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Miracle on Sinai

By Osbert Sitwell

Poems

ARGONAUT AND JUGGERNAUT
OUT OF THE FLAME
ENGLAND RECLAIMED
THE COLLECTED SATIRES AND POEMS
OF OSBERT SITWELL
POOR YOUNG PEOPLE (with Edith and Sacheverell
Sitwell) Illustrated

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MIRACLE ON SINAI

A SATIRICAL NOVEL

by

OSBERT SITWELL

" The Vision of Christ which thou dost see
Is my vision's chiefest enemy.
Yours is the healer of mankind,
Mine speaks in parables to the blind."

DUCKWORTH

3 Henrietta Street W.C.2

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DEDICATION I
TO THOSE
WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

NOTICE

None of the characters in *Miracle on Sinai* exist, have existed, or ever will exist.

The author is glad to be able to take this opportunity of offering his thanks to Professor Plaudit and the Reverend Philip Fosdyck for the invaluable aid they have so generously given him.

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The few Arab words that follow occur from time to time in the pages of this book:

Araki—a liqueur prepared from dates by the monks of St. Katherine's on Mount Sinai.

Delfil—the *he gin* of Egypt, a superior breed of riding camels.

Duhr—the midday prayer of the followers of the Moham-medan faith.

Jebeliyeh—literally, mountain people from Jebel.

Nawdmis—curious stone huts, built in the form of beehives, found in the peninsula of Sinai.

Ras—a promontory or peak.

fowdra—a small Beduin tribe which inhabits the peninsula of Sinai. The name means, literally, "Folk of the Mountain Tor," i.e. Mount Sinai.

Wadi—a valley.

Wakil—the prior of a monastery.

THEMES ANNOUNCED ON THE TRUMPET

" O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called."

—From the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to Timothy (vi. 20)

" . . . And beyond this, at or near the apex of the evolutionary pyramid of which space-time is the base, the quality of deity—the highest of all—emerges in us the latest products of evolution up to date."

" Deity is an emergent quality of the highest natural systems that we know, i.e. some human persons."

—G. Lloyd Morgan's *Emergent Evolution*.

BOOK I: A.M.

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CHAPTER I

BIRD'S EYE

IT was early, though not too early, on a May morning ; the very hour when in England the sun, after for some hours attempting, in the manner of a hard-working and never totally disillusioned charwoman, to brush away the cobweb mists, has finally taken sad departure to other and more rewarding mansions ; when pet dogs bark and snarl under the lilacs and laburnums - their mauve, white, and yellow plumes and drooping feathers seeming finery out of place among so much greyness - or snap at the aproned legs of tradesmen from beneath dusty laurels, while, above, larks, linnets, and many other mousy favourites of the British Public can dimly be perceived bumping and fluttering among the dirty draperies of northern skies. Here, however, the sun had sprung like a lion into the arena and a machine leapt gaily up through air, transparent, blue, and otherwise untenanted save by vultures. Very quiet was the world, these clear heavens and the earth below, heavily strewn with sand that muffled every footfall as though in deference to some impending death ; very quiet save for the purring of this speck. But within the plane, so comprehensive and inevitable were the vibrations, the humming and roaring which proceeded from it, that to the occupants they became a personal and all-pervading silence like deafness ;

the condition to which, it was evident, all men were born in the air, though tubes and ear-pieces enabled it to be overcome artificially, and in this instance caused the continuous texture of sound to be punctuated by little volleys of questions, shot at random but sharp as arrows in their flight.

" Say, Cliffy, are we yet in Old Man Mose's Land of Miracles ?" So, once more, Ninette de Nina demanded of Clifford Hearnshaw. Adjusting the tube, she shouted down it : but that wise mechanical serpent still offered no answer. . . . Perhaps it was out of order again, or perhaps - she scarcely formed the question even to herself - her new husband was already tired of talking ? Experience had taught her. Men were like that. . . .

Besides, he belonged to the silent, strong-chinned type. (" I know the type : the stronger the chin, the weaker the conversation," as FitzK., who was no doubt jealous, had averred at the last wedding-breakfast.) A brave pilot and a good husband was Clifford - not that he was either as handsome (and here she lost herself in reverie) as Tito - Tea-toe - with his Goya whiskers and lithe, Andalusian waist, or as musical as dear Conrad (he was *sweet*), or as good at tennis as Lulu. He possessed no title to offer her. He was not so amusing and go-ahead as FitzKelly. (Did *he* belong to the talkies, or to the far-off, silent days ? No dumb-bell that, a real high-flier who could drink synthetic gin and high-balls with the best, and yet never let it affect his memory or deportment, so that she knew he could always be trusted to make just the same wise-cracks to-day as yesterday, keeping the men in a roar and the women in a flutter) . . . not so

go-ahead, then, as FitzKelly, nor as generous as Lew, her first husband (he had been . . . well, a character). . . . Yes, Americans, she knew, were always said to make the best husbands, attentive but easy : nevertheless, taking them point by point, one thing with another, to her mind Cliffy and Tea-toe were the two most accomplished. Tea-toe, being a Spaniard, was, like all Latins, a better lover than husband : but Clifford, though an Englishman, was the real thing ; no necking, scented, crumpet-munching sugar-pup, for there wasn't a single bronco-busting cowboy who was a patch on him. Gee, he could get the big, he-man stuff over ! . . . Somewhat on these lines was built up Ninette's reverie ; primitive temple to Priapus, even though she did not recognise it as such.

And then, thinking of her husband made her wish to talk to him again. . . . But about what ? . . . She squared up to the view, and it gave her inspiration. Once more she essayed the tube. " Clifford, Clifford, do you get me ? " she barked down it sharply. " I'm sick to death of hollerin' atcha like a prodoocer ; but I waant to tell yew that this here scenic pannerrammer puts me vurry forcibly in mind of the occasion when me and Ed. Junior played the lead in *Sultan's Retinoo*, a gran' spektakkeler drammer of love and lust in ole, colorful A aby." . . . But the little bombs of her speech fell back on her, even through all the rattling and flapping, for no reply came, and the tilting, helmcted head in front betrayed no symptom of interest. . . . Evidently he just *would not* talk any more : that must be it. . . . So she looked round and under her again at the stupendous prospect, which bumped now nearer and now further below.

The sun had not yet donned his suit of steel armour : the light was soft and feathery, or, from this height, seemed to flow over the undulations of sand as if the earth lay flooded beneath a lake, which, though shallow and translucent, had yet miraculously covered, too, the mountains, so that the whole world was revealed through a golden and a liquid sheen. Or, again, it was as though a great artist were varnishing a picture, at the dry canvas of which one has often glanced before. Notwithstanding, now it was unfamiliar : for colour-passages in it that ever previously appeared dull had become stressed of a sudden, thereby gaining an importance and beauty hitherto undreamed of save in the comprehending eye of their Creator. The vast expanse of sand was not ashen as yet, lacked altogether that leprous tone with which noon paints all desert places, but seemed invested, instead, with a proud and leonine tawinness, alone broken every now and again by the clumps, dots, and streaks of the oases, which speckled it with the darkest and, so it seemed, most unliving green, while, majestically hemming in the arrow-headed shape of this immense tract, a range of mountains, their tops crenellated, ripped and torn into double, treble, and even quintuple peaks, glowed with a steady radiance, their various improbable formations of red, purple, and yellow, of green and amethyst, not yet having attained that cindery, incandescent quality which the stronger light of subsequent hours imparted to them. One thick cloud, she noticed, lay upon the top of a mountain beneath, by the side of two small white buildings. Far away, behind the whole mass, quivered two sequined arms of water, and beyond, on the left, the Arabian mountains could very faintly be

distinguished fading into a further and strangely discoloured sea. . . . But then, Ninette reflected, after the glorious Pacific coast and nordic-eyed ocean of her own country, naturally all others would appear discoloured ; and she turned her eye disdainfully away from the Red Sea. . . . Now she swept the nearer prospect again, and could isolate, at the foot of a mountain, the tangled, multi-coloured domes and turrets of a large hotel. She could even see, attached to it, a small building which must be a church ; little red squares which were hard tennis-courts and the sand-bunkers that proclaim a tropical golf-course. " How cute it looks ! Why, it might be the Taaj Mahaaäl ! " she screamed down the tube, as they bumped and glided nearer to the land. " No newspaper men and street cars here : nothing but just space, peace, and sunshine."

CHAPTER II

MAN'S EYE

BUT, alas, from that point down below where T. L. Enfelon was endeavouring to read his guide-book in the shelter of a Saracenic verandah, the prospect and impression, interior as much as exterior, were very different. "Cute" was the last word he, in his present mood, would have applied to them. High up, above and behind the hotel, reared the contorted bulk, distant and yet overpowering, of Jebel Musa, the Mount of Moses, or, as it was said, Mount Sinai (though how could that be certain ?) : further away, again, showed Jebel Zebir and Jebel Katherin, enormous twin fangs of one mountain ; while, in front, the desert, its tents of sand presenting an unending and monotonous undulation of, as it were, dust and ashes, extended for ever beyond and below the limits of the garden. (You felt, he thought, as much shut in by the boundless freedom of this great space on one side as by the barrier of mountains on the other.) And now he observed that the curious thick cloud, the only one in the sky, which he had noticed there for the last five days, still clung securely to the top of Jebel Musa, screening from sight the chapel and mosque, and throwing, even, a shadow down on the walled bulk of the monastery and the precipitous cliffs over which it floated. It was a cloud that darkened towards its centre, and yet somehow

produced the effect of enclosing deep within it a kernel of radiance.

As for the garden, it was but a miniature oasis, wherein, from raised paths bordered by intertwined and knotted clumps of cactus - their fleshy serrated suckers of a rusty red resembling those of an octopus, save that these were immobile, green, and transparent, and instead of eyes bore scarlet and evil flowers - it was possible to contemplate a curiously beautiful but very false luxuriance of green. Huge apricots and figs, little groves of lemon, pomegranate, and orange, banana-trees shaped to the pattern of overgrown cabbages, but with the edges of their smooth, green leaves *cut horizontally by the hot desert winds as though a child had been snipping at them with a pair of scissors, grew beneath the tufted shade of lanky palm trees. (Near by, mocking them, were two or three machines for drawing water ; tall legs, balancing large revolving metal wheels which, with their circular form and their broad, knife-blade spokes, exactly parodied, he thought, the natural vegetation, constituting, as it seemed, electric artificial palms.) All the trees, all the fruits they bore, were larger, much larger, than elsewhere : and raised paths, two or three feet above the level, provided new, interesting perspectives of mammoth green shapes, flashing light and dense shade, along which the eye could lose itself. But their beauty was essentially one of foliage : and only here and there, where the crossing and juxtaposition of leaves made exotic patterns, were they thinly sprinkled by the large red flowers of the pomegranate, that seemed to kindle the darkness under them with a crimson flickering of candles, by the ivory rosettes and

light bouquets - so pure and out of place among all this hot, lascivious growth - of orange and lemon, or more darkly punctuated by the enormous, drooping, purple-black blossoms of the banana. . . . Yet this singular loveliness, Enfelon knew, soon palled, and you began, scarcely realising the process at work, to regard it merely as a sinister home for spiders, snakes, and scorpions : it lured you on, forgetting, and then a faintest rustling in the trees, or a movement, almost imperceptible, along the ground, and, acting on instinct, you shied away from it like a horse.

" Space, peace, and sunshine." Thus, privileged to eavesdrop, even in the air, we heard Ninette de Nina sum up the prospect from above. So much for space. Concerning the sunshine, the heat was intolerable, cutting you off from the world outside the hotel. May, Enfelon had been warned, was too late a month in the year to visit Sinai : and, as for peace, if he had caught a mere mention of the word, he would have been able to correct her: for, only last night he had been complaining to Effie that the desert was noisier than any city. And this morning ! . . .

It was Sunday, first of all. You could tell it was Sunday. Dragomans were shouting, calling gutturally such names as Achmet and Hussein ; and from the back door, round which Arabs were standing while they held by the legs emaciated, fluttering chickens, destined for the dining-room, and haggled with cooks and caterers over their swinging, cackling bodies, were wafted the moanings and the invocations of Allah, all punctuated by a piteous clucking, of the rival parties and their victims. Just inside wide open doors at the

top of some marble stairs, the green-faced Egyptian manager, in a sleek tail-coat, stood against a prodigious background of porphyry and encrusted gold, enjoying a loud altercation in English - for in their anger, oriental discretion was thrown to the winds — with his slate-faced compatriot and colleague, clad in a grey network, built up of horizontal and vertical stripes of white and black. (The cause of their quarrel, it transpired, was that Slate-face, through a rare error of judgment, had omitted to charge extra for the toast Melba, supplied last night at dinner to an American millionaire, who had left an hour ago for Damascus. This, Green-face opined, was an opportunity missed, gone for ever.) A yellow-faced confrere, the texture of his countenance apparently tough and pachydermatous as that of the crocodiles in his own river, yet deeply pitted with small-pox, was swearing, in Arabic, at a servant who had forgotten to take the every-other-day bath stipulated for by the directorate in their contract. Camels, their Queen-Alexandra fringes slightly awry, brayed plaintively at one side of the garden. . . . You could tell it was Sunday. But now, as if a further reminder of it were necessary, or, perhaps, as though unconsciously gauging Enfelson's mood, the clergyman could be heard, in a momentary lull, enunciating from the church near by the words of the Sixth Commandment. " Though shalt do no murder," the gentle, lisping voice proclaimed. . . . Enfelson listened. . . . " Thou shalt not covet ..." it continued. . . . " So they still keep on with their thousands-of-years-old Jewish moral code,"⁵⁵ he said to himself irritably, his eye resting, far away and high up, on the cloud at the mountain's side. But his attention

was soon distracted, for out of many windows issued several excruciating minor noises.

Thus, for instance, Lady Helen Hornmaker stood on a balcony filing and scraping her scarlet nails with an emery-board, thereby imitating the effect of grit in metal wheels. (Upon even this very artificial proceeding she contrived, he admitted to himself, to bestow a charming semblance of nature, as though it were an act of primitive womanhood - which, perhaps, after all, it was, he reflected - just as to enlarge the lips is the first responsibility of any Congo beauty.) She was conducting at the same time an open-air conversation, above the sound of a tango played on a gramophone, with Michael Bettony : while, quite at the top of the building, Professor Crotchester, like a happy old woodpecker, could be heard chipping away at some stone or fossil with his geologist's hammer. . . . The recital of the Decalogue had finished. And now, over all these other sounds, high above the natural crepitations of the desert, that shifting and singing of myriads of grains of sand moved by the faintest wind, and the continual expansions and contractions imposed upon every object by the heat, waxing or waning, of the sun, and which, if we could hear them in their entirety, instead of being but here a rustle and there a creak, would form a regular though ever-modified song of life, superb but intimidating ; now, high above all these, there rose tremblingly triumphant, from the direction of the English Church, the strains of " Jerusalem the Golden." Penetratingly sweet, the hymn soared, borne up on Jie greasy, groaning wings of a portable harmonium (ai? organ had not yet been installed), and hung heavy on the air. Even from the

verandah, Enfelson could distinguish the gruff, " Good-God,-get-the-men-on-parade ! " voice of Sir Rudyard, leading off in the opening phrase, and the trim, knowing-her-place, lady's-maid tones of Miss Minnie Minus - tones respectful, but persuasive and convinced - following with " With meelk and hoo-oney blest" ; even from here, so that he wondered whether the music might not stray yet further, so dry and resonant was the actual quality of the atmosphere ? . . . Perhaps, quite far off, where a broad smear on the surface of the desert denoted in one direction the track to Mecca, and in another the road to Egypt, whole caravans, strings of camels and dark-bearded figures in white robes and cowls, humble Towara, conveying millstones or charcoal to the distant cities, or princes, mounted on prancing horses or debonair *deluls* and escorted by their own retainers, would be startled, in this on an equality, to hear such remotely alien strains come leaping at them from behind the tents and pyramids of sand. Not for a moment, however, would their significance escape the Men of Islam, whether proud or lowly. " The English with their dancing girls again. Insatiable race ! " they would splutter one to another. " For us, it is true, these queer occidental dances lack tune and rhythm, but to their ears they are the perfection of voluptuous abandon."

To himself, he was obliged to confess, the hymn, alas, conjured up no seductive images of this order, no dancing girls, swinging an alluring hip and jingling an anklet, but roused, instead, memories as strange ; frowsy, musty, frowsty pictures of defunctive old ladies in obsolescent hats and dresses, decked out in furs and feathers, rich, glossy, and all redolent of camphor -

that substance distilled by dusky natives from tropic plants, which were thus destined to fulfil a most grotesque and unpremeditated purpose - singing in cracked voices among a litter of black-bound books, white surplices, and brass eagles. (Every Sunday his mother used to take him to service at Nottingfield, some seven miles from his home. How he had suffered, especially when his father had preached !) The volume of noise increased. . . .

*" / knoo no^ bbh, I knob not
What joys await me there,
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare"*

the hymn proceeded sardonically.

Really, said Enfelon, his irritation returning, it was impossible, quite impossible, to read. Better, he thought, to recognise the fact : and he laid down his book. (A large, expanding spider, engaged, doubtless, on some horrible search for food, in absolute silence dropped down its silken rope from the honeycomb roof wherein it nested, and, spreading out black-velvet legs, scuttered across the brightly tiled pavement.) The professor, a little, frail old man suffocating under a mat of white hair, with heavily marked features that were too large in scale for his body, and who always tumbled head-first at a great rate, rather than walked, now came round the corner of the verandah. " Good morning, Enfelon," he croaked in his little old voice. " Good morning," saying it testily as though interrupted. Enfelon returned the greeting and asked him how he was ? The professor immediately altered his demeanour, smiled and nodded, adopting that all-comprehending

but in reality self-protective look of the very deaf, unable to appreciate any particular meaning which a companion may strive to convey to them, but determined to be prepared, facially, for every conceivable remark : then this expression relaxed, and, wrapped in a soundless, age-old dream of flints and skulls, the professor sat down next him and proceeded to read quite peacefully.

For once, Enfelon envied his isolation. He gazed at the mountains and made a final effort to take in the content of the printed words before him. " This huge range,³ the book continued, " composed of primaeval gneiss and granite, or, in more precise geological terminology, of colourless quartz, flesh-coloured felspar, green hornblende, and black mica-slate, rising in majestic and precipitous masses and furrowed by vertical clefts, extends from Serbal to the Om-Shamar, and from the Om-Shamar to the Ras Mohammed. Since the time of their formation, these crystalline masses have undergone no geological change, but have reared their summits above the ocean from the beginning of time, unaffected by the transitions of the Silurian or Devonian, the Permian, Triassic, or chalk periods. At the base only do these venerable mountains show any trace of alteration. Thus the Red Sea has on one side thrown a girdle of coral round Mount Sinai. . . ." The very words, with their curious blending, equally stereotyped, of modern scientific term and old-fashioned poetical *cliche*, were irritating. " Girdle of coral," indeed ! Himself a writer who took pride in a forcible but very large vocabulary, here he was, stumped. In its ordinary sense, *Devonian* presented no difficulty - much as hailing from the industrial north.

sage-green country of moors, hills, and angular slag-heaps, with smoke swaggering in wind-blown plumes over every slope and valley or lifting a head, venomously crested, like a serpent, over a village, he despised that placid, luscious country of green, lush hedges, cows, morris-dancing and insulse peasants - but Permian ! " What is *Permian*, professor ? " he yelled at his neighbour. This time, however, as if the word fitted immediately into some corner of his brain shaped to it, the old man heard without effort. He did not even look up. " The Permian," he answered at once, in a voice which resembled the tearing of parchment or vellum, " is a group of strata, forming the uppermost division of the series named Palaeozoic, which denote the lowest division of the fossiliferous rocks, so called because they contain the earliest examples of life. At one time the Permian was falsely associated with the Triassic, which, as you are doubtless aware, is the oldest group of the Mesozoic strata, under the name of the New Red Sandstone, but modern research has - and, to the minds of all right-thinking people, correctly - discarded so unscientific a nomenclature and classification." The professor then closed down as quickly, and with as little preliminary sign of it, as he had opened : he merely continued, apparently, to read his book, his eyes, indeed, having never wandered from its pages,

Enfelon felt snubbed : which sensation, as usually he cast himself for the opposite role, was a peculiarly unpleasant one. . . . The momentary anger of a weak nature overcame him. Where was Effie, he wondered. Why wasn't she here ?

*" And theyare from keyare releest
The sheout orv them thut treoomph,
The sorng orv them thutfeist,"*

trilled Miss Minus from the distance. It was too hot. The air came up off the desert now in great puffs, calefactory as the wind evolved from a hair-drying machine in a barber's shop. . . . Perhaps it would be cooler inside, among all the marble. But he sat on, brooding and, for the moment, oblivious of all the noise, allowed himself to merge in the general sense, almost of despair, which for the last year or two had enveloped the whole civilised world ; the growing, all-pervading miasma he had journeyed hither to avoid.

Yes, it was depressing. Enfelson looked depressed. " T. L." - as his disciples called him, in the diminutive intimacy to which, for the sake of their credit with the elect, they must pretend ; or " Enfelsoni," as his apostles, those still more familiar and understanding chosen few, dared to designate him, thereby in their ecstasy striving to associate him with all that there could be of Italian primitive strength and subtle Renaissance manliness - was now middle-aged in appearance ; very tall and lanky, built up, it seemed, on a lengthy series of concavities. His narrow, ladder-like body was crowned, upon its long stooping neck, by a thinly bearded head of weak though intellectual order. The beard, of which himself, his disciples, and especially his photographer, ever made rather a feature, detracted from, rather than added to, any appearance of virility that he might possess : and his pride in it was pathetic. Every now and then in conversation he would carefully throw his head up into the air, to keep

it there while he uttered a goat-like laugh ; which action, as it were, thrust these few, fair, sparse hairs into an unfortunate analogical prominence. His face, except for the underlying suggestion of feebleness and etiolation, was in its concave tendency rather beautiful, its hollows clearly cut, but his skull was too visible beneath the drawn skin, and in his whole frame was something that told one of his stock, and how in the past it had already supplied too much achievement, both intellectual and artistic. Yet to himself, albeit by now almost unconscious of the deception, to his disciples (and the violence of his teaching had brought him many) and to his public, he loved to pose as the son of a collier, brought up in a miner's cottage ; one who had as a youth owned whippets and pigeons, and could then have been observed, in the intervals when he was not brawnily hacking coal, dressed coarsely, but with a vivid cotton bandanna knotted round his neck, squatting on his haunches by a doorstep, in the occasional flickering sunshine of a northern village street.

In fact, he was the son of a clergyman-schoolmaster who had happened to own and conduct a school outside a large industrial town, and the great-nephew, though Enfelon most carefully disguised this connection, of the celebrated Pre-Raphaelite artist of the same rare name ; while maternally he was related to a very tribe of lesser but distinguished people, the Sipwaters, an ultimate blossoming of Victorian, middle-class culture.

Such, then, was the chief apostle of force, or, as he loved to call it, *guts*, in literature ; a weak, weedy, bearded man, stooping and emaciated : a belated, mid-nineteenth century intellectual, despite the Italian

mould in which his hypnotised admirers affected so clearly to see him. And, indeed, the wish to be vigorous inevitably betrayed his flaccidity : for when does the bull feel it essential to boast of its strength ; the rabbit, however philoprogenitive, to extol prolificacy ; or the thrush to lecture us on the necessity of sweet singing in modern life ? Actually, in their very real, unmistakable, and educated sensitiveness, and in their deliberate design, was to be discovered the entire quality of his works, which lacked all natural strength, all virtues of an unconscious order, and, despite continual literary resorts to violence, could not, by the widest and kindest stretch of critical imagination, be included in the category of the robust. Before by his writings he had sought to reform or, as many thought, to debase his readers, before, in any case, he had been chiefly concerned with a purpose, his books had been exquisite and delightful : for their merit was ever of a mildly intellectual and esthetic, rather than of a fierce doctrinal, kind ; and even now, when the grim national desire to shock, or to improve, his readers - fundamentally an identical aim, rooted deep in English Puritanism - and, still more, the inwardly felt necessity to shock himself, marred the character of them, nevertheless passages of genuine poetry broke unexpectedly through the pretentious text of his teaching. But, after the manner of the thrush, so delicate and delicate-minded an artist should have been content to sing ; if possible, moreover, to sing unseen ; and ought never to have sought the lecture-room or the boxing-ring for the display of his talents.

Unfortunately, this sickly and ascetic bachelor was the very prophet who for two decades had been urging

the white men, and, above all, the Anglo-Saxons, to abandon the specious and the clever, the money and the machines, the kindly materialism, which, he maintained, had produced a form of dry-rot in our civilisation ; to cast away their ideals, whether palely Christian or strongly materialist, and revert, instead, to others which, actually, they had never possessed. They were, he commanded, to adopt a grotesque and humorless cult of dark gods and blood-wisdom, as opposed to brain-wisdom ; the wisdom of animals and of nature (but he forgot that cleverness is an ancient monkey-characteristic, not so lightly to be thrown off). Toward the accomplishment of all this, to worship properly the dark gods within us, or even to learn the* correct approach to them, daily life must be altered. The male-principle must be dominant, upheld against the female-principle which had obtained so formidable and sinister a hold upon civilisation. And for the support of this ideal, a beard was doubtless essential : part of the aim, indeed.

Yet T. L. had never married. Fame had, however, won him an aunt. Miss Effie Sipwater, his mother's sister, had abandoned a promising career of art-embroidery in the Cotswolds, in order to keep house for him. She had, further, pledged herself to keep secret their relationship ; which, indeed, puzzled many worthy people, who, taking T. L. at his own coal-mining valuation, were bewildered by his connection with - for they always travelled together - so perfect a type of fading Victorian ladyhood. What could be the link between them ? But Miss Effie, gone modern, would never betray their kinship, any more than she would have confessed to her age. An example, however, of

T. L.'s lack of logic was that himself was forced to perform all his own housework, though his aunt, who possessed the muscular alertness of a bantam-boxer or jockey, appeared, except in her laziness, admirably fitted for it. Indeed, no other excuse served for her.

To continue with his programme, it was necessary to lead a full-blooded life, to wash less (hot baths, it seemed, sapped hot blood), to abolish modern sanitation, and to revel in sweat and the odours of the body. The word *virgin* on his lips was an insult; though one often applied to him, had he but known it, by his enemies. Rape, from the point of view of both persons concerned, must be preferred to abstinence : and there was much talk of inhibition and complex, repression and sublimation, for to a certain extent he had adopted psycho-analysis, or, rather, had incorporated it in his own theories ; and his books abounded in its jargon. But, above all - and this was original - one must learn through study to indulge in the old Saxon language of sex, now banished equally from the drawing-room and the dictionary, rather, he propounded, than countenance the prevalent, wan giggling at secret subjects, or the frivolous innuendos of the modern stage, which are a substitute for it.

Enfelon's disciples, who took pleasure in the follies as much as pride in the achievements of their leader, often related among themselves how he and his aunt, when they lived in Surbiton, used each week to hold two classes or give two parties — whichever you chose to consider it - especially devoted to the mouthing of these outlaw words, hitherto despised and neglected, but now once more sesame to the elect. Until the evening wound up, in a culminating orgy of strong tea

and weak sandwiches, host, hostess, and guests would stand in a circle, very seriously hooting out, over and over again - pronouncing them with the curious mal-accentuation of syllables, stressed in the place least able to bear the burden of it, which is the outward grace of those who, educated at Cambridge, then send themselves to be "finished off" in Bloomsbury - these phrases they supposed to be indiscoverable now, except on the lips of gamekeepers and navvies : though in reality, had they but known it, every expensive golf-course and Public School rings with them. (So perhaps a Public-School education has its uses after all !) Then, again, it was known that when, for two years, Enfelon and Miss Sipwater had made their home-or, rather, hut -in the Congo, they were, after a month or two, successful in persuading the natives to allow them, triumphantly nude, if a little self-conscious, to take part in the ritual dances of the tribe. And the sceptical and unworthy, and even the convinced, could not but laugh at the vision of these queer figures, giraffe-like and gossamer, careering and caracoling round the jungle-fires of Africa, wildly waving their assegais and stamping their bunioned feet, in order to learn " the proper cultural rhythm of the country." (It was the only way in which one could do it, the master used to assure his followers.)

Nevertheless, however occasionally absurd, a person and a writer of distinction. Again, whatever may be urged against him or his theories, at least he had understood that something was wrong : but he had *felt* it with the heart of the poet, instead of with the intuition' of a prophet and teacher. He had realised that the materialism of the past century might now explode,

blow up the whole world. Almost alone of his generation he had comprehended the importance of religion, the peril incurred by any system which possessed no real religion and yet would not tolerate any frank rejection of it; the sinister vacuum thus formed ; the danger, that is to say, not so much to the system directly, as to it through the souls of the individual men, lost and discontented, who compose it. He might, indeed, have been both happy and great, but that the English Puritanism in his etiolated blood, and his exhausted physique, which would not carry any further weight of achievement, hindered him. In addition, it seemed as if there ran through his whole nature an irrational thread, out of place in the make-up of the role for which he had cast himself. Things that had otherwise no connection seemed in his mind related. His heroes, for instance, his prophets, the teachers of old to whom he bade his disciples turn, studying them as prototypes of himself, were selected at random and on no fixed principle. Some - one or two, perhaps - were priests ; others, philosophers or generals, poets or criminals. None appeared to share any qualities or doctrines in common, their only link being that, of each name in turn, if it were mentioned, Enfelon would murmur oratorically, in hollow, owlish tones, " That man had a daemon in his belly ! " Alas ! he was, in fact, an unhappy man : for, being, as we have said, an artist by nature and not a teacher, he had yet assumed a propagandist responsibility. (Thus he was bound, every now and then, to be disappointed ; by the consummation of the very things which he had always advocated -just as a man who wins a tug-of-war may temporarily lose his balance.)

And this same lack of logic was manifested in his life. For example, he had urged always that more violence must be brought into the modern world : yet, when the War came, his intellect, as much as his whole nature, was revolted by it. This sort of violence was wrong. Similarly, for years he had insisted that we must all return to a more primitive conception of life, and to a simpler way of living it : yet now, when all were, perforce, following his counsel, he loathed the trend of events. Hating materialism in principle, nevertheless its threatened collapse depressed and embittered him : because, had he only realised it, he was no prophet, and should not have rendered himself in this manner accountable for his every opinion. From its disposition, his mind ought to have been free to take flight, so long as it soared in every direction.

It was, he understood, as he sat there brooding under the verandah, impossible to escape the feeling of impending prostration : but he was glad, all the same, to be away ; to be away from his books, his publishers, and his disciples. His doctrines, he thought to himself angrily, were no doubt being misunderstood. He had preached always that we should *return* to a more primitive method of life ; but, as he said to himself with considerable justification, we were not deliberately returning to anything ; instead, we were falling back into something ; perhaps into some horrible form of slum-life that would endure for centuries, without its victims being able to extricate themselves from it. Poverty in itself, accidental poverty, was no virtue in countries given over to the pursuit of wealth. Nor had he ever pretended that it was. Europe had become pauperised by mistake, and not of intention. It was

one thing to abandon voluntarily a material creed ; quite another to find yourself still tied to a machine, but receiving no wages for it. Failure, both of a material and a spiritual order, lay heavily upon the world, tainting all its impulses, frustrating all its efforts. (Even the pleasant emptiness of the hotel reminded him, from time to time, of the misery which now clouded all life.) The very ideas and systems which for so long he had hated and told men to overthrow were now failing ; failing too rapidly, automatically, and not because of any attack launched against them. Capitalism on the one hand, Bolshevism on the other, were both in mortal danger. (Stuart Lollygo, enthusiastic Soviet amateur, fresh from Russia, admitted to him in private, though he would angrily deny it in public, that the new Five Years Plan was toppling also, owing to the present inability of the capitalist powers to buy Russian commodities on a sufficient scale.) Europe, withered and shrunken, was nearly gone : America, stuffed to bursting point with gold and goods, would soon explode - unless something happened. And what could happen ? For the truth was that the material basis of life for our enormous modern populations was suddenly seen to be slipping away from under them, and, however obstinate an artist he might be, even he was compelled to understand that man cannot live by the use of forcible words alone. Nothing could be built on the shifting sands of such ruin.

What had brought it about ? Chiefly, he thought, with some pleasure - reverting to an ancient antipathy to-day further enforced by the sound of hymns and Decalogue from the church near by - the Testaments Old and New. . . . Christianity had, originally,

inspired the scramble which was now ending, yet had played no part in attempting to regulate it or keep it decent. It had taught men to discard their animal origin, and had offered nothing solid in its stead. Unlike Disraeli, that typically "*clever*" man, Enfcion was, he knew, on the side of the baboons ; would always prefer to be a hot-blooded, short-lived baboon, rather than one of those selfless, sexless angels,¹ leading a drone-like life throughout eternity, that was the ideal of all our bishops. (But it must be a baboon with a purpose, a baboon who deferred to the mystic quality of the blood within him.)

And, his mind wandering off, he thought of Disraeli. ... It was impossible not to wish that a being of the same order would arise in these times which were so difficult of management ... for he admitted to himself, now, that perhaps he had erred in proscribing *cleverness*. It was not cleverness, at present, which was at fault : indeed, more of it was needed; much more. . . . The prima-donnas and the farmers, the Macdonalds and the Baldwins, were not clever, in spite of their statesmen-like appearance. For years the politicians had flattered the public by reflecting the public mind. Democracy had been proud of its leaders, because they sometimes pretended to drop their aitches or talk in dialect, because, like those who voted for them, they were almost permanently hysterical ; because they boasted of their honesty like card-sharppers, or because they attended football matches and placarded abroad that Edgar (" I can't think how he can do it ") Wallace was their favourite reading. . . . Well, now we were

¹ " The question is this : Is man an ape or an angel ? My lord, I am on the side of the angels."—Disraeli, at a clerical meeting at Oxford in 1864.

paying for all that reading of theirs. The old women, in their panic, were in private consulting the clever every day : but the public still believed, for example, more in Edgar Wallace and Larwood than in Maynard Keynes ; in football and bridge tournaments than in hard thinking or hard working. And the statesmen, the old women, did not dare to undeceive them. Once more, they dared not tell the truth to the public they had trained; so that, though they continually asked the advice of the clever, they never presumed to take it, but preferred such an expedient as a " Day of National Prayer for the Recovery of the Pound" to any attempt to deal with the question of solvency on economic lines. . . . And that which made it funnier still, he thought, was that, unlike himself, so few people believed now in the efficacy of prayer. ... It was a contradictory situation. . . . Yes, cleverness could, perhaps, make the world safe for prophets (or was it already too late ?). A failing world was no place for them. People in general were too listless to be converted to any new creed, just as were, for instance, the guests in the hotel. And who could want to teach, or, as for that, to write, paint, or compose music, in such a world : who, in that sense, dependent on posterity, would not feel that his work was useless, for there might be no posterity able to read, write, or think : while, as for the present-day audience, how, when falling down a precipice, could it be expected to listen to advice or congratulate singers on their songs ?

