unconscious part of Self that we really understood the things that mattered.

"I knew when you were lying in her arms on the Hill o' Dreams. And I was standing by your nuptial couch. Nor did I come to curse but to bless—if blessings for me be possible. I think I even knew when first your lips met—a pang shot through my poor broken body, which can still feel the agony of life as well as its joy. Nay, O'Brien Leicester, don't shrink—you have been a good husband and a decent man to me." For the first time she turned her eyes upon him, and it seemed to him that they appeared to smoulder with some interior light as she turned her head to him.

"In all those years together you never deceived me with other women. I knew that. You held to me when I was stricken. I knew that. And now, when we are both passing over the hill of dreams and of life, to go down into the valley, I can tell you I loved you for it."

She had said then with a great simplicity:

"I have always loved you—and I always will. And it is because I love you that I am willing and even happy to surrender you to the arms of another woman, who can give to you what I can not." And then she had whispered: ". . . if only because I know that whatever you do with or are to her, I, Aase, will always have your heart and your inner understanding . . . and yet it seems to me that we don't lose anyone we have loved, here or hereafter. Perhaps it may be that all our loves are part one of the other and that all are conjoined into the love for what the poets call the 'Twin-Soul', the heavenly twin. And some day, who knows?—Woman may yield her age-old sense of single possession and learn to share her Man with other women—not sexually, if you will, but in mind and spirit—and in the yielding find the fuller possession. For she that saveth her life shall lose it—and she that loseth her life for the sake of the whole world and with it something of the spirit of the man she loves, may find both it and him. . . ." She was silent again as though deep in thought, and then:

"Yet do I also know that there are many ways of love and loving . . . and when the earth has learned that, our earth will be very near to the kingdom of heaven, which is the kingdom of love . . ."

O'Brien Leicester believed that he was dreaming—that here he was upon another Hill o' Dreams. Here was the Aase who had shrouded herself from him all these years as life seemed inexorably to insert itself between them . . . to compel them to draw away each from the other. But Aase was speaking again . . .

". . . but we shall not learn that lesson in this life. Only in the life that awaits us both down there in the valley, on the other side of the hill. For Ella Cattermole shall have you for her little hour, but I, Aase, have you for ever!"

Then she had closed her eyes.

L

MURDER

THE Second World War dragged its weary length, like some wounded serpent. Eventide, and with it, Paradise Row, had witnessed the rise of the Great Bear Constellation, overshadowing the Yellow, overshadowing the Brown, and which, perhaps, one day people were beginning to believe might overshadow the White.

They had watched the unavailing contortions of the Nazi Snake, now in its death-throes, as it sought to wind its stranglehold about the strange Allies who found themselves united but on a single issue—of extracting the poison-fangs from that Snake. The Isle, still the Isle Inviolate, had survived the fangs—the blitzes and the once nearly fatal effort of the U-boat and the thermite and phosphor burnings—and now the last efforts of the V1 and V2 and the other *Vergeltung* weapons of blunted vengeance, flying-bomb and rocket-bomb, with the possibility of gas and bacteriological warfare still to come. They had seen the fall of Hitler and of Mussolini and the rise of Himmler—a rocket-bomb soon to fall to earth—one more of the Nazi duds.

And when they had thought the war won, once more had they to brace belt and spirit to fight the last round—against the beady crafty Jap, a more terrible business than anyone had imagined.

So far, Paradise Row and England had won. What of the future?

. . . . .

Then there were the matters personal.

Leicester never told Ella Cattermole from then until the end, of this conversation with or rather monologue-reverie of his wife, Aase. Yet he knew that did he tell her, she would understand.

All he knew at this time and in the months that followed and up to the coming of the V1 weapon, the flying-bomb, was that he was always quietly,

not actively unhappy, with Aase, and always deeply happy and serene with Ella. Never did Ella and he quarrel, even though they differed about all sorts of things. Always, when he was with her in her flat—and he was in it at this time at all hours of day and night—did he feel as though she and he had been man and wife for many years—and yet not man and wife, but comrade-lovers. He could not even imagine the time when Ella had not been near him to comfort and advise and console.

He could not understand it, but so it was.

But what he did realize in some strange way was that never, here or hereafter, would he forget Ella Cattermole. That not only on this earth but in that world beyond the corporate existence of which the scientists were now saying had been as clearly proved as any other fact of science, Ella would be near to him.

She might not be to him in the same relation as on this earth, even though they said that marriages were made in heaven, though perhaps not made in the earth way, in a world of vibration where, as we had been told, "there was neither marriage nor giving in marriage". It might even be that he would find himself wedded to Aase on the other side of the grave. But always Ella would be near him to advise and comfort and console. And he, Leicester, was satisfied to leave it to the time and circumstance. Death might solve all problems, although he doubted it. For, be sure, love and hate and misunderstanding went on there as here, and, for all we could know, into the worlds beyond the worlds.

Often had he wondered what would be the solution of this problem of a man and two women. For a solution, one way or other, was inevitable. Life had a way of solving our problems after its own manner, and seldom did we know what that manner might be, for, despite the prophets, men and women did not see into the future in these private personal things. They could only see the big event and the bigger things which concerned the nation or the race or, at most, the family. And even conservative Eventide was now beginning to flirt with Dunne and his theories of time. For not even Eventide could indefinitely keep back the Future Things now knocking at its door.

Yet never in any dream, or nightmare if you like, did O'Brien Leicester see how life, and his comrade death, were to solve this personal problem and loosen this knot. It was not world-problems that were so difficult to solve—it was just these personal problems of life.

And the months went by, and Ella and Leicester made love and were not madly, but serenely happy, once more in direct contradiction to public morals and public righteousness. And it even seemed to him that Aase, when he would come in o' nights to see if she wanted anything and to say good night, looked more kindly on him, as though, and not for the first time, she understood.

. . . . .

Then came that September night, when for twenty-one nights in succession he had been on night-watch against Hitler's new horror—the flying-bomb, known to the millions with that solitary irony of the English as the "doodle-bug". It was the night when, for the first time, he and Aase had wondered

if the illness which had taken possession of Snow-White would or could pass. For from the moment that Sean had gone off to the wars, the little maid had fallen into a sort of decline. Listless to life, she lay in her bed. Even Doctor Crab, who, to her alone, was gentle and devoted, could do nothing. "She is dying of a broken heart," he had said.

Everyone knew that the Second World War was reaching its close, but everyone was beginning to realize that ere the Nazi hauled down the hated Swastika, a malign Deutschland would pour forth horror on horror, and that many young English and Scots and Welsh and Irish men must die, and with them many Germans.

He had now grown so used to "the baneful incident", as it was called when bomb struck house, that he could watch the monsters come drooling up Bourbon Lane without turning a hair. Once, in the beginning, as he saw the fiery monsters roar towards them, dragging their fiery tails, like winged dragons, then blick an instant, and "heard" the horrid silence of the death-glide, he would fling himself flat on his stomach with his companions and hope for the best, wondering if Queen Elizabeth Close, after two hundred and twenty-five years, would still be standing at the end of the war. And once, when the rains had been torrential, and he with four others watched one of the "doodlers" come straight for their noses, he had hurled first his four companions and then himself down into the running water to be lifted off their stomachs by the blast. That "blast" which nobody who had felt it would ever forget—not even in heaven or hell.

But this night, Ella Cattermole and he, now bracketed as night-watchers for that particular evening, were supposed to "sign on" and report for the night shift. Never had Ella failed Eventide in all these five years. But this night, not one of rain, but of full moon and stars, she did not appear at the meeting place.

He waited for half an hour with something cold clutching at his heart. She was probably ill, or had been detained. Such things did happen, even though they had never hitherto happened to the tall quiet girl.

At last he could bear it no longer and, leaving word with the Air Warden that he wanted to leave his post for a little he went to Number Five, where Ella lived. The hall door was open, but this was not unusual in a house which had now been "flatted off", with the result that all sorts and conditions of people, including even the hated "foreigner", would be going and coming at all hours, so leaving the door ajar. It was sad declension for a Row which boasted that "no Jew and no foreigner ever darkened its doors". For there was a lot of anti-Semitism about these days, and not least in the Victorian villages like Eventide.

The bright moon streamed into the dark hall, as he pushed the door open. The narrow stairs passed upwards into the gloom of the house, the old panelled walls sombre under that *macabre*.

Facing him down the passage, he saw the door of the solitary room in which Theophilus kennelled—lived and moved and had what being he might. Then he realized that the door was open.

There was nothing in that to alarm. Yet he did feel alarm—something more than alarm. He felt, somehow, that Ella's non-appearance on the

rota had something to do with this open door, showing behind nothing but emptiness. But in what way?

He turned his pocket torch on the door, to see something swinging behind, and then walked up to it.

He stood there, without movement.

It was the body of a man swinging from the beam which in that place, as partial stair support, ran across the little room. He flashed his torch upon the face of the man. It was Theophilus.

He swung there, coolly enough, with a large silk handkerchief caught up under the ear and around his throat in a slip-knot. The other end was knotted to a rope which went over the beam. By the side was a chair which had obviously been pushed away and fallen on its side as the suicide had sprung off it and so hanged himself. For the man had been dead for some time and the hands were cold, as they hung casually there.

He stood there irresolute, cold. Then he had remembered and so had taken the chair and cut the body down.

As he did so, his hand caught in something on the body. It was a tiny scarab brooch, which he had often seen on Ella Cattermole who invariably wore it.

He stood there looking at the tiny green insect in his hand, as though he had seen a ghost. And he *had* seen a ghost.

He went out, closing the door, and then had gone slowly up the stairs to the top flat, where he knocked.

There was no answer. He knocked again. Still no reply.

Then he had pushed open the door and gone into the three-room flat. There was nobody in the outside room.

He passed over to the bedroom door and listened. It seemed to him that something stirred on the other side of the door, which suddenly opened to show Ella Cattermole in a green and gold dressing-gown thrown carelessly over her nightdress. There were a few drops of blood on the white.

She yawned in his face. "Must have been asleep," she said, when he had apologized for his coming. "I went into bed to take a little nap as I so often do before going on night duty, and I must have overslept myself. Come in, Leicester, and I'll dress myself."

The man looked at the woman and the woman at the man. He held out to her dumbly the tiny scarab in the palm of his hand.

Something seemed to go through the woman. It was recognition of something.

"Where did you find it? As a matter of fact, I had been looking for it for quite a long time before you called." She appeared relieved as she took it from his palm.

"Where did you think I found it?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Probably picked it up on the stairs," she said carelessly enough.

"I picked it off the body of your butler, Ella," he said just as quietly. And then, as she looked at him, he knew that she knew that he knew all.

"I am in your hands, Leicester," she said. "Don't you think you had better send for the police?"

LI

THE TELEGRAM

SEAN had now been "Over There" for six weeks, and each week his mother had had a letter from him. It was perhaps significant that Sean wrote to his mother, not to his father, whom he loved with all his heart and soul with a love from which his mother was excluded. Yet, when it came to the dearer, more intimate things, it was to Aase, not to O'Brien, to whom the boy wrote.

Once he had said to his father about such things: "You know, Father, Mother needs me more than you—she needs all the love that I or anyone else can give. All the love of all the world would not be too much for her."