No, the world was returning swiftly to its old loves ; to priests for advice, to generals for statecraft : soon, he supposed, the Old-Testament God would come out of hiding to uphold His favourites ! (At any rate, then

the world might grow less wishy-washy, the young less dead and tired, the old less active and aggressive.) Priests and generals : though these often were in modern guise ; the priests being spiritualists, the generals strong-chinned and beetling super-men of political ambition. The war mentality, which had descended on England - as, indeed, on the whole of Europe - to its ruin in 1914, had now, through that ruin, been made stronger. . . . A melancholy absurdity was, without doubt, the characteristic of this age. . . . Soon it would be time for civilisation to seek sanctuary again, in secluded and fortified communities, such as the one on the mountain above, even if to do so it were necessary to pretend to an old religion or to invent a new one. . . .

And now the text of Mr. Simpson's sermon reached him from the church near by. " And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire : and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly."¹ A majestic rhythm, spoilt solely by the mincing voice of the preacher. . . . Whatever false doctrines the Bible had inculcated, certainly it had benefited the English language, providing for it an admirable foundation. The text, too, he had to admit, was well chosen : and here, coming back to his surroundings, he turned and let his eye wander far up the granite slopes of Mount Sinai, to the fortified white walls of the Monastery of St. Katherine. " Altogether on a smoke " ... fables and legends, of course, and yet more true than ordinary truth. It was amazing how this strange tract of country, though now, except for the presence of a few monks and their retainers, in the

¹ Exodus xix. 18.

main Mohammedan, appeared nevertheless to be saturated with the Mosaic story. Biblical verity seemed to inspire the skeleton landscape itself, about which there was some quality, austere and relentless, that proclaimed the Lord God of Israel. And once more, as he looked at the monastery, and then allowed his glance to follow the abrupt slope up to its very summit, he wondered at the little cloud which clung to the top of the mountain : a cloud that might be, he thought to himself idly, the cocoon of some sleeping but gigantic and glorious being within, for, deep in it, light and darkness were to be sensed, light coming through darkness. And it was very lovely against the sombre bulk of the rock. He had noticed it, nestling there, for the past day or two. Bad weather coming, he supposed : perhaps the heat would break It was insufferably hot.

The present was thus borne in again on Mr. Enfelon, together with its sounds ; from which his neighbour the professor was for ever exempt. The professor was still reading : but the author, nervous and irritable, felt he could not concentrate, although he noticed that, only a few paces away, Father Munnion, who must have stolen downstairs during the last ten minutes, was reading his breviary. And Father Munnion was not deaf: doubtless, though, he knew by heart the book before him. And then he was used to the life here, the noise and the heat, had been here before any other visitors had arrived, and would remain here long after all of them had departed. . . . Further, perhaps unquestioning belief helps a man to read, to fix his mind steadily on what he is reading . . . though how so intelligent and learned a man could believe in all that

holy rigmarole Enfelson was at a loss to understand, especially when he had spent his life studying so many unknown documents, some of which dated back to the very earliest days of Christianity. The author watched him, a dear old man, tall as himself and collapsible as a folding ladder. But it was a remarkable head, sunburned to the colour of wood, with a prominent nose and its manifold lines so deeply marked as to be almost those of a peasant. Really, the heat and noise increased every minute. (May was certainly too late in the year for this place.) And T. L., as his disciples so loved to call him, now abandoned his senses to a form of self-torture ; the enjoyment and analysis of the symphony round him and an enquiry into the single threads that composed this tapestry.

The hymn, of course, had ceased : but the chaplain, who always suffered from curate's-voice, an occupational disease comparable to housemaid's-knee, was making an effort to speak loudly, and had now assumed for that occasion a special sermon-tone - a sermon-stop, as it were, after the fashion of an organ - which supplied to all the nearer, individual instruments a background of continuous bagpipe-like droning. The yellow-faced manager was no longer arguing with the servant, but the haggling round the backdoor was still in progress. Discreet sounds of banging and buffeting, together with miniature sancl-storms, issued from the windows of the bedrooms, where, under the supervision of a severe Austrian lady, wearing a grey wig, grotesque, dark-faced, male housemaids dusted with unparalleled vigour. (The cutting up of the old Austrian Empire, in itself an act of wild and tragic folly, has, incidentally, resulted, through the dissemination of an ancient and

pleasant people with a talent for comfort, in the improvement of many hotels and restaurants in the most remote parts of the world : and that, Enfelon reflected, might, in its turn, be responsible for further disaster. Modern civilisation pampered the flesh and starved the soul : and once more, though at present wallowing in it, he cursed luxury.) The dusky servants, in their haloes of amber dust, continually increased the uproar. He watched them with interest, for these *jebeliyebs*, as they are named, though now of the Moslem faith, were descended, he recalled, from the hundred Roman and the hundred Egyptian slaves whom the Emperor Justinian had presented to the Monastery of St. Kathcrine some fourteen hundred years before - a longer and more certain descent than most reigning princes or nobles. They seemed immensely proud of being useful in such modern surroundings : but, being desert folk, they were so fascinated by the mystery of running water that, when the Austrian back was turned for a moment, they could never refrain from touching a tap, to see the waters flow, for they regarded it as ranking almost with the aqueous miracles of the Prophet Moses. This accounted for the frequent groaning of water being sucked down a pipe. Camels were still maintaining their well-bred complaints (" Such a bore ! " and " Really too tiresome ! ") from the back of the building. In one corner of the verandah, Master Roddy Ramshackle, who had been " taken out before the sermon," was reciting a daily lesson to Miss Tether, his governess. Even Sunday was not exempt, for poetry, she considered, was in a special category, like sacred music ; that is, of course, the right kind of poetry. A sun-baked, innocent-looking woman in

a grey dress and topee. Miss Tether appeared severe and resolute, but, nevertheless, an expression continually lurked in her blue eyes as though they were on the watch lest people "should take a liberty." This aspect, further, was emphasised by the prominent chin, which, though in itself kindly and clumsily good-natured, was ever set, as that of a boxer in the ring waiting to receive a blow. At present, she was sitting very upright, superintending the recitation of her pupil. T. L. listened.

" ' If you can eat with triumph . . . ' " he was piping to her in a shrill treble, and then could get no further.

" No, Roderick " : she corrected him firmly, " It's not ' If you can eat with triumph ' : that would be greedy, and we don't like greediness, do we? (Pm sure nurse has been helping you again!) It's ' If you can *meet* with triumph and disaster. ' "

" But, Miss Tether, I don't see how you can meet with both triumph *and* disaster. . . . Nurse says it isn't sense and he can't mean it."

" I wish nurse wouldn't interfere. I've had to speak to her about it before. (She has not received the *education* to understand such things.) It means : if you make a great career, and then lose everything, and are forced to start all over again, ' you'll be a man, my son. ' You see now ? "

" But, Miss Tether, I should have to be a man, surely, before I could make a great career ? And, besides, I can't be your son, because you aren't married; and you yourself told me that it was only married people who could have children. And if I lost everything, surely——"

" Purely puerile, Roderick ! Don't argue, but

proceed with your recitation. You had better begin anew."

So it was Kipling to-day ! And, thought Enfelon with the charity of one author toward another, it was extraordinary how events had played up to his gospel. As the result of listening to him and his philosophy we have been obliged, practically, to lose everything and start again. Still, it was more appropriate than the effort of yesterday - a peculiarly hot, breathless morning, when the poor child had been forced to recite : " Welcome, Wild North-Easter - Shame it is to see - Odes to every Zephyr - Ne'er a verse to thee ! " And it wasn't the boy's fault. He wasn't by any means one of those horrid, pale-blooded, cultured little brats who love, when specially dressed-up for the occasion, to bounce into a room and recite before proud parents, in a mincing, meaningless voice, some poem, atrocious either in form or sentiment, so that the friends of the house must first shuffle their feet in silence and then fawn with false praise. No, he was a nice, natural child, with a healthy, perhaps inherited, bent for bad language. All he wanted was to be left alone and not bothered by that beastly governess. And T. L. felt deeply on this subject, for latterly he and his aunt had applied their principles to the children, as much as to the adults, and had been the chief patrons of a school, wherein a few privileged infants were at an early age taught to " do just as they liked," and, further, to indulge, naturally as a navvy and without any injurious sense of shame pertaining to it, in the most frank, violent, and, as some thought, injudicious language. Enfelon and Miss Effie would assist on prize days and at examinations. ... "If you can make one heap of all your

winnings," Roddy was continuing. . . . Every day she made him learn something by heart. The day before yesterday it had been Humbert Wolfe's poem to the late Rudolf Valentino (was Miss Tether another of the dead man's victims, he wondered?), " He was so frail-a-thing, he was so pale-a-thing," and afterward she had confided to him that in the course of the next month or two she hoped to teach the boy the whole of " The Land." All wretched " literary " stuff, with never a *real word* in it.

An Arab song - T. L. imagined it must be one - rose from the courtyard and for a little while cut off from him the recitation. Other rhythms, too, asserted themselves, for the slate-faced Egyptian manager's children (one was blue, one brown, and the other purple) were sitting under the shade of a eucalyptus-tree, performing on whistles, which they had obtained out of crackers at Christmas and had never since stopped blowing, and swinging wooden rattles, with which they had thoughtfully been provided at the New Year. These emitted a sound resembling the music of a million giant cicadas. . . .

And then there sounded from above a new and ominous music, and, looking up at the faintly blood-shot sky, he could discern a purring mote speeding toward him. More visitors, doubtless. . . . Soon he could see, below in the desert, mechanics in blue overalls running along, holding down the wings of the alighting airplane, and, just as the final, after-sermon hymn was being struck up near by, accompanied, on the part of the congregation, by an ostentatious chinking of coins into embroidered bags, the occupants, who in their padded flying-clothes resembled Esquimaux, came hurrying up the steps. " Who are these,"

the singers at this moment demanded lustily from the church, " like stars appearing ? "

" I must say I call that downright kind of the management, though I never care for a fuss when I'm arriving. . . . But it's delicate. It's not just a thing everyone would think of," remarked Miss Ninette de Nina to her husband. Now Helen Hornmaker, still sharpening her talons, shouted her greeting from the window. " Hullo, duckies ! I shouldn't have thought that this was your kind of savage stuff." And the directors, that sleek, tail-coated tribe, ran out of the hall to welcome their new and famous clients.

The recitation, in spite of all excitements, continued, if somewhat fitfully : and his neighbour, the professor, was still quietly reading. Suddenly, he looked up, pointed at his book, and said, " It's a treatise on the mines of Maghara. Very interesting : you ought to read it." " Isn't . . . that . . . where . . . they . . . find . . . the . . . turquoises ? " Enfelson slowly bellowed at him. " Oh, no. I don't think so," the professor replied. " If they do, they must be very small ones. . . . I don't recall ever hearing that there were any tortoises there."

. . . And yet it was supposed to be one of the old man's subjects ! " Silly old nitwit and dunderhead," T. L. cried to himself in a burst of exasperation, "is it likely that I should ask you if they quarried for tortoises in a mine ? O God ! People are being typical to-day ! "

CHAPTER III

SNAKE'S EYE

HAD the eyes of Mr. Enfelon been able to pierce walls, he would have realised how true, how painfully accurate, was the casual exclamation to which he had just given vent. . . . Michael Bettony, the sprightly chit-chat spinner of the *Daily Spy*, was, in his way, educated and agreeable. His exterior, professionally, must be - and was - good enough to enable him, without fear of the consequences, to attend parties to which he had not been invited (and nobody, it may be said at this point, wrote with more bitterness about the evils of gate-crashing : or more sought the views upon it of duchesses and demi-mondaines) ; that is to say, it was pleasant without being conspicuous. Clean-looking was perhaps the most favourable word that could be found to describe his face, fresh-coloured and round, with, by now, a delightfully deceptive appearance of innocence. He had even, a few years before, in spite of an Eton and Oxford education, been possessed of a definite if slight intelligence : but gossip had now rotted it away as surely as absinthe accomplished this process in other days with other men. Alas ! he had to support his father - in the technical phrasing of his new profession, " a former racing peer and company promoter " - and two sisters in a *pension* at Rapallo : for their sakes numberless innocents must

be slaughtered. He was a good son and brother ; but, though always at parties, was lonely and not very happy ; for he seldom saw those he supported, and his prey assuredly did not love him. The constant necessity of finding a *story*, as journalists call it, had, it is true, endowed him, although he was still young, with a strange impersonal point of view (because to the good journalist nothing matters except news), and this fact, though it helped to anaesthetise his feelings, nevertheless forbade his making, or at any rate keeping, many friends. . . . Moreover, the writer for the newspapers is so conscious of his own transitory nature : the good he does lasts but a day - if he does it - while the bad lives after him. (Indeed, as Enfelon had once said, the most for which in the end a journalist can hope is that his death may be near and may be news : while even this piece of good fortune must inevitably entail the regret that he would not be there to record it.)

Michael Bettony, then, had only arrived the previous evening, and was already jackalling round the hall in search of refuse for his readers. This was, of course, his business ; yet it must have seemed to anyone watching him that some more direct enjoyment than the consciousness of duty done, some actual gratification, as it were, of the senses, rewarded him for his peering and prying. He was aware of his intelligence and of his antecedents, and it may be that his ability to earn a living in this manner, which was so dissimilar from the lives and careers of all his relatives, provoked in him a perverse pleasure. Everyone round him, he knew, had always secretly worshipped money, however unwholesomely it was come by. And here he was,

earning it : not a lot, he had to admit, but a living ; which was more than any of his ancestors for several centuries had essayed or could have accomplished. And no bunk about duty, a sense of duty (a responsibility to one's own people and the country, doncherno), and then gambling away everything on horses . . . !

Certainly with enjoyment, a stranger would have pronounced, he rooted round this high hall, so cool and marbled that it resembled one of those very splendid modern and sanitary fish-shops that of recent years have begun to parade their shining monumental slabs in the great cities. And, as though in reality it were such, and they, lithely gliding and turning in their tank, the only live fishes in the whole mortuary establishment, the Egyptian managers, Green-face, Slate-face, and Yellow-face all, are now in captivity behind glass walls at one side of it. Seeing Bettony, they rose up, goggling in apparent expectation of piscine dainties - breadcrumbs, or, it might be, ants' eggs - mouthing at him with an air of welcome and enquiry : but he ignored them, and craned over a marble slab to examine the floor-charts hanging just above the level of his head. The few names inscribed were spread among numerous white blanks : the last moves, they looked, in a game of skill. . . , Yes, it was empty, very empty (naturally enough, considering that foreign travel was, at present, discountenanced in nearly every country) : but, all the same, what a haul ! Although his eyes queried the few names, unknown, or for the instant unidentified, he read very quickly ; and with an air of excitement, since he had come here partly for holiday, partly as a speculation. . . . There might be something to report.

- 4|
 5. Lord Pridian and Party.
 6.
 10. Major-General Sir Rudyard Ramshakkle, D.V.T.O.
 11. Lady Ramshakkle.
 12. Master Roderick Ramshakkle.
 12a. Miss Tether.
 14. Miss Deirdre Ramshakkle and Nurse.
 18. The Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Newborough and
 Mrs. Hagworthy.
 21. Sir Levy Lollygo, Bart., M.P.
 22. Miss Poppy Lollygo.
 23. Mr. Stuart Lollygo.
 24. Croucher.
 28. Mr. Eric Fuller-Flitmouse.
 34. Lady Helen Hornmaker.
 35. The Honble. Michael Bettony.
 44. Madame Galactic.
 60, 61, 62, }
 63, 64, 65, }
 66, 67, 68, } The Shereef Abdul and Household.
 69, 70, 71, }
 72, 73, 74 }
 86. Father Munnion.
 92. Miss Ninette de Nina.
 93. Mr. Clifford Hearnshaw.
 184. Rev. Symsson.
 210. Mr. T. L. Enfelon.
 211. Miss Sipwater.
 212. Dr. Acquarius.
 213. Professor Crotchester.
 357. Minus.

Now he ran through them again, more slowly, making sure that he had placed everybody with accuracy, turning the names upon his tongue as though he were tasting rare wines. . . . Yes. . . . What a haul ! . . . But could he build up a story out of it ? How could he make one, he asked himself ? . . . And then, he must do nothing in a hurry, must be careful, very careful. At the top, for instance, of the list stood out the august name of Lord Pridian.

No. 4. LORD PRIDIAN. Now Lord Pridian always approved, he knew, of professional enterprise : would he be inclined, therefore, to pardon for once an over-zealous expression of it ? But Michael Bettony realised full well the expediency of caution. . . . He was a difficult man, " the Boss " as they called him in the offices of the *Daily Spy*. ... In example of it, he would never permit himself to be mentioned by any one of his own papers, except in their political columns : where his name had no business. Therein, however, he was resolved to pose continually ; insisted, even, on *figuring* - such was his term for it - in the cartoons, compelling his hired artist to this purpose, so that the poor muddled readers of the *Daily Spy* were nearly every morning confronted with the grotesque effigy - though not more grotesque than the original - of Lord Pridian, a placid, pot-bellied little mock-Buonaparte, with sharp but rather mournful eyes, and a lock of hair falling over a Napoleonic forehead, strutting and swaggering among the caricatured likenesses of great men, of Stalin or of Mussolini or Einstein, and later this fashion precipitated into a delusion which they shared with His Lordship ; that he was a person of

importance - nay, more than that, of national, and even international, consequence.

This, however, despite a remarkable career, he was not. The son of a Welsh engineer, he had emigrated to India, when little more than a boy, and had with rare speed accumulated an immense and unnecessary amount of money. He was, you could see at once, the sort of man capable of making the sort of fortune he had made ; a money-beetle, in fact. And if you were of a turn of mind to admire money-beetles for their industry and ingenuity, then you must admire Lord Pridian among the foremost. Now, however, power was his ambition. But alas ! in money-amassing alone did he display the application requisite to gain an object. Perhaps power was too abstract, too ideal a thing even, for him to strive after : perhaps his will could only be exercised within the compass of material acquisition. In any case he was apt to take up a number of affairs of a sudden, and then, with an equal rapidity, to let them fall : though himself imagined his character in this respect to be the opposite.

Actually, he possessed a lively, whistling, errand-boy intelligence, accompanied by much - usually mis-directed - energy. His brain was one that knew how to win in gambles on the Stock Exchange, and could be safely trusted - in the sense that it was safe to distrust it - in such matters as political intrigues. These, albeit even to himself he exaggerated his part in them, were now his hobby : and it must be admitted that, by contrast with the dull, platitudinous mind of the average democratic politician, his, with its ingenuity and ready interest, was almost that of a genius. But

immediately he attacked ideas of a larger order (he was a tremendous believer in "large ideas" and was for ever calling upon the readers of his papers to abandon "petty old methods of thinking" - or, in more precise phraseology, thinking of any sort - and in his company to embark on the particular short-lived goose-chase of the day) a latent condition of megalomania made itself felt in him, as in so many owners of enormous self-amassed fortunes. Moreover he was obsessed by the Anglo-Saxon, very faulty conception of Buonaparte, and by the imagined fact of a resemblance to him, that are often the bane of the families of such community-made men. Mirrors were placed in all parts of his several houses, at the correct angle to secure him in his innocent hallucination concerning his profile : though in reality they should have helped to dissipate it. When meeting any person for the first time, he would rattle off a series of questions - the answers to which could interest no one - after the manner of a machine-gun. This was one of his, as he imagined them, Napoleonic traits. Indeed, he had suffered on behalf of his ideal : for, though but an indifferent rider, he would, in order to improve his will-power, persist in trying to break-in untamed horses (Super-man dominating Brute-beast) with results disastrous to everyone in the vicinity, to those riding near him as much as to himself. Whence he had derived his image of Buonaparte - who was far too clever to attempt anything so infantile - as a kind of circus-king will ever remain a mystery. But nothing, no amount of physical discomfort and even pain, could cure him of it: and many were the parties recruited from the office to watch, at a safe distance,

these recurrent and picturesque incidents in an adventurous life. First the great man would prance and caracole uncertainly past them, looking very stern and ferocious, his chin out-thrust, and then, in a sudden, inextricable and whirling confusion of limbs, equine and human, of spectators and passing riders, perambulators and policemen, would come catastrophe. In fact, as a disrespectful subordinate once remarked of these accidents, "First the Boss sets his jaw, and, the next thing he knows, the doctors are setting it for him."

For the rest, Lord Pridian's mind was tempered by a very fervent interest in religion - in part inherited, doubtless, from numerous Welsh, hymn-singing ancestors and otherwise thereto attracted by a personal fear of hell-fire - an apprehension which old friends of his, who had always followed with eagerness the course of his career, could never consider so ill-founded as many of his other presumptions. For, if he believed in orthodox religion - and he most assuredly did - then his activities could hardly be said to have been consistent with this faith, and his outlook for the next world would not, indeed, from his point of view, be an encouraging one. However, in his more certain moments of greatness, he was, in this more Napoleonic than Napoleon, inclined to treat the Deity as the great Emperor had treated the Tsar. He welcomed God. Between them, they could portion out and rule the world.

And, Michael Bettony recalled, making a note of it on an envelope, this man was "Boss" here too. . . . As Louis XIV, before him, had evoked Versailles out of a waterless waste, and Jiaji emblumed its arid fields

with a thousand fountains spraying over fluttering green leaves, so Lord Pridian, swept momentarily off his feet by a combined attack of his two manias, megalomania and religious, had sworn to conjure up this vast, luxurious hotel, cooled by an ice plant and dripping day and night with water (h. & c.), out of the biblical, dry wilderness. During the several years that the process of building occupied, it had constituted his chief toy. Every few weeks he had flown over from England, persuading himself meanwhile that his arrival would be unexpected, accompanied by a gallimaufry of valets, secretaries, shorthand-writers, architects, professors, caterers, eating-companions, and cringing sycophants, to interfere with its construction in a manner which he quite erroneously imagined, when it did not more resemble that of *Le Roi Soleil*, to be Napoleonic. Sometimes a hill, a village of stone huts, or a ruin would stand in the way of his view. Then, surrounded by the motley mob of his lieutenants, he would grimace at it through a telescope, for that purpose handed to him by one of them, and dramatically would command, "Smash that village" or "Smash that hill"; just as in his oak-panelled office at home he would, in tones wherein the Welsh inflection could be heard rising and falling, telephone down to the dramatic critic, "Smash that play, Snaffles," or to the golf expert, "Smash that course, Ridpath." . . . Now that the hotel was more or less completed, though, he visited it more rarely; only, perhaps, when an acute attack of religion bade him seek sacred ground.

And such this was: for local tradition maintained that, while Moses was on Mount Sinai communing

with the Lord, Aaron had dwelt on this very spot with the Children of Israel. Influenced by this in his choice of a name for it, Lord Pridian had called the creation "The Aaron Palace Hotel," and was, in consequence, much annoyed when he discovered that his company of buffoons and comic retainers were wont to refer to it among themselves as "The Golden Calf"; a vulgar, unworthy, English-market-town appellation.

Lord Pridian and Michael's father had at one time been intimate. They had met in a riding-accident in the Row, and had (*after* regaining consciousness) made friends. But this friendship, which had begun so well in a riding-accident had finished in a financial one : for they were scarcely matched, one against the other, either in horsemanship or company-promoting. Tips, financial and racing, were equally fallacious. Nevertheless, Lord Pridian, showing the typical magnanimity of Napoleon, able to forgive those whom he had most injured, had obtained for the son of his old friend his present post. Perhaps it flattered his pride to have the heir to an ancient peerage working in the scullery, as it were, of his enterprise. Nor was Michael numbered among his cringing cronies, but was kept at a distance and only occasionally submitted to one of those battering inquisitions that were a sign of, if not the great man's favour, at least his interest. Our gossip-writer, thus, it will be apprehended, knew all about "the Boss," and after running over in his mind the things he might say, and those forbidden to him, approached, therefore, the next name with the more eagerness. .

No. 10. MAJOR-GENERAL SIR RUDYARD RAMSHAKKLE, D.V.T.O., etc., etc. Oh, yes, that old man with the bristling, grizzled, ginger hair, the rather red face and white moustachios, and the habit of puffing out his cheeks as though he had just been engaged in a hundred-yards sprint : who talked, too, as though out of breath, in an elisive and elliptical manner. . . . Had just come here from Egypt. . . . Michael had watched him last night. At present he divided his waste of time between golf, bridge, and billiards, and lost at all three. Notwithstanding, it was he, almost last of our National Heroes, who had quelled the budding mutiny at Melnaimpore by giving the order to fire into " the dirty, black-faced mob " and by making its component members, under the threat of various severe penalties, crawl next day on all fours as far as the English Church. . . . (That had put an end to it : that was the way to clean the place up : that had taught them a lesson, that had : that was the way to impress upon the uneducated natives the incorruptible majesty of the British Raj : so, on becoming acquainted with the facts, stated English public opinion through its various mouthpieces.) And now, of course, he was a figure in the land. . . . Whenever anything went wrong in the Empire-which it did continually - old men, whispering together in clubs, and middle-aged ones, wiping their mouths with the backs of their hands in public-houses, would declare, " They ought to send Ramshakkle out there, that's what they ought to do. That would stop the rot."

And, indeed, the Government often made use of his talents. He was on every Committee, was a governor of the B.B.C. and president of the new, and very

popular, Society for the Prevention of Foreign Artists from Entering Britain or of Native Ones from Escaping from It. He advised, too, on the imports of broccoli and the exports of English pianos, and, as a Currency Commissioner, had helped in another field to support British credit. And Lord Pridian for one, knowing India, was never tired of demanding, through the columns of the *Daily Spy* and its associated journals, that "Rajput Ramshakkle" should be immediately nominated Viceroy of India, or, failing that, leader of the National Party. ("A Man to Smash Socialism" and "Why Must it be a Politician?" were favourite captions designed to lead in that direction: while, after the general's return to Parliament at a by-election, the *Daily Spy*, carried beyond itself by enthusiasm, appeared with the equivocal heading, splashed right across the leading page, "Smashing Blow for Empire.") . . .

No. 11. LADY RAMSHAKKLE. Well, Birdie Ramshakkle was altogether different . . . artistic. Michael Bettony knew her quite well, had often written her up. At least twenty years younger than her husband . . . a wan, pretty, tortured-looking woman, who seemed at first sight to wince from life, she would have appealed more to Burne-Jones's sense of beauty than to that of any subsequent painter (the Pre-Raphaelite standard of beauty is now anchored for ever in the blood of the Public-School, church-going classes): a fact of which herself was quite conscious and determined to make everyone else equally aware. Always she carried about with her, wherever she went, a few reproductions of that artist's more wistful works, gazing mournfully

from sad, green-leather frames tooled with golden poppies by members of the Tooting section of the Retired Gentlewomen's League to Abolish Bolshevism, of which she was chief patron. . . . Indeed, her esthetic outlook and pale, willowy appearance in no way impeded her in the exercise of other activities, or of a love of country full-blooded and robust as that of her husband. Like him, she was known to nourish the hard, matter-of-fact patriotism of the realist; that is to say, of one who is ever willing to advance as far as he can, but will retreat directly he is forced to do so. In consequence, her popularity in India was so intense that many had convinced themselves that, not satisfied with a true memsahib's encouragement of every art-and-craft embroidery, brown-silk covers threaded with cobweb-lines of orange and boasting a thousand bright, unseeing eyes of looking-glass, muslins a-rattle with sequins and the like, she had actually influenced our policy in the Province, and wondered, even, whether the conception, usually credited to the general, of the great stroke at Melanimpore might not have had its origin in her infinitely more subtle and resourceful brain? (Certainly she was seen standing with the deacon, who was a great friend of hers, on the steps of the English Church, upon that memorable day of dusky atonement.)

When in England, she found time for everything ; for sports, hunting, and rescue-work, as much as for her favourite opera - *Carmen* - or needle-work shows. There can be no doubt, indeed, that in Lady Ramshackle's character was found manifested, to the highest degree, the great English gift for compromise. Thus, she was president of the All-British Yellow Cross

Association for the Prevention of Suffering in Animals (she had at the last meeting of the society knocked out, with her own parasol, eight rival and dissentient ladies) and was, at the same time, among women, one of the few noted big-game shots. Then, while immensely opposed to vivisection - which, as she said, could at its best only serve a *scientific* purpose ; in that, by means of such wantonly cruel experiments, medical men might in the end learn to lessen the pains endured by mankind - she was the moving spirit of the Anti-Vegetarian League, and an enthusiastic figure in the hunting-field. Moreover, she had conceived and introduced that remarkable campaign for removing the pelts of native rather than foreign rabbits, to which so much space had been devoted by the Pridian Press under the caption of " Skinning British." [The argument ran that to neglect British bunnies was plainly unfair to them. Let them reap the benefit of British industry. There they were, burrowing in British woods, and meadows, waiting to do their bit for British steel (Sheffield knives are best). Very well, then, they should be given their opportunity. Besides, one could not trust a foreigner to skin a rabbit *kindly* : whereas in our own dear land it would be done *nicely*, don't you know ?]¹ The pursuit of this ideal had given rise to a number of bazaars and fetes and, in recent months, to a celebrated fancy-dress ball. The ball-room of one of the great hotels had been turned for the night into the enlarged replica of a burrow (it had been Birdie's appropriate idea) and all the revellers had been invited to come dressed as rabbits, of one kind or

¹ By insisting on British furs a woman will be doing a practical and graceful service to the dumb animals whose furs give her so much joy."
—Quotation from letter in *Eastern Daily Press*, 1932.

another - a costume at once original, hot, and patriotic. Michael Bettony had been obliged to pay a great deal of attention to this gala, since readers of the " I Spy " column were voracious for that kind of thing. It was just what they liked. And Lady Ramshackle, always eager to oblige the public in everything, had been unsparing of herself, and had, the next morning, granted him a spirited interview concerning an uninvited guest, who, disguised as a donkey, had " gate-crashed," shouting out that he knew his garb would make him welcome. The servants had been obliged to eject so ill-mannered an intruder. . . .

No. 112. MASTER RODERICK RAMSHAKKLE. Newspaper readers love paragraphs about children ; the sillier, the better. Couldn't the poor child be induced to wear Arab dress, or something of that sort ? "... A Young Sentinel of Empire : the latest photograph of Roderick, son of Major-General Sir Rudyard Ramshackle, in a picturesque pose."

No. 120. Miss TETHER. Tether . . . Tether , . . ? The governess, of course. Nothing doing there for readers of " I Spy."

No. 14. Miss DEIRDRE RAMSHAKKLE AND NURSE . . . But now he came to

No. 18. THE BISHOP OF NEWBOROUGH AND MRS. HAGWORTHY. And the bishop was a favourite with readers of all newspapers ; a broad-calved, broad-minded, and broad-jawed prelate (Why, he pondered, do all bishops still protrude chins that to this day are so true to the epoch of Rowlandson or Hogarth ?)

who was gifted with a genius for publicity. He had given up his palace, owing to taxation, and had gone back to live in it, owing to "a sense of tradition," more often and with more *eclat* than any of his brothers of the crook. Never did he allow the public a rest. His everything - will - come - right - if - only - we - all - pull-together-in-the-wrong-direction articles were a much prized and regular feature of the Pridian Press. In days of crisis he was at his best, because he was the fortunate owner of an episcopal bedside manner, which really encouraged in the patient the fallacious assumption that he was on the road to recovery ; the reader would argue subconsciously, "Nobody would dare to be such a prolix bore and carry such a heavy apparatus of 'jolly' humour unless confident that he was right in his diagnosis." His speeches were permeated with the same indefinable quality as his writings, and on a platform he ranked as a draw with any actress, acrobat, musical monkey, or performing mouse in Britain or the Dominions beyond the Seas.

Not only was he popular in the great cities and the great spaces ; he was as well loved in his see as outside of it, for his manner was bluff and hearty, his laughter boisterous, his charities none too ostentatious, while, at the same time, his importance as a national figure induced in his flock the pleasant notion that it was at the actual centre of things. And he was very much leader of his flock. Indeed, he could stampede with the foremost and most frenzied of them. For example, during the discussions of the proposed New Prayer Book, no one had shown himself more muddled than he was muddled, or had confounded more people than he had confounded, or had been - and had shown

himself clearly to be - on more sides at once. As day had followed historic day, his life had become increasingly eventful, until he had become the busiest bishop of the lot, living in a delicious but confusing whirl of statements, interviews, counter-statements, letters to the Press, more interviews, telegrams from archbishops, and warnings to inhibited curates (inhibited, that is, in the best sense). And it was in those times that Michael Bettony had first, and professionally, come into touch with him.

Further, he boasted a passion for compromise, and, though otherwise very modern, betrayed a great love of Latin tags. When engaged in argument, and in doubt as to its outcome, he always introduced one with effect. And he believed, though he was too wise to make this public, that if only a few of them could be sprinkled over the discussions in council-chambers, when industrial disputes were in progress, such unrest would swiftly die a natural death. But, in general, the secret of his success, and of the wide esteem in which he was held, resided in the fact that it was plain to all who knew him, or who read his articles, that he was on terms of affectionate intimacy with the Deity, Whom he treated, not only as a good-all-round-sportsman-with death as His hounds - but as a real man-of-the-world, with no nonsense about Him. And nonsense, in the mind of the bishop, was identical with anything that transcended a rather limited imagination. Thus, from the point of view of the Church of England, he was, technically, very advanced : he held that we must reconcile science with religion, each being complementary, and even indispensable, to the other. For science, he used to point out in his sermons, " exists

that it may enable us to understand the ways of God, just as the ways of God illumine science " ; a somewhat ambiguous, if comforting, statement. . . . But then it was amazing, he used to add, how everything gradually became clear, if only you cogitated on it long enough. . . . In fact, he was certain that the Almighty would never in His Creation have stooped to the employment of any methods which he, the Lord Bishop of Newborough, could not comprehend : while in discourse he was apt to declaim passages from the writings of prominent scientists, as ecclesiastics, in days gone by, were wont to quote from the Holy Writ.