And then, again, one day on the Old Stag ground as he and his father were about to go out to open the innings for Eventide, he had said inconsequently: "Mother is a woman in a trance. Sometimes I think that Mother is not really there at times, but Something or Somebody that dispossesses the real mother. It is in those moments when that darker something enters that she needs all the love that she can get—something to hold the house of her swept and garnished against her return."

He had never returned to this, but it seemed to his father that the boy knew that he understood.

And the night he had said good-bye on returning to his depot before going across the Channel, he had said to him, Leicester: "Remember, Father, if anything should happen—I only said '*if*'—I shall always be near Mother, even when 'Over There'." But whether he referred to this world or that shadowy world over there on the other side of death, his father did not know. Then the boy had added, fatality in his voice, very gently: "Father, I don't understand much about life and love, but if I should not come back, I want you to watch over and care for Snow-White—and to tell her that wherever or whatever I am, I shall always be near to her." He had turned to go away and then had turned again for a little moment:

"As I said, Father, I don't know much about life—I am too young and inexperienced—and there are some things which I cannot even begin to understand . . ." he had paused a moment and then had added: "Ella, for instance . . . and Snow-White . . . for it is to Ella that my heart clings in this world, on this earth, but it is to Snow-White that my soul is knitted . . . perhaps in some other world—and it may be that there is the love of earth and of heaven, as you wrote in one of your poems, and that mine is the love divided between two women . . . and, Father, may it not be that all our loves of all the women we have loved have something one with the other to do? May there not be a group-soul of love as of other things?"

He, who had never before confided in his father about Ella, had then walked slowly out, and it had seemed to his father, looking after him at the closing door, that in those moments, Sean had made his farewell of something more than of him and Queen Elizabeth Close—in it something irrevocable, of finality.

. . . . .

So the weeks had passed. All that they knew was that the boy had been behind the firing-line in his work on "Signals", and that he had gone across the Channel from the White Cliffs of Dover in the Invasion on D-day. He had said nothing about his duties—that was forbidden—but there did come, at irregular intervals, a few lines to tell them that he was safe and well. He even resumed his letters to Snow-White, sending her one or two and then stopping them as before.

But his mother had said suddenly one October autumnal day after she had lain there reading Sean's last letter. "You know, I feel as though I had gone through all this before—even the very words of this letter I have read in some other time and place—or is it out of both time and place?" And for a moment she had slowly turned her eyes towards her husband and as she did so, there ran through him a little shiver. He knew that Aase was fey, and in those moments he feared her knowledge.

But the letters had come. Sometimes Snow-White, lying palely on her bed in her room upstairs, would receive a letter from the boy—but of the contents of such letters she never spoke. She but became paler and paler as though lying mortally sick of some secret disease, for the doctors they called in could do nothing for her, nor could they say what was the matter with her.

The one woman the little girl desired to see was Ella Cattermole, who would come in nearly every day, always with some little gift for the sick girl. Now a tiny box carved of some rare and curious wood—and now with some rare flowers. But what passed between these two women, one of them a child, who loved the same man, O'Brien Leicester, although not in the same way, who could say?

It was only long after the telegram and with it the event which on that telegram supervened, that Ella had told Leicester of the last conversation she had had with Snow-White. It had happened on the day that the telegram came.

For some weeks, nothing had been received from Sean, but as this was a common occurrence during this period, his father tried not to feel troubled. As for Aase, she said nothing as she lay there, and O'Brien Leicester felt that there was something she was thinking, something even that she knew, which she was hiding.

Ella Cattermole had called that afternoon and had walked in the garden of the Close with him amidst the glory of sunflower and last roses of summer, and the Japanese anemones white-shining against the ancient brick walls, and all the passing glory of an English autumn. The pair of great herons who each evening winged their homeward flight high in the upward air beat slowly above their heads, as they turned their heads towards the sinking sun, golden and crimson amidst the purple, the green and the blue. Everything was passing and the sound of a distant radio playing a Chopin prelude was its requiem.

Ella had looked in on Aase, as she often did, and, in her way, Aase showed that she was pleased to see her, but here had been a time when she would never enter the Leicester home.

They were walking up and down the bricked paths by the side of the

Roman fountain, playing lightly under the setting sun, when they heard Aase call through the open door of her room which gave on to the garden. They paused together to listen.

Again they could hear the call—in it something of urgency, of loneliness.

Ella ran at once towards the house and up the steps of the verandah into the room.

"There is a knock at the door," Aase said, in a sort of quiet desperation, as O'Brien entered the room behind the girl.

"Let me go to the door," said the woman quietly. Afterwards, it had seemed to Leicester that from the beginning she had understood what was waiting at the door of Queen Elizabeth Close. It was war-time, and no maid was in the house.

They heard the opening of the door, the sound of voices, and the rustling of paper. Then the soft closing of the door.

Ella Cattermole stood there, just behind her, Snow-White, wrapped about over her nightdress with some soft white gown, her face white, her garments white—as though she had risen in her grave clothes from her tomb.

Ella looked towards Aase, who then had said with authority:

"I am his mother. Give it to me."

But even as she reached for the yellow whimsy, a little white hand had come round from behind Ella and had said with strange air and usurpation of authority:

"No. Give it to me. He is mine."

And so had taken it and opened it.

Snow-White stood there perfectly still as she read. And then like white flame in wind she had swayed slightly, and then had sunk to the floor.

Sean Leicester had been killed in action.

LII

THE PASSING OF SNOW-WHITE

THE evening of late October was drawing to its close. The last rays of the dying sun found dimly the tiny room in which the girl lay, as she looked through the westing window. A clock ticked somewhere.

The twitterlight drew down as there moved silently past the window one of the owls from the park, flying after the bat which had fluttered past. Over Paradise Row there lay a silence not heavy but light—light as shroud over corpse. A late bird was singing near, singing into the dying sun as though its heart would break.

The girl was lying there as there came a little knock on the door, to be followed by Ella Cattermole, who passed quickly over to the bed to bend over the girl as she dreamed out of life, her head turned to the last rays of the gloamy light.

Ella Cattermole bent still lower over the girl, who, without taking her

eyes away from the casement, sought to feel upwards with her hand for the neck of the woman bending over her. But being too weak, the hand dropped listless.

Ella, sitting on the bed, took the tiny hand to place it about her neck and then had run her own arm beneath the neck of the girl.

And the little bird sang on from time to time, and the clock ticked—and yet time stood still in that 'chanted air.

The girl was whispering something.

"I saw Sean, Ella, just before you came in. He was standing over there against the window, his hand on the curtain, and looking out into the west, as though he were waiting for something." She was silent a little, as Ella held her closer to her breast.

"Yes, darling," was all that she said.

". . . and then he had turned, dressed in his uniform of Signals as he was, his dear eyes looking straight into mine, and so had smiled a little. He did not speak. It was not necessary."

"Yes, darling . . ."

"You loved him, did you not, Ella? Loved him in your way—not in the way you love O'Brien . . . but, just in your way?"

"Yes, dearest . . . yes, I loved Sean, the darling boy that he was."

"And he loved you, Ella. Whenever anyone spoke of you, his soul would come into his eyes—and it was that which broke Snow-White's heart." She smiled a little.

"He loved you heart and soul, Ella Cattermole, and I also love you if only because Sean loved you. Queer that us two women—and me only a child of a woman you might say"—she smiled a little wan—"should both love him so much and both each in her own way, and that I shouldn't be jealous or envious of you. Queer?"

Poor Snow-White's head began to sag a little on Ella's arm as she whispered the last word. There passed through the woman who clasped her a tiny *tweep* of apprehension.

Then, as though she had come out of a deep sleep, the little maid had said: "But Over There, we shall understand, and, as the Bible says, 'shall know even as we are known'. Then, Ella dear, we shall know how and why it was that Ella and Snow-White both loved Sean Leicester and why he loved us both—but neither in the way that he was beloved. It's too much for a little girl like me to understand."

"Yes, darling. It's too much for any of us to understand," the woman had replied, as she held the little girl to her breast as though afraid she would escape her.

"But all of it is right, Ella. Nothing wasted, nothing lost. And though for you has been the Sean of earth, and what O'Brien calls 'the Outward Seeming', for Snow-White is the deeper Sean that stands behind—that other self that waits for me Over There."

The girl lifted her head a very little to look again towards the window and the last rays of the dying sun, and then had sunk it again as though it were too heavy for her.

Even as it dropped, she had lifted it again for her, most surprisingly, to

sit up in her bed and to cry, as she looked out towards the casement, with shining eyes, as though she were speaking to someone:

"All right, Sean. Snow-White is coming . . ." and then as she pushed away the arm of the woman who supported her:

"Let me go! Let me go to him! I have seen him!"

And so had fallen back into the waiting arm.

LIII

HANGMAN'S NOOSE

THEN for O'Brien Leicester had followed the days and nights which would be with him to his grave—and beyond. For being a man of intelligence, he knew that the earth-story did not finish with the passing from that earth and that, Over There, we took up the bitter-sweet tale of life and of life's partner—death.

He knew that neither in this world nor in the world to come would he be free from Ella Cattermole, any more than he would be free from Aase, his wife. Nor did he wish to be free.

He had learnt his earth-lesson that life was amalgamed of death and delight. That the delight lay in the alternation of joy and pain, evil and good, and that sorrow, as every Elizabethan-Irishman at least knew, had its own peculiar joy and titillation. Sorrow as well as joy was the spice of life, with death at the end as the supreme tit-bit—a door opening on new life and new experience.

Yet was it a nightmare. For when we poor humans are in the midst of our pain, we cannot imagine either surcease or joy.

First there was the battle with himself and with his conscience, such as it was, as to whether he should speak or keep silence about the scarab. Then there had entered the police after that horrid inquest.

But the police had sent to Scotland Yard for the C.I.D., and what had been a simple "suicide" now became as simple a "murder". For the Yard specialist had stated that this man had been dead some time before he had been hung up on his beam. And he had proved it by those demoniac means of the post mortem specialist.

Next, it seemed that the slip-knot had been tied peculiarly—in this case, as the Indian thug slip-knotted his victims into the next world, by the craft through which the knot was twisted back on itself.

After that, it was a natural course to arrest Honoria Lackplace for the murder after she had given contradictory and tumultuous evidence at the inquest. And that "active and intelligent" officer, Constable Jorkins, had been able to prove, and prove with relish, that Theophilus and Honoria "had had words" on various occasions and that there had been a sort of feud carried on between them for some time ever since Honoria had charged him with lifting or stealing part of a collection for Air Raid Prevention—he being the last person seen near the plate or box. Dazzled by the white

light of publicity which had fallen upon him, and with the name of Jorkins looming in the "Sensational Sundays", it was fearful and wonderful to watch the Guardian of Eventidian morale preen his moment on the stage. Indeed, had he wished, he could have been comfortably drunk every night whilst the trial lasted and at somebody else's expense, but to all attempts at loosening his tongue, the impeccable Jorkins turned a dry throat and a deaf ear.

Poor Honoria was stunned when the detective officer arrested her. She could no longer even call upon her gods who had deserted her. All she could do was to sit in her cell, melancholy-mad and rocking herself to and fro.

Nor did she deny that she had taken up thuggery *con amore* and that Professor Ramswaddle or "Swami" Ramswaddle, as he was known, had taught her not only the science of deep breathing and Indian lore, but how to tie the thuggish loop which was identical with that of the handkerchief which had been left *in situ* by Leicester for examination by the police, when he had cut the body down.