His healthy, materialist outlook, apart from endearing him to all who met him, had been responsible for the general request that he should aid the archbishops in composing the special prayers to be read in the places of worship on the Day of National Prayer for the Recovery of the Pound ; a form of service which finally placed upon the broad shoulders of the Almighty the whole onus for the capitalist system, and more particularly for the British branch of that institution. And although, as the bishop looked round on the tight little British Empire, he immensely resented the suggestion, insinuated into one or two of the new efforts by his more socialistic colleagues, that arrogance or greed could in any way have been included in the category of virtues which through the ages had helped to build it up, he willingly lent his assistance, all the more valuable because of so long an experience of literary matters. Some of the prayers that resulted were indubitably his own : and such ones as " Send Thy Pound peace in our time, O Lord " and " We beseech Thee, Almighty God, to prop up Thy Credit

System, so that Thy servants may continue to derive a fair, just, and even handsome profit " ranked among his most fortunate inspirations. . . . And . . .

MRS. HAGWORTHY. Of Mrs. Hagworthy, Michael Bettony knew little, except that she was often described in newspapers as " a real helpmeet to her husband " : and that her friends liked to say of her, " Madeline was really never *pretty*, but she has a pleasant face " - by which, actually, they meant a plain, bad-tempered one, with a very determined, all-weather, travelling smile hung over its thin leather lips. Her eyes were of an implacable greyness, beneath very straight black brows : her nose was perpendicular - Early Perpendicular - rather than slanting, with fierce little distended nostrils, and her whole face was set, as a rule, in a nest of soft white hair and soft white lace so inappropriate as to make it look still more forbidding. . . . She was a lady who knew her own mind, and ignored that of everyone else. To her husband's gift for compromise she opposed her own talent for directness. She prided herself on always going " straight to the point " (invariably a disagreeable one) : for she believed in telling people what she thought, but her power of thinking was, alas ! less remarkable than her power of expression. Both the bishop and Mrs. Hagworthy were intimate with the super-rich, and were at present staying here, after a tour of the Holy Land, as the guests of Lord Pridian. . . . So Michael Bettony must be careful again, in the writing of his paragraphs.

No. 21. SIR LEVY LOLLYGO, BART., M.P., presented no difficulties, either to Michael or to the general public.

Son of the late Lazarus Lollygo, " merchant " of Hull, his name was a household word. It had been made immortal too, and its correct pronunciation for ever established in the national consciousness, by a snatch popular in the first decade of the century. Pierrots, from a thousand platforms by the then prosperous pale-eyed northern seas, would, as the piano rattled out, run and jump forward, singing - while the white-clothed figure at the piano, with his back to the audience, turned his head right round over his shoulder to prove how independent was he of a written score -

*" Oh ! here's a jolly go,
Pm Levy Lollygo :
To prove it's no spoof,
Pm after your oof"*

. . . An immensely influential old man, it was said . . . yet Michael Bettony, though his profession did not allow him to be too fastidious, found it difficult to like Sir Levy. It was not that he entertained any aversion for Jews as such : but that this one was plainly of so low and wallowing a variety, of a baser and more repulsive order, even, than any wealthy Englishman of the same ideals. . . . [And the young journalist asked himself, what could be the explanation of this problem that had so often puzzled him ; a racial one, for he did not fall into the usual English error of regarding Jews, not as members of a race, but as members only of a common faith? In example, he possessed many Jewish friends whom he loved and admired ; people who combined an immense talent for enjoyment and an exotic love of the arts and conversation, with a certain curious austerity. But Sir Levy was not one

of these, and seemed to betray, both in mind and appearance, some entirely different blood. Was it that he had reverted to the type of certain ancestors, who had originally been members of one of the many Palestinian nations whom the Israelites, when they had taken it into their heads to settle in the Holy Land, had first conquered, then converted to their religion and finally absorbed - Jebusite, Ammonite, Canaanite (the Canaanites, he had been told, were renowned for their hideousness), Hittite, and Perizzite - and that thus he did in reality represent a different breed? Or was it merely that, as a race, the Hebrews tend less to establish an average, are inclined to produce individuals who are either higher or infinitely lower than the average citizens born of other nations? This would account for the preoccupation of the higher types with philosophy, religion, or scholarship, their devotion to duty and absolute neglect of all mundane considerations, just as it would explain the entirely material outlook and interests of such men as Sir Levy.] . . . Notwithstanding, in his repulsive clumsy way, he was indubitably clever. Michael thought for a moment, and then, in preparation for a paragraph, turning chit-chat spinner once more, noted down in his book the customary keyword, "*genial*." Never was this adjective allowed to be separated from his name in print; any more than was the description "philanthropic"; which is now always applied in the columns of the newspapers to any extremely rich man. . . .

Outwardly the great financier resembled a very fleshy and aged wild-boar, save that his countenance lacked the expression, peculiar to that animal, of brutal courage. Nevertheless, he showed his tusks. . . .

Perhaps in some aspects he seemed more rodential or reptilian than porcine ; a dark-coloured bald head, fringed by thin but matted curls of horsehair, or some substance akin to it ; a huge blunted nose with wide-winged nostrils ; and little twinkling dark eyes peering through a great mask of crocodile skin, sprinkled here and there with black bristles, and inevitably smeared across with a horrible sneering smile that revealed two pointed ivories and which, further, had bestowed upon him his journalistic description. Yet to those who observed for themselves, without accepting the placard thus handed to them, his geniality must have recalled the legendary smile of Red Riding Hood's self-alleged grandmother. The voice that came through his large shapeless lips was glutinous, difficult and thick of articulation, as though a human soul were prisoned within this hideous body of a saurian and must use its clumsy tongue to essay speech, or again, as though some rare and cunning beast had been, after much training and the continual effort of many years, almost educated up to the point of talking. . . . Such, in voice and outward form, was this Paladin of capitalism. (And why, Michael questioned, should it be unfair - as we are so often told it is - to judge by the exterior features, when the tiger and the wasp both flash their stripes as a warning and the shark glitters in its appalling and admonitory whiteness : and when, similarly, Sir Levy's appearance amounted to a caution, kindly provided for us by Nature herself, to avoid all dealings with him ?) This was the man so often called as the champion of a system of which, at face-value, as it were, his appearance alone - if he really were its ideal defender - constitutes a sufficient condemnation. For

Sir Levy, typical representative of our democracy, had sat for many years in the British House of Commons, where he represented a Scottish constituency. He owned a castle in the Highlands, and the temperament of the old pagurian often led him to identify his ancestry with that of the romantic but vigorous race which inhabited those hills, moors, and valleys. Nevertheless, though he had been known to claim Jacobite descent, and though quite often he wore a kilt of that tartan which had belonged to the former owners of his domain, he was no feudalist, but was inclined to see himself, on the contrary, as a humble crofter risen to fortune.

The diversions caused by the great financier's speeches in the House of Commons were many, for the very personal characteristics of his pronunciation tended at times to obscure somewhat his meaning. Thus, in a debate which grew out of some reforms proposed in the laws governing the treatment of insane persons, the old philanthropist was understood - and Hansard subsequently perpetuated the error - to demand the internment of "all people who are thirty-five." Consternation, naturally, was caused among the junior members by this apparently unwarranted attack on those younger than himself, and much and wide bewilderment : nor was this in any way lessened by the honourable gentleman's insistent and angry reiteration of "I never said thirty-five : I said *thirty-five* " : and this general commotion continued until, in the end, it transpired that Sir Levy had intended to say - and considered he had said - not "thirty-five," but "certified."

In some respects, he approximated to Lord Pridian

(who, notwithstanding, secretly entertained a great aversion to him). Thus he was, as himself would have framed it, " a Man-of-Big-Idearth " ; in effect, the sort of " leading capitalist " who, by his megalomaniac materialism and blatant irresponsibility, had helped to ruin capitalism. Moreover, he had been one of the first to grasp the commercial value of " Empire " as a decoy, the names of nearly all his undertakings carried the swollen prefix of " Imperial," while his every public utterance was crowned by some appeal, high-sounding and vague, for further folly. " We want Big Men with Vithion," " Imperial Prothperity dependth on Imperial Enterprithe," " Our Induthdrieth demand Expanthion," or " We mutht learn to Think Imperially " : these were some of his happily phrased inspirations. It is probable that he believed in himself and his words ; his actions were in accordance with them. Every balloon within reach Sir Levy had inflated to bursting point, and most of them had by now burst. Yet, though in these slump days the old baronet was much poorer than formerly, he was still one of the richest men who have ever squeezed money out of a grateful country, and he was not in the least dismayed, though shares which had rocketed up to 280 and 290 were now in the neighbourhood of 8J. He had lost money (but his shareholders had lost more) : and he remained undaunted. He preferred to place the blame upon high national taxation rather than upon his own excessive greed, and had retired undefeated on catchwords so new and untried, albeit perilous to the tongue, as " Organithathion" and " Rathionalithe Your Induthtrieth" (it was to be noticed that the industries were " our " in good, and

" your " in bad, times), and was merely waiting until the American National Hysteria should sweep back from undue distrust toward unjustifiable confidence, before launching several new little ideas.

Even now, though, he was not idle ; nor for a moment had he abandoned his habit of " thinking imperially." Michael Bettony remembered how only in recent years and as an old man — led to it, perhaps, by some queer ancestral reversion - he had acquired considerable interests in Egypt and still more extensive ones in Palestine, which offered, in his opinion, a great field for modern enterprise. Further, he was responsible for the attempts at present on foot to locate gold at the base of Mount Sinai : for he was of the tribe of Levy, and it is written that his ancestor Aaron, while Moses was upon the Mount engaged in communing with the Lord, had made on this very spot a golden calf, to that purpose addressing the Children of Israel in these words, " Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me." And where, Sir Levy naturally asked himself, did the gold come from ? . . . But it was a difficult business, and two of the prospectors had died. The Dead Sea, again, had particularly captured his imagination : its possibilities were immense. (It could, indeed, supply the whole modern world with sulphur and brimstone.) But, alas ! he was too late in the field : a rival company had already been formed to exploit the minerals, and its rights were fully established.

Nevertheless, Sir Levy's genius had enabled him to perceive the existence of a fortune in what had hitherto been regarded as an unprofitable by-product of those

waters : the Dead Sea fruit. This "fruit" looks palatable and even delicious, costs nothing, and there is an abundant and never-failing supply of it. Sir Levy's plan was to find a market for it among the nomads and natives of the more distant desert-lands : because these would be attracted by its cooling, fresh appearance, and unaware of its nauseating flavour. He had framed a scheme, consequently, of a large and imperial order and was even now floating a company, which was to be named "The Imperial British and Palestine Mandated Fruit Supply Corporation," to carry on the business. Profits might not be long : but Sir Levy intended to see that they were large. Chiefly, it would, of course, be an affair of organisation. The fruit would be transported across the deserts in caterpillar lorries, armoured for defence, bearing machine-guns (natives were very troublesome sometimes) and heavily insured ; in case, after a month or two of this diet, there should be "symptoms of disaffection among the tribes." . . . One couldn't be too careful, for the genial old man remembered how, once before, when he was immersed in some similar philanthropic work on behalf of the Arabs, they had nearly captured him, lying in ambush for his car. Stones were thrown and, though all the members of his party succeeded in making their escape, they were yet forced, on their way back, to disguise themselves in order to avoid their cowardly persecutors. Sir Levy was now accompanied, as so often on his business expeditions, by his devoted only daughter. . . .

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No 22. Miss POPPY LOLLYGO. (That would make quite a good paragraph for the readers of the "I

Spy " column. . . , Better do it while he thinks of it, and under the watchful eyes of the Egyptians he jots down in his book : " Miss Poppy Lollygo, the vivacious daughter of that great Empire capitalist. Sir Levy Lollygo, inherits a fair share of her famous father's geniality and charm, and, since the lamented death of Lady Lollygo, some years ago, has entertained much for him. She is, of course, very musical. Mr. Garrulous met her, a few days back, at a little pyjama cocktail-party she threw in the Aaron Palace Hotel beneath Mount Sinai, and she gave him some intriguing details of the lovely villa they have built outside Bethlehem. The Villa Beelzebub - as, with a typical English sense of fun, her father has named it - is most original. Except that a turret at each corner recalls Balrakkat Castle, their beloved Scottish home-Balrakkat, perhaps, is Sir Levy's favourite residence - it is in every other respect an exact replica of the Lollygo country scat, Crabhermit Hall, that splendid old Jacobean place in Sussex. Naturally, it looks extremely well in its new surroundings, though it was no easy matter to produce the half-timbered effect of the west facade, or to copy the lovely plaster ceilings. All the old beams were sent, she told him, from England, and so was the furniture, as well as numerous flowers. ' Of course Daddy said to me, " Buy British," ' Miss Lollygo related, laughing. ' You know what he's like ! ' The daffodils, of which twenty thousand bulbs were planted, flower in February, the Dorothy Perkins roses are just over, and there will be a fine show of chrysanthemums in the autumn. But Miss Poppy owned that she found it difficult to acclimatise there the bluebells of Auld Scotland. . . . ' We miss them,'

she said simply. ' To us they mean something that no Sassenach can comprehend. Still, the place itself is too, too marvellous and, as you may imagine, so British and home-like,' she added in her quick way, with her father's fascinating smile, ' but the natives are absolute Gehenna.' "... Yes : that would do, he thought.)

The vivacious Miss Poppy was not swarthy, but pale with a strange ichthyoid pallor, a slimy, deep-sea achromatism, the complement of her father's darkness. She was built, too, on a much smaller scale. Nevertheless, it was true that she had inherited, in a degree, his smile : when *she* simpered, it was as though a very strong, unshaded electric light had been turned on for an instant and was splashing you with its hard whiteness, while *his* intimidating grin resembled a more powerful limelight, with an orange slide over it; one which could be focused on any object with ease and celerity. . . . Her chief hobby was heraldry, and she enjoyed playing the piano. . . .

No. 23. MR. STUART LOLLYGO. Stuart - or Tuey, as he was called in the family - was about forty years of age, and Sir Levy's son and heir. His first name was the fruit of Sir Levy's Jacobite tendencies. But they did not survive in this offspring, who had been driven by the violent antipathy that existed between himself and his father - and for which it was hard to blame either of them - into becoming an enthusiastic supporter of the Russian Soviet's : than which nothing could have more grieved and affronted the old financier. In conversation he always identified himself with the Bolsheviks by the use of " we " when talking

of them, and "you " when referring to other communities. That aspect of Russia which had originally in part attracted him was perhaps the revolution in the relationship between parents and children : there, at least, no talk existed of love on one side or of duty on the other. A creche was the proper place for a child : and it could pursue a happy, parent-free life. Nevertheless, at present, Stuart was enjoying one of his yearly reconciliations with his parent, and had journeyed from Moscow specially to meet him. Perhaps each had from time to time a great need of the other's company, however unsympathetic, in that it supplied him with a particular, accustomed stimulus of frayed nerves which he could obtain after no other fashion.

But in no way did Tuey take after his father. A desiccated, professorial type of Semite, his intelligence was of an unpractical and rather abstract nature. He had a narrow forehead, and, in general, a narrow, flattened look, which suggested that as a child he had been pressed between the pages of some gigantic ledger. There was nothing uliginose in his stature or countenance, and his voice altogether lacked the succulence of the paternal tones, grating painfully and rising angrily even when at peace, while his lisp was arid and arrogant. Very fond of argument, in it he would lose a little of his dryness, while, further, he was as great a lover of doctrine as ever were his Pharisee or Sadducee ancestors - but doctrines of a political rather than religious order - and, though in a different direction from his father, possessed a strong belief in the value of "organithathion." All institutions represented themselves naturally to his mind under

initials, and all human beings as numerals, to be added or subtracted ; so that the manifestly similar tendency on the part of the Bolsheviki must plainly have endeared them to him. The portion of the human heart (now officially classified by such beings as himself under the heading of " the subconscious mind ") which has created religion and the arts, which has summoned, out of the void, gods of tremendous power, wonder and beauty, as much as those multiple-limbed, dyed, and exotic deities boasting the majesty of transcendent horror, and has invented the temples appropriate for their worship, had been altogether omitted from the purely chemical processes, as they seemed, of his formation,, and was, indeed, odious to him.

He delighted now to watch the *Russian Experiment*, as he termed it, and spent many months each year in the U.S.S.R. In England he had given quantities of time and money to all the various ineffective attempts to foster better relations between the two countries. He was the founder of the L.S.A.Y. (or Love-the-Soviet-as-Yourselfes) Association, a society formed to raise funds in Great Britain for such purposes as the presentation to the OGPU of dentist's drills, for use in Russian prisons, of dynamite to the Soviet Government for the blowing up of its churches, and of Rolls-Royce cars to carry the peasants back to their farms after the theatre. . . . The response to these appeals, however, had been a little disappointing - but this was certainly in no way due to any want of enthusiasm on the part of Stuart. . . . Stuart was always attended, despite his own political principles, which he accommodated by bestowing the reciprocated title of *comrade* upon his servant, by

No. 24. CROUCHER, a valet; and Croucher - which made it easier - was a zealous Bolshevik, never so happy as when visiting Moscow with his master, Comrade Lollygo. . . . Comrade Croucher had not so much sublimated the inherent sycophancy of his nature as transferred it to the Soviet leaders. Thus he always spoke of them to other servants, telling stories of Stalin, it might be, and how he was dressed, and the details of his appearance and speech, and of the car in which he drove, in precisely the same manner in which the valets of fifty years ago used to dwell on the detailed merits or delicious faults of Royal Personages. . . . Towards the governing classes of other countries he bore a deep enmity, and was fervent as his master in flouting their bourgeois conventions ; as, for example, by sitting down and putting on his hat during the playing of the National Anthem. He loved to whistle the " Red Flag " when Sir Levy was in the next room, and on one occasion all the retainers at Crabhermit Hall had given their notice to the venerable millionaire, because Croucher had insisted on reading portions of Karl Marx's *Capital* aloud to them after supper. Sometimes he lectured in public on the Soviet System, breathless psalms of praise, and Betty had been taken by Tuey to hear a specimen of them. . . . But he was a good servant, and a necessary one : because Tuey, who prided himself on his practical and realistic outlook, was singular in his absolute personal helplessness, and could in no way deal with the complicated modern apparatus of dressing and undressing.

No. 28. MR. FULLER-FLITMOUSE was brother of Jerry Flitmouse, the coming young diplomat, and of

Aubrey Flitmouse, the scientist ; and Michael Bettony again takes out his note-book and notes down, " Foreign Office . . . famous biologist." Eric, the esthetic member of his family, was also a youngish man. Greenly pale, as though his features were carved from green turtle, with a large head and tortoise-shell spectacles, he worked in a museum, where he shuffled spectrally between avenues of vitrines, in the four glass walls of each of which, as well as upside-down in its glass ceiling, his high-shouldered, low-waisted Tahitian silhouette was reflected to infinity as he passed. Here he seemed the spirit attached sometimes to this, sometimes to that, primitive object, the spiritual emanation of a feather mask from New Caledonia or the shadow thrown into the next world by a fetish from the Congo, while, in the open air outside, he would, it was to be conjectured, have dissolved, uttering the last of his cynical, supercilious giggles while so doing, into dust - not earth, but ashes : and his materialisation, rather than his vanishing, would then have been seen, in its true perspective, as the illusion.

The manner of his speech served, perhaps, to bind him to this world. It was languid, its syllables stressed manfully in the wrong place, although its matter was full of enlightenment. Eric was a nice, old-fashioned snob - in contradistinction, for instance, to Croucher aforementioned, who was a nasty, new one. He positively revelled in titles, whether ancient or modern. But he betrayed a regrettable insensitiveness in boasting-for his assumed modesty, an inverted pride, amounted to this-to people such as Lady Helen or Stuart, neither of whom, for their varying reasons, would

be at all impressed by the names he brought forth and then proceeded to play with, quietly, as a squirrel counting out its winter hoard of precious nuts. To learn this particular lowering of the voice at resounding titles, so as to produce the impression that to him they were a boring, everyday affair, had at first been no easy lesson. His conversation, on which he congratulated himself, was thus chiefly occupied with little, twittering spurts of gossip, or with immensely long stories of cataloguing in aristocratic country-houses and laughing talcs of the lowly treatment he had received therein ; all designed with mock humility to demonstrate his own supreme unimportance and the insignificance of museum-officials in general, although in reality they revealed his secret belief that these dusty mandarins were the embodiment of all most precious in European culture. (So might an everlasting flower pass judgment on itself as the most beauteous of spring blossoms).

Eric's appreciation in matters of art was not lightly to be won ... a Byzantine boot-button here, a Gothic stone-finger, an Egyptian lip there, but never a thing entire, whole, uninjured, and alive. He was staying at the Aaron Palace in order to visit and study the reliefs which are found in the Mines of Maghara . . . and had excavated a small portion of one of them, which had been fortunate enough to arouse his admiration : the tail of an ox which, *in extenso*, was doubtless drawing a cart. After himself, his brother Aubrey was at once Eric's greatest interest and trump-card ; for Aubrey was a brilliant and famous young professor of biology ; and Eric's lengthy monologues were largely concerned with his theories and experiments. And

after Aubrey came Jerry : poor, snuffling Jerry of the Foreign Office. . . . Michael Bettony supposed that he could make something out of Eric, but the " I Spy " public was not really interested in such people. Nor, of course, was it in the least impressed by his scientist brother, though it enjoyed for the moment listening to his broadcasts and reading his semi-sermons, which were often opposed in the same issue of the evening paper to the semi-science of Dean Inge. . . . Better, far better, was

No. 34. LADY HELEN HORNMAKER, beauty, traveller, and the greatest ornament of our divorce courts. Her career had been eagerly followed, from its inception, by the amateurs of that world. . . . Michael had known of her for a long time (in fact, the editor had sent him to attend several of her weddings), but he had never met her until last night. . . . She had been so sweet to him. . . . It was impossible not to love her. A pale skin, through which some light shone, a glowing, dark-coloured light ; long, slanting, green eyes, which distributed a very level radiance ; straight eyebrows and dark-golden hair ; a long body crowned with a small head-in fact, by type, that most rare and lovely of beings, a fair Italian or Spaniard, a fair Venetian, fair with a dark glow underneath the fairness. . . . But though it might be possible to classify her beauty, in every other respect, he thought, it was as though she were unconnected with the rest of her sex, class, and nation - a phenomenon. She did exactly the things she wanted to do. Throughout one day, forgetting meals entirely, she would eat only two or three nuts, standing at a window and probably throwing the shells out in

an absent-minded manner : the next day, she might feast. And - not that she was old - she remained young so easily, without that resort to vehemence which others found necessary. . . . She was young because she never thought how old she was. . . . Again, she irradiated the queerest kind of innocence, not in the old baby-face sense, but in a manner altogether modern and self-possessed. Alarming, she always told the truth. Thus her frequent and open breaches of the public moral code had affected very little the regard in which she was held ; for her absolute and pagan inability to comprehend that any sin could be connected with a human body - so long as it was not an ugly one - had, in a curious way, sterilised the scandal ; a thing which could have occurred to a woman in no other generation.

But then her attitude toward love-affairs was, for one of her sex, a new departure, approximating more nearly to that of certain men ; a Juanesque attitude. Who has heard of a man refusing to love a girl because she was " such a cad " or " such a bounder " ? Similarly, Helen was willing to lavish an ecstatic temporary affection upon cads and bounders. When her friends, when men of her own upbringing, complained to her of this, she laughed ; for to her it signified nothing that her lovers were outrageous. She adored them, she knew, for the moment, and because of some definite physical attraction : and, if other women failed to understand her point of view, that was not her concern. (She was, in fact, a collector of men : large men, small men, masculine men, effeminate men, stupid men, clever men, cads and bounders, all interested her for a day or a night ; interested her

truly, for she never allowed herself to be overwhelmed by her sexual bias of the minute, could recognise, for example, even during the few days she was in love with Michael, that Enfelon was the more remarkable man. But Michael would never suspect this.) She wearied of men with the same rapidity as she fell in love with them. Fortunately for their peace of mind, the men she loved seldom realised for themselves this characteristic of hers, until it was too late to make scenes or protest. Sometimes she had made rich marriages and sometimes poor ones : but all were alike in the shortness of their duration. In spite of her cleverness, in spite of her beauty, she had, people said, made a muddle of her life. That could scarcely be true, however, for she had enjoyed it all - divorce and marriage equally. She had not expected such things to be protracted ; knew herself well enough for that. Only in money-matters had she been a failure : for she was extremely unmercenary, liked money merely because she liked to spend it, and preferred squandering her own to other people's.

Now she was running a decorating establishment. Her home was extremely pretty, her dress always perfection. In such things her taste was excellent : yet, once she attempted to capitalise it, to make a business out of it, the results were unpredictable except in their being, inevitably, atrocious. . . . Every room she touched professionally, so her enemies declared, was transformed at once into the likeness of a divorce court. ... At present she was being employed by Lord Pridian to furnish part of the hotel : and it was taking her a long time to complete. (Incidentally, Michael tried to recall, hadn't she at one time been married to

Clifford Hearnshaw ? He couldn't quite remember . . . must ask her. . . . She'd be sure to know.) . . .

No. 35. THE HONBLE. MICHAEL BETTONY. (Comfortable inner glow.) Who was next ?

No. 44. MADAME GALACTIC. The celebrated medium, or, as she and the American Press preferred to have it called, *noted spiritist*.

This large American lady had achieved an extraordinary amount of useful work for the Cause. During a famous trance in The Boltons, South Kensington, she had been bound, head-downward, to boards, with a gag over her mouth and with her ankles padlocked into handcuffs, yet, despite these hindrances to physical activity, had contrived to knock cigarettes out of the hands of eminent scientists sitting together in darkness in the next room (amazing !), and had rattled tambourines in the boudoir, played drums in the drawing-room, struck gongs in the library, clacked castanets in the bathroom, sung through trumpets in the basement, and thrown two tiles off the roof into the street below, all at the same time ! . . . Really there was no end to her psychic accomplishments. She was skilled in phrenology, mesmerism, hypnotism, and onomantics ; in the arts black and white ; in high magic ; in clairvoyance, clairsaudience, divination, and astrology ; in chiromancy, cartomancy, ololygmancy, daphnomancy, spodomancy, necromancy, thaumaturgy and theurgy, and transataumancy, as well as in every form, rare or common, of voodoo and hoodoo. . . . Enemies there were who denied, who were sceptical of, her boasted power of falling into trances and attributed the

symptoms, which she produced in triumphant proof of it, to an over-indulgence in oenomanancy : but, at least, they had to admit that astral bodies held no mystery for her and she could cast horoscopes, rap tables, and fabricate ectoplasm with the best in the land. Her control, " Little Toucan," who during Madame Galactic's trances spoke through her mouth in an eager, pidgin English, was, so she alleged, a negress of twelve years of age. . . . Madame Galactic had just arrived from Egypt, where she had been the instrument of a very curious and discursive exchange of views, held in the interior of the Great Pyramid, between Rameses II and " Little Toucan." . . . (Rameses, who talked English fluently, betrayed an inclination to render the word " got " as " gotten.")

Nos. 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74- THE SHEREEF ABDUL AND HOUSEHOLD. The renowned Arab chieftain descended from Abu Talib ... a power in the East : a dignified though unexpectedly dark-faced figure; for, like many of the great chiefs, owing to the Harem System employed by his ancestors, black blood flowed in his veins. . . . *Household ?* Michael thought that, by the sounds issuing from his rooms, one would assume that he travelled with a touring music-hall company, or a midnight-matinee cabaret-performance, rather than with a household . . . chanting and drums and tambourines. ... He at once planned a paragraph. " Mr. Garrulous writes : ' Somewhere in the desert yesterday, I ran into the Shereef Abdul, the great chieftain, looking very bronzed and well' . . . (or should he say ¹ tanned ' ?). ' He is, of course, a well-known figure

on the Turf, and on every golf-course in the south of France. He is very popular in London, which he visits once a year both to order his robes, which are cut to his pattern by a first-rate firm of tailors, and to see the running of the Derby, which he won two years ago with his colt Fatima. He travels with a large household, and his own orchestra and company of entertainers invariably accompany him. He told me that he had much enjoyed his talks with the Bishop of Newborough who is at present . . . ' "

No. 86. FATHER MUNNION. The eminent Catholic student . . . sent here, Helen had said, by the Vatican to study various missals and codices in the possession of the monks in St. Katherine's. A man of quiet but exceptional tact, he had been able, in spite of the ancient but still existing feud between the Churches Catholic and Orthodox, gradually to persuade the monks to trust and like him, and was thus allowed to examine all the papers in the library without interference from them. . . . He had spent many months at St. Katherine's, but had now been obliged to seek sanctuary in the hotel for a week or two, finding a change necessary from the dietetic peccadillos of the old white-bearded brothers. Not, indeed, that they indulged in rich food, or a too great diversity of it ; their order forbade them both meat and wine, and their diet was often confined to bread and dried fruits : but their hospitality - and they were truly hospitable - made them atone for this by pressing on their guests great quantities of home-made *araki*, a liqueur manufactured from dates, and their guests could not in friendliness refuse to pledge them. . . . Father Munnion had formed an unlikely

friendship with Lady Helen. Each respected the other, and in his presence she made an effort to behave as other people behave. . . .

No. 92. NINETTE DE NINA. (A real treat for readers of "I Spy.") One of those rusty-skinned, raven-haired women carrying pantomime-heads far too ponderous for their bodies, and with smiles heavy and slow as their eyes, who, for some photographic reason or another, are transformed by the screen into visions of beauty, frail, fragile, and passionate, and thus become the idols of five palpitating continents. Parted from the camera, she was, albeit millions were in love with her likeness - for as such in their ignorance they accepted it - neither pretty nor intelligent. Her voice was now slow and husky, but even Hollywood could remember a time, not long ago, when it was indeed a siren voice ; though the siren seemed of the mechanical rather than of the fleshly variety. The talkies had fortunately damped it down ; and now at luncheon- or dinner-parties it dragged after it - uphill work - that well-known load, as it might be a show-car laden with painted and motionless allegorical figures, of American charity and kindness. Nevertheless, on the films her success had been prodigious, and she was a world-figure. Her divorces of temperament had long been a feature of the Press in every country of the globe. In private life - a thing which, as a matter of fact, she never permitted - she had been

- (1) Mrs. Lew Morris,
- (2) Mrs. FitzKelly,
- (3) Duchesse de Conde,
- (4) H.S.H. Princesse Hohenstaufen-Gliicksberg,

(5) Duquesa del Rio Calente,
and her sixth and present soul-mate was

No. 93. CLIFFORD HEARNshaw, film-hero, pilot, and golfing-champion. His silence and his firm-chinned profile had made his reputation, and were, perhaps, the most significant things about him ; except that he was able, too, to play the guitar and sing duets with Ninette, who had a great love of offering her friends this kind of entertainment. Whenever an opportunity occurred in public, she would rush forward, sit on the floor at Clifford's feet, and begin either one of those inane, gay, Southern ditties that are fortunately confined to the guitar as an instrument, or else a negro-spiritual. The object of this was partly to show how human she was, how unspoilt by success. She needn't even be asked to sing : no trouble or bother. . . . They had come here, " Mr. Garrulous " understood, to find inspiration for a grand, all-biblical talkie of Moses and Pharaoh. (Originally the film was to have opened with Ninette de Nina, in the character of Pharaoh's daughter, discovering Baby Clifford in the bulrushes, but the difficulty of the subsequent adjusting of ages had now forced them altogether to abandon this idea.) . . .

No. 184. REV. SYMSPON. Such abbreviations and distortions were the penalties incurred through permanent residence in a hotel. The directors very naturally despise you for it, and Michael had often noticed how, the more convinced a hotel-management became of your continued custom, the more fantastic became the variations of your name : so that " Rev,

Symspon " was doubtless the latest sportive nickname bestowed, by one of that sly tribe behind the glass panels, upon Mr. Cyril Simpson, the resident chaplain. . . . Lord Pridian had " given " - nobody quite knew to whom, but presumably to his Creator - the English Church : and it was His Lordship, too, who had given to this church Mr. Simpson, his pet curate. . . . More than that, Mr. Simpson, as Michael knew, had constituted, in fact, one of the chief reasons of the church being built and the only cause of it having assumed its present outward form.