Also, she admitted that she not hated, but pitied, the dead man, who, she still insisted, had purloined the funds of the A.R.P., and if she had never been able to prove it—why, your honour, that but showed the cunning of the man himself.

And so Honoria lay in jail, or as *The Bugle* pompously pointed out, was "incarcerated", and so Eventide and Paradise Row had something really to talk about. For what was the tremendous trifle of a World War to a real live murder in your own midst?

And then, when it had looked very black indeed for poor Honoria, out of the silence there had come a telephone-call from a woman who had gone to the police to give herself up after having telephoned "The Yard" to ask them would they kindly send a man to take her, or would it save them trouble if she came on herself direct to the Yard?

And then the trial that was the seven days' wonder with a full free confession from the murderess—"and couldn't you see that she had the face of a murderess and the very moment I lay eyes on her I said to myself: 'Maria, that woman has done Something.' "

And into this horror Leicester himself had, not so much been dragged, as intruded. The scarab had been found, and the story of how O'Brien Leicester had found the body told by the gentleman himself, as the judge said, "with the frankness and clarity we should expect from so distinguished a man". But as he looked at the woman in the dock, tall and pale and really distinguished, he felt mean and "bloody". He was placing that slender neck in the noose in spite of himself. Nor had he kept back anything. He had told his story evenly and clearly, even though every word was warp and woof for the hangman's noose.

And the woman in the dock had never once looked towards him. She had just admitted everything Mr. Leicester had said. It was the simple truth. But when she was asked for her motives in killing her butler and general factotum, she resolutely refused reply. Nor could any appeal by judge or counsel affect her decision to keep silence. "It might make all the difference between hanging and a commutation to a life sentence," her counsel had urged.

"I have been suffering a life sentence ever since I came into this world," she had said quietly. "Also, I want to die. My story is ended."

And there came to Leicester the solemn farce of the black cap, and the judge's portentous admonitions as though, like a Saint Peter, he held the keys of life and death. And the curious attention of the spectators and their ghoul interest in "how the woman in the dock would take it". And their tears—just as foolish and as malign as their curiosity. And all the paraphernalia of judicial murder.

And the tea that was drunk. And the talk that was talked. And "The Robe of Glory", still on its feet in that moment, did a flourishing business at all hours of the day and night as the *habitués* discussed juicily the succulent details of the trial. And it was surprising how many of these men and women, poor things, like the Woman, caught in the trap of life, who had known all along that she had "done something" . . . and "I never liked her, *you* know what I mean—she wasn't like other women—she gave you the creeps."

And then the last time of all, when he went to the narrow cubicle in the jail out of which she was to be taken on the morrow's morn "to meet her God", as they said with a certain blasphemous comfort and satisfaction. She had wanted to see him. And because she was already a dead woman, dead to the world of life and light, but also to the world of pain and darkness, they had permitted him to come in to her.

There, sitting face to face, her hands in his, she had told him her story. And what a story! A story that went back two or three generations.

The story of the Cattermole family. Of the young earl who had had his pleasure with a pretty housemaid in the castle—but this had been years and years ago, and all these people, the wicked earl and the pretty housemaid, had long since returned to Mr. Wodes' ashes to ashes. And when the wicked young earl had had his pleasure with the maid, and her little baby had been born, and the earl, being not only wicked but noble, instead of following the custom of his forbears to cast out "the woman who had tempted", had taken care of her and even had loved her, until her baby was born, she dying in childbed.

And being still a noble earl, the young Earl of Cattermole had placed the child under the care of the then youngish butler of the family, one Theophilus Passover, who when she had reached the age of seduction, had seduced her, Ella Cattermole being the result, and this little mother of sixteen years also dying in childbed. For even butlers, like the earls they serve, must also have their pleasure as their pain.

So Ella was a Cattermole after all, and from her grandfather had got that distinction and charm which had followed the Cattermoles down the pages of history.

Yet, from the beginning, when she was a tiny tot of four, playing about the servants' quarters of Cattermole Castle, Ella Cattermole, *née* Lovelace, had hated her father, whom she did not know as her father but as her guardian, appointed by the family to take care of her.

But he had loved her.

Loved the child with a sort of inburning conscience-stricken affection, as

though in her he saw all the wrong he had done to her mother, who had been placed in his care. And as time went on, this Theophilus Passover had allowed himself to be consumed with a passion for the child, which usurped him, body, blood and soul. And as such things may be, the more he loved the child, the more the child hated him. One-way love.

In vain did he seek by cajolery and sweets and toys to win the little girl's affection. She would have none of them. And still she played about the servants' quarters of the gloomy highland castle, and the servants loved her and to her were father and mother and friend.

And as she grew in grace and wisdom, did the little girl in the dark castle, of which she had been made free, seek to read the story on the Cattermole walls and in the Cattermole library. She read and read and read. She looked and looked and looked. And she was a strange little girl—a girl who might have been a second Charlotte Bronte, had the wheel of life taken the right turn at the right time. But it was not to be.

And often would the reigning earl find the child hiding herself behind one of the great bookcases in the library with a book. And knowing the child's history and birth, the reigning tyrant, who was also a noble tyrant, fell in love with the little maid, and, as was the way of the House, took from her her pearl of great price, in a day when pearls were pearls and not "Orients" and paste, and maidenheads were not for sale, at reduced prices for "damaged goods".

So had the little maid learned the ways of mice and men, until that day when her lord and master, for whom she had come to care, though not to love, told her the story of her birth and of the young earl, now dust of the earth, who had seduced her grandmother much as he had seduced her, and then of how, instead of a scion of the Cattermoles with the rights of *prima noctis*, doing his duty, of the wickedness of Theophilus, a base butler, who had done it instead. And at this, the noble reigning tyrant was quite indignant, as is the way of the male, no' le or ignol le.

And, as is the way of women, whether Ella Cattermoles or other, the little girl's hate for Theophilus her father took new shades of darkness and of meaning, and it was then that there first entered her still childish mind the idea of ridding the earth and herself of this monster. Of this red-eyed, shrinking old man, with the veined head and the strands of grey carefully taken over the hairless skull, the man who would gaze dumbly at her, his soul and love in his red-rimmed eyes.

Then had entered Arthur Kasterling.

He had come to the castle with the son of the house, on a hunting party, which talked stags, and stalks and telescopic sights all hours of the day and night. A tall, dark, slender young captain of the King's armies at that time —fire in the face—blood in the eye. A male man fit to make the blood stir of an Ella Cattermole, much more any woman of them all.

And she had fallen crazily in love with him, she who in that castle was suffered as a sort of assistant to the housekeeper. And from the first, he had fallen crazily in love with her, in the way of a man with a maid, of which Solomon wrote.

And so one would have expected this love-story to go as all such stories

are supposed to go, when they are stories compounded of rank and position and humble sufferance.

But this story did not go that way. For Arthur Kasterling, who had begun in careless dalliance with the tall slender beauty, ended by being caught in his own snare and so far falling in love with her, that he wished above all things to marry her and to make her Mrs. Kasterling and be damn' well done with it!

And so they were secretly engaged, and they would meet in the glen of the waterfall and on the purple heather of the mountain side—often in the wee sma' hours when conscience is supposed to be most active and so often is not. And happiness was theirs—for the first and, as it happened, the last time.

For from the very beginning, Theophilus had hated the tall dark flashing captain of the King's Guard. Envied him his power with his daughter. Was jealous of him in a way that he had never been jealous of the reigning earl—for so are butlers—and where in the reigning earl it was natural that he should enjoy his daughter, became in a half-pay captain an impudence not to be endured.

So did the jealous Theophilus write the letter to the dark captain to tell him the facts of Ella's birth, and of her living with the noble earl his friend, and of everything that such a man could think. He did not need to invent, and he did not invent—and his letter carried the franking of truth which is its own justification and damnation.

So was it, that Arthur Kasterling had suddenly packed his bags and left the castle and the jolly hunting party, and so had vanished from the ken of Ella. And so had the girl, her heart broken, gone out into the wide wide world and over the hills and far away to become of the tribe of the adventuress and to break many hearts and many pockets, and to take with what she felt was full right, the name of Cattermole. And so had she in the long last, when her father had been dismissed with ignominy for theft from the castle of the Cattermoles, and when he had come to her to beg her for a roof—so had she malignly agreed, in order that his life might become torture long drawn out—just like a play.

And the rest he, O'Brien Leicester, knew. How Kasterling, unable to forget Ella, now crazy once more to marry her and to live happy ever after, had come back only to find that what had been two-way love now was one-way. That Ella Cattermole had not forgotten him but had ceased to care more about him than the ticking of her little wrist-watch. For so are women, even the Ella Cattermoles.

So had he gone back to the wars, V.C. and all, to die under the chancy spray from a German machine-gun, after wiping out its crew with his hand grenades, for Arthur Kasterling was a fighter.

And so, without plan and without thought, she had found O'Brien Leicester and with him all that she had hoped to find as a tiny maid roaming the libraries of the castle. She had found her Prince Charming, who also had the wisdom of life and the knowledge of death. And, again as such women will, had yielded herself to him, body and blood and soul, and for ever and ever, Amen!

It was then she had found the letter. Theophilus, having the same hate and jealousy for Leicester that he once had had for Arthur Kasterling, had set his crafty brain to work to break him from Ella. He could not bear that any man should come closer to his daughter than he himself. He would have killed them all had he dared.

The letter which she had found in his den, which he had begun to write to Leicester—a terrible letter. To tell Leicester that his daughter was an adventuress and an evil woman, and that she had given herself to many men and that she would drag him, Leicester, down as she had done others. That to the now dead Kasterling she had been mistress, and that she lived only for men and money.

In his madness, he was prepared even to dirty his own nest and his own daughter in order, at all costs, to separate her from Leicester—and in so doing had signed his own death warrant. And so, she had done what she had to do in that den and the wheel of hate had turned full circle.

. . . . .

And there in that little darkened place, with the shadow of the gallows already hanging above it, the Woman and the Man sat side by side and face to face, the woman telling, and the man listening.

And when she had done with the telling, and the warder had called through the grating that time was up—as though time for them could ever cease—the Woman rose and placed her arms about the neck of the man in the old way and had kissed him on his eyes and forehead, but not on his lips, and so had turned to her pallet and the hanging noose.

So had ended the earthly story of Ella Cattermole—an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, which might find its continuation on the other side of Death's dark shining flood.

LIV

PEACE

O'Brien Leicester, coming out of the dark prison, walked through the London night along the Embankment which for so many had been the *via dolorosa*. The mud flats shone dully beneath the misty moon who veiled her sight from men and women on this night, dull-gleaming on the darkened waters and dark-flooding London Town from lofty firmament.

The new bridge at Blackfriars magnificently spanned the darkling waters, to show their twin lights to the stray longshoreman far beneath. On the Surrey side, the mud flats and the waters lost themselves in the shadowy outline of the façades over there. London, not loveliest, but queen of cities.

Over there, he could see that irregular pile in the cell of which the woman was now asleep before her last awakening, when the grey dawn would steal over the London Town which even the years of war had been unable to change.

How cruel was not life!

Big Ben rolled out the hour of eleven—strokes that boomed sonorous from the tower which still kept watch and ward as though no bomb and no blitz had ever fallen on the old city, as they had boomed serene during the long years of war. St. Paul's in the distance still held its golden cross bravely into the upper air. "The City" was still. But the City was still there. For, death or life, business still was "business".