This was the story of Mr. Simpson. Lord Pridian, during a strangely amiable Napoleonic interlude, had one Sunday by chance attended the Morning Service in a village church. The vicar was ill, and in consequence the curate, a very young man, preached in his stead. It was his first sermon and - no one will ever know why, for Buonaparte was notoriously inscrutable and given to caprice - it produced a great impression upon Lord Pridian, who had sent for him afterwards, had commented, " You're a great lad, Mr. Simpson " (from him no mean praise), and, before the poor, rattled little man had even been granted the time to realise the identity of his patron, or to what land he was journeying, he had at once crowned him with a topee and whisked him away in an airplane to the desert; there to be established on an income that to him seemed fabulous, and to preside in great stateliness over an unbuilt and, indeed, only recently dreamed church. . . . And then, surprisingly to those who knew him, Mr. Simpson had begun to assert himself. . . . It had been expensive, that little stone church. More, it was said, had been spent upon it, in spite of

its diminutive size, than upon the whole hotel, panelled within and without, as it was, with the most precious marbles : because, notwithstanding that porphyries and granites, basalts and alabasters, of the rarest beauty were to be quarried easily in every part of the peninsula, Mr. Simpson, on being consulted, had vetoed all such materials and had threatened, were they made use of, immediately to return home. The church, he declared, would not look respectable if thus decked out as the Scarlet Woman. It was " inconsistent with the tenets of the Anglican faith" : and, albeit a mannikin of the mildest manner, he had insisted on its being built in a cataleptic Bournemouth-Gothic, of Cotswold stone specially imported from England, and had bullied and browbeaten Lord Pridian into ultimate acquiescence and payment. This had been a mighty victory : for Lord Pridian was a man of tenacious mind, and had from the start recognised that this coarse, grey stone could here masquerade as an extravagance of the wildest order, a veritable folly, and that a temple fashioned of solid gold would scarce cost him a greater sum. . . . Before many days had passed, however, the idea had conquered His Lordship's imagination, had positively captivated him. . . . Indeed, he would have liked to have gone further, Proud of his own good taste, and aware of all that had been achieved in that same direction by W. R. Hearst, he would, of course, have preferred, as he admitted subsequently, to " buy up one of those old places " and convey it hither, stone by numbered stone, to become so appropriate a feature of the wilderness; But this, unfortunately, since it was a consecrated building that he wanted, could not be arranged, and

he had been obliged to content himself with erecting a new one, as Mr. Simpson had originally suggested. Nevertheless, even this scheme, petty as it was in comparison with the other, had been agreeable to him, appealing as it did to his Napoleon-complex : for special ships could be constructed to carry the stone quickly, and simple masons, torn from their cottage, Cotswold homes, could be dropped down of a sudden, into the desert, from the air above. . . . Thus, in the end, Mr. Simpson's extravagant whimsy had, somewhat unexpectedly, confirmed him in the favour of his patron. " He's a great lad," His Lordship would repeat appreciatively, whenever the conversation turned on him.

In appearance, Mr. Simpson was one of Nature's curates ; a vague-minded little athlete of a clergyman, whose aspect betrayed a constant desire to pray ; or, perhaps, not so much to pray as to wrestle in prayer. His very face, narrow and wan as that of a greyhound, seemed composed of two supplicating profiles, folded in prayer, as hands are, round the central line of his features. Indeed, he was very greyhound-like. . . . There was a certain expression of tenseness and pursuit in his gaze, as though some transcendent electric hare were for ever eluding him, leaving him breathless and unsatisfied. But he compensated for so austere a shell by developing to the highest pitch a particularly jolly, " you - needn't - mind - what - you - say - in - front - of - me " laugh, an automatic, self-starting, Public-School (he was, you could see at a glance, from a famous Public School) laugh, often quite unconnected with anything going on round it. . . . Besides, he was very literary, a great admirer of " the Shropshire Lad " and

of Miss Clemence Dane ; while, when in England, he entered, too, for all the competitions in the literary journals and evinced a fondness for paper-games. . . . Decidedly he was the right man in the right place. . . . He had achieved everything he had desired here . . . a church of Cotswold stone, a lychgate, oak doors clamped with a design of cast-iron ivy-leaves, lots of iron railings, an octagonal pulpit of Portland stone, an unstained oak reredos, much brass-work . . . everything except that organ ! . . . Notwithstanding, it was now his desire to leave his church and become a missionary in the black heart of Africa. . . . Well, he wouldn't be missed, what with the bishop and Father Munnion, Michael Bettony reflected. There were quite enough ecclesiastics here, of one kind or another ; and, except for old Hagworthy, one couldn't make much out of them for the public. . . . Thus sometimes the mind of the chat-spinner works as if he were, after the manner of a scavenger, a public servant, and owed the duty to the community of handing on gossip and scandal.

No. 210. T. L. ENFELON was the author with the mild but petulant beard, with the loose, shaggy clothes clinging to a giraffe-like body - wore his tie in a gold ring, as if it were a napkin at a boarding-house. . . . He was on " the Boss's " black-list, Michael remembered, and became inquisitive as to how they liked each other, now that they were thus hemmed in and bound together by the desert. Had they become friends ? (People of whom Lord Pridian disapproved were not permitted to be mentioned in the columns of his papers, and thereby, from his point of view - a

very usual one - ceased to exist : " If you don't like a thing, look the other way, and it's there no longer.")

No. 211. MISS SIPWATER, the Russian-Bloomsbury-looking occupant of Russian boots. (Hardly Michael's type, he owned.) How hot they must be in this climate: and tweed tailor-mades - rather unsuitable, too - of heroic pattern, embroidered with self-administered, pink-woolwork roses. She had published several volumes of poems, described by her publishers as " slim," and had written a book of mixed natural history and sex-psychology, entitled *Adult Life among the Smaller Mammals*. In spite of the innocence of the subject, this work, owing to its exceptional obscenity, had attained a real success : a far-wider popularity than had ever rewarded any of the more worthy writings of " T. L.". Miss Sipwater, too, he recalled, had conducted much interesting research-work into the origin and derivation of obsolete oaths and bad language ; the formerly common indulgence in which, indeed, her writings of every kind had done much to revive. She recommended the use of certain words, profane and bawdy, at the open window, in conjunction with regular exercises which herself had adapted from the war-dances of the Congo tribes (feathers optional). . . .

No. 212. DR. ACQUARIUS. Yes . . . Rudolph Acquarius. A Swede. The greatest living water-diviner. He had latterly performed a miracle, in the way of water-divining, while in the service of the Greek Government. . . . For months the papers had talked

of nothing else. . . . Water was the problem here, too, and his presence in Sinai was due to one of Lord Pridian's impulses. . . . His Lordship had been reading Exodus and Deuteronomy in his spare time, and had sent for Dr. Acquarius to study the Rock of Kadesh; from which, after Moses had struck it twice, the waters gushed. He was to report on it from the standpoint of science, history, and engineering : the latter in the sense that he was to ascertain the possibility of deriving from it a new source of supply for the hotel. . . . So far, he had failed to discover the site either of Kadesh or of Horeb. . . . A little, fresh-complexioned professor, with a neatly trimmed fuzzy beard, which grew as though it were the fur of a kindly animal, and who spoke English with the eager, bubbling, rather sing-song accent of the Norseman. . . .

No. 213. PROFESSOR CROTCHETER. A celebrated professor (or, at any rate, he would have to be celebrated temporarily, for the benefit of readers of " I Spy." Good fortune attending, hardly one of them would know, surely, the degree of fame pertaining to the various professors of palaeontology ?). He was here to study the various natural and archaeological features of this region. . . .

No. 357. MINUS. . . . Minus ? . . . A person of no importance. . . .

And now, once more, Michael Bettony scanned the whole list. Out of it he ought, certainly, to be able to extract some genuine nourishment for his public, some vital, vibrating, luscious story from these few names.

. . . But then what, exactly, constituted a story in the journalistic significance of that word ? . . . Easy to know from experience, difficult to define. . . . And his mind fell into its most accustomed grooves of thought as he hurried back upstairs out of the marbled hall, not heeding, in the rush to reach his writing-desk, the rude titters of Green-face, Yellow-face, and Slate-face, now floating at ease in their glass tank.

CHAPTER IV

MIND'S EYE

ENFELON, then, had been correct so far in his complaint. Bettony was being typical enough to-day in his behaviour. . . . But what, the reader will ask, were his fellow guests doing at the moment ? Were they, too, playing their roles ?

Church was over.

Sir Rudyard was reading " the mornin' paper," as he somewhat inaccurately termed it. The journal in question, though it took over a week to reach Sinai, had not even arrived that day, for with regard to it he observed a particular Old Calendar, as it were, of his own. Some twenty years before, he had - though it was only one episode in a lifelong pursuit of his dangerous foe, the fox - incurred a serious accident, of which a period of more than usual semi-consciousness (it had endured a fortnight) had been the result : and because of this, and because, while in India on another occasion, he had contracted the plague, which, though he survived it, had put him a whole fortnight behindhand with his reading, and because since then he had been " too busy to catch up," and was thus, his mind being not over swift, obliged during his residence here, if he wished to read the paper in full for any one day, to keep it, as though it were game that must hang in the larder until perfect, worthy of the palate of such a

connoisseur, for an entire month before consuming, he was at the moment five weeks and a day, and always, probably for the rest of his life, a full four weeks, behind the news. . . . However, it was evident that he was not in the least ashamed of this idiosyncrasy, but, on the contrary, derived a certain rather haughty pleasure from it : for, while Lord Pridian was staying in the hotel, copies of the *Daily Spy* were delivered every morning by air, only two days late at the most, and, though His Lordship would constantly urge his friend to take one and read it, nothing would persuade him even to glance at the headings. No ! To Sir Rudyard, a thing of this kind, so nearly fresh from the press, was vulgar ; an object for every wretched Tom, Dick, and Harry to devour. His was a more subtle, cultivated, and Chinese taste. And, further, as Tuey Lollygo had rudely observed to him, " What does it matter being only five weeks behind the news, when you're at least fifty years behind the times ? "

He sat there, then, perusing - or, more precisely, rattling and crinkling - the paper ; a large and dignified one. It would appear as though with him the process of reading was aural rather than visual, as though, perhaps, he could gauge and absorb the news through the sequence of sounds which the instrument, in his hands, emitted. But the next impression would be different : it must be a form of exercise : for he belonged obviously to that school of old gentlemen who can daily be seen fiercely fighting their papers in club windows. . . . The seconds, it was clear, had already been ordered out of the ring. . . . First, he would provoke a preliminary skirmish, by means of an inefficient folding movement of his large, uncertain

hands. Now he would be compelled to attempt a straightening-out of the paper. In this round a regular battle would ensue, and the general could be seen, from far off, struggling with it, endeavouring to escape from it in order to renew his attack, as though in the grip of some insidious and implacable foe, octopus or boa-constrictor. And, indeed, the antagonists were ill-matched : the foe all lightness and grace, Sir Rudyard all strength. At moments, it may be, the contest would assume a classic resemblance, putting the onlooker in mind of some such group as the Laocoon : but soon it would again grow less static. The general would bash the journal in the middle with his fist ; it would bounce back like a punch-ball and rustle and scratch against his red and sweating face. For his part, he would counter with a hasty left, until, suddenly grown playful, it lolled lightly forward, gently tapping his nose and lovingly tickling him behind the ears. Enraged at this breach of the rules, he would, after a few clever feints, land it a real knock-out. So he might have thought : but, serious once more, the whole journal first somersaulted backward, and then, spreading wide wings, fell forward and enveloped him in a thin but smothering and inexorable embrace. Emerging from it breathless, almost, as it seemed, at his last gasp, the general would yet pull himself together to deliver with irresistible *elan* the final blow. And now that it was still unconscious, he would grasp it firmly by its thin, paper spine and shake it long and angrily, as a dog shakes a rat. . . . After this he could read for a little in peace. . . .

And the particular issue was informing. His eye, from habit, turned first to the obituary columns. . . .

All sorts of people - people one knew, too - seemed to be dying this spring : which, he admitted, with a secret feeling of satisfaction that yet had no root in cruelty, was rather stimulating. He possessed the martinet's love of orderliness and compactness : and death, there was no doubt, tidied things up, was the greatest arranger of lives. *Finis*. It was nice to know where your contemporaries lay, in which neat boxes, and how far their aims had been achieved. ... In addition, there was a sporting interest in reading the obituary column : it was like going out shooting in Africa. . . . You never knew what you'd bag. Dear, dear ! poor Adele de Montfort. What an abrupt ending . . . and in the South Seas, too ! Birdie had never liked her . . . but she had been an extraordinarily pretty gal, a real corker, doncherno. . . . And, good God, poor old " Swanker " ; " Swanker " Tuddleforcl ! " Birdie, old gal," he cried out with concealed elation, " what'cher think ? Poor old ' Swanker's' dead ! " "I was afraid he was failing when I saw him last . . . but, still, I hadn't expected him to go yet," replied Lady Ramshackle, who belonged to that pre-War world of refinement in which no one ever died. (Indeed, to this day, no Victorian has done anything so coarse and earthy : they " pass away," " pass over," " slip off," " fall asleep," " go home," " are taken," " depart this life," " close their eyes," " leave those dear to them," " breathe their last," " resign their breath," " awake to immortal life," " yield up the spirit," even " expire " and " cease to*live," but never, no never, just die.)

The general abandoned his obituaries with reluctance, and passed on to the Personal Columns situated

next them. There were the usual small placards, headed by a cheerful little quotation from the Scriptures.

" . . . And visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation ..."

In poor taste, he thought. One didn't read the papers to be depressed. The next notice was more cheerful if enigmatic.

Dobbits-Tobbits. Better and most loving. T.

Vicariously comforted, he read on.

Newborough. Lady offers charming furnished suite in her own house to Gentlefolk. Refined environment. Delicious cuisine. Quiet. Conveniently situated within stone's-throw station and all-night Garage. Trams and buses pass door. Box 18111.

D.L. T. Beware rabbits. X. Daddy.

A splendidly capable woman requires post in bachelor's house. Very willing. Good physique and early riser. Recommended by Sir Ralph Rooster, K.B.E., who has had several years' experience of her. Apply Box 12906.

Lovely Peke bitches for sale. Apply Kien Lung, 2 The Villas, Godalming.

Swiss Lady wishes place son, aged 4, in refined English family. Write " Cuckoo" 4 Avenue du Nit, Zurich.

Golly-Wolly. Why break heart of Babsie-Wabsie ? Wire.

Lady Mentals received in genteel home. Pleasant surroundings and cultured atmosphere. Hourly bus to Earlswood (12 m). Box 0.804.

Remove superfluous hair by Merlin Method. No pain : and a pleasure to others. Countless unpaid testimonials.

Why not learn French for foreign travel? Accent guaranteed. Apply Mdllle X., Box 12018.

" Tou cannot afford

The Pound (£) abroad " ;

so dorit go to Antibes or Monte, but spendjour summer at the Lido Palace, Brixton. Rdio. Dncng. Rung wtr. Swm-mng-Bth. Lft. Elctrc Ight. Evry cmft.

Gentlefolk have vacancy for delicate or backward child on their Farm and Kennels. Plain English food. No pains spared. Box 92811.

Tally-ho ! Cheerio ! Chums-all ! Greeting to all friends. Major Chubble Cooksey (late nolh Hussars)., The Gables, Chingford.

Lady wishes active partner. Apply " Malmaison" 1002 Maida Vale.

T.L.X. Dbbljble ntw. nt. pttg. J.R.D. 78. L.

Old Wykehamist (C. of E.) wishes meet Old Harrovian of same age. Clock-golf essential. Box 13.

Voting at Parliamentary elections must be made compulsory. Why ? Please explain. 0.

Gentleman, retired officer, interested in Birth Control wishes meet lady interested in same. Apply Box 9812.

Single vacancy in famous preparatory school with expert teaching. Sufficient scholarship assured for entry any public school: tennis - cricket -football - lovely gym - netball - rounders -Jives - squash - trap, pitch, and ball. Apply JV,₃ Box 101823432.

Old Public Schoolboy will take any job anywhere. Box 28114.

Humble lumble. Numble dumble pumble lumble quumble tumble. No more Quumble of lumble pumble pumble.

Interesting Brochure on Alcoholic Excess. Apply "Confirmed" 2 Leadenhall Street, E.G.

Exquisite Cocktail Cabinet. Chinese Lac. 80 gns. only. Box 432.

"Pukka Sahib." Bd. bkft. ev'ry Ixry. Come and try it. Near Sloane Square Tube station. Box 246192.

. . . Nothing very exciting to-day. . . . The general skipped the Home and Foreign News sheets and landed, plump, on the Court Page. "Lord Tantrum has left London for the country." "Lady Tantrum has arrived in London from the country." At it again, then. . . . Hullo ! "Lady Leaning has left the Isle of Man on a short visit to Lesbos. No correspondence will be forwarded." Well, well ! Who'd have thought it ? . . . More deaths ! A memorial service for poor old Meaty Meddlecombe. So he was dead too ! Must have missed it somehow. 'Xtrordinry thing, way people die nowadays. . . . Don't know any of the A's. Try the D's. . . . The Earl and Countess of Dunster, Lady Sophia Diddle, Lord Dundlefold of Didham, Lady Dimple, Sir Dogherty and Lady Duffy, Major-General Sir Dundas Dalrymple-Dunn and Lady Dalrymple-Dunn, Mrs. Dottery-Dumble, Miss Dorothy Darcy... Miss Dymple and Miss Dymne.

The Marquis and Marchioness of Gandleford, Major Gumble, D.S.O. (representing H.H. Princess Louise Victoria of Mannheim-Schlossberg), Sir Rufus Guggenheim, O.B.E. Miss Gwendoline Guggenheim, Lady Godalming. Major Gorringer, Mrs. Goosefleisch, Sir Rupert Gaggles (dear old Goosey, that must be!), Miss Guinevere de Grey-Gander, and Mr. Jacynthe Giggle. Sir Ibje Abdul Izzeboy, G.C.S.L Lady Ermyintrude

Klavering, Vice-Admiral Sir Percy Kingslake-Totteridge, K.C.B., Mrs. King and Miss Kitty Kling. Sir Lamington Levy, Bart., Lady Languishe, Major Lymp-ton-Dunhill, and Miss Lean. Mrs. Mumm. . . . Nothin³ really until the T's. Emily Lady Tickeridge, Lady Tottering, Lady Muriel Tunbridge-Trotter, Sir Hercules Totter, Bart., Sir Louis Tither, Miss Titter, Sir Redvers Ticklemarshe, M.P., Lt.-Col. Sir Robert Totcham, and Miss Totte. . . . Really I don't know who goes to funerals these days . . . hardly a name one knows. . . . Still, it's interesting. . . .

" Birdie," he cried out, " poor old Meaty's dead, too. 'Xtrordinry good account of m'morial service. Like to read it ? " But Lady Ramshackle was no longer there. . . . Indeed, even from here she could be heard engaged in argument with some Arabs, whom, because of their cast of countenance, she suspected of a clandestine but permanent ill-treatment of their camel. (In reality there was no sign of such a practice on their part, and it was little more to be presumed than that the proprietor of a Rolls-Royce would, habitually and of intention, injure his machine.) The Arabs spoke no English : but this in no way discouraged Lady Ramshackle, for, as she was wont to explain in her subsequent description of such incidents, " Of course, I always speak French to them " : since she shared the British belief that, when dealing with backward races, who cannot understand you when you speak your own language, it is better to converse in a language which you yourself cannot properly speak. . . . At this moment, swathed in soft sea-green veils and draperies, she was, in fact, pointing at the camel with a sand-coloured parasol (a gesture which really did seem to

frighten both the supercilious creature and its drivers) and was saying, " Poor camel . . . *pauvre chameau* . . . *Jest necessaire Stre ires gentil avec elle. Comprenez ? Tres douce ...*" " *Pauvre chameau*" they mimicked back at her faultlessly. " *Tres douce* " - the words conveyed no meaning to them, but were produced, parrot-like ; out of fright, mingled with politeness and the desire to please.

Master Roderick was eating chocolates and still arguing. " But, Miss Tether, you are always telling me I ought to ask if I don't understand a thing . . . and I don't see *how* you can ' wait and not be tired by waiting.' It's no use my pretending I do. . . . All the waiters I've ever seen looked dreadfully tired : and you should just hear what nurse said when I recited it to her, to see if I knew it. ' Did Miss Tether teach you that ? ' she said. ' Well, all I can si is I wish Miss Tether would try it herself. 'Ow would she like to 'ave to carry up the tns to the nursery, dl-in and dl-out, I should like to know, though it's a job 's is quite good enough, and too good, for some people, in my opinion, and besides, Master Roderick, your father's a great general, and even what with all this socialism and a pound what is wonky, my boy will never come down to be a witer, not 'e.⁵ " Roderick's memory for every word of a conversation, which was accompanied by a considerable mimetic gift - but, in his case, one which owed nothing to the parrot's desire to reproduce without meaning - was able admirably to reproduce tones thus inspired by the usual nurse-versus-governess feud, and seemed more remarkable than his memory for poetry : but on this occasion Miss Tether paid no attention, for she was

writing a long letter home to her sister. And so Roddy ran off upstairs, whistling like a steam-engine and hooting like a car, two pursuits congenial to his temperament and sufficient in themselves, as his nurse observed with no sense of contradiction, " to keep him quiet for a little." . . . Meanwhile, Miss Tether's thick stylographic pen - which symbol of office, even in her leisure moments, she always carried in her hand, as Mercury his wand - was scratching busily away.

" DEAREST MOONEY," it scraped, - " I am writing to you after Divine Service. Such a revealing sermon by a Mr. Simpson, comparing Mount Sinai to the Church of England ; Moses to, I could not quite make out whether it was Ramsay MacDonald or the dear archbishop - but perhaps the other was Aaron - (owing to constant *interruptions*, it is not really very easy to concentrate) ; and the Golden Calf to the Swiss franc. The pound, he pointed out, now rested on *faith*, and was in that sense a more spiritual standard than many other currencies : quite a new view to me. You must remember to tell papa, who I hope is still interested in all that goes on ?

" But now for some account of my travels. We arrived, you will be relieved to hear, without mishap : although the movement of camels gives one an uncomfortable sensation, not altogether unlike *mal-de-mer*, and, of course, the Mothersil, which you so generously gave me for Christmas, was right at the bottom of my new green canvas trunk ! The Pyramids (did I mention them in my last letter ?) were most *interesting* and conveyed to me - I wonder if other travellers have Jioticed it - a tremendous impression of what I can

only describe as *Age* (if you know what I mean). I did not so much *care* for Cairo. It struck me as being very dirty.

" So little does it resemble an English city, however, that Roderick and I wandered quite a lot in the old part of it, gathering new impressions. (I love *new impressions*., do not you, dear?) Some of the streets are very narrow, and it all seemed strangely oriental, quite, as Lady Ramshackle - who, being so artistic, always says the apt thing in an original way — said, ' like a page out of *The Arabian Nights*' It was very hot, and I wore my little Liberty dress with just a red scarf and my topaz necklace. The natives, though they stared dreadfully, appeared, I thought, as I passed them in their queer clothes, to be good-humoured, always jabbering to themselves in the strangest way and laughing. . . . And yet, I wonder, is not their sense of humour very different from ours? . . . No doubt it is, for the English are the only people with *real* humour, and, as a family, we Tethers have always rather prided ourselves on ours, have we not?

" The city is full of picturesque bits, in spite of the dirt, and I often wished I had brought my box of colours with me. . . . The life, though, was not what I had expected. I had always been told, had not you, that women were kept in seclusion : wore veils and were not allowed to go out? But I did not find it so at all - at least, not in all the streets. In one quarter, where Roderick and I often walked in the afternoons, quantities of *such* pretty girls (though rather too much made up and *decolletee* - but then, as poor papa often reminds us, one must not be too censorious, for they may not have had our *opportunities* : besides, it's the

fashion, and modern girls grow up like that) were sitting at the open windows on the ground floor and were entertaining such lots of friends. They seemed to know everyone and were waving, smiling, and talking to all the men who passed. Quite cosmopolitan, too, for there were many sailors, and people from foreign parts. Fresh men were always going in and out, and there must have been a *gramophone* in nearly every house, I think. Everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves, and it was really quite bright and pleasant to watch. And, though it would not do if we did it at home (for such things need a *southern* climate, don't they?), I confess I quite enjoyed the lack of formality after the hotel. A curious foreign custom I noticed is that all the ladies had their names hanging on little signs over the doors ; but I suppose in such crowded streets it is very practical.

" They were all so *friendly* : and one of the ladies asked Roderick in to tea : but I thought it better *not*. She seemed to have taken quite a *fancy* to the boy and said (she talked excellent English and told me all the girls in her street spoke three or four languages) that she quite envied me. It is curious, but she must have had a *premonition* about the school you and I hope to start together one day, for after saying to me, in such a jolly way, ' There's nothing like teaching them young,' she added that she supposed that later on I should set up for myself and that, if I wanted any addition to the staff, I was to remember her and that she never tired in the exercise of her profession and in building up a new clientele ; which might, as she said, be useful. She gave me her card, and is at present working with a *Madame Julie*, a Frenchwoman, where she gets only one

night to herself, as she puts it, in every three weeks, . . . She called on me at the hotel one evening after dinner and wanted to get up a party for us : but unfortunately we were out, and, though it was extremely kind of her, Roderick is really too young for that sort of thing.

" Lady Ramshackle has painted a wonderful water-colour of the Pyramids at night (so soft and hazy - she hopes to get it hung in the British Watercolour Association's Autumn Salon), and has accomplished, as always, much good work on behalf of animals, especially camels. (You know how kind-hearted she is : she cannot bear to see even a fly hurt.) Otherwise I have not much news - except that one night we went out to see a wonderful crocodile-hunt by torchlight. The method is to attract the creatures by tying young deer to stakes at the side of the river, and then, when the crocodiles attack, to shoot them through the eye. But it is a difficult sport, and you must not shoot until they are actually *devouring* the deer. It was most picturesque . . . to anyone interested in Nature.

" Nurse, I am sorry to say, continues to interfere. She eggs Roderick on, and helps him with his recitations behind my back. Of course he gets them all wrong in consequence, and has developed a strong Cockney accent when he recites. Such a pity, and gives quite a wrong idea of my teaching. No refinement at all. The other day his mother called him up to recite to the High Commissioner after tea. I had rather expected him to be naughty and refuse : but he made no objection and entered the room as nicely as possible (sometimes he is inclined to be rather rough). So I chose ^c My Garden,⁵ that beautiful little thing of T. E. Brown's (you know, dear, whom papa

met that year in Switzerland. He was looking at Mont Blanc, if I remember rightly : but you must ask him). A real gem, I always think : and it is in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. It goes

*A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot !
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot -
The veriest school
Of peace ; and yet the fool
Contented that God is not -
Not God ! In gardens ! When the eve is cool ?
JVqy ! but I have a sign ;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine.*

(That is just, I think, what we all used to feel in the dear old rock-garden at the Rectory ! And how clever is the use of the word 'Nay' : so dramatic !)

" But Roderick rendered the first lines :

*A garden is a mudsome thing, what swat !
Rose plot,
Fringed fool.
Darned rot.*

and then broke down altogether. All the poetry was taken out of the thing, and of course the High Commissioner laughed. It made me look so stupid : especially as I wear a fringe and he looked, at least I thought he did, straight at me when he said it. Most likely, however, that was only my fancy. But, such dreadful words ! Where can he pick them up ? Not that it is the boy's fault, for it came out that nurse had coached him. Of course it may be only her *ignorance*,

but I cannot help wondering sometimes whether she does not do it *on purpose*. Certainly she tittered in a most offensive way when I mounted my camel the other day, and whispered something to Minus, but not loud enough for me to hear. Minus, thank goodness, has given notice. . . . Forgive my bothering you, dear Hermione, with all my trivial little troubles when your trials, I know, are so much heavier. . . . Is *he* better now ? And how are the chicks ? I am told the new treatment advertised is a very good one, though it does not altogether abolish the craving.

" Your affectionate sister,

" PENELOPE.

" P.S.—There is some talk of a picnic next week. I will write you an account of it, if it comes off."

The pen stopped its scraping, and Roddy could be heard running round the verandah outside, hooting and singing. But, even above this sound, the Bishop of Newborough's voice made itself plain, booming away to Enfelon, telling him ingratiatingly how expressive he found some of " those dear old words." " Of course, I don't like them all, you know," he added. " But what was it the ancients used to say ? ' *De gustibus non est disputandum* ? And I'm not squeamish. (Am I, my dear ?) Even when my advice was sought concerning the composition of new prayers, I always said to my brother-bishops, ' Use the old words, my lords ; our fathers used them. Face up to the truth and call it by its name.' " (Enfelon felt very much inclined at the moment to wince away from life, instead of facing up to it, in spite of his principles : and he wondered why, if the bishop was so devoted to

old modes of speech, he must use the phrase of the minute, "face up to," when "face" by itself was more simple, and conveyed the same meaning?) "Oh, yes! I think you are on the right track; but you must be careful . . . vmy careful. To be outspoken but not offensive must be the aim. . . . And now, Mr. Enfelon, perhaps you will join Mrs. Hagworthy and myself in a cocktail? In this country one needs a light stimulant, and they're mostly orange juice, I'm told."

Thickly articulated yet lisping sounds, accompanied by a guttural wheezing and a sharp squeaking, oozed out of a window above. Sir Levy Lollygo was again wrestling in hot argument with his son; an episode in a struggle long drawn-out and gigantic, and in the time it endured, as much as in the very enchantment of its so intense repulsion, only comparable to one in the realms of natural history; the noxious and obscene battle which is sometimes witnessed between a giant cuttlefish and a shark. The body of the old millionaire seemed to have puffed itself out, and his fingers moved slowly through the air, like short, discoloured tentacles. A red slide had been substituted for the yellow: since the yellow light, which his smile cast upon the person fortunate enough to earn it, was nothing to that strange, greasy-red glow switched upon him by Sir Levy's anger. Even the top of his head - swelling, ovate and polished, out of its outer wrapping of coarse hair, like that surviving from mammoth days on the skin of young elephants, or to be found, every now and then, yet clinging to a portion of the hide of some extinct reptilian monster newly excavated - was touched with bright carmine, and his lips were deep-tinged with the Tyrian purple of dead kings. His little

eyes had grown smaller than ever during the conflict, while, on the contrary, his heavy eyebrows were more firmly drawn, and black hairs could be seen sprouting from many large pores in his plum-coloured skin. Without ceasing worked his mandibles, a mill grinding out irate platitudes, and when he spoke, with a resounding splutter which resembled the dying fizzle of a firework fallen into the sea before its time, it seemed that his pointed, boar's teeth had grown still longer. . . .

But if Sir Levy was thus changed, thus more richly tinted, Stuart was paler than an hour ago, wan with the significant pallor of a shark, and thinner, more angular, with the torpedo-line, engine-turned, steely slenderness of a member of the same voracious, elasmobranchiate species. The lines of his mouth, with its compressed, blanched lips, were very straight, the contours of his face were shrunken and the only swelling visible in it was a faint palpebral flushing and expansion. Even his hair, which, in contradistinction to all else, usually curled in luxuriant, sebaceous locks round his narrow head, appeared now to have flattened itself out, so angry was he.

" You can't alter human nature," Sir Levy was reiterating loudly. " It'th natural in man to want to achcumulahte a little properthy " (he was wont, as are most people, to deduce, from his own character, facts about human nature in general), " a little properthy of hith own." (By which, again, he meant other people's.) " And that'th why I tell you that Bolthevithm can never thurvive." His fingers, swollen and purple, trembled as he spoke.

" You wouldn't thay that if you could thee the communal thoup-kitthens in Thtalingrad. . . It'th

a marvellouth thight. Abnegation and Dithipline on behalf of the Community. . . . And what about the Nomadth," his son replied in a voice that seared the air, " they don't collect properthy ? . . . Only a few camelth at the motht."

" The Arabth are a beathtly lot of cowardth and murdercrth," Sir Levy spluttered back. " They're not Themitic at all. They don't underthtand money or thirculation."

" Don't let your Hebrew prejudithith run away with you." They grated back at him. . . .

Here Sir Levy turned pale — the inner, red light extinguished suddenly - and said, quietly and pathetically, " After all, Thtuart, you thould not talk like that. . . . We both have Jcwith blood."

" Thuck it, dad," Stuart retorted playfully . . . and the round was over. A temporary peace reigned again, and, in the distance, Miss Poppy Lollygo could be heard playing a cool but wistful *etude* of Chopin downstairs in the lounge, while, near by, Croucher was very obviously learning, for propaganda purposes, " Men of England, wherefore plough ? " He kept on repeating the first line over and over again, unable to proceed further ; a gramophone, he sounded, which had stuck in a particular rut, and once more Sir Levy's face grew stormy. Another round would follow swiftly, no doubt. At last the voice continued, " For the lords who lly you low. . . ."

Lord Pridian was carrying on several conversations at once - some of them quite sensible - and at the same time was dictating to one of his secretaries the trend of policy which the English Government was to follow. This he did every Sunday after church : and his

statement would be published during the next week without any immediate ill effect. It was headed "Crisis" and was written in the manner of a speech from the throne, except that more of an air of command seemed to inspire its words. "Our relations with Russia must be severed forthwith, in the interests of trade and humanity; while those with France must continue to grow more friendly. Within our own storm-swept shores, we must concentrate on emphasising the sanctity of private property, especially when it exceeds the amount of one million sterling, and thus help to restore the confidence which recent events have inclined to sap. Taxation on high-grade incomes must be reduced, so as once more to enable trade to flow in its wonted channels, and a prohibitive tariff will increase the volume of our trade, aid our popularity with foreign powers, and strengthen our international position."

Having thus relieved a somewhat congested mind, he turned to discuss with another of his secretaries a recent demonstration of Madame Galactic's. It was all very well for her to claim that just as, a hundred years before, Dr. Acquarius would have been classed as a fraud, and not as a scientist, so, in fifty years' time, would spiritualism, the practice of it, be recognised as a science, and not as a fraud, and its revelations as religion: one could only judge by results. Dr. Acquarius, in Lord Pridian's phrase, knew how "to deliver the goods." Madame Galactic did *not*. His Lordship had asked for an interview with her, to test "Little Toucan," and, though inclined, by nature to belief, and in most ways easily gullible, yet his errand-boy shrewdness had isolated a fact which,

however obvious, had escaped the more powerful intellects of expert investigators : that no returning and controlling spirit is ever that of an adult European male, for all mediums, when they fall into their professional trances, claim to be under the guidance of some infant negro, Red Indian, or Hindoo. Nor had anyone previously deduced the simple explanation of this phenomenon ; that broken English facilitates the Delphic quality of their utterance. Thus " No You Go India " may signify " Don't you go to India " or " You are not going to India " or " No, you are going to India " or " No, go to India " ; whichever he who seeks the advice wishes in his heart.

Further, Lord Pridian had in the first place been impressed unfavourably by the manner in which, after the stertorous breathing and grunting of Madame Galactic had notified him of a change (for " Little Toucan " was now in charge), that forward spiritual child had asked him for something to hold in her hand. It had to be an article thoroughly invested with his personality, and, she had suggested the " key of his wigwam " ; by which " Little Toucan " intended to denote his latch-key. Now this had made Lord Pridian, versed in Empire, suspicious : for the child was supposed to be a negress, and not a Red Indian. " Kraal " she might have said, with some show of reason, but never " wigwam." Moreover, " Investments all go zig-zag " was much too vague counsel to offer a financier who had often in his time caused them to do so : while " Money velly good " might have been either comment or advice. " I've a good mind to smash that woman, unless she does better," the autocrat remarked, and then reverted to his dictation. . . .

Meanwhile, somewhere above him and all unperturbed - for " Little Toucan " had issued to her as yet no intimation of overshadowing fate - Madame Galactic was at present occupied in polishing one of her trumpets, the brazen mouthpieces of departed spirits, while yet considering various passages in " Paracelsus " : to an annotation of which, in their bearing upon the doctrines of Madame Blavatsky, she had devoted a useful and felicitous morning. One had to be able to hand them out the dope : and she had been doing it for so long that from time to time she almost believed in some of this extraordinary stuff herself. . . . And now she began to practise, playing a muffled tambourine by means of almost invisible cotton attached to her big toe. She was still making progress.

Helen, her green, long eyes full of an inexpressible vagueness shading down into affection, was shaking a cocktail for Michael on her balcony. " I feel we deserve it, my sweet," she was saying to him.

" When you return to England, angel, you'll forget me : just as you have all the other men who've loved you. I know I'm only a journalist : but why don't you marry me ? "

" Do look. What beautiful eyes that Arab has, Michael ! "

" I do think that, when I'm asking you to marry me, you might pay some attention."

" Well, darling, it's not the first time it's happened, as you know. Besides, I can't marry all the men I've been in love with, can I ? Marriage only makes me forget I ever loved them."

" Yes, but I don't want to be in the past."

" You're not, my lovely. Don't be so ungrateful. You're in the present all right."

Neither of them listened for a moment to Eric Fuller-Flitmouse, who, a Tahitian shadow poised exquisitely against a burning yellow background, patterned of sand and palm-trees, was addressing them from the balcony next door, relating a historic and favourite story of cataloguing in aristocratic halls ; a pompous and interminable booming sound, it seemed to them, punctuated by a high giggle, unattached to any meaning, which he had adopted from his brother in the " F.O."¹ and which the reader must supply for himself at intervals. " We poor mice in the Museum," he was saying - with his light, false-humility resting upon all he said like lead, " We poor mice in the Museum are seldom brought into touch with the great, the really great . . . but we are occasionally sent for to catalogue their possessions and nibble a crumb, most probably in the servants' hall. Often the nearest we get to them is in the effigies of their ancestors. We enter the mansion house (as it is called in the catalogue). What do we find ? A portrait of the first great man, the chancellor and first earl, labelled Hogarth, but not by Hogarth : a picture of the second earl, labelled Sir Joshua, but not by the hand of Sir Joshua, a possible Lawrence, and a portrait of the present noble lord by a pupil of Sargent's : and, on one occasion, as I was looking at such works, I saw quite suddenly, on a table, a fragment of a small Byzantine plaque, an amazing thing. . . . ' Good heavens,' I said, ' that's worth all else in' the house put together ... a discovery of first-rate importance.' ' By Gad, Flitmouse,' said the owner -

¹ Foreign Office cant for the " Foreign Office."

I won't tell you his name - ' it's nothing, just a paper-weight brought back by my grandfather, that's all. You can have it, if you like.' * I couldn't dream of accepting it. It's too good for me,' I replied, * but if you would present it to the Museum, you would be conferring a benefit upon the nation.' And that is how it's there now, that magnificent object." And he looked round with a smirk of empty self-satisfaction. . . .

Roderick's nurse, clad as if for a campaign, in a field-grey uniform, surmounted by the bravest but most unassuming of little grey bonnets, was walking beside a perambulator, wheeled patiently along by an ox-eyed nursery maid with flaming crimson cheeks. Though tending in some ways to be rather old-fashioned, nurse prided herself, where the bringing-up of children was concerned, on her modern ideas ; she believed that they should be surrounded by bright colours, paint, varnish, and gaily hued flowers, so that the face of the nursery maid, you felt, as much as the perambulator, highly polished and sporting a red awning, in which, under a coverlet of rose-pink satin trimmed with lace, Miss Deirdre slept, might be the fruit of these enlightened theories. Nevertheless, she was practical as well as imaginative, and, in consequence, the coverlet, in addition to being ornamental, served a particular purpose.

Slowly the little *cortege* passed up and down the paths of the garden, broad paths of beaten earth, which, being raised well above the serpentine roots and irrigated soil, were thus nearer the blossoms of the flowering trees. Up and down, up and down, it paced, under the sighing shade of metallic noonday leaves, and at each intersection of the paths stood out little

placards, which bore in glaring black and white the inscriptions, " Please do not pick the flowers," " *Priere de ne pas cueillir les fleurs*" Up and down, while the elder woman related to the gaping younger one the strange tale of Miss Tether's misdeeds, and further indicated, where they existed, the possibilities of combating them. But, every now and then, nurse would check the rhythm of the procession, would pause, and, after looking round carefully to make sure that no one of the tail-coated sept was watching her - her face, in the meantime, being transmuted for the moment from that of a commander into an antique mask of terror - would whip out from under Miss Deirdre's coverlet a pair of heavy, rusty garden scissors, and, with a swift perfection of technique that could only have been born of long practice, would snip off a poinsettia, that five-pointed irregular star of fire, a scarlet hibiscus, or a sprig of ivory orange-blossom. " Pore little mite, she must have *something* to cheer her up," she would remark, and then, secreting the scissors again, together with the stolen flowers, in the depths of the perambulator, would resume her spirited discourse. . . . " Mind you, Jenny," she was saying, " my motter alwise 'as been ' Livan-letliv ' : but, if that pore boy ever does anythink wrong, then it's my fault, and orf she goes, fast as she can, to Erlldyship like a dart - or worse - ' Please, Lady Ram-shackle, Nurse 'as done this or Nurse 'as done that,' in that mincing wi of 'ers or, ' Nurse has been teaching Roderick his recitation ' (and why not, pore child, I should like to know ?).... Well, that's one thing. But I 'can tell you, Jenny, that what that 'ere conkeyurge, or whatever they calls 'im, told me at the 'otel in Cairo fair took my breath awl, and soonerorllter Erlldyship

will 'ave to 'ear of it, and the sooner the better, as is likely. It appears one evening when the governess - Miss Tether I won't call 'er - was out, hin comes a woman, covered with pint, 'e said, from ⁵ed to foot and arsked for 'er ; for that very one 'oo's so stuck-up and lidylike to the likes of fuss. A nice friend, that, for 'er, and tipsy too, 'e told me, into the bargain. Naturally 'e wouldn't stand for it, nottee. (There now, you needn't mind Miss Dirdrey, Jenny, she's too young, bless 'er little 'art, to understand.) ^c You get out of ere,' 'e said, just like that, ' and don't come a-worriting respectable persons,' 'e said. ' Hout of it now, you vamp. We know your kind.' ' And keeps 'em here too,' she hanswers, as bold as brass, ^c and I'd like to know, I would ' (only it was all in French, 'e being a reel one for languidges), ' I'd like to know, oh, wouldn't I just, in what wl,' she says, ' she's better nor me, with all her hairs anglrlces and getting awl with it,' she says, swearing somethink fearful, 'e said. ^c And now she won't see me, won't she, just becos she lives in a posh hotel ? She's " out," is she ? ' she says, in English, sudden, imiliting 'er to the very life, 'e said, so 'e could 'ardly 'elp larfing. ' " Out ? " Oh, yes. The dirty little crldle-snatcher ! ' she says, ' doing us pore gals 'oo need it out of a job, and then treating me like dirt,' she says, ^c when I come round friendly-like to ask 'er to join a party. " Hout," indeed ! Well, I wouldn't wlste good liquor on the likes of 'er,' she says (in French aglne), ' and you can tell 'cr so from me : but next time she comes down the old alley, I'll mike it 'ot and strong for the lldy, just won't I,' she cries ; * that's fair done it.' And then she began biting and scratching like a wild thing, 'e said, and up to the

very dl we left 'e 'ad 'is 'and done up in a bandidge just like a dog 'ad bitten it, pore man ! And when I think of my dear boy, as hinnocent as a newborn lamb, in the charge of'er, and 'oo calls 'erself a clergyman's dorter, I feel like going right up to Erldyship and telling 'er now, I do. ... But, fortunately she can't be up to much 'arm in the desert, not unless she tikes up with Harabs and the likes-of-them : but tell 'er 'erself I shall one dl, and that's to 'er own prim, ugly fice, for it's more than flesh or blood can bear with. . . . And I've told Miss Minus about it, every word, and you should just 'ear what she 'as to si about it."

The Shereef Abdul reluctantly laid down, on a dwarf table of cedarwood enriched with ivory, the last volume of *The Forsyte Saga*, a work the various parts of which he read over and over again with the avidity of an English schoolboy devouring the forbidden *Arabian Nights*. To his oriental mind it was all tremendously exciting: and just as Lady Ramshakkle had exclaimed of Cairo, " It's just like a page out of *The Arabian Nights*" so the Shereef Abdul, during his state visits to London, would wander - incognito, in frock coat and bowler hat - round Earls Court and the Boltons, through lilac-fringed squares and terraces, above which rose strangely shaped spires of stone, until, entranced, he murmured to himself in Arabic, " It's just like a paragraph out of *The Forsyte Saga* ! "... He loved the *Rogue Herries* Series, too, but this month Mudie's had been late in forwarding his order. He closed his book now, glanced at his watch lying beside it, and clapped his hands together, until the music of tambourines and jangling anklets, which issued from the neighbouring

room, came louder all at once, as an old man with a white face, lined like that of an old woman, opened the door and waddled into the room. The great chieftain uttered his guttural commands : the eunuch hurried away, and in an instant the sound of revelry was quelled. Then the Shercef looked once more at his Turkish watch, a gold bauble with an enamelled, very realistic view of Vesuvius on the back of it, arranged his prayer-rug at the correct angle, and, taking off his yellow leather shoes, knelt down on it as though sailing to Mecca on a magic carpet. It was *Duhr*. Muttering, holding his hands first to the lobes of his ears and then a little below his girdle, he bent his green-turbaned head till it swept the floor in profound obeisance. . . .

Ninette dc Nina and Clifford Hearnshaw had ripped open their large leather coverings down to the feet, and, as a butterfly flutters from a discarded chrysalis, had stepped out of them. Ninette was regarding with judicious anxiety an array of cosmetics, just unpacked from a dressing-bag, widely ranging in tint from plain blush-rose to subtle, suffused coffee and purple, for she was eager to choose one suitable to day and place, climate and environment. There were " Haarlem Nights," "Mrs. Baldwin," "Ville Lumiere," "Royal Golf," " Marquise," " Nephertite," " Princess May," "Flamenco," "North Berwick," " Fleur-du-Mal," "Rose-Queen," "View Halloo," "Dago Days," " Sakuntala," " Peter Pansy," " Tricorne," " Gondola Gold," " General Pershing," " Grand ficart," " Spring Bouquet," "Roman Cardinal," " Daytona Beach," " Tarantella," " Mad Otto," " Eldorado," " Lady de Montfort," " Ogpu Tan," " American Duchess,"

"Rumba Roosevelt," " Syrene," " Vanite VanderbUt," "Blue-Baba," " Almond-Eyes," " Mrs. Hoover," " Colourful Orient," " Cricket Pavilion," " Tsigane," "Lady Di," "Magnolias at Midnight," "Isles of Greece," "Park Avenue," "Bridge and Backgammon," " Apple of Temptation," "Pompcian Red," " Dernier Espoir," and " Half-Time " : but spurning them she chose a simple " Rose of Sharon." Meanwhile Clifford had opened the two guitar-cases, to see that the instruments had arrived intact, and was considering his golf-clubs ; exotic weapons of wood and steel, with names more fanciful than those of any cosmetic ; *brassie*, *niblick*, *mashie*, and *cleek* ; taking first one out of a bag and then another, testing them, examining haft and butt. . . .

Similarly, on the floor above, Dr. Acquarius, the dowser, was inspecting his rods, nameless but magic wands, which Time had transformed into scientific instruments. There were many score of them, old-fashioned twigs of hazel, twigs of many woods, hardy or tropical, and dyed in at least a hundred shades of colour attuned to the vibration that each rod was to receive ; there were three or four artichoke stems, fresh-cut yesterday, strips of cane, tied together at one end, and slips of whalebone, fastened after the same fashion. He was excited by the day's work before him and his head was full of the technique of his profession, so that now he was thinking in terms of fields of force, planes of force, azinential, ovoid, and parabolic, and of many other things half magic, half geometry, and wholly wonder. Thus his brain jargoned along, even as he picked out his wand for the day (it was one of his favourites) and selected, too, a little diviner for metals

and a small piece of *cippolino* marble, glossy and rounded, as though through many centuries rolled on sand by caressing waves, which swung on a long gold chain and would indicate to him the position of buried marble statues, of porphyry kings, or Parian deities. Yet, easy as such work seemed, it was exhausting, and already the fatigue that inevitably associates itself with any uneasy feeling of suspense was beginning to attack him. . . .

The Rev. Cyril Simpson was still in the church, locking up the harmonium ("otherwise that Ramshackle boy will get at it again") and for his comfort conjuring up visions of good works, of sermons and baptisms, among the mangrove swamps of his dreams. . . . But he was sad : for he was determined to inaugurate his missionary career at once, and now he would have to leave Sinai before the new organ had been installed : whereas there might have been such a nice little service to dedicate it, with the bishop officiating. . . . That was the worst of the East : nothing was ever ready in time.

Effie Sipwater was in the midst of her exercises. This morning it was a simple affair. It was only necessary to strip and stand in front of the open window, repeating the word "Loins," over and over again, to a slightly Figian swaying of the hips. To-morrow it was the : : : : : exercises. Perhaps she had better do one now, to see if she remembered them ? That was right : backward and forward : and she repeated the accompanying words slowly, with gusto and in a voice pure and kindly as the church bells of a seaside town.

Professor Crotchester, that weazened cicada, was

back in his bedroom, chipping merrily away at relics of the ages. Once he walked, head-foremost, to the window and, lifting up his eyes, looked toward the mountain, trying to decide what manner of cloud it might be clinging there to the rock ; a cloud that fitted with ease into none of the scientific categories, because sometimes it had seemed to move a little, whirling like a dervish round a faint inner glow, and then, once more steadied, adhered back in its old position. " I suppose my eyesight isn't what it was," he reflected, " but still, it's queer. I must remember to tell young Topham at the Athenaeum. He's wonderfully keen on clouds. To him they're just what fossils are to other men. I *must* remember to ask him about it when I get back." Like all very old men he never doubted a safe home-coming. . . . He was, had Michael only known it, an extremely famous professor.

High up, in a room ensconced in a pseudo-minaret, one of four, and commanding the desert in a manner almost intimidating, floating over it as though it had turned airplane or balloon, sat Minus, back from church. Now that her hat was off, her hair displayed the terrible, undulating neatness which indicates the head of a lady's-maid. Pagan mood had succeeded to Christian. While singing for her own amusement snatches of popular songs, past and present, she was at the same time engaged in a clandestine and unsabatical mending of some socks belonging to Sir Rudyard, for whom she cherished a fervent, selfless, and unrewarded passion. He reigned alone or, at any rate, supreme over a heart in which Croucher occupied a more practical but less ideal position. " Botherim and 'is ' Red Flag,' " she said out aloud, so intense was her

feeling, and in accents very different from her official prim precision: for when off duty she indulged in tones and phrases that would have astonished Lady Ramshackle, while, though sentimental, her humour was often Rabelaisian. "He's too Bolshie for the likes of me, is Croucher. I like a gentleman to be a gentleman. Still, he's a nice boy." And, holding up the socks, chequered with the Ramshackle tartan, against the desert which shook its mane in the heat of the midday sun, she surveyed them for a few minutes with her head on one side, repeating, at first softly, but letting her voice gradually swell into the rapidly enunciated chorus, the words of a song which had been popular a year or two before the War :

*" Cholly and Dolly
Are two of the very best:
They are a specimen of the dressy men
You meet out West:
And in the morning,
When down Bond Street they trot,
Every Polly and Molly cries ' Golly, how jolly,
Here's Cholly and Dolly ; what, what ! ' "*

She sang shrilly, and with an un conjecturable enthusiasm, inspired doubtless by her work of love. And then, regarding them again, she was satisfied and, taking a sprig of dried rosemary out of a drawer, she pressed it tenderly into the darned toes and laid her task aside. . . .

Enfelon had returned to his old place under the verandah, having disengaged himself from the Hagworthys and was sitting there in silence : Father Munnion, next him, had closed his breviary and was

staring into the vast space that lay glittering before them, his eyes drawn down into the heart of it by the sand-coloured, sun-helmeted figure of Dr. Acquarius who, holding the split ends of his twig in both hands, was merging into the distance. No doubt he was oblivious of the overpowering heat in the isolation bestowed upon him by the interest of what he was doing. . . . Father Munnion watched the dwindling of him into the delusive and ever-changing map of the desert. . . . It was difficult to know what he might or might not find, so generous and inscrutable were the ways of God : streams of pure water that would convert this waste again into a triumphant paradise of fountains and waving palm-trees and streams of mineral water that would heal the sick ; gold mines and a thin sprinkling of precious stones, lying like little pebbles among the grains of sand ; turquoises, those eyes of buried mammoths, interred so deep among the under-strata ; quarries of rare marble ; bones of giant fishes, and the frozen figures of the ancient world : stiff hieratic figures of dead Egypt, the athletes and gladiators of Greece and ancient Rome, fauns and satyrs, god and goddesses now outcast. . . . And, even as Father Munnion thought still to watch him, the figure of the water-diviner was lost. The sun was now invincible, you would have said, and dark glasses were of no avail : it was impossible to gaze for long on this glimmering and shifting expanse, through which tall palms shivered as though stricken with fever. Sometimes, for an instant or two, their trunks dissolved, while he looked at them, into the sky, or, more curiously still, into the semblance of lakes, as the heated air rose tremblingly in front of them, so that it was an unquiet

prospect, a landscape of hallucination. Pale, cool stretches of water, momentary domes, towers and trees, fashioned themselves on the horizon, and then were gone . . . gone, Father Munnion moralised, like the terraces, temples, and gardens, the great gates and ramparts, which had once actually existed in this neighbourhood and yet seemingly have left no more traces of their former solid being than do these phantasmal structures of sun and sand. The real buildings of brick and stone had lain long buried beneath these scintillant particles, which constituted so insatiate and formidable, if microscopic, a foe, devouring all such material enemies, consuming them utterly with a terrible because unrelenting slowness, and then ever and again calling up these mocking ghosts, which change from second to second, in their stead. And, Christian though he was, the old, lean man pondered on how thoroughly these lands, in which biblical history had dawned, and in which Christianity had once prospered, belonged now to Islam.

Perhaps all deserts were inherently Mohammedan : for that arid religion, you felt, was understood by the nomads who live and pray among their sands. Moreover, the deserts in this neighbourhood had increased in number and extent. The Cross, for all the monks up aloft on their mountain, had no part here. The skies by day and night were heathen : the sun was still the old sun-god of the Persians, the stars were still those of Greece and Rome, while any mirage that rose dazzlingly out of the heat was always a domed city of mosques and minarets, in which no true hymn would sound, but only the warning cries of the *muezzin*, "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar." . . .

We too must not question, but accept . . . yet not so many centuries ago these lands had proclaimed the veritable faith. . . . And again, he felt, the world was in course of transmutation. Vague thoughts of the future, handed on - perhaps, in some telepathic manner of which both were unaware - by his neighbour, assailed him. . . . Yes, it was changing : the centres of gravity were once more shifting, after a thousand years : but, though sure in his faith and of steadfast mind, his thoughts were tinged by a subtle and restless apprehension. He sat there, looking before him into the desert : and, even as he looked, the prospect altered. . . . The desert was launching one of its age-old attacks upon the habitations of men ; a sudden, dashing affair, as of cavalry, perhaps to distract attention from its steady, step-by-step encroachment, which never ended. The sun grew darker, and the delusive lakes, domes, and trees fell back into the dust that had given birth to them : but no more absolutely than the jagged, substantial mountain which rose behind the hotel. . . . Now the sun was red and defeated. Doors banged, windows rattled, and curtains flew like proud banners. The desert was coming : and soon the whirling spectres of its advance-guard rose threateningly on a hot wind. Mysterious shapes that gyrated, lifting themselves up on huge wings, approached swiftly on a sound of drumming. Nothing existed save sand. It filled the air, seeped, trickled, and filtered in at every nook, cranny, and keyhole, under every door and window ; lay, a red layer of it, in every bath, drifted into clothes, boots and beds, cups and saucers ; was in the eyes and ears of the guests, plastered their food, setting their teeth on edge, just as the

dry wind grated on their skin. And, for those hours, hotel, garden, and even the sky and sun itself had been, it seemed, turned to sand, overwhelmed by this victorious onslaught. Nevertheless, hidden from below, the mountains still lay bathed in a pure, if torrid, light, save where, above the monastery, at the very summit of the Jebel Musa, nestled the glowing cloud which had been seen there for the past few days.

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CHAPTER I

DINNER

EYES smarted and a feeling of suffocation persisted, notwithstanding that before sunset the desert was back in its right place, hemmed there by sea and mountain. But the process which such a return to everyday life occasioned, the gradual falling back of the sand from this element it had failed for the time to conquer, had appeared to repeat that of the Creation. God, seeing that the earth was once more without form and void, had decreed, " Let there be light" : and slowly land and sky had sculptured themselves out of the whirling particles. As though regaining consciousness, the guests in the hotel had begun to identify their surroundings. First, those things that were very close and near the level of the eye had asserted their outlines, vague but familiar ; the slant of the verandah roof, a raised path, the trunk of a tree, the faintly Japanese angle of the lychgate leading to the little Cotswold church, and then, above, the panache of a palm, or, high in the air, a distant peak, until at length every object had assumed its usual bulk and mien.

But no sooner had light thus returned to the world than it began, though this time more normally, again to falter. The setting sun dyed the outlying tents of sand a fluttering, flamingo pink, poisoning them in sudden isolation against the grape-blood fringes of the sky ; and,

far away, the mountains reared their contorted battlements and revealed along their ribs whole systems of barren rock, all bathed in a clear, lime-green light which ran over them like a liquid, although one woolly cloud still hung above Mount Sinai, clinging to its top, and seemed to hold within it a lingering core of luminosity, even after elsewhere the radiance had faded.

Now the lights were turned on. The dynamo to supply electricity had quickly been overhauled and put into order, and, as it began to work, the Aaron Palace Hotel became an island, or, more nearly still, a great ship floating on a sea of darkness, silence, and deadness. There was no life outside ; few birds, no frogs, a snake or two, and a scorpion perhaps ; no fire-flies, as in happier climes, to make the night dance in unexpected gaiety ; nothing but the soft, dead rustling and settling down of the sand, where it lay for hundreds of miles round, as though Nature was sick and dying, and this soundless carpet had been spread for her.

Consequently it was not to be wondered at that, even after an ordinary day was over, the span of darkness before they retired to bed forced the inhabitants of the hotel to adopt the same order of existence which develops in a liner that has been a day or two at sea. The boundless and inhuman monotony of their exterior surroundings always galvanised those segregated within into the same false but very sociable activity, encouraged them to enter into the identical feverish, ill-regulated friendships, that, devoid of real feeling, could not possibly continue beyond the crossing - or, rather, beyond their stay here. . . . How much more, then, was the air of gay and unenquiring

cordiality which always prevailed, noticeable this evening ; especially, perhaps, in the dining-room.

This hall, of enormous, mosque-like proportions, was high enough to offer safe port to countless squadrons of cruising mosquitoes, who were able, from out the elaborate honeycomb fortifications so thoughtfully provided for them, to launch a thousand daring raids. The top of the walls, under the cornice, was decorated with clumsy Arabic inscriptions, which the directorate, who were responsible for their having been put there, had informed Lord Pridian were extracts from the Koran : although, in reality, where they did not merely constitute threats to the uncircumcised, they consisted of proverbs, unbelievably lewd and obscene ; a joke which, however much it might deviate from the canons of English Good Taste, never failed to amuse the Shereef, when, as to-night, he entered - alone - to dine.

The great chieftain, indeed, appeared quite unaltered in his bearing : because, doubtless, a sandstorm was to him as a rainy day to a Londoner : but in the other guests, at least in the female ones, a change was visible. Their pride had stung them. Just as after a liner has plunged through rough seas, so had the sandstorm placed them on their mettle : more than ever, too, on their honour to behave as though they were dining here, not because the black waves cut them off from any other possibility, but of their own free will ; while in addition it had induced them to blossom out into unwonted, if rather gritty, finery. They must make a resolute effort, they had felt, to prove themselves impervious to adversity.

Moreover, a sandstorm or a fog involves its victims

in conditions which resemble a temporary state of Communism, depriving them for so long as it lasts of any factitious individuality they have assumed or that different sets of circumstances had imposed upon them ; but, after it has passed, they are bound, in an attempt at self-justification, to emphasise those attributes which they believe to differentiate them from others. Thus when, within, the hotel life began to renew itself, its habitual character was tinged by the recent deviation to a deeper tint, and the ladies sailed into the dining-room with all the outward, as much as the inward, tokens of their personality intensified.

For example, Lady Ramshackle was not so much swathed as swaddled in sad, sea-green draperies : but, after all, from her point of view, the more (and the sadder) the merrier. And over them lay a thin, milky sprinkling of moonstones, gems innocuous as barley-water, which matched her eyes and her, as it were, thatched and faded hair. With her was dining Miss Tether, who was wearing for the occasion, over her black dress, a lace shawl - appropriate, because, being somewhat discoloured, it resembled a pattern scratched in the sand - while pinning it was a pretty little sapphire brooch, itself almost invisible, but a-jingle with altogether invisible brilliants, swinging round it on miniature gold chains as dead planets whirl in their orbits round a dying star. Both these ornaments had been left to her by a deceased great-aunt. . . .

Even Effie Sipwater had been affected by the prevailing inclination toward display. Notwithstanding that, officially, she shared the opinion of her nephew, viewing evening dress with the same degree of disapproval and contempt as hot baths (for, so they held,

it impoverished the blood and drove out the dark gods who dwell so masterfully within the breast of collier and gamekeeper), she was nevertheless wearing a very handsome gown, bought during her last summer pilgrimage to Switzerland ; for, though she kept this hidden from the disciples, always pretending that she was going on a visit to Jung, she had, in her Cotswold period, become addicted to Alpine plants, and could never, even now, break herself of the habit. It was a gown that, though serious, had been inspired, unconsciously it may be, by an indubitable sense of fantasy, while yet at the same time displaying all the kindly stolid attributes of its native place. In cut and decoration, in the pleats, folds, and trimmings, in the sumptuous elaborateness of it, were reflected many features of a rich land flowing with Nestle and milk-chocolate : mountain peaks and valleys, unwinking lakes and the green hair of glaciers, blue gentian and white edelweiss, yodelling peasants, St. Bernard dogs at noon, and tinkling cow-bells at twilight - all these were there, just as in the intricacy of its steel beading, in the whorls, spirals, and Catherine wheels, could be traced, contending, the mechanical, clockwork ingenuity of the Swiss race, as much as the engineering supremacy that had harnessed flashing torrents and pierced whole ranges of granite ; to such an extent that even the little enamel watch, anchored by a gold butterfly-brooch to a flat, embroidered breast, seemed from time to time softly to cry, " Cuckoo ! Cuckoo ! " But, of these two opposing influences, the bucolic one seemed in the end to triumph, because her shoes, bought in an Oxfordshire village, were fashioned, without doubt, of artistic pottery, rather badly baked ;

except that a third warring note, and one quite unexpected, was introduced into the *ensemble* by the finishing-touch of a fan of ostrich feathers. These plumes had been given to Effie a few days before leaving England by Lady Septuagesima Goodley,¹ and looked as though, after playing a prominent part at the Courts of the Sun King and his descendants, they had been taken unaware by the outbreak of the French Revolution, and had suffered severely at the hands - and feet - of the insurgents, until finally they had found a safe but prolonged asylum (if one may use that expression) in an industrial part of England. . . . Nor was her nephew dressed less carefully. No smock or Russian blouse, surprisingly enough : no Red Indian feathers or Congo cowrie-shells : nothing of that sort, but a well-cut, velvet coat, ribboned eye-glass, and waist-coat, first oddly shaped, and then embroidered, by a few of the more enthusiastic ladies among his circle of admirers, with delicate, priapic patterns in coloured silk. Even this ornamentation, however, was not so vigorous or startling as it sounds, for, from a distance, it resembled eighteenth-century needlework. But T. L. himself, in this conspicuous costume, looked more than ever weedy and ailing. ... As usual, they had been having - and giving - a good deal of trouble about their food. T. L. had always taught, though it sounded a manifest contradiction (and, indeed, his enemies pretended that this doctrine had no other basis than a feeble personal digestion), that a meat diet was incompatible with red blood. The life-long dependence upon eggs and vegetables, which, since he was conscientious, devolved on both of them, was a cause of

¹ See title-story in *Triple Fugut*,

perpetual friction between themselves and the waiters. But, worse, T. L. had to-night caught Effie eating a clandestine cutlet, skilfully hidden beneath a mound of tinned vegetables. And, though she adored her nephew, this ridiculous exposure of her weakness had made her angry, so that she treated him for once as no disciple should treat a master. " Really, Enfeloni," she was saying courageously, " it isn't the waiter's fault for bringing it ; / must take the blame. I felt I needed it after all that sand . . . and surely one small cutlet every ten years won't do any harm? After all, I was only following the inner urge, the dictates of that blood-wisdom which you are always carrying on about. Besides, it's gone now. I don't want to hear any more. . . . And you might shake your beard a little (you've got some breadcrumbs and New-Health Vita-B corn-flakes entangled in it) instead of nagging at me like that. Really, you remind me of your father. Why don't you watch those people coming in, in their ludicrous lady-and-gentleman clothes ? "

Certainly, the ladies now advancing showed diverse taste in their costumes. Miss Poppy Lollygo was a striking enough figure, in a pyjama-suit of silver scales, which emphasised her piscine quality, bringing out all that was flat and glistening about her. Mrs. Hagworthy had, as it were, enlarged and rebuilt her nest of white hair : while the fact that Lady Helen had recalled the existence of such things as clothes and food and had, further, contrived to find a new dress, demonstrated beyond question how far, and to what unexpected quarters, the *esprit de corps*, originating in the experiences of the afternoon, had spread : since, though not slovenly, her vagueness and general

irregularity enabled her to lose things in even the most minute rooms.

It was Lord Pridian's party, and the rest of the company consisted of the bishop, Sir Levy and Stuart, Ninette de Nina, Clifford Hearnshaw, Eric Fuller-Flitmouse, and Michael ; for whom Helen had secured an invitation, though the newspaper peer secretly preferred to see the son of his old friend working in his office rather than sitting at his table. Their host was limping slightly and bore a piece of plaster above one heavy, hooded eye, as the result of an attempt to master an Arab steed in the desert the day before yesterday. And the reason of their being thus so late was evidently that the cinema star, in the best American style, had kept them all waiting for three-quarters of an hour ; because the hotel now echoed to the ear-splitting apologies of the rusty-skinned beauty, whose slow, hoarse voice had recovered, in her emotion, its former range and compass. When at last they sat down to dinner, it was to be noticed that after the bishop had said grace, Clifford, who, though an Englishman, had in everything adopted the American manner, rushed round the table to hold Ninette's chair for her, as though she could not be trusted to sit down by herself, or, again, as though she was so refined that the attitude of sitting, coming as an admission that she, together with the rest of humanity, was possessed of the portion of the human body designed for that purpose, was an act, on her part, of public, if self-humiliating, heroism. Further, Clifford had learnt to hold the chair in so ostentatiously gallant and manly a way that it served to focus the unseen limelight entirely upon the two of them ;

precious, pitiful little girl-wife and old-fashioned, pioneer-courtesy husband. (Lord Pridian was by this time annoyed, hungry both for food and public attention. It was dreadful, he thought, how much time they must waste in this process, whenever they ate with friends ; still more when you remembered that it was on top of being three-quarters of an hour late, inevitably, for everything.)

The members of their group were already talking loud enough to drown the conversation elsewhere : especially in the quiet corner near by, where Father Munnion was entertaining Dr. Acquarius. Opposite, in another corner, sat Madame Galactic. " The Boss " had not invited her to join him, and she was dining defiantly alone - or at least seemingly alone : for, of course, she may have been enjoying the inner company of " Little Toucan," or as for that, Great Rameses himself was, perhaps, her honoured but unseen guest. The only woman present to wear a hat with evening dress, a huge hat in the Monte-Carlo fashion of late Edwardian days, her appearance at once summed up memories of a halcyon period, alive with the peaceful humming of wasp-waisted diabolos, dancing and spinning on their strings.

The small portion of the dining-room at present in use was by now full: and every few minutes one of the managers, clothed for this acronychal feast in the blackest and whitest of evening dress so elegantly shaped that, poured into it, they resembled their native scorpions and looked, moreover, as though they had been polished with black or brown boot-polish from head to foot before donning it, would saunter with a rhythmic nonchalance about and among the

tables, stepping in a kind of tango dream, to favour the most important clients with green, yellow, or mauve smiles of a greasy but yet cut-throat superciliousness. About such poorer guests as Enfelson and Aunt Effie they troubled not at all. Indeed, the only one of these despised who could, however unwittingly, defeat them, was Professor Crotchester. Though actually a very ill-tempered old man, he had acquired, through solitude and deafness, the habit of nodding, smiling, and sometimes laughing loudly to himself, a habit which, as the managers roamed, glancing round at the guests, invariably deceived them, making them stop short for a moment, convinced that he was either smiling *with* them or laughing *at* them. Every single time, at every meal, they were taken in ; they would pause, creasing their faces back at him with an expression that had collapsed from haughtiness into fawning, gaze at him with an air of startled enquiry, and then, visibly disconcerted, would turn quickly and hurry away. But the professor had not observed them at all, and would continue to smile to his own shadow.

Alone and sitting in the middle of the room, to-night a procession of shells, advancing, in order of seniority, from the earliest times, monopolised his attention : but it did not prevent him for a moment from engaging in his usual tricks, while, in addition, he spoke to himself soundlessly, so that Slate-face was obliged to ask him to repeat what he had said. He did not make any reply, but laughed aloud and very heartily before once more returning to a silent munching and mouth-ing, cutting and tapping his food as though with his little hammer.

And, indeed, he would have been justified in doing

so, for this evening it was decidedly more mineral than animal; it all tasted the same - of sand. Sand was served up by the chef in a hundred ingenious modes : but in every instance flavoured with decay. The reason for this was that fish, flesh, fowl, and T. L. Enfelson's vegetables, had rested on ice since the installation, a year ago, of Lord Pridian's refrigerating system ; a useful contrivance which enabled the materials to preserve a semblance of complete freshness until such time as they were removed from it, when its effect was to encourage them to putrefy with an appalling rapidity in the few minutes that must elapse between thawing and cooking. But, again, just as on a transatlantic liner to pretend that the food is fresh and good becomes a point of honour with the guests, who are therefore obliged, in proof, to eat a lot of it, and then to attribute the ensuing pains to the motion of the boat, so here it was commonly alleged that the climate was responsible for the agonies which followed, in reality, on that surfeit to which their own body of public opinion compelled them : while, for his part, the chef felt spiritually constrained, in order to play up to the visitors, to make every dish as elaborate as possible ; though, failing a miraculous supply of manna, dates and coffee, with a little smoked or stewed camel as a treat, form the correct and natural diet of the region.

This evening the food was too full of sand for people even to simulate any appreciation of it. Dinner was, in consequence, soon over. But long after the others had gone, long after the waiters had begun to bump chairs and tables and rattle and clash together knives plates and coffee-cups as a signal for

prompt departure to lingering guests. Father Munnion and Dr. Acquarius sat talking. . . . The two men were fast friends ; the priest recognising, perhaps, a reflection in other spheres of his own simple faith, his obedience, his consciousness, from time to time, that he was the vessel of a pervading and beneficent will. The profession, too, of dowsing, the constant effort to uncover water in a desert, resembled, allegorically, his own high calling. And then, they were the same age, a link in itself: though Father Munnion looked crumpled and lined beside Dr. Acquarius, who had by now recovered his fresh child-like colour.

So far had the intensification of personality made itself felt, however, that even he, most genuine and unpretentious of men, appeared, when he spoke, to employ to-night more pronounced, more bubbling an accent : albeit this may have been due to fatigue, because, though finally he had escaped, his had been an exhausting and, in truth, frightening ordeal. Dowsing, even when things seem to favour it, ever depends upon the delicacy of the nervous system, which must be responsive as the most exquisitely balanced and sensitive of machines, and a sudden disaster of the kind that had overtaken him - to be lost in a rushing, revolving, burning confusion - must of necessity administer to it a violent shock. . . . Perhaps, moreover, he had comprehended how peculiarly sand was his enemy, a powerful and unscrupulous foe : and that this hostility did not lack provocation, for he was everywhere its adversary, at every point striving to divine springs of water with which to oppose it, and able, too, to pierce its most precious secrets and

uncover its carefully concealed hoards. . . . He had felt worn out, absolutely worn out.

None the less, tired though he might look, and know himself to be, nothing and nobody could have dissuaded Lord Pridian from summoning the dowser, immediately on his return, to compliment him ; a fact which proved how highly the newspaper-peer, at any rate, valued his own approbation. " You're a grand lad, doctor," he had said, " a pukka-sahib and a grand lad." He had been able, however, with clear conscience and good grace to refuse Lord Pridian's invitation to dine, on the plea that he had already engaged to dine with Father Munnion : but both of them had been obliged to promise to join the larger party afterwards. And, rewarded in this fashion, Dr. Acquarius was for a time allowed to rest. . . . But, indeed, everybody in the hotel had been glad to see him return in safety, for there was no one who did not like him ; except, perhaps, the professor, whose sceptical old mind remained unconvinced as to the authenticity of dowsing. He belonged to that antique school of scientists who hold that the root of true science lies in disbelief, a rigid refusal to believe, rather than to the softer, more credulous band of to-day, whose wish is father to belief: thus if the diviner had brought to light whole rivers as big as Ganges or Euphrates, whole subterranean lakes as large as Michigan, it would not have satisfied him, for he was determined to dismiss the unassuming little Swede as a " charlatan." . . .

At the moment, Father Munnion was confiding in Dr. Acquarius the details of Madame Galactic's determined effort to persuade him to attend a *stance*, there

to meet St. Benedict; to whom he was formally to be presented by "Little Toucan." St. Benedict had, it appeared, become converted to spiritualism during the fourteen centuries that had rolled by since, as he now phrased it, he had *passed over*. He was very intimate with "Little Toucan," and already called Madame Galactic by her Christian name - Hortense - and since they had often spoken together of Father Munnion, he was soon eager to have a talk, through her interpretation, with the priest, so that he might persuade him, too, to see the truth. Father Munnion, though, had been resolute in his refusal to meet the saint under such auspices. Yet, as he said, in the circumstances it was unfair that only priests of the Catholic Church should be invariably suspected by members of other communities of trying to make converts. "And there are times," he added, looking through the glass panels of the doors into the lounge, "when I wish the accusation were justified, at any rate in so far as it concerns myself: for I tire of poring over faded manuscripts and wearing my eyes out over palimpsests, however important. I suppose it's reprehensible, a weakness of faith, for I have been appointed to this work and may not rebel. But the immortal soul of a human being is to me a thing of so much greater consequence than anything else, that often I can't help wishing that God in His mercy had commanded me to occupy myself with men and women rather than with books, much as I love them."

"But you couldn't leave your work, valuable research work that it is, unfinished," objected his friend; "and surely one day you will be free to do what you like?"

"No, I'm here to do as I am bidden, doomed to

pass this life to the rustling of parchment and vellum ; a labour, too, that needs devotion. And yet, in this very hotel, my heart is often wrung, so much do I long to help those I see, rich as well as poor : and especially the young ones, for they have, none of them, any sense of direction, and the days are closing round them. Even here, in this country, beneath that extraordinary mountain - and I, who've lived up there, can tell you it is an extraordinary spot - they pay no attention to religion, never think of it ; except the older ones, for an hour weekly in their church. You'd imagine the place would *make* them ponder on its mysteries : but it doesn't. Sometimes I think a new revelation might come to-morrow and they wouldn't heed it. ... Poor children, poor children. . . . You have your own mission, Acquarius, but what have they ? Airplanes, cars, yachts, clothes, *objets* (*Fart* : all toys to them. Madame Galactic is about the saddest instance : for she is guilty of what I call the American Sin ; that is to say, religion itself is her toy. She makes a business out of it, too. Bad enough ; but to allow it to become a toy is still more degrading."

" But there are exceptions, Father. What about T. L. Enfelon ? "

" Yes, I admit he's serious. He at least believes in himself: but too much. Most of them don't believe in anything - not even in themselves. There was a time once - not so long ago, either - when the rich and powerful *really* believed in themselves : but they don't any more. Only Lord Pridian, who is, despite his fortune, an intensely stupid man, with just enough imagination to make him dangerous, retains the illusion of power : believes that he can influence the world.

The rest, for the most part, believe in nothing. They are, as it were, uncreated ; because it's better, far better, to believe in Beelzebub than in nothing. If you believe in the Devil, you must believe in God, and there is a chance of atonement and eventual salvation. But these people are not *wicked*; they are uncreated. It would be easier to try to convert a cannibal-chief, who had faith in his own beastly idols, than young Betty or Miss Lollygo, or even dear Lady Helen : for with them there would be something to get hold of, to wrestle with. Lord Pridian, again, strong in the Anglican heresy as he is, it would be *possible* to convert . . . but few of the others.³⁵

Dr. Acquarius beamed back, wrapped in the strange, northern happiness that, like northern gloom, has no direct reason, except the pleasure - or the pain - which lingers in the blood of those born to snow and sparkling air. At last he answered, " Yes. They believe in nothing. It's true. But, Father," he added, with hesitation, " though, as you know, in so far as I belong to any Church I'm a Lutheran, and therefore have no real right to ask you such a question - What do you believe ? I enquire only out of respect and affection, and the answer of such a man as you would have weight for me, so perhaps you will find no offence in it ? ... What allowance do you make for science ? Do you make no effort, as members of northern Churches do nowadays, to reconcile historical and scientific probability with your teaching : with what you would teach, and have been taught ? Do you, studying your codices and early versions of the Gospels, come to no fresh conclusions ? Do you still believe that ' in six days the Lord made heaven and earth ' ;

that we are descended from Adam, whom God created out of dust, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life, and from Eve, whom He fashioned from one of Adam's ribs ? We will leave out the New Testament, with which Catholics certainly are the most concerned : but do you believe implicitly, for instance, in the story of the divine origin of the Ten Commandments, the two Stone Tables of the Law, and that * the Lord descended upon the mountain in a fire ' ? " . . .

And Father Munnion, with the gentle smile that creased his face into map-like lines and contours, answered, " Yes, I believe it. Science comes and goes, but religion, true religion, remains. I believe that if religion were to die - which it cannot - the world would die too : because neither the brain, nor the science it produces, differentiates man from beast, but the soul and the knowledge of good and evil. You remember the warning of the Apostle Paul to Timothy : ' *O Timothee, depositum custodi, devitans profanas vocum novitates, et oppositions falsi nominis sciential* . . . And much science, like all else conceived by Man, is Vanity."

CHAPTER II

CONVERSATION-PIECE

THE exceptional sense of comradeship, which was the fruit of so unpleasant an afternoon, resulted after dinner in the formation, little by little, of a group in the Egyptian Lounge. Indeed, in time it came to include all the guests, though Lord Pridian's party, now disposed in recesses, on deeply cushioned chairs and sofas, against a background of plaster bas-reliefs and lotus-petalled pillars, still constituted its nucleus. But the Ramshakkles had already joined it, as had, perforce, poor Miss Tether ; who, deprived of Roderick to reprimand and instruct, formed a little island of silence and pink self-consciousness in a sea of talk, though her chin was more than ever set - if set now at an angle, jaunty as an admiral's cap, to show that she was fully at her ease.

There were other guests, however, who would have been utterly unexpected, and certainly unasked, the previous day, had not the dust of the desert obliterated all feuds, even erased the name Enfelson from " the Boss's " black-list, so that the author and his aunt were now drinking coffee in his company. They, it is true, had been invited : whereas Madame Galactic, in sweet proof of her inability to bear rancour, had merely walked up to ask boldly if she might make one, for only a few minutes, of so interesting a gathering ?

And since Lord Pridian had found himself, despite his imperial model, unable to refuse a thus modestly phrased request ; and since, as she always said, minutes, hours, and days are but human and arbitrary divisions of time, which do not exist after we pass over, she remained there for the whole of the evening, during the early course of which the medium had, further, taken a great fancy to Sir Levy, saying, "Just look at that face. I guess I knew it in old Egypt."

It was Sunday, so there was no bridge ; for " the Boss " would not countenance card games on that day ; nor, Ninette realised, could she and Clifford venture to give the other guests a treat with their guitars. It must be conversation : and she looked a trifle disconsolate, for she liked a partner, but Cliffy seemed disposed to lift his voice more readily in song than in talk.

Lord Pridian himself was engaged in an orgy of, as he thought, Napoleonic questions : questions often unrelated, and for the answers to which he never paused. Eric Fuller-Flitmouse was his present victim, and looked plainly overwhelmed. (It was of no use even trying to work in a story at present; he could see that!) Nevertheless they were intended to be taken as a compliment; a sign of interest. And Lord Pridian would never have considered that he had fulfilled his obligations, to one who was his guest for the first time, unless quite at the beginning of the evening he had made this pretence of wishing to elicit information. It was also designed to show that he was a live wire, a regular go-getter, rather than to demonstrate, which in fact it very completely achieved, his profound, invincible ignorance and insensitiveness coupled with

a certain rather acute monkey-memory for words : " How old are you ? Who made that suit ? Is he a good tailor ? Do all museum officials have evening suits ? - And shoes ? Who is your chief ? Do I know him ? How much money does he get ? How much do you get ? Is that a year or a month ? Do you believe in Daylight-Saving ? In Sunday observance ? Is a business education among your ideals ? How would you define ' Byzantine,' as opposed to ' Gothic ' ? Do you consider death-duties justifiable ? Have you seen [naming a play] ? What are your politics ? Do you realise the illimitable possibilities of Empire ? Is the scientist your brother ? Are you fond of him ? Is he a good scientist ? Has he been to India ? How much does he earn in a year ? Does he believe in God ? ? ? ? ? " Somewhat after this fashion the press-baron conducted his *questionnaire*.

Meanwhile, Tuey was in a corner opposite his host, and was, as usual, being provocative : but his arid lisp will be omitted from the further record of his conversation, although that of his father, more important if not more intrinsic, must of necessity be included. " I can't imagine," he was saying to those round him, " how any of you can bear, in this enlightened age, to live in countries where there is no real freedom " (Sir Levy thought it wiser not to listen, for it would only end in his getting angry with the boy again : which achieved no good purpose and looked very bad in public. Instead, he pretended to listen to Madame Galactic, who was, he decided in his Edwardian way, " a fine figure of a woman "), " where you are not allowed even to *mention* things of genuine modern importance without the fear of being prosecuted for blasphemy or

obscurity. Thus the word is on the same level of retrogression as the deed. Where are your reforms? I ask you. . . . But Russia . . . take divorce in Russia. It's as easy as posting a letter ; a matter, as it should be, of convenience, rather than of old-fashioned morality entangled with religion. And it has done more for happiness than has any other reform. But, until there's a revolution, you'll never obtain any real alteration in the divorce laws of England. Think again of the Soviet child, brought up in a lovely, clean, communal creche, instead of in a slum home where drunken parents prate of duty, or, even, in a rich home where he is alternately spoiled and bullied. There's no question of love or hatred between father and son. The sons grow up uncramped, the fathers lead a care-free and happier old age. Here you are not allowed to arrange your lives on any rational basis ; you may, if you like, plan, as does our host, for human happiness in the next world : but never in this one. *You* want your heaven in heaven only : we Bolsheviks want it on earth. And how *can* you continue, of your own free will, to live in countries where all the nauseous old legends of miracles and supernatural occurrences still obtain credence ? For they're not just harmless old fables : they're stultifying in themselves, apart from the use your rulers make of them in cowing the proletariat. Where you forbid the use of opium and cocaine, we forbid the use of religious dope. . . . And the results are superb. . . . I wish some of you could have seen the enthusiasm of the anti-Christian services at Christmas last year. And the processions . . . wonderful processions, especially in Moscow ; * Holy Moscow' as it used to be called ! "

" Why, we have them too, Mr. Lillygum," cried Ninette, inspired by the national genius for wrongly memorising names and misunderstanding anything said to her. " We even have Christmas-trees for the poor wee kiddies who cannot afford to have them at home, all lit up by electric light, in the public squares. And we have an interesting old custom, which I don't think you have in Eur̄op on what we call Christmas Day. Why, we have a special diet, turkey and plum pudding, just for that one festival: and we decorate our house with wreaths of synthetic holly . . . Oh ! We make a lot of Christmas in the States."

Unable, to strike any sparks with his flint in that direction, Stuart now turned to Professor Crotchester, whom Lord Pridian had just brought within the circle. " Professor," he roared slowly, and with a marked effort to overcome his lisp, "I ... appeal ... to ... you ... as ... a ... scientist. . . . You . . . don't . . . believe ... do ... you ... in ... all ... these . . . old . . . tales ... fit ... only . . . for . . . paleolithic ... men ?"

" Of course they didn't have tails, paleolithic men," retorted the professor rudely, in answer to the question his ready brain had substituted for the actual one. " If you believe that, you'll believe anything, even all the old stories in the Bible. I should have thought any schoolboy of ten would have known that they didn't have tails. They were very like us."

This reply rather defeated Tuey : but Madame Galactic took up the challenge. " Oh, Mr. Lollygo, how can you talk like that ? I *know* that there are other worlds than this. I can prove it to you. I've met your dear father, for example, and Miss Poppy,

many times in the past in Egypt and ancient Rome . . . Poppea, she was called, then . . . and later, at the Court of Mary Queen of Scots. . . . But you're still young. You don't understand these things. Of course you don't. All the same, we must remember, mustn't we, the words of our poet, 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Brutus, than , . . .' " ("Horatio, Horatio, Madame Galactic," Miss Tether interrupted, in a sudden burst of corrective self-confidence, which, alas, died away all too soon into a brick-red blush) "and well, I kinder mean that there are ..."

Conversation, split up at times between two or three, or, at others, delegated to one of the principal performers, remained, perhaps, bolder than usual, if no better. However childish in detail, however much limited by the English-public-school-boy mind, at any rate it seemed momentarily released by its surroundings from the conversational code which such minds formulate ; that it is the duty of all present to avoid every topic in which any individual talker might be particularly interested (any violation of this rule would constitute the monstrous solecism, *shop*), while still more must the possible beliefs of those congregated together be eschewed, and in no way impinged upon, for in that direction might lie enthusiasm, the one unforgivable sin. (To this clause, politics - about which people, usually the most nonchalant and yet proud of their manners, permit themselves to bandy words in public like so many Billingsgate-trained fishwives - provide a unique exception.) But to-night the talk, perpetually veering, nevertheless, however inept in itself was any individual contribution thereto, dealt with important and even formidable subjects.

Moreover, religion continued to underlie the whole flimsy fabric.

Perhaps this was due to Lord Pridian's very genuine passion for religious discussion, as much as to the influence of environment. But undoubtedly it was as if, through the absurdity of the conversation and the idiosyncrasies of the performers, through the artificiality of the hotel, exotic in spite of a so carefully prepared evocation of local colour, arabesques and hanging lamps and horseshoe arches, every now and then there broke the truth, the legendary truth, of its actual surroundings, source of so many religions and branches of religions, until the wilderness seemed to sweep in with a breath of prophecy, the mountains with a blast of foreboding.

The talk, so far, had continued as it had started. " Bishop, I won't intrude my personal beliefs - or lack of them - on you : but I want to ask you a question, for all the world knows that you are a broad-minded prelate : or you have that reputation, at any rate. Do you dare to maintain that you believe in the literal truth of the story of the Creation, as related in Genesis ? "

" Should we, you in fact ask me, believe in all the old stories ; we can revel in their literary distinction as men of taste and education, but must we believe them implicitly ? . . . That, my dear sir, must be as our conscience dictates . . . yes. . . . There are those, for example, who consider that Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount has supplanted the Ten Commandments : others, that both are of equal value. The Church of England in her great and charitable comprehensiveness finds place for all ... for persons of every political, as well as of every religious, shade of thought."

" No, bishop. I did not put so indirect a question to you. What I meant (let me amplify it) was : Do you doubt men's descent from the lower animals ? Do you mean to say that you believe in the literal truth of the story of the Creation as related in Genesis, and refuse to accept or consider, even now, after all that modern discoveries have taught us, the process of evolution, as Science has unfolded it ? There is no way out."

In reply, the bishop, as was his habit in discussion, walked crab-like round the argument. " Ah ! Mr. Stuart," he replied heartily, " I admire your independence of thought and recognise that your attitude is one that must be combated on its merits. (There's nothing like independence !) You take a scientific view of life, no doubt ; very scientific. But let me remind you that Science and the Church - the Church of England - now see eye to eye on many points. (Oh, yes, I think so !) And taking a broad view, a sweeping view I might say, to my mind that is exactly the respect in which we, of Anglican Worship, differ from the members of other Christian communities. *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*. Let us put it like that. Our Church has moved with the times and has made room for Science. . . . Perhaps, who knows, neither can even live without the other ? . . . Have you never met my old friend Dr. Barnes, ' Bishop Barnes' as they call him in the Press, a truly charming and enlightened old fellow ? . . . Then you are probably not acquainted with his words, many of which I know by heart : for I often find occasion to quote them in my sermons. And not seldom, friends, I have found them helpful to those of little faith but who desire to believe.

^c Unless religion is moribund,' he said in one instance,

' it is dynamic and not static ' ; and in another, ' Christianity resembles a biological organism with a racial future.' Or listen to this : ' Religious teachers must use scientific method.' Or, again, words even wiser, and, if we truly seek guidance, of more succour : * If there be a God behind Nature, He can show His creative activity through the process of emergent evolution just as definitely as by special creation.' . . . , So that, we may say, Science has the confirmation of Religion - er, at any rate, of a large and influential portion of the Church of England : while God, too, has thus the sanction of all Christian men of Science, in the full panoply of their great knowledge and achievement."

" Yes, bishop : you have quoted Bishop Barnes, but you haven't really told us what Science has to say to Religion?"

" Better still : my dear young sir ! Science confirms the Church. Not only do we see the Church make room for Science ; but Science nowadays makes room for the Church. There's that chap Whitehead ; most interesting man, without doubt. He pronounces, as I told my flock only last Easter, that ' the Progress of Science must result in the unceasing codification of religious thought, to the great advantage of religion.' And then, again, there is Sir James Jeans, a wonderful chap, who believes, if I grasp his meaning correctly, in a Mathematical God ; a Mathematical God, it may be, of his own conception, but not differing in essence from the Modern Churchman's view of Him."

" But that is English Science, Capitalist Science. It's not Russian Science. It's not the same thing at all. The English scientists are the paid servants of the

bourgeoisie, and not free-thinking, class-conscious workers under an all powerful Dictatorship of the Proletariat, as are members of the experimental section of the D.B.S.R. or T.V.L.D. Your scientists have to fit squares into circles, in order to justify their bolstering up of your present tottering system. They have converted even Science into a vested interest, and are naturally afraid now that if they made it free, or if at last it freed itself and spoke for itself without their interpretation, the whole bourgeois edifice would tumble (which I jolly well hope it will !). They are the same thing in your country, bishop : Science and the Church. Science dare not attack such a powerful fellow-vested-interest. So it has allowed Superstition to triumph. All that Science has so far achieved for England, is to place the life of her people on a slum-city, rather than on a slum-village, basis. As for the scientists themselves, they seem merely to have changed places with the bishops. Every English scientist makes a deep obeisance to the Deity before he begins a discourse, or after he ends it, just as your bands play ' God Save the King ' at the opening and close of a theatrical performance. It is true that the God to whom he bows in every instance varies : though in every case it is a synthetic, home-made God (but then scientists are so often employed to produce synthetic creations). And the bishops, in return, are only too glad to identify each one in turn as their very own, and to make room for every possible scientific heresy, so long as Science continues to prop them up. A thousand different Gods of scientific origin are now accommodated within the Temple. Science rests on Faith : and the Church on its twin pillars of Science

and Superstition. The Catholic Church, alone, bravely reserves itself for Pure Superstition : the Bolsheviks, alone, have bravely closed religion down altogether, have liquidated it once and for all."

" It seems to me, Lollygo," Enfelson broke in, " that the Bolsheviks, whatever merits you may claim for them, have behaved toward God in the same way that the people of every other new creed have always behaved where a God was concerned : for Communism, after all, is a religion : though, unfortunately, the most material one that has ever existed, for you seek your Heaven on this earth at no very remote a date. We are taught that ' God created Man in His own image ' : but the truth is that man has ever created God in his own image, always taking a subjective, never an objective, view of him. In this respect I hold that the savage races are best, for their minds are vague, shadowy, and instinctive, and the Gods they make are still the vast shadows thrown by man in the first, faint light at the world's beginning ; shadows projected from the impenetrable jungles of their subconscious minds. Their witch-doctors deal in magic : and magic is the best part of religion. Their conception of a God is often cruel, but always innate and full of awe. ... As for the others, there are the Gods of Egypt, between the savage conception and the modern, dwelling in a half-way, half-lit land of hawks and crocodiles : there is the brutal, blood-sucking Baal, father of all evil, but at least a God of power: there is the Jewish Jehovah, a hirsute shepherd who in the end turned business-man, like those who worshipped him : there are the Greek Gods, sensual and attractive and taken up with the joys of their own lovely

world, and, last, comes the God of the Christians, a god who is too much in two minds ; mercy and retribution. Of the two, I would choose, any day, the old, red-blooded, thick-bearded, cursing Jehovah, rather than the wan, lily-blooded Deity of suffering invented by the Christians. But, at any rate, they cannot both be accommodated within one temple. Neither God nor man can be of two minds : and the result is obvious in the Church of England of to-day. For the scientists and the bishops make their own Gods in the old way : that of the bishops is a bishop, but a bishop of scientific outlook ; that of the English scientists, a scientist tending toward Anglican belief. . . . Then there are Allah and Mohammed : at least this last was an energumcn. As for the Bolsheviks, ' There is no God but Marx, and Lenin is the prophet of Marx.' They believe in nothing : and have consequently made Nothing into a God. But they share, with all other religions in their early stages, a profound zeal for proselytism and a burning hatred for those who do not bow to their faith - or lack of it."

" That's all very well, Enfelson, but you've gone further, you've created your own personal gods. And a pretty archaic lot they are, too ! " rejoined Stuart. " Whereas the Bolsheviks, by their refusal to be hoodwinked any longer by old superstitions, have risen to the full stature of men, you merely want older ones and more of them."

" Mr. Enfelson," the bishop argued, wisely ignoring Tuey's last remark, " you impugn the scientists and the ecclesiastics : but does not all this great body of scientific opinion tending towards a belief in God - and, moreover, a belief, so it seems to us, in the God

whom we have always worshipped - make you hesitate to include the conception of God, as we see Him in the Church of England, in your general condemnation : does not . . . ? "

Lord Pridian had relaxed his inquisition, and now interrupted : " I, for one," he said, with, glowing in his eyes, a sudden fanatical look that accorded but ill with Napoleonic curl and profile, " I, for one, think that you go much too far, Cyprian, in your desire, however worthy, for compromise. Personally, I believe every word of the Holy Writ, and I believe expressly in the story of the Creation, as it is unfolded to us in Genesis, just as I believe in the future world as prophesied to us in the Revelation of St. John the Divine. I have had to make my own way. Perhaps I may not always have lived up to my beliefs, to the religious side of life : but I should have been worse without it. I have faith, the same Christian faith which animated our fathers and upon which foundations, as we like to think, our great Empire was built, for God helps those who help themselves. (Why are you smiling, Mr. Enfelson ?) I'm serious. I have faith : I believe that God created Man (How can any of you believe that Napoleon was descended from an ape ?), and I have confidence in the Mercy of God. I believe that sin entails punishment, and, at the same time, that all our sins will be forgiven us."

" Eh, eh, eh," Stuart grated offensively into the argument. " It's a convenient if contradictory belief, Pridian. I don't believe and I make no secret of it : but I *do* try to govern my conduct in accord with the convenience of my fellow men and the general good of the community. And, in a quiet way, I strive to live

worthily, so that I may one day be fit to play my part in the life of a European Union of Free Soviet Republics. I see it coming. It may seem far off. . . but it approaches nearer every day." (This vision of his dreamer son was almost too much for Sir Levy, though he appealed so often for "men of vithun, who will take a far view.") His setaceous countenance had assumed an enhanced tone of purple, and a hard, beady fright, no less than rage, gleamed from his eyes, with their pursy pouches above and below. Was it for this, was it in order that his only son might talk in this way, and revel in it, that he had toiled, year after year, worked like a spider, first in one direction as it seemed, then in another, but all the time enticing the unwary into his webs? A tear shone for a moment: but, for the sake of appearances, he mastered it, and contrived to splutter - genially, "All the Young Men talk like that now. But a little rethponthibility will thoon thober them dowghn." Stuart regarded him for a moment with a dry, discerning glance, and then turned his face away.

Meanwhile the bishop had sidled delicately round to Lord Pridian's standpoint from that of the Modern Churchman, and remained for the rest of the evening, like a violently oscillating pendulum, swinging between them. There were two ways of dealing with the newspaper baron: but to-night it would be dangerous to contradict. He would be rude, in front of everyone. Conciliation was the thing. "I should never, Horace," he urged reassuringly, "disassociate myself entirely, far less abruptly, from the point of view which, with, if I may say so, consummate ability and conciseness, you have defined for us. I, too, believe in the old, the

lovely old stories. I yield, I may say, to no one in my admiration for them : but I believe them in a spiritual, rather than material sense. And what stories they are, full of inward truth ! In fact, *Magna est veritas et prevalebit*" Having thus, for the moment, skilfully eluded being pinned down - since from this statement no one could really deduce exactly where he was - he resolved to make a sortie, in order for the time being to divert Lord Pridian's attention. So he addressed himself to Sir Rudyard, who had been silent throughout : " And what do you, Rudyard, think, with your experience of the East ? A real treasure house of lore, they tell me. What do you think ? " " B'lieve in live-n-let-live," replied Sir Rudyard with a somewhat vague succinctness, and then relapsed into red, stertorous silence. . . .

But at this moment there was a general getting up and shuffling of places, for several new guests came up ; Father Munnion, Dr. Acquarius, and Mr. Simpson, the last of whom had just returned from an errand of mercy. (He had been reading *Tom Brown's Schooldays* aloud to a dying Arab convert in a wattle hut.)

As they entered, Lady Ramshackle was still talking to Clifford, no less monosyllabic than was his wont, though Birdie, for so picturesque and wistful a type, appeared quite vivacious this evening.

" I love *new* people, don't you ? " she asked him.

" Quite," he replied.

" There's nothing in the world I love so much as meeting new people and making new friends," she continued. " Are you like that too, I wonder ? What do they mean to you ? . . . But you men will never *admit* anything. I admit it : though I suppose I

oughtn't to be like that at my age - for I'm older than you. ... Of course I am. But I get so tired of the old faces, and the old voices saying the same old things. And then unexpectedly, one meets someone . . . you know what I mean . . . someone, who, though at once he becomes an old friend and all that, has everything to give. New thoughts and new feelings. ... I *love* it. It's necessary to me. Do tell me, are you like that, too ? I'm sure you are."

"Quite," he repeated.

Now, however, as the new arrivals came in, their conversation was cut short. She saw Mr. Simpson approaching her.

"What a nuisance," she whispered to Clifford, "our little talk is going to be interrupted. (One of the old faces !) But I've loved it. We must continue it some other time. You've made me see things in quite a different way : you know what I mean ... a *new* way."

But she managed to control her feelings, and by no sign to betray her annoyance, when the clergyman came up to greet her. "How lucky we were," she said to him, in return, "to get in our service before the storm! It would have been sad if we'd had to abandon it."

"Yes, we were, indeed, Lady Ramshackle. You can have no idea what a strain sand is upon a preacher's vocal chords. It deprives the voice of all tone and resonance, and works havoc, posahtahve hahvoc, with the harmonium."

"By the way, Mr. Simpson, do you know Mr. Hearnshaw, the great star ? He only arrived after church this morning. You missed a most interesting sermon, Mr. Hearnshaw."

" Lady Ramshackle is too good to me. It was a very ordinary little sermon, I'm afraid."

" You've arrived here just too late, padre. There's been a discussion about Science and the Church."

" Never mind, it's not too late for him to tell us what *he* thinks: Do you think that everything need be taken *quite* literally in the Old Testament, Mr. Simpson? "

" Ah, Lady Ramshackle, I'm only a humble helper. You must ask my lord bishop : but, still, I'm sure he would agree with me. I think the Old Testament should be *interpreted* : interpreted, that is, in the light of the New Testament. .. and, of course, of Science ... I ..."

Enfelon interrupted : " How can you abandon your Old Testament like that, Simpson ? " he asked. " It may not agree with the New : but at least it has ' guts.' It's a fine unafraid religion, of words boldly spoken. If I were a clergyman I'd nail my flag securely to its mast."

" Well, let me explain what I mean, Mr. Enfelon. . . . Take the case of the Ten Commandments. Have they not been a little, just a little, superseded by the Sermon on the Mount ? They were fitting, no doubt, for the day in which the Lord revealed them : but if, to-day or to-morrow, there was to be a new revelation, it would surely be in keeping with the times in which we live. . . . Take, for instance, the Fourth Commandment, in which, as you remember, we are enjoined to ' keep holy the Sabbath Day.' . . . Well, it may be that the old-fashioned interpretation of it is wrong, for we can be sure, I think, that a little healthy recreation would not offend against the spirit of the Law. .. "

(" And then," observed Father Munnion in a low

voice to Dr. Acquarius, " the Catholic Church is blamed for not allowing her priests more freedom of opinion . . . ! ")

" Bravo, padre ! " said Clifford Hearnshaw. " Pm with you ; I love a good round of golf on a Sunday afternoon : healthy exercise in the open air. We badly need a reformed Sunday. Think of the foreigners it would bring to England ! "

" Well, I don't play golf, myself, Mr. Hearnshaw, Pm afraid ; but I see no harm in it."

The bishop, who had been listening, now seized his opportunity and put in a word. ... "I wouldn't go so far as that, Mr. Simpson. (But then, you are young.) If you countenance, or, if I may so phrase it, if you wink at Sunday games, you may as well join in them yourself. There is need of discretion in these matters." . . . Poor Mr. Simpson was silent, and the bishop, having delivered this reproof, looked round with a heavy-jawed smile : for he felt that, if Lord Pridian had heard him, he would be reinstated in his good graces : but, better still, he flattered himself that the newspaper-peer's train of thought - if such it could be called - might have been broken altogether by these new arrivals and the necessity of receiving them. . . . But he was to be disappointed. . . . Indeed, he should have known better. Not even " the Boss's " responsibilities as a host could deflect him for long from the pursuit of a congenial subject, and, before the evening was over, he was to revert to it.

Now, however, the Shereef Abdul advanced, in his stately white robes, to join the group : for " the Boss " had for once succeeded in inducing him to abandon equally *The Forsyte Saga* and the society of his wives.

He had even consented at last to meet the Lollygos - hated name among the Arabs. Nothing, it must be conceded, could have been more affable than Sir Levy's reception of him when they were introduced by their host. But though he favoured the sheik with his most insinuating orange smile, his eyes - deep, interior boot-buttons they seemed - shone more than ever, and this time with a very ancient fear. Perhaps he remembered that undignified changing of hats and swapping of clothes in the desert, lest they should recognise him : that skulking about in armoured cars, lest they should catch him and his accompanying friends, which the enterprise and enthusiasm of the Shereef's supporters in the north had entailed for the whole party, not so very many months previously. In the end, in order to protect so distinguished a visitor, it had been necessary to call the troops out, and to bomb some dozen villages from the air. Only thus had calm been, somewhat tardily, restored. The Shereef, who had declined throughout to acknowledge any degree of complicity in the plot to kidnap the venerable financier, had issued an appeal to his clansmen to support the British Government . . . but Sir Levy had always entertained a doubt in this matter. He had a feeling, somehow, that the chief didn't like him. And then there was that story ; to the effect that one of the old philanthropist's yachting caps, which he had lost in the desert, was now hanging on the wall of a room in the most remote of the Shereef's castles. ... It was difficult to know what to make of it. ... You couldn't trust these Arabs. Nevertheless, he grunted " Glad to meet you at last . . . love the Arabs, although they need organithing on a buthneth batheth." . . . Such

cordiality, such gregariousness, were the pleasant consequence of the desert's attack upon man that afternoon.

Though it sometimes worked up to a general chorus, conversation became more general and desultory, devoted to a number of subjects. Yet, in spite of this, and in spite, too, of the restraining influence of a Catholic priest, an English bishop, a Mohammedan and a Jew or two, religion continued to be its sub-structure, as though the talk were born with a subtle tendency always to revert to it.

As for Michael, he had spoken hardly at all. Child of his age, the Scriptures interested him little ; except that the Old Testament had seemed to him as an infant to contain many immoral and unedifying stories. Science, too, was a matter for specialists. It was only his immediate present that ever concerned him and he listened-in, all round the circle, with the ears of a specialist in chit-chat : and, perhaps, with particularly attentive eyes for Helen and ears for the bishop, who was now talking to Enfelon ; a promising combination. (Helen was seated next to Eric Fuller-Flitmouse, and so was bound to pay heed - at least outwardly - to his stories, which were all the longer and grander owing to the ordeal-by-query through which he had just passed.) He listened-in, quietly but carefully. The fragments were restless and eccentric ; difficult, even for him, to piece together. He still saw no chance of a story. ... At last he abandoned himself to it as though it were music ; as though he were in a trance, making no effort to bridge the gaps, letting the broken pieces that reached him, and even his own infrequent contributions, roll round his feet, roll over and through him.

" But you mean, Enfelon," the bishop was saying, " that the mere recital and pronunciation of such words releases the vital forces within us ? A most interesting idea ! Oh, these old chaps knew what they were doing - and saying - not a doubt of it. ... At what time ? . . . Oh, yes, though I say it myself, she's very unconventional for a bishop's wife : I'm sure Mrs. Hagworthy would be delighted to practise with Miss Sipwater . . . but to her the words will be something of a novelty, I fear . . . not much in my line. ... At what time ? ... In front of an open window, you say ? I suppose there's no danger of the words being overheard ? Things carry so far in the open air, and people are often regrettably narrow-minded and unhelpful.... Fortunately, as you say, the Arabs would hardly understand them. . . . No, no, no ; no harm in it, of course, none whatever. . . . And she's inviting Miss Tether, too ? Oh, no, I don't expect Lady Ramshackle would object. . . . But you had better ask her yourself. . . ." Near by, she was quietly talking, " Yes, Shereef, a camel. Such a nice creature. Poor thing, I felt so sorry for it. I spoke to them in French, of course, and said . . . You see, in England, Shereef, we believe in kindness to animals. Rather than hit a dumb brute, we'd sooner hit one another. . . ."

" Yes, Lady Ramshackle, I know. I read of the last meeting of your Society. . . . Terrible affray, it must have been. . . . Nothing like it out here since the Wailing Wall, a year or two ago. Quite reminded me of my dervishes in the old days. . . . Sixteen ladies wounded and the chairman with his skull cracked like a cocoa-nut, they said ! But I find your customs so interesting . . . and your committees - how thrilling ! "

" Oh, Shereef, the last affair was much exaggerated. Not more than eleven were hurt : and umbrellas do no *real* harm."

The bishop's voice covered all others again. " No, Lollygo. ... I wouldn't be prepared to go as far as that. ... To quote Dr. Barnes once more, I would frame it thus : * By continuing to be always and everywhere God constitutes space-time, and space-time so conceived becomes the primal stuff of the physical universe through which and in which God's purpose of creation is achieved.' Do you agree with that definition, Miss Tether ? . . . "

" I'm afraid, my lord bishop, I don't quite understand it : but then I was brought up in an old-fashioned rectory, and we weren't allowed to discuss such things. . . . "

Enfelon had escaped from the bishop and was listening to Eric Fuller-Flitmouse. " And my brother Aubrey says that, though by that time the proportion of the sexes will be scientifically regulated, within a century woman will be the physically stronger and predominant sex. . . . "

" And the world will be weaker and washier," the other objected, " than it is now. No science and no politics will help us, for the only thing in the world that matters to-day is the relationship between Man and Woman. The male-principle must again be dominant : blood must be restored to a bloodless age. The phallus must again become the symbol of power, the ... "

" But they will still need our protection, Mr. Fuller-Flitmouse. Every little woman needs a defender, in her struggle against the world," Clifford Hearnshaw interjected.

" No, no, Hearnshaw ! You don't understand. They won't *need* protection. Probably ectogenesis will be an accomplished fact. Women will no longer bear children. None will die in childbirth. They will work in factories, and enjoy themselves in hostels during their hours of leisure. . . . And, as Lollygo was saying just now, given these circumstances and a few others, conventional morality will be completely transformed : and then who will want your protection, Hearnshaw ? . . . What do you think, Lady Helen ? ..."

" I'm afraid I've never seen morality from a conventional point of view : nor have I ever wanted anyone to look after me. That's just Clifford's trouble. . . . You must admit, darling, / never asked *you* to look after me when we were married. . . But I expect you've forgotten all about it by now. . . ."

" Waal, I caall that reele downright naasty of you, Lady Hornmaker," cried out Ninette de Nina. . . .

" I find Clifford the ideeel husband. . . . Ready to play tennis or golf at any time. . . ."

" But tennis and golf don't make the ideal husband, Miss de Nina," T. L. contradicted. " What a woman needs is a feeling of warmth, of support and blood-company."

" Of course, Fuller-Flitmouse is right," Tuey declared. " You don't mind if I speak out freely, as I should in Russia ? (It's difficult to return to the cramped conversational code of the bourgeoisie.) There, they say that before the advent of Christianity, the ideal of absolute sexual faithfulness hardly existed anywhere, except among savage tribes."

Lady Helen took up the challenge. " That's not quite true, Mr. Lollygo. It's a matter of temperament,

I think. I've been married to faithful men and unfaithful, so I know. ..."

" Well, you may be right in this particular : but at any rate the idea of intercourse as a sin, the conception of ' unfaithfulness ' was founded on fear - fear of disease, fear of offspring. Should a method of stamping out disease be discovered - and one may be found any day now - it would cease to be a sin. Already, in the eyes of the younger generation, it is a less serious offence than it was, for in this respect, even in such backward countries as France and England, the possibilities of birth-control have greatly modified behaviour (I refuse to employ the bourgeois word, morality). ... In Russia there are public institutes of birth-control (the R.U.S.B.C.) for the instruction of the Proletarian Youth Movement (the R.U.S.Y.M.D.)."

Lord Pridian now bore down on this ethical discussion. " I didn't hear the whole of what you said, Lollygo. But I heard enough. Any nation which adopts birth-control is a decadent nation, doomed and finished. How can you build up a great empire, when it is public policy to discourage large families ? Just tell me that." '

" But surely you don't want to build up *another* empire ? You've got a nice large bit of the world already ! And where would you find it ? Besides, you've always got to face us now. Russia would denounce any aggression."

" A slip, Lollygo. Cancel^c build up ' and substitute^c maintain.' Think of the teeming cities of Victorian England and all the beauty they brought into the world. They are the worthy monuments of a great age. Think of the good they have done, peopling

the wastes and making gardens of deserts. Think of the great streams of tinned food, conveyed over the ocean in British bottoms, to make a healthy race at home, under skies less clement. Think of the trade it creates. Think of the virgin forests, cut by British hands, to make British newspapers, and report British news ; cricket, football, murders, politics. It's great ! Think of all that : and look round, too, on Australia, Canada, and India. Where would their people be now, if birth-control had raised its venomous head in days gone by ? "

" Well the Indians, at any rate, were there before ... in great numbers. And some of you seem to think there are too many of them to-day. Ask Sir Rudyard. He'll tell you. All I can speak for are the institutes in Russia. They have achieved wonderful work. Children are fewer and healthier ; and so are the parents - and less worried. In the next generation there will be no unemployment. Sex has again become a thing of joy and common sense : not a furtive snigger on one hand, nor a hocus-pocus mystery among priests and doctors on the other. ..."

This was too much for T. L. " But don't you see, man," he shouted in his high voice, which scratched the air like an old gramophone needle, "it *should* be, must be, a mystery : a mystery between man and woman. The regulation of sex, or the introduction into it of science, the knowledge of hygiene and obstetrics, being man-made things, lead to sex being regarded, not as a mystery, but as an instrument for human pleasure, until in time its joys become degraded from what they should be, a ritual, a covenant between Man and Woman and their Maker, the Darkness and

Beauty of the Earth. Not that I wish to see the animal, physical side slurred, for it is all-important : but your view belittles it merely to processes enjoyable and beneficial to the health, like washing or brushing your teeth. Whereas, in these days of cleverness, sex could exist, as it does among the splendid people of the Congo tribes, as the one reality, the only true mystery : for, though physical, it represents the older, non-human, and therefore almost psychic, side of Man's life. In it he can still find refuge from the intolerable littleness, the slick, mechanical ingenuity of the twentieth century. I agree that an alteration is needed in our outlook : but not in the direction of comfort and common sense ; the two things that have gradually strangled the European Daemon. . . . The relationship between the Man and the Woman is the supreme thing in life : and for that relationship fidelity may be necessary - and you would abolish it. . . ."

Tuey protested, " Take the clinics. At one institute of control alone . . ."

But Madame Galactic interrupted him before he could deal further in those statistics so dear to his heart. " Oh, I wish you could meet my control, Mr. Lollygo. Li'll Toucan. You'd love her. All the men do. She's just the cutest little Bantu piccaninny. ..."

At this Ninette fired up : " But I can't bear niggers, Madame Galactic. I think they're horrid. . . ."

Michael tired of it and bent his ear once more for the rotund tones of the bishop, who had again engaged T. L. : " Yes, there's something wonderful in the way those old fellows wrote, Mr. Enfelon. Impressive, if at times somewhat coarse : it would be impossible to

deny that. One need not concur entirely in their doctrines, or altogether accept the old stories in the sense in which they intended them to be accepted : but one believes in their *manner* of expressing them...."

T. L. was roused, so that not even the bishop could quell his enthusiasm : " Strong words, strong deeds, bishop. But the self-pretended refinement of the Victorian Age sapped the strength of the upper and middle classes. Only among my sort of people, the miners and the mill-hands, do you still find the secret strength of men, red blood and the wisdom of the blood, with no cleverness or chatter. . . . Strong words, strong deeds____Now take the word < X ! X ! X !'____The man who pronounces that, with his whole heart, has a daemon in his belly, bishop. It gives strength and represents a primitive urge which no degree of smug civilisation can smother. Or, again, take the word < X ! X ! X ! X !'____"

The bishop was growing nervous at last. " I hope you won't think me a prig, Mr. Enfelon," he said, " but please remember that Father Munnion is near you. Quite a nice man, I believe, in his way. But you know those Roman priests . . . often very old-fashioned, I am sorry to say. . . . And Miss Tether too. Not, I hope - indeed I am sure - that she knows, for a moment, what it means."

" But that's just my point, bishop. She *should*. Every woman ought to know, both through instinct and instruction. . . . It's precisely *there* that modern education has gone astray : that's why Effie practises every morning. It develops the psychic, as well as the moral and physical, sides, and helps in that way toward the attainment of a true balance. . . ."

The bishop turned to Michael : " Oh, dear me, Bettony ! I believe he has said it again, and I've been trying to head him off it ... a most strange individual. . . ."

" No, bishop, it was only Clifford Hearnshaw saying, ' Bogey.' He's telling a golfing-story now. But it must be an old one, for bogey's been abolished. . . ."

" What's that, Mr. Bettony ? " Enfelson asked : but already Michael's attention had been claimed by others in the group.

" Prevents 'em from getting soft, though. Peace makes nation terribly soft," Sir Rudyard was pronouncing.

" But surely there are plenty of *unpreventable* evils with which to struggle ? " Father Munnion demanded. " Poverty and disease. Think what could be done if the cost of only two battleships were applied to clearing a few slums or devoted to combating, not other men, but the enemies of all men, such as cancer and tuberculosis ..."

Sir Rudyard was steadfast. " No, no, Father. You can't do that. Can't waste public money on public works. That would never do ... and I know Madeline here will support me on a point of this sort. She's a practical little woman, ain't you, Madeline ? . . ."

" I prefer not to express my own feelings," Mrs. Hagworthy replied ; " but I know that my husband the bishop's view is that, before a war, we should do all we can, while fully prepared for it, to prevent it : and that when it becomes inevitable - which, under these circumstances, it always does in time - we should be the first to enter, and should prosecute it with the utmost violence. . . . But then, Cyprian has

the old English belief in compromise as the best method. . . ."

Lady Ramshackle was still talking to the Shereef. "Do tell me, Shereef: I've been longing to ask you. What do you think of Colonel Lawrence *out here* ? . . ."

"I find it very difficult to fit him in with my conception of an Englishman, Lady Ramshackle. How, for instance, would you place him in the pages of Galsworthy ?"

"Yes, Shereef. But it takes all kinds to make a world. . . . I often think that. . . . Don't you think so, too ? . . . But it's certainly an extraordinary career : not a bit like a soldier's, is it ? . . ."

Michael reverted to the other end, where Sir Rudyard had not relinquished his thunder. "League of Nations, absolute nonsense, if you ask me: League of Tanks would do much more good. Only way prevent war is prepare it : have more ships, more men, more guns than other chap. Take my word for it, Father Munnion."

"But that didn't prevent the last war. Sir Rudyard, did it ?"

"No : because we hadn't enough of any of 'em. Nor had the other chap, donchersee ?"

"That isn't the spirit in which wars are prevented, I'm afraid," Father Munnion objected. "Besides, I don't want to *prevent* war ; I want to *abolish* it altogether."

"Oh ! You *can't* do that ! It's not in human nature," the general blurted. "Ev'ry normal man loves a scrap. After all, if fellow does something you don't like, it's up to you punish him for it. It's a healthy instinct."

"But we don't do that in civil life, do we ?" the priest insisted. "If a man were to murder someone,

even one of your own family. Sir Rudyard, you'd hand him over to justice. You wouldn't take it upon yourself to shoot him in return ? "

" That may be so : but when you're wearing the King's uniform it's different. Must be properly dressed for a thing, doncherno. Besides have to keep up with the times, Hitler and the whachercall-it state."

" Well, I certainly can't speak from your experience and with your authority . . . but for a time I was with the troops, and I've seen too many thousands of poor lads go out, never to return."

" That's just ' fortunes of war,' donchersee ? "

" But it isn't war : it wasn't war ! " Father Munnion reiterated. " Most of them were blown to pieces by shells, fired from ten or fifteen miles away by other men, against whom they bore no grudge : whom they had never even seen. . . . How can you call that *war* ? . . . It's something quite different. It shouldn't be called *war* any longer. . . . It's more like an earthquake, than like war as it was in our fathers' day, even: for now it is something with which no individual or group of individuals can grapple."

Madame Gálactic was trying to influence " the Boss " in the right direction. " Oh, Lord Pridian, clair-audience is a vurry, vurry ancient science. Sometimes I wonder if they didn't use it in biblical times. (I know you love the Bible, like I do.) Perhaps Moses employed a control. . . . I was looking at the words of Exodus only to-day. Do you remember how, * When the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice' ? . . . clair-audience, clair-audience, I'm sure of it. . . . And how could *Moses* use it, if it were

forbidden in the Bible ? I am sure he wouldn't have, would he, Miss de Nina ? He just couldn't! Oh, it's a wonderful means of communication, Lord Pridian : and all I claim is to be able to put you in touch with the Infinite_____"

" Oh, Madame Galactic," Ninette joined with enthusiasm, " Pm crazy about the Infinite. I think it's grand. And so does Cliffy : don't you, my love ? That's just the reason we came here to this wonderful spot. Why, I attend a little Infinity-Class at Hollywood every Thursday. To me, it's gotten much more to it than the Eternal."

Michael continued to cast his net into the sea of conversation. Some shuffling of the talkers had taken place, and Mrs. Hagworthy was now dealing a few light cuffs to T. L.

" I don't want to pretend, Mr. Enfelon. I don't *like* modern books. My motto is : Whenever a new book comes out, read an old one. . . . Of course, I don't mean yours : because, before we go any further, perhaps I'd better tell you that I've *never* read *any* of them. . . . But explain to me, how it is that I've never even heard of you : because we know a great many literary folk, and they come to us with all their little troubles. . . . Perhaps it's because I don't take in the daily papers ? Yes, my husband reads them : he has to keep in touch : but, I'm thankful to say, *my* newspapers are a collection of old, bound *Punches* of fifty years ago. I read them every morning at breakfast. . . ."

" Yes, it may be because you don't read the paper. I think that must be the reason, Mrs. Hagworthy," T. L. modestly admitted.

Mrs. Hagworthy looked at him reflectively and reminiscently. " I have a niece who's a novelist," she said. " She, too, has never made much of a success."

Miss Sipwater was congratulating Miss Tether. " The way you use English is so expressive, Miss Tether. And you teach it ? I hope you employ our words, which we are striving to refloat on the tide of consciousness. You *dorft* know them ? Let me instruct you in them. . . . We will say them together.

The bishop was again a centre of explanation. " And after all, Horace, if my memory does not betray me, for I'm getting an old man now - (Oh, yes I am, my dear sir) - and, if I grasp his meaning aright, Einstein holds that ' Matter is the centre of a persistent corrugation in a space-time continuum. . . . ' "

Lady Helen laughed aside to Father Munnion. " No wonder they taught us as children to sing, ' Oh, dear ! What can the matter be.' "

" You're being frivolous, I fear, Lady Helen," he said ; " but I sympathise. I make no effort now to understand these things, for, if I did, I shouldn't succeed. . . . "

Miss Poppy and Clifford seemed to be getting on well together, Michael remarked.

" You'd like Bethlehem, I think, for a holiday," she was assuring him.

" So I said to Neenette : ' Look here Neeny, old gal, you look worn out. Just let's go and have a reele holiday at Sinai. . . . Good golf, I'm told, and tolerable tennis, too. . . . ' "

" But I believe you might like Bethlehem even better, Mr. Hearnshaw, for a rest. It's not so hot as here. . . . And it's wonderful what we've achieved under the

Mandate. You'd probably have a really good time. A splendid eighteen-hole course, tennis, and a perfect dance-band at the Country Club. But (the Shereef can't hear, can he ?) the Arabs aren't a bit grateful, in spite of all we've done for them. I can't understand people of their mentality. . . ."

" I'd like to see it, of course : I've heard of Bethlehem," Clifford replied, " but I'm afraid when we leave here we ought to go to Touquet. They know us there : and you see, after America and England, one likes a complete change. ..."

Eric Fuller-Flitmouse was still talking to Tuey and T. L.

" And he says that the miracles and supernatural appearances are either a form of mass-hysteria and delusion : or else they can perhaps be explained on some Freudian basis. . . ."

"It seems to me to be easier to believe in the miracles than in your brother's explanation of them," Enfelson objected.

" Either they took place or they didn't," Tuey agreed aggressively. " As a matter of fact, they are a pack of lies for which no explanation is needed. . . . Religion will pass from humanity like a bad dream : and its disappearance will differentiate the future from the past to a degree it is now impossible to imagine. . . ."

" I doubt, Lollygo, if you'll ever get rid of it. Aubrey says that certain glands are called into work by religious emotion. In their turn they secrete a fluid to increase that emotion : which offers, incidentally, another explanation of miracle-working ; because the glands, when fully called into action, may even produce hallucinations and cause, in those undergoing this

purely chemical process, the belief that a miracle has been performed, or that they have witnessed some divine manifestation. Even a permanent invalid might, granted these premises, be temporarily persuaded that he had regained health ; the use of a limb, or the recovery of his sight. And then the miracle would be absolute. . . . So religion's difficult to extirpate, for it has a natural physical basis. . . . Of course, in time it might be possible, through some process of sublimation, to overcome it, helping it to transfer itself, let us say, from churches to museums. . . . I often think, in all humility, that museums will be the churches of the future. . . ."

The word " museum " in Eric's mouth was ever a challenge.

" First," Tuey scraped out, " you must rid them, as has been done in Russia, of the clinging cobwebs of bourgeois culture. . . ."

" But in Russia," Eric Fuller-Flitmouse continued blandly, " whatever happens to the churches, the museums could never replace them. . . . For what is there in them ? One or two beautiful little Scythian objects from South Russia : but in the whole length and breadth of it there's nothing, for instance, to compare with Lord Dunster's collection. In fact, I *must* tell you, to illustrate the remarkable nature of that collection, of a visit I once paid to Dunster Domberville as an assessor. It's a lovely old place. Queer thing, the way we museum officials have these things thrust upon us and little recompense . . . not, of course (he-he !), that I'm claiming any importance for them. . . ."

Michael began to collect still more assorted fragments. Sounds of lisping and suction betrayed the

fact that at last the great financier was talking.

" So I called them together and said, * Boyth, look heahr. Look what capitalithm hath done for you . . . given you rhuinning wachter and elecktrick light; boooths and bread and thinemath too. . . . Don't go back on it, boyth ! After all, you work for me in a clean, well-heated, well-lit factory : everyone numbered and given hith food, inthead of working in the open air for a brughtal fughdalitht. Don't you go back on it, boyth, I thaid. It ithn't cricchkcket. How am I to fathe my shareholderth, or youh, your wiveth and dorchterth ? ' "

In a pause, Mrs. Hagworthy could be heard saying to the general : " So the bishop wrote to her, Rudyard, and said, ^c It is not for me to cast the first stone.' "

" Think of your wiveth and motherth," Sir Levy went on, " and play the game like Englischthmen. . . ."

In another corner the talk was now of health. " And I'd only just recovered from the plague," Sir Rudyard was informing Madame Galactic.

" But weren't you turribly ill, Sir Rudyard ? " she enquired.

" Well, I *was* a bit off colour for a day or two, don-
cherno ! But I don't believe in being ill : so infernally
depressing, I think. Never let myself be ill now. . . ."

Lord Pridian had resumed his attack on the bishop :
" I don't hold with these modern alterations, Cyprian.
I blame you very much for your attitude. Hands off
the Prayer Book ! There's something authentic and
impressive in the wording of the Lord's Prayer, which
you'll never get again . . . and the Decalogue too. . . ."

For some acoustic reason or other Professor Crot-
chester heard this remark and, after having mumbled

for some time, suddenly roared, with a wicked gleam in his eye : " They're merely a set of obsolete Jewish rules of conduct. Don't believe any of it."

Lord Pridian had to bellow back in answer : " No, no, Crotchester, if you and I regulated our conduct by them, we should be sure of the Kingdom of Heaven ! And yet you, Cyprian, lend the authority of your name and position to the movement for the reform of the Prayer Book, and even support the proposal for a fresh revision of the Old Testament. But the Old Testament is every bit as great a book as the New. I take my hat off to it" - a favourite conversational gesture - " indeed, I envy my friend Lollygo here, for being privileged to bear the name of Levy, and no doubt to be descended from the Levites ; that tribe set apart for the worship of the true God. It would be a disastrous mistake. *No Monkeying with the Bible*. (Make a note of that phrase, Mr. Bettony : we'll use it for a front-page caption.) You can't improve upon the two Books, words or meaning. Now take the Commandments. Listen to them, the wording of them."

It had almost become a monologue : but soon Miss Tether could 'be heard saying : " Good gracious, Sir Rudyard ; what is it ? Lord Pridian is reciting something. . . . What do you say ? No, it's not ! It's the Ten Commandments."

And even through Lord Pridian's tones, raised as they were, Sir Rudyard's answer resounded : " Must listen. Always heard so much about them."

Softly and surreptitiously Michael kicked Helen's foot. But his anxiety for her to miss nothing of it was unnecessary, for " the Boss's" voice, the inflexion, rising and falling in his devout excitement, as though

it were a deliberate contrivance to attract the general attention, soon quelled the orchestra of talk, now reduced to an impressive solo. It was true ; he was reciting, faultlessly and by heart, the Commandments, so many of which he had transgressed. . . . (Really, Michael reflected, he was rapidly becoming a borderline case : acute religious mania might at any moment supervene.) "... nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is his." . . . The words closed gravely. There was a dramatic pause, and then, with an altogether different yet solemn modulation, he added, " Magnificent, Rudyard, aren't they ? "

" No doubt, no doubt," replied the general, to whom they had come with all the force of novelty, and who had therefore weighed every word with care, " but, by Gad ! they'll do some harm in India if they leak out." . . . Empire was ever in his mind.

Lord Pridian continued with vehemence : "I believe, even, in the peculiar sanctity of this region, and especially of the mountain up above us, where, so many centuries ago - I will not, after the manner of historians and scientists, attempt to number them - there occurred to the Prophet Moses one of the supreme and transcendent manifestations of God. I believe, look you, in the Ten Commandments and in their divine origin." (His voice began to assume a yet stronger Welsh inflexion, familiar to those who have attended Revivalist meetings.) " And I believe that, in the first instance, before Moses, owing to the idolatry of the Children of Israel, smashed them, they were 'two tables of testimony, tables of stone written with the finger of God.'⁵ What is more, I am firmly persuaded that if you saw the old places, the majesty of

them would convince you too. I know it would. But instead of visiting them, most of you spend all your time here playing golf or tennis ; all very well in its way, but why not climb Mount Sinai ? It's better exercise, and more stimulating to the mind and to the religious sense. (I don't believe, Cyprian, that even *you* have been up there yet.) Every tourist ought to be *made* to climb it. They should learn to know it as well as Father Munnion here does." . . . And it was now that Lord Pridian framed definitely the invitation which he had been contemplating for so long that it had become the talk of the hotel. . . . " But no one has any enterprise nowadays. . . . I tell you what I'll do. I'll arrange a picnic up there, and I ask you, everyone here, to come as my guests. . . . Now, what about that ? We'll fix it up. . . . How about next Saturday ? Will that suit you all ? . . . "

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One star still burned brightly between earth and heaven. It was late, but Minus and Croucher had been having an argument. " You needn't be so narsty, Gerald," she was saying. " It was bad enough last year when Boscobel, Lord Leaning's valet, tried to teach us ' The Ballad of Reading Gaol ' after supper in the housekeeper's-room : but beds is beds, Gerald, and no place for Marx's ' Capital ', believe me. And I won't have that sort of high-brow stuff put over me, not for a moment. I believe in affection, and not in the ' Rights of Man ' or the ' Needs of the Worker. ' I like you, Gerald ; you're a nice boy, there's no denying, and I'm very nice to you : but, thank goodness, I'm not a

class-conscious whatchercallit and never likely to be ! And I wouldn't be nationalised, not if Lenin 'imself rose rotting from his tomb and arsked me to. I'm a lldy's-mlde, that's what I am : and there wouldn't be no lldies, not one, if the Bolshies 'ad their wl . . . and then what would / do ? And I *wortt* come to Russia and leave Sir Rudyard and My Lidy, so there ! You mike me fair wild with your proper gander, and often's the time I wish Sir Rudyard would go at them beastly Bolshies, or Bolos as 'e calls 'em. My word, 'e'd give 'em socks, like 'e did them 'orrid Injuns ! . . . And when we 'ave to go on that blooming picnic next week, which they're talking about, don't you give me any of your sauce, not a little bit, or I shall get the sack. . . . Now, just one more kiss, love, and don't tike what I've said too 'ard."

At last the light was extinguished and the hotel showed its bulk transmuted, a thing now of beauty, of masses and angles, in which no detail was visible ; a derelict vessel, rudderless but unmoving, afloat on a dead and breathless ocean. The only living, breathing things in this world were the stars, which alone possessed light and movement as their attributes, for the moonless sky was of intense and unfathomably transparent colour, and the constellations shaped themselves out of a twinkling nothingness and showed their bodies very clearly in intricate ornamental designs. Gazing up at them it seemed at times as though, if the heavens were always clear as this and human eyes a million times more powerful, it would be possible to trace in their disposition a regular and intentional pattern ; just as in sanguine moments it may appear to the onlooker, in a sudden access of arrogance to which all

human beings are liable, that he can almost trace a purpose and a plan in the world's ordering. . . . And then the stars again dissolved into an unmeaning smear of light on darkness, into angular, fire-pointed kites trembling without significance in a void of the deepest and most pellucid blue.

BOOK III: THE MIRACLE

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CHAPTER I

THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

" VISITORS desiring apartments must book a head for within the precincts of the Aaron Palace Hotel, the holiday maker will find idle home-life in idle surroundings ; golf, tennis, excursions, American Bar designated by one of the principal Egyptian decorators of today, English Church (Cotwold-style), dancing, riding, (horse and camel), world-renowned chef and old world Arab garden, enfolded in the perfume of an orange grove and in springtime a kaleidoscope of multitudinous wistaria, all set in famous miniature oasis Jewel of Sinai." . . . So, with a few subtle slips in spelling, the hotel prospectus composed by Slate-face beckoned alluringly to guests. But the usual run of quiet home-life which it so touchingly adumbrated had been broken.

Little tremors of eagerness, felt more often and more acutely as the great day approached, had, for nearly a week past, afflicted the sensitive. Lady Ramshackle had been busy preparing over and over again, with the aid of Minus, first one little basket and then another, in which she had placed an extraordinary assortment of objects wrapped up in paper, until her room seemed to be that of some amiable lunatic whose folly it is to manufacture for herself artificial bird's-nests. She was, in fact, definitely keen on baskets, and had, during her

extensive travels, amassed the most varied and variegated collection of them : but few, she now found, were big enough to contain the necessary apparatus for needlework and water-colours. And she must bring both with her : though the worst of it was that the desert, to her mind, was really unsuitable to treatment in water-colour - so violent. Scotland, with its lavender-coloured hills and lochs, was much better, though there, quite often, heather spoilt the effect ; but what would even D. Y. Cameron or Muirhead Bone be able to make of these ill-proportioned camels and self-assertive sunsets ?

As for Miss Tether, her room had long fluttered with scarves from which to choose, hanging on bedrails and over chairbacks, so that, when the door opened or shut, they floated, sad pennons of russet and tawny and sage-green, shivering banners of beige, dull orange, and bistre, as though the gonfalons of battles fought long ago still rustled damply within a secret, autumn-haunted grove. Further, she had taught Roderick, in preparation for the picnic, to recite :

*" Abou Ben Adhem, may his tribe increase,
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace——"*

Effie Sipwater, too, had been fully occupied : for, by means of a newly devised system of verbal exercises, she had succeeded in ridding herself of several more inhibitions, so as to be ready for anything, as she put it, on the outing. . . . To which, indeed, she much looked forward, because there were reasonable grounds for hoping that, with Enfeloni a little distance off and talking to someone else, she might be able to snatch a mouthful or two of real food - say a ham sandwich.

(It couldn't do one any harm - moral or physical - occasionally. . . . Over-indulgence was another thing, altogether. . . . Two sandwiches - a dreadful idea !)

Mrs. Hagworthy had been refreshing her memory of the appropriate chapters of Exodus : while upon Poppy Lollygo the prevailing tension had produced the effect of making her abandon Chopin for Scriabin, whom, in her wiser moments, she would have eschewed. The hotel, in consequence, had daily resounded with his plaintive Slavonic grumbling. Even Sir Rudyard had been so far affected as to admit that it " ought be dashed interestin⁵ show, what ! "

T. L. and Father Munnion were probably the only two visitors who would rather have stayed at home : the first because, among other reasons, he still felt low and depressed : the other because he already knew Sinai so well and, further, was afraid that he might be required, when the party visited the monastery, to translate to the brothers, or at least to the *wektl*, Lord Pridian's remarks, dealing, in all probability, with his queer obsessions, both religious and imperial. But it would be ungrateful, the old priest felt, to shirk : since the newspaper-peer had not spared himself - nor, it was equally true, anyone else - in arranging for the expedition. Many a morning had he and his staff of assistants spent in the congenial task of organisation : for the picnic was to be on the grand scale, to recall Versailles at its most megalomaniac, while it must also to some degree, by the smoothness of its running, suggest Detroit. Now the plan was drawn up, even its slightest detail fixed. It ordained that the members of his party were to be conveyed by car so far as the new road, which was still in course of making, extended

above the monastery. At that point they were to dismount and climb on foot the final two hundred steps of the great flight, which leads from the wall of St. Katherine's to the summit of Jebel Musa, where they would find luncheon ready for them. After the meal they could inspect the monastery at their leisure.

Since the programme was to be a long and full one, Lord Pridian and his party must themselves set off as early as eight o'clock in the morning, while for the others, indeed, the day started earlier : even, as it were, on the previous afternoon. Thus, at four o'clock on Friday, a car, full of secretaries, had been despatched to make certain that the road was in repair, because the torrents ran in their season violently, and nobody from the hotel, except Father Munnion, in any case too vague a man to be trusted over so mundane a matter, had inspected it. At three-thirty a.m. it had returned, having been delayed by a breakdown in the desert for several hours, and the messengers, fortunately able to report that all was in order, were personally received and commended in the best style by Lord Pridian : for " the Boss " prided himself on the fact that, when campaigning, he could, after the fashion of his prototype, wake or sleep without inconvenience to himself at any hour of day or night.

And certainly all the guests in the hotel, except Professor Crotchester, were awake by six o'clock : at which hour a snorting, palpitating lorry, loaded with flattened canvas and coiled rope, destined to blossom on the mountain-top into a marquee, left for the scene of action in company with several cars containing workmen and selected secretaries. Last of all in this procession, Minus and Croucher rode alone in an open

landaulet. (These two were appearing, by kind permission of Lady Ramshackle and Stuart Lollygo respectively, and were to be in charge of such English comforts for hot weather as tea and bread and butter ; but their departure must have defeated any lingering sluggard or lie-abed in the neighbourhood. Holding saucepans and kettles and tins, they had clanked down the steps with the authentic music of knights in armour, and, even when securely seated, had continued to clink and rattle these properties, much as marionette directors invent sounds for their puppets, with an unparalleled din. But, after a while, even Croucher's whistling of the "Red Flag" died away into the desert and there was, for a little, quiet again.)

At precisely the correct hour the party stood by the door, ready to set out, and a fleet of eight handsome cars was drawn up to receive it. The great man stayed at the top of the steps, a secretary on either side, indicating with impressive countenance and gesture to every guest in turn the appropriate car. He seemed to be swelling as you watched him. (" Thank heaven," Michael whispered to Helen as he watched the set jaw so familiar to all workers in the office, " there's to be no horseback to-day, or there'd be a disaster of the usual kind.") Not only had " the Boss " drawn up a list of his guests and in which vehicles they were to travel, but, in addition, he had appointed one of the *jebeliyehs*, whom himself had interviewed and chosen, to sit beside each driver, and from this point of vantage to turn round and explain occasionally to those behind him the interest and historic associations of the landscape and its monuments.

The details had thus been skilfully arranged. The

caravan began to move and everything was working exactly as he had commanded, when, alas ! Madame Galactic, who was riding with Sir Levy in the first car, discovered that she had neglected to bring her trumpet and insisted on returning to the hotel for it, because, as she said, you never knew when " Little Toucan" might not need it. . . . This, of course, in itself held up the whole pageant, while, as ever if a lead is given them after this fashion, all the other ladies now found that they had forgotten something which wouldn't take a minute, would it, to fetch ? Ninette de Nina, while she had remembered to bring her banjo, had overlooked her shooting-stick : Miss Poppy had forgotten her movie-camera, Effie Sipwater her sunglasses, Lady Ramshackle her thermos-flask with hot tea in it, which she always carried on expeditions in case of an accident ; and Mrs. Hagworthy, whom no one would ever have suspected of harbouring so worldly a vanity, had omitted to put in her bag that little flask of lavender-water, with which liquid magic she was determined, as though Sinai were the episcopal garden at Newborough, to " keep away the midges." Only Helen, who on any other day could have been trusted to forget everything, and Miss Tether were apparently exempt from this wave of feminine negligence. And then, as though this were not enough, the professor began to lament, saying that he had left his hammer behind in his bedroom : but since, in spite of the heat of the morning, he insisted on wearing two heavy overcoats, it was, after an exhausting ordeal by shouting, located in the pocket of one of them and happily disinterred. ... In the meantime, our Napoleon, considering the success of his campaign to be menaced, was

fretful, disposed to allot the blame for this loitering and lagging equally between Madame Galactic, never one of his favourites, and the two poor marshals beside him.

At last, however, they were able to make their second start. While the melon-like domes of the hotel spun behind them, smaller and smaller, into the distance, they glided smoothly above the desert on a well-tarred and slightly raised road, which was one of "the Boss's" gifts to the neighbourhood. But, except in the last car, in which he was riding with his staff to protect him, there was at first little opportunity of seeing anything, for the *jebeliyehs*, instead of indicating the curious features of the view, contented themselves with perpetually worrying the travellers to examine everything written on the very soiled pages of the books of recommendations ; testimonials at once equivocal and patronising, which never left their persons.

Thus, for example, Miss Tether, who had brought with her a Bible and glossary, was not allowed to fix her attention for a single instant on either book or landscape. Not only were Miss Lollygo and Mr. Fuller-Flitmouse in the same car, lispng and booming together about the pleasures of London, and their various acquaintances in that city, not only did Roderick insist on bumping up and down on the seat opposite her as if he were riding, making the sounds of puffing, whistling, and hallooing associated with that habit, and of course, in consequence, continually kicking her legs, a favourite recreation of children ; but the *jebeliyeh*, who, in any case, Miss Tether thought, was inclined to be forward, too liable to pat and nudge, was determined that she should read through.

over and over again, every single testimonial which he had ever received. And she was obliged to do it, for none of the others offered to : indeed, they completely disregarded both the guide and herself- except Roderick, who, seeing her poring over her book, laughed, said, " Hullo, Miss Tether, mugging up your 'recites' again ! " and then went on making hunting noises. . . . She couldn't speak to him about it now, or the boy would make a scene in front of Miss Lollygo : and that would never do. [For of course Miss Lollygo would repeat what he'd said to Lady Ramshackle, and then *she* would get the blame for it, just as she had the year before last, when she was teaching an Italian family in Venice . . . and had been asked to leave because of the annual fight between the distinguished English visitors of the summer season. . . . Didn't want *their* children to grow up like that, they had said. . . . But, all the same, what expressions ! " Recites," indeed, and " mugging up." So *vulgar*, just like a board-school boy : and where could he have learnt them ? . . . Nurse again, she supposed . . . and she dreaded, positively dreaded, to think what poor little Deirdre would grow up like. Just as bad : that much was certain. Why, she could hardly speak as yet, but it was only the other day, when the Bishop of Newborough had been gracious enough to peer at the little thing through the curtains of the bassinet, making those delightful clucking sounds nice children ought to like so much, that she had shaken a finger at him and admonished him in the words, clearly and deliberately enunciated, " You jigger off." . . . After all, whatever one may say, it was not the way to speak, was it? But that *dreadful* Mr. Enfelon, who had been there

at the time, had seemed enchanted and, though you might find it difficult to believe this, had actually dared to *congratulate* Nurse on it, saying something about how he "knew what the child meant, that children were always right, and were more fully aware than their elders of the processes of the unconscious mind," and that "one mustn't check them." (Well, he most certainly had come to the right person, if he didn't like children to be checked !) He had added how much he hoped that the child would be able, later on, to join one of his classes - whatever they might be ! And even Sir Rudyard had laughed and had said, " Well, I don't know the word myself: must have picked it up in an Indian barrack-room ! " But, in her opinion (which she supposed was not worth having), it was no laughing matter : and it was *Nurse's Jault* ! . . . 7/0z«; Lady Ramshackle could tolerate a nurse of that kind she would never know : but no doubt Minus (thick-as-thieves) made it all right for her. (The worst of it was that although the maid was always giving notice, she never went.) At any rate, though Minus, silly, spiteful little person, was going to be there to-day, Nurse, thank goodness ! had been left behind to look after Deirdre . . . (and teach her some more of those words, presumably !). Fancy leaving a child in charge of a woman like that ! And it was so that he should not be contaminated by her company that Miss Tether had insisted - yes, insisted - on bringing Roderick to the picnic. The woman's influence was evil, and even a few hours alone with her would undo months of good.] . . . Really, she wished that the horrid, dark man on the box wouldn't touch her. She couldn't read those things the whole time, could she ? Surely

she might be left a moment's peace and silence in which to look out of the window, without being worried in that way. How could she possibly describe the scenery to Hermione, if she was never granted an instant's quiet ? It was no use complaining or saying anything ... at any rate, *yet*. . . . But, if the others *must* leave everything to her, she wished at least that Mr. Fuller-Flitmouse would stop shouting for a little. . . . (Why *shout*, after all ?) " All right, all right, then ! " - and she drew her elbow away sharply. She must look at them again : that was all : but surely it was somebody else's turn soon ? How dirty the book was, terribly soiled !

" Lady Muriel Tunbridge-Trotter, D.B.E., has pleasure in recommending Abdul Achmet as a thoroughly reliable *man*, who can be trusted to give *satisfaction*. She was much pleased with the view of Mount Sinai."

Next page : " The Bishop of Bognor and Bournemouth is delighted to recommend Abdul Achmet. He is a splendid fellow in a tight corner."

" Mrs. Kinfoot employed Abdul Achmet throughout her tour in Sinai. She had much exciting climbing in his company, and can guarantee that he is a marvel with a ladder. The ascents were worth while, though arduous : but she would like to warn other aspirants that climbing in the East and in the West are not at all the same thing."

And : " Judge and Mrs. Cyrus K. Kleinwort of Chicago, 111, venture to pen a few words on behalf of their friend Abdul Achmet Third. He is dark-skinned, it cannot be denied, but no truer heart beats in Nordic breast. A wise and courageous guide, possessed of

old-world courtesy and charm, he appears, in addition, to have a real American sense of humour and to be quite as honest as any of our citizens. Sinai is very, very mountainous, and will never be forgotten by him who has seen it :

*They saw Sinai, wondrous weird mount.
And wondered, saying, ' My ! Can this be true ?
Is this the origin, the veryfount,
Way up there, in the far cerulean blue ? ' "*

And then : " Mrs. Chitty, who passed through Sinai on her way to the East, can confidently recommend Abdul Achmet as a guide. She watched most carefully, and he certainly appeared to be fond of animals. His help was invaluable in the influenza epidemic which suddenly broke out during her residence here."

And : " Sir Jonathan and Lady Towser-Tooling, during a lengthy stay at the Hotel Aaron Palace, employed Abdul Achmet as courier. He showed a thorough acquaintance with the language."

And : " Mr. and Mrs. Moses H. Minnerhausen (*nee* Kyngstori-Kosher of N.Y. City) visited the Aaron Palace Hotel on their honeymoon. The journey to Mount Sinai is a bum show on a hot day, but the view is a wow. Abdul Achmet is a bozo."

And : " Lord and Lady Killamarshe of Kympton, passed a few days at the Aaron Palace Hotel. It is quite comfortable and the staff is obliging. During their time here, they took A. Achmet into their employ. He appeared to be clean, sober, and hardworking. Other enquiries can be addressed to the secretary, 151 Pont Street, S.W.

And, finally : " Captain Darcy de Bonner and some brother officers of the loist Queen Caroline's Own Hussars made a stay here, *en route* from Simla. They cannot say too much for Abdul Achmet. He seems able to procure almost anything one wants, and they employed him frequently."

. . . Really she couldn't go on looking at the wretched things for the rest of the journey. After all, she had promised to give Hermione an account of the expedition, and how could she do that if she had to spend her . . . But surely that was more than a casual touch ? (She'd thought so all along.) There it was again ! Something had pinched her under the rug. . . . She gave a little stifled scream, and looked angrily at Abdul Achmet. . . . But even now her companions ignored her, saving only Roderick, who laughed, being puzzled why she should make such a fuss suddenly when he had touched her so lightly and for fun.

Now she was able to gaze out of the window at the country . . . but, truly, it could hardly be so called, could it ? There were no wild flowers : and it never seemed, somehow, to be country without them, did it ? Not even a lesser celandine in sight." Only a few immortelles, dusty white and yellow, at the side of the road. Very unsuitable to *country*, she should have thought : but she supposed everything had a purpose : one mustn't criticise. And it all seemed so brown and desolate - just like the background to Holman Hunt's " Scapegoat " - and yet so glaring and crude. It was interesting, people said : but there was no country so *green* as England, was there ? . . . Now they passed first one stone circle and then a second. How strange, out here ! Such a long way off. And her mind leaped

distance and intervening years in an instant, and she was back at one of those happy picnics at Stonehenge, when papa had been at Salisbury and young Mr. Wimperley, who had been such a nice young man then, but who afterwards made such an *unfortunate* marriage (one of those five Hankey girls, who always wore mauve and those dreadful "hobble-skirts," as they were called), had been curate, and after lunch in the sand, with ham sandwiches and tea and hard-boiled eggs, Mr. Wimperley and she had been talking so busily on their way back that they had lost their path and the rest of the party, and then she had scratched her ankle badly against a jumper bush (she could remember the smell of it even now) and Mr. Wimperley had insisted - yes, insisted - on her taking off her stocking and allowing him to bind it up with his handkerchief, and his hand had trembled, and he had shivered in a funny way as he touched her, just as she had known he was going to do : and then afterwards, when they returned, her mother, who was very strict as a rule, had allowed them to go into the church to arrange the flowers, in the new chased copper vases, for Whitsun (the first Dorothy Perkins of the year) : and they had stayed on there until it was almost dark, but the light had still glowed through the old windows, so that red and blue trembled lingeringly on the legs of the crusaders, and then they fancied they heard something move in the organ-loft and had returned by way of the water-meadows (and the air was loaded with the scent of meadowsweet, as heavy and fragrant as honey) to the Rectory and supper. . . . And her mother had seemed in a good humour . . . and then had become cross again a week after : and a week after that the

weather had turned cold, and mama said that he was leaving and was going to be married. . . .

A long time ago. . . . She was called back from this melancholy, yet happy, meditation by Abdul Achmet, who was again trying to compel her to read more testimonials. In every car, except the last one, the same scenes were being enacted. Otherwise, only Helen and Michael found their guide of use, because he made so loud a chatter that they could talk to each other in peace, without fear of being overheard. Mr. Simpson was his victim, but, underneath his semblance of attention, he was as oblivious of Omar and of his two companions as of the glittering rhetoric of the desert outside. He was thinking how fortunate he was to be given this final opportunity, before leaving for Africa next month, of seeing all the dear old places. They were interesting, he had to admit. Often, no doubt, in the tropical nights of the swamps, his mind would revert to the mountain where true religion was born, even though that creed had been fulfilled and a little superseded by the Gospel. . . . It would be lonely among the mangroves, after his dear little church here. And he wondered if any of the girls at home would come out to join him, and whether they would be able to read Glemence Dane together in the evenings round the fire. But - stupid of him - of course there wouldn't *be* a fire. At least he hoped not : except for cooking, of course: and the natives, he had been told, always cooked in the open. Besides, probably "the governor" couldn't spare them . . . was getting old now. . . . And then he wondered whether there was a harmonium in the corrugated iron church at Haha-baba, . . . Probably not, because of the white ants.... Sometimes, he'd

been told, they ate everything, even the lectern : and in the case of the disappearance of Mr. Thomas Ringer - not his predecessor, but the one before - the natives had blamed the white ants for that, too. The bones were found, picked quite clean : but nothing was ever proved ; white ants and vultures, no doubt. There had been a wonderful improvement since then, he'd been told. They wore many more clothes and their diet was much healthier (and more varied) since the missionaries had come. And there was a black choir now : that's why it seemed a pity if there was no instrument to accompany them. But these things were so expensive. Think what the organ had cost here ! He supposed there was no chance of it arriving in time, before he left : and, in any case, the bishop was leaving on Wednesday and was annoyed at there being no little ceremony first. But he had done all he could to hurry it up.... It was just bad luck.

Helen, opposite, was at once in captious and capricious mood.

" It's all very well, Micky," she was saying, " but I oughtn't to have come on this expedition at all. So don't grumble. ... Of course he'd see. ... I haven't even finished the ballroom yet."

" But I'd have much preferred to stay at home with you. I might have been able to think up a story. . . . Otherwise it's just waste of time."

" Well, it's Horace's fault. He would insist on my being one of the party. And it seems so idiotic to take *me* to see the place where the Ten Commandments came from. It will only make people titter, if they hear about it : so don't put it in your column, please."

" Don't be silly, darling. Is it likely ? And, if I did, why should they laugh ? "

" In any case, none of this sort of thing interests me. I don't believe in all these stories and know very little about them. I haven't even been to church since my second marriage (when some cleric was found broad-minded enough to conduct the service). The others have been at registry offices.... I wish I hadn't come."

" But, darling, I love you. . . . Surely you like me enough not to wish out loud the whole time that you were at home ? "

" It isn't a question of liking *you*. ... It is that I *do* like Moses. I am sure he was the image of Sir Levy - horrid old man. And I can't bear bulrushes ! They make me think of all those endless lines of houses in London, where there's a silver epergne in the centre of each dining-room table, and, in the corner of each drawing-room, in a tall brown vase, stands a bunch of bulrushes, dusty from year's end to year's end, the memento of happy days in the Lake District. So unhygienic. And hygiene and utility are the only things which count in decoration to-day."

" But the Boss ' says they weren't bulrushes at all : they were papyrus plants."

" Well, that's better : but still, I don't see why /need inspect them."

" But we're not going anywhere near the Nile or bulrushes to-day, darling. We're going to Sinai. . . . It's a lovely day : and the point is, surely you like me enough to enjoy talking to me ? "

" Micky, I've told you before that I like you in some ways : but not to talk to."

" /love being *with you* : perhaps that might please

you ? I don't ever want to go away. I wish you'd marry me."

" My dear boy, I am not a marrying woman. I know my own character. Here we are on the way to Sinai ; and you're already urging me to break one of the Commandments : for that's what it comes to. I should, for a certainty, if I married you : for, once married, I can't help being unfaithful."

T. L., who was driving with Ninette and Sir Rudyard, left them to their conversation, and, albeit the guide wanted to talk, pointing out every ordinary feature of the landscape as if it were something unique and confined to this neighbourhood, shouting out in great excitement, " That is tree," or " That is mountain," refused to take part in the game, resolutely turning his beard away. Fortunately, there was no wind and, in consequence, no dust : moreover, they passed never a vehicle on the road, and on the tracks the camels were few. Once only they saw a fine caravan, a line of twenty or more nodding animals, their Hanoverian eyes heavily lidded, while, in charge of a special driver, two or three young camel colts, of a particular soft and downy whiteness, which betrays to the eye of the expert their rarity and breeding, frisked in awkward, almost prehistoric, play. For the rest, the first part of the journey was long and, as are all desert drives when unvisited by illusion, apt to become monotonous : for to-day there were no mirages. No lakes flickered enticingly on the ashen horizon, no crowded white domes and tall, plumed palm-trees indicated the temporary vicinity of whole spectral colonies. No, the sand was itself to-day, compact of common sense, a pattern, T. L. reflected, of democracy:

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though, every now and then, where the sand-roses lay on the surface, there was, in addition to the general unpleasant glare, a metallic and cruel scintillation. . . . Yet the morning was delicious, hot even at this hour, though with an unexpected freshness lying just under it : and the sky, he thought, staring up, was of a deeper blue than usual, so that, after the parched and spangled earth, the eye gazed on it with relief. . . not a single cloud. . . . But then, Mount Sinai curling into view round a bend, he saw the same fat, fleecy shadow which had been there for so long a time, clinging to its distant summit. Just where we are going, he said to himself: still, it was small and at the side, and ought not in any way to incommode them, even if some slight puff of wind did not dislodge it before they arrived. For to-day it appeared buoyant, ready to move. . . . Oh ! that American voice droning on ! One might just as well be at the cinema with one's eyes shut. . . .

The car ahead of them contained Mrs. Hagworthy, the Shereef, and Clifford. Already the chieftain had been obliged to speak severely to the " Nazarene " - despite their common religion he applied this opprobrious epithet to him in his own mind, for so all Arabs consider *thejebeliyeks* to this day - because the guide, not content with forcing Clifford to read his testimonials, was now positively endeavouring to sell him some obscene postcards from Aden. . . . And the Shereef, though in some ways the English proprieties confused him, adding at times an unexpected richness to his talk, always rather perplexing, had nevertheless realised from his prolonged reading of the *Forsyte Saga* that these were not in Mrs. Hagworthy's line.

"What are they, views?" she asked, catching a vague glimpse of them. "I love postcards: they bring back so many jolly hours, don't they, Shereef? And they're wonderfully artistic nowadays, some of them. . . . Do let me look, for I promised to send a special one to our dean for his collection. (He has literally hundreds!) We sent him such a lovely thing of the Matterhorn last summer."

"No, Mrs. Hagworthy, I don't think you'd like these," Clifford warned her: and then addressed the guide in a more menacing manner: "*Will you put them away at once?*"

"But what are they?" she insisted. "I can't quite see."

"Types of feminine beauty in the East," replied the Shereef with presence of mind.

"Perhaps I ought to tell you, Shereef, before we say any more, that as a rule I do *not* admire oriental women: but I loved your little wife, fascinating little mouse. It was kind of you letting me meet her. . . . Sweetly pretty. . . . And what a lot of female attendants she has with her!"

"My wife?" . . . Oh, yes. Fatima: that would be Fatima. . . . But you would like Thamar too. . . . She is fat, very fat; but she has - how you say? - beautiful heeps."

"No, Shereef, we don't say 'hips' in England. We say, * She has a pretty figure', or 'How beautiful her lines are.'⁵"

"Yes, heeps, beautiful heeps: it does not matter that she is fat. And she is agreeable too. So she did not die, as many wives do, when she was thirty. . . . Fatima, I think, will die when that age comes."

" How sad, Shereef, how dreadfully sad ! I had no idea she was delicate. Cannot anything be done to save her ? Medical science can accomplish so much. What is it ? Not consumption, I hope ? "

" No, merely fatigue : *l'ennui*."

" You ought to make her play golf," Clifford advised him. " She needs more fresh air and exercise, I expect. It can't do a woman much good to be shut up like that all day."

"It is exactly that, as you say : because she will not shut up, she must die."

" It's a dreadful thing to lose such a wife. You'll never find another like her."

⁴ It is possible, Mrs. Hagworthy : life is very expensive now : but my agents tell me that she has three sisters, who, though younger, resemble her much ; very much." . . . Instinct told him it was now time to divert the conversation into another channel, so he looked out of the window, hoping that some exterior incident might help him : but the desert offered little aid. Fortunately he turned his eyes towards the heavens, and there the miracle occurred. Two large bodies with vast black and white wings were flapping across the sky in a south-easterly direction. " Look, Mrs. Hagworthy," he cried, " they are two storks flying, as our legend is, to Mecca."

In the car behind, Sir Rudyard and Ninette were still talking. Outside, the landscape remained in its former haze, composed impartially, it seemed, of dust, ashes, and cinders, sweltering and almost incandescent in the heat. But now the sand near them was sprinkled with flints, shaped like knives and spears and arrow-heads, which, as they lay burning and shimmering,

imparted to its texture a certain interest. Nevertheless, the lack of variety irked T. L., so that, long ago, he had allowed his eyes to turn inward : but in that direction the prospect was no more auspicious. Indeed, the old depression which had haunted him for weeks past had fallen back on him, its weight further exaggerated by his surroundings.

What a world of collapse ! He blamed a society which had worshipped materialism - but a materialism, at that, entirely presided over by chance-for its material failure. . . . And yet perhaps a sense of personal stultification lay at the root of his misery. Alone among his contemporaries he had tried to build up something new on the spiritual side : or, at least, he had striven to prevent the absolute divorce of body and soul, had urged that there were not two compartments to life, one for weekdays and one for Sunday. (They were a whole : just as man and woman formed together, but not separately, a unit.) He had, in fact, essayed to found something in the nature of a religion. . . . For this purpose he had journeyed the whole world over during the last fifteen years, weighing custom against custom, and observing what feeling, as its cause or result, was in the air. He, at any rate, had realised that the Western European and the American of to-day must be brought back to some anchor, which they lacked ; that they must be made to feel - even the slum-dwellers - not that they were isolated creatures, living in houses which themselves had made, on the surface of the earth, but that they were part, and the chiefest manifestation, of the animal world round them, related to plants and hills and sea. For, indeed, the misery of modern man and

woman was due to their assumed superiority ; they despised and starved the animal which lived within them : and this was as silly and cruel as though, ashamed of their own parents, they were to ill-treat their old fathers and mothers. They must be made to understand once more, through a development of their natural, but now atrophied, instincts as opposed to modern education, the pulsing of the blood in every vertebrate, and that it is more important than wisdom or love of cleanliness : because their wisdom withers the overwise, and cleanliness, a casual comfort, of which no man need boast, much more skin deep than beauty, cools the blood, inducing a false sense of superiority : and overmuch love kills its object. Besides, hatred is as warm as love - or should be. But the people of to-day could not feel. They had been brought up to believe that wealth consisted in abundance of possessions and money, rather than in richness of life and sensation : they could feel nothing, almost nothing : so that even hatred was beyond them, and mockery only was left them as a weapon. He had endeavoured to found something that approached a religion (and the faith and zeal of his disciples had nearly made it into one) : but he had omitted to leave any valve through which the humour of the modern world could escape. . . . And, looking at Sir Rudyard and Ninette, listening to the talk of these two eminently successful and celebrated human beings, he knew that his task was hopeless. At last he realised it; completely, to the extent of its uttermost bitterness.

They were still talking. It was not that they showed any conscious humour in their conversation : but that people who talked, after this manner, giving and taking

nothing, would not scruple to vent it on anyone else : on someone who was their enemy : still more on an idea than on an individual, because all ideas were their enemies, and of this they were subconsciously aware. An idea to them, so far as it existed, was something which, though hostile, was essentially laughable : something of which to make fun. With all persons of this kind, so uprooted from the earth, this irresistible laughter was their only community. It was both simian and canine - the laughter of the monkey hidden in the branches which it shakes ; the laugh of the dog baring its stupid fangs. Moreover, as an armament, it was offensive as much as defensive : with it they could destroy anything new - or, at any rate, long delay its arrival : Bolshevism, a new religion, scientific thought, poetry, or any human manifestation of which they were outwardly derisive but inwardly afraid. How he loathed them and their humorless apparatus of humour : this laughter shared by all pretending to Anglo-Saxon blood, this explosive ridicule which had overthrown great empires and had blown to dust age-old systems of thought and civilisation. It was this weapon, for 'example, which first had crippled, and then humbled and consumed, the Empire of the Grand Moghul, and had remodelled the life therein, bringing it down to its present squalid level. Indeed, during the last two decades, when it had obtained the special sanction of its twin gods, Commerce and Big Business, who were then enjoying their chief period of exaltation, this laughter had allowed itself to become much more daring and open in its assaults, so that, for instance, in the " Great " War it had not scrupled to reveal the word " Kultur " - or culture - as one of the principal

objects of attack and mockery (funny as the idea was in English, its translation into a foreign language made it appear much funnier still). Once again he wished he had been a foreigner. What a much more interesting and rewarding career he would have enjoyed ! Still, it might be that his doctrines, to be perfected, needed the tonic of misunderstanding so well and faithfully supplied by the English public. All the same, he almost sympathised with that gloomy fanatic Valera, who, being humour-proof, unable to feel the battering effects of the gusts and waves of laughter directed towards him from the other side of the channel, can defy them. Gandhi, too, he reflected, was such another.

Hark to this couple ! Their conversation resembled, he thought (and how irate they would be, if they knew anything about this author and his work, to find themselves thus identified), a dialogue between two people in a play by Tchehoff; the two characters maintained their separate lines of talk, neither of them in reality paying any attention at all to what the other said, though by continuing to answer, snip for snap, as though in response, they contrived a polite counterfeit of it. Neither attempted for an instant to usurp or monopolise : on the contrary, both permitted each other punctually to say their parts, albeit nothing, it was evident, would ever divert them from pursuing these parallel straight lines as far as their creators could produce them.

"You see, general, that's the spirit of Hollywood; constant change. The stars of one year may be forgotten the next, and so we must always be on the *qui vive*."

" Exactly. So I told 'em when I went to the W.O. saw G.K.L.O.S.I. * Don't consult me,' I said, ' 'less you want m' help. And if y'do, gimme free hand ; soon tidy place up.'"

" That's it ! Change, the whole time. One day it will be short hair, you know ; shingled, and plucked eyebrows. The next, a chignon and those false eye-lashes."

" Yes. I know ... ' with Bolos, one must take a strong line,' I said. ' Iron-hand and all that sort of thing in velvet whatcher-call-it.'"

" Or take, for example, the celebrated ' It '-girl. Her reign is over in Los Angeles. Finished. U.P."

" Quite. So he said, ' Ruddy, old man (that's what they call me, doncherno), it's up to you. Take it or leave it : but for heaven's sake don't touch their sacred cows ! ' "

" Because - you know only too well - men turn up their noses at the hard-boiled, boyish girl of a year or two ago."

" Precisely, Miss Neener ; ' I know that,' I said. ' Give 'em their due, can't play fast and loose with 'em.' "

" No : old-fashioned poise and allure are what drive our men crazy nowadays."

So they droned on. Imagine creatures, he thought, so cut off from the earth and ludicrous, yet so puffed up and pompous, daring to mock or snigger at anything, let alone his writings ! Yet they were just the sort of people who laughed at him, or who made fun of his doctrines, his search for a new ritual, and his devotion to the cultural exercises which he had proclaimed with such eloquence. And though he did not

care a damn (if for once he might use so mild a word) for their mirth, nevertheless he was convinced, all the same, that the foundation he had laid was ill-laid, because he was too much of an artist ever to be a teacher. And, even as an artist, he lacked strength, must always adopt overstrained and too muscular attitudes, could not help himself. (And he had always been conscious of this, underneath, in the lanky, slender bones of his body. It was for this very reason, he knew - though he seldom admitted it, even in his own mind - that he had grown his beard and counterfeited his descent, denying his intellectual and esthetic affinities. Yet he was persuasive ; for he had persuaded, indeed convinced, himself. And it was only very occasionally that he remembered, as he did now, his true life story, instead of the one he had chosen to manufacture.) But, unlike his contemporaries, he could feel, was over-sensitive : and perhaps - with what sadness and regret he framed the question - he might have achieved better, more useful work if he had abandoned his dark gods and blood-wisdom, and what that swine on the *Sunday Distemper* had called his " Cultural Mumbo-Jumbo of the Jungle " (how often that spiteful phrase came back to him), and had attended only to his business as an artist, to the exploration of sensitiveness ; for, in spite of all effort, beauty still crept like a miasma into his books, every one of them.

But he could not retreat now. It was too late : there were his aunt, his disciples to consider. Somehow or other he must keep his ideas afloat. And, he comforted himself, his religion, though it might not succeed, was, at any rate, not based on lies. Magic was in it, but

none of these old fables which must be accepted as tenets of faith : because, much as he admired some of them for their vigour, he knew that these stories of the Creation, of Adam and Eve, and, as for that, of God appearing to Moses on the Mount whither they were journeying, were false. They were merely a mixture of religion and parable : and, even when they were parables in their entirety, they were false : for parables must never be interpreted as the literal truth. Nevertheless, sometimes he was almost tempted to believe in the truth of the old religions, in the existence of a jealous God, the God of Isaac and Jacob. Consider the collapse of Europe and America ! It looked as though God in His actions resembled volcanic energy, at times appearing altogether extinct, at others giving a spontaneous and unwelcome exhibition of activity. (It made one sympathise, he reflected, with the Roman legions who had chosen for their camp the crater of, as it was supposed, the harmless old mountain Vesuvius, on the night of its first historic eruption. What had stirred these dormant fires ?) And, indulging in a flight of fantasy, he wondered whether the war, with its reek of wasted human blood, had not woken up an obsolete old tribal deity from his long and sated slumbers, so that he had mistaken all these odours, as of sacrifice on an unparalleled scale, for a call on him to emerge from his long retirement after the manner of some old commander, crowned with blood-stained laurels, who is once again begged to take the field. But T. L. wanted a special God ; no independent Deity, but one who would manifest Himself in and through humanity and its ways, the ways of Nature in general : and if he could not achieve this God, then he

would reject the conception of Deity altogether. If we wanted to see God, as Moses had seen Him on the Mount, we must seek Him in the universal rhythm of the blood, and not on a mountain-top. . . . And perhaps, one day, when the West had educated away its instinct completely, and made every value artificial, it would comprehend its loss, and turn - who knows ? - to his own doctrines. With his fingers, which were so curiously long and thin for their blunt, squat nails, he stroked his beard carefully, softly, as a cat sometimes strokes its velvet chin, and glanced across again at Ninette and Sir Rudyard. . . . Or, again, perhaps the Bolsheviki were right, and you could not alter or improve, but only abolish, such people. . . . It was difficult to tell. There might be some hope left, but he felt tired, very tired and old . . . worse, middle-aged.

He turned his head toward the window and grew immediately more sanguine, for, after the fashion of all people of his temperament, his emotions veered with great rapidity and the country outside was gaining in interest. The sand had begun, at first ever so slowly, to relax its grip, to allow its universal dominion to be broken here and there by groups of doom-palms and, later, by lines of tamarisk, the delicate foam and feathers of which, ethereal as they were, yet served to transfigure altogether the appearance of the desert, for they evoked in it all the latent shades of rose and lilac, of pale flamingo and deep grape-bloom, that are otherwise visible only at dawn or before dusk. . . . And gradually the character of the country again began to alter. For miles round the surface was now littered, first with stones, and then with huge boulders :

and soon, on one side, a gigantic wall of granite towered above them. And all these solid but tumbled lumps and blocks, these scattered fragments which lacked so completely the terrifying, all-devouring neatness of the desert just below, were pierced to contain cells and tombs, formerly the habitation of a lean, black-burnt, and hair-shirted race : since in the early centuries of Christianity the anchorites and coenobites had made of this impressive and uncompromising region one of their strongholds, and from the pinnacles of the great mountain above had gazed across the sea toward the Thebaid, that rival community, and on them, no doubt, had emulated, strengthened by fasting and prayer, the grotesque, immobile exploits of the stylites. (So important, T. L. recalled, had this tract then been, so numerous its fanatical population, that the Council of Chalcedon had awarded to the Oasis of Feiran, on the other side of the Jebel Musa, an archbishop of its own. . . .) He wondered how they had looked, these hermits, and to what cries, strange, fierce, or pitiful, but all born of hallucination, to what singing, raucous yet inspired, these roads that were now so silent had once resounded day and night. Nobody could accuse *them* of over-cleanliness or a lack of emotion : and yet it was precisely these romantic celibates, with their manes of rough hair and their eyes which had seen visions, who, living only for the spirit, had originally ruined the relationship which Nature had prescribed between man and woman. Carrying things to so great an excess on their side of the balance, they had thus, fantastic as it might appear, prepared the way for such people as Ninette de Nina and Sir Rudyard, who sat opposite to him at this moment.

Now that they had begun to ascend, the road disclosed a varied and majestic view. It was true that at first the vegetation died down again, that there were no more palms or tamarisks, but this was more than compensated for by the improbable streakings and colours of the rocks. At one side of them, on the bare surface, wherever it had been blasted, ran oblique layers of green, dyed by the antimony they contained, of porphyry, purple and slate-blue, flesh-coloured, rusty-black, and golden yellow, and of sparkling hornblende. . . . Alas ! it was owing to the existence of these formations that the road had occupied so long a time in building and had cost Lord Pridian so vast a sum of money.

And regarding it from their - or rather his - car, Lady Ramshackle and the Bishop of Newborough felt moved, in the end, to praise their host after their own fashion. At first, however, they had been discussing other things.

" What