How unchangeable was London and how unchangeable were her people. And how unchangeable was life.

As he sped through the night to Eventide from Paddington, this unchange in the English people and the English landscape once more invaded him. Neither Hitler nor hell could ever change these stalwarts, who never remembered, never forgot, and perhaps never learned. He had been speaking at the Universities about England as spiritual leader of that Anglo-Saxon Confederation which he had once hoped would lead the world. But would it? Would they? Would that Empire of which he had once been the mordant hater find its newer empire and newer victory in the realm of spirit rather than in that of matter?

Would the men and especially the women of the post-war world find their places in the sun to lead the worlds of Asia and Africa out of their karmic fatality and age-long sleep, into the light of the West? For light no longer came from the East but from the West.

Would work be found in the world that was coming for the Ella Cattermoles whose young ardent lives had been wasted in petty personalities and in petty problems? Or would the England and the British Empire of which she was the heart go down into the dust in which lay the loveliness of Greece and the brute power of an Imperial Rome, and all those other empires that had been founded not on spirit but on matter? That Rome which had lost herself in the glut of power and that Greece which had lost herself for the love of a "line"?—that line which, in her cold chaste temples, had been the mausoleum of spirit.

And now, running from Thames to Thames, from the Thames of Westminster to that of Eventide, he could see dreaming before him the Berkshire countryside, and the tiny white cottages, and the Hill o' Dreams where only the other day he had lain with the woman whose warm body and warm lips would so soon be chilled in death. Yet had life to go on and to be lived.

There swung the great river, rolling onwards to the Westminster he had left and to the sea, with copse and 'shaw", reed and backwater, along her broad bosom stirring to the gentle rocking of boats. There he swung past cot and manor, castle and church, down to the sea in which all would one day be engulfed. Father Thames, like all about him, unchanged by war.

As he came out of the main street and away from the old church, with its white-gleaming stones, to turn into Paradise Row, he could see, facing him calmly, the long but not unfriendly line of Georgian houses, with their high narrow façades, the half moon gleaming upon the panes, scarce one of which had been cracked through all those awful years of Blitz and explosive hate.

There came back to him that day at the opening of the war when the plane had come out of the blue to affright - a plane which in the years after

they had learned was no Nazi but one of their own. That day when Mr. Wodes, leading his Cohorts of Death to their final victory, had stood inflexibly there, behind him the corpse and the carriages and all the panoply of Death's Parade indomitably ranged against hell . . . and perhaps against heaven. Beings untouchable by fate or Nazi . . . even by God.

The tall silent façades now stood insolently there in the light of the chastened moon, as they had stood for two hundred and twenty-five years. Untouchable by fate or force. Perhaps inside them, with their instinct to hide, a few ceilings loosened or even down here and there, for Paradise must conceal her scars from hell. But virtually untouched, unbroken.

With half Europe mutilated, battle-scarred, Paradise Row still held her proud head to the stars, now showing faintly above, gleaming glassily at that moon. And perhaps there were spiritual forces which even Adolf Hitler could not hurt. But were these immobile indomitables spiritual? Or were they something else—something neutral? Compromisers of life.

Perhaps it might be written on England's coffin: "She lived and died of compromise."

Might it not be that Paradise Row was the microcosm of the macrocosm that was the British Empire? An Empire and a Row that never hated, but that never grew?- and hate and love were both essential to growth, its systole and diastole. A people neutral to life but active to death? A people who had never learned to hate because they had never learned to love? A people who feared happiness more than sorrow.

A people parochial rather than universal – national rather than international. Shepherds without crooks, into whose hands had been given the control of a world by the sheer inertia of that world or of the Power Behind that world—whatever that power might be. The Power to which Eventide, as Westminster, gave lip service, but which as living reality and living passion, they felt nothing.

Perhaps it was that the Eventides and the Paradise Rows had to pass—and that one day they would pass-- to make room for the youth they hated—for the Englishman and the Englishwoman of the post-war world. But what sign was there of their passing? When every brick and tile and slate was in place after Hitler had sent bomb and blast, "doodle-bug", incendiary and rocket gun, against that Row, which for him, Leicester, as he stood there at the corner looking its length, was the very centre of Empire.

Yet changes there were.

Down there, just outside the bounds of the Row proper, he could see the gutted roof of the Wilderness, its naked rafters showing to the night skies, with its owner already getting ready for a pauper's grave, and his scion, last link of a noble house, dead by his own hand, because he could not face the New World that was coming. There would be many like that in these days when the stately homes of England were becoming garages and "Good Pull-Ups for Carmen".

And behind him on the left, the famous Parish Hall, where they had held their Councils of War, but never those of peace. And just across the way and a little to the left, the blackened hole where once had stood "The Robe of Glory", which had been the meeting place of the social life of the Eventide

world, a parliament of man to which even some of the Paradisers had begun to come in a day when Class rubbed shoulders with Mass. There it stood like blackened tooth in broken socket, as the flying death had fallen on to it in the very last phase of the flying-bomb and had snuffed out the life of every man-jack and woman-jill of them all, as they had stood around the high bar with its brass footrest, or sat at the little tables, as they drank their double-brandies and pints of ale and talked about cabbages and kings . . . and the Eventide which to them was more important than all the rest of Europe, dead or alive.

The flying death had come out of the night and that was the end of "The Robe" and of its glory. Still, like the Row itself, it had served its purpose. Perhaps nothing was wasted, nothing lost.

But there, be sure, still stood the ghosts of the past. Mike Malone still defied the British Empire—and Buck Galanty still flung Shakespeare into the teeth of a decadent petticoatless world of jazz and revue. And the gallant little Mrs. "Kish" Chicks still challenged her world and death—that death which Mr. Wodes had caparisoned and cloaked for so long, only in the end for himself to be gathered into the capacious folds of the Scythed Man in the Cloak.

And there in the shadows, with the moonlight streaming between the broken walls, sat Mr. and Mrs. Bull, mine host and hostess, with young Mr. Bull, still strong in the wrist, pulling pots of "four 'arf" out of the beer engine, whilst Mr. de Burgh and his girl-friend, Mrs. Jack Ketch, sit apart and silent in the corner behind the bar.

And our Mrs. Mallory still brought round to the "Bottles and Jugs" department a discreetly shaded and shawled half gallon water jug for the beer which she affected and talked as of yore about her "innards". And Mr. and Mrs. Cocklepill, be sure, Punch and Judied as they sat at *their* particular table and laughed at everything and everybody, including themselves.

The flying death might have taken all these on that night of winter, but they were still there. *They would always be there.* For Eventide never gave up anything—least of all her dead. Eventide would always be there—and England.

He could almost hear the ghostly voices coming to him on the tiny night-breeze as they sang together "*There will always be an England!*" Perhaps. And perhaps—for what could he, O'Brien Leicester, know and how dared he to judge?—there was about England and about the Paradise Row which of her had once been the very heart, something fine and deathless. Something which, like all things mortal, might have to change—but a mortality having within it the stuff of immortality.

And Our Queen, there at the bottom of the Row through the tall gates of the Bowers, now retired from public life, no longer gave her tea-parties, and though still in the land of the living, was factually as dead as the Lord Lovem who at this hour was fast asleep in the Home for Incurables, he also not being able to bear the birth of the new world of after the war.

And still along the fronts, he could hear the cry of "Come on Coffee!" and watch the little shifty-eyed man, one Alexander Honeypot, *né* Botty, now doing time in the very same prison out of which he, Leicester, had just

come, and in it finding, like so many others, surcease from trouble and a home from home and that time was not so very hard to "do", in a retreat where even a life-sentence was but one long day and one long night—and heigh-ho! for heaven or hell or whatever should next come to torment or delight. And the black-eyed white-faced Scotswoman who had disappeared into her native highlands after the trial of her beloved who had been "sweeter than honeycomb, lovelier t an lilies", she possessing her soul, and even her passion-torn body, in patience, and who waited the day of his coming out.

And the Little Old Lady of the Curls would still totter into ill-considered doors on her errands of a mercy that was constant, but like the gentle dews from heaven, unrestrained. And the battle between the clans of the Lackplaces and the Pompadours, over their cats and dogs and chickens and what not, when the war was over would still continue to give out their alarums and their stratagems to trouble Paradise. And the six daughters of Lady Lackplace and the four ditto of Mrs. Pompadour, for the Naughty Girl had found a beautiful and Good Man, would still be trying to "hook a husband", as Lady Lackplace would say, as they dragged their ill-considered length of Pomp and Circumstance from the war into the post-war peace . . . if there were to be such peace.

And Mr. Valentine Windermere, whom the Man with the Cloak and Scythe appeared to have forgotten, would still chuckle malignly over his long malacca, and wonder why young Valentine had taken his final bow at so early an age. Whilst the Reverend Robin, more rubicund than ever and fuller of worms, like gloated redbreast, would feebly wonder at the antics of Serena Gadfly and Honoria Lackplace as he himself antucked upon his altar.

For these two ladies, whatever else came to Eventide, would, like the brook, go on for ever. Miss Gadfly would still delve into the stars and sparkle with the spirits, and Honoria would still take her high dives into the cosmos, returning to Mother Earth trailing her clouds of glory. For there were some things and people that, like their Maker, were the same yesterday, today and for ever.

And those other pale ghosts, the middle-aged lovers at Happy Shadows, that vast and lovely Queen Anne House which he saw as he looked the length of the façades the other way, who now were happy shadows themselves together with their s litary product—that tiny baby who had put his little weary head out into this sorrowful world only to withdraw it again and to go back into that world of shadows which, maybe, was the real world, and to take with him the father and mother who could not bear to lose him but had to go back with him. For they had died in the gas—a gas not that of Hitler.

It seemed to him, Leicester, as he stood there that midnight that he was in the world outside life and that he himself was a ghost looking at ghosts. The ghosts which shadowed past him as he stood there, and which, long after he had been gathered to his fathers, would still continue to pit-pat their way along the imperishable Row. But perhaps by that time a Row with new faces and, however impossible it seemed, with new minds.

. . . . .

It was as a cloud came over the moon that Leicester sighed and turned into the Row towards Queen Elizabeth Close. He walked through the high beaten iron gate and walked up the four steps to his front door, fumbling for his key as he went. Then he had let himself in, and so had passed to the room on the left in which his wife would be lying.

Out of that room, the murmur of voices. And once more there came to him, incredibly, that he was a dead man entering a dead house—a dreamer living amongst dreams. And once more it came to him, and not incredibly, that perhaps life itself was but a dream.

As he opened the door of the darkened room, he saw the soft glow of the radio and in the shadow of the corner, held to her couch, the outline of his wife, Aase, as she lay there, eyes staring at ceiling, as always. So it had been, and so, for thousands and thousands of years, he felt it would be. . . .

". . . send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God Save the King!"

The voices, thousands of them, were coming through the radio out of the darkness. It was as though the heavenly choirs were singing.

There was a silence—a silence in which he seemed to hear the echoes of the voices. The golden light of the radio gleamed dimly on the face of the woman on the couch. There was a hush—in it the flutter of wings.

And then, incredibly, the silence was broken by the woman:

"Peace has been declared. The 'Cease Fire' will sound within the hour. The World-War is ended—but the war of the world goes on . . ."

The voices had come again:

". . . send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God Save the King!"

THE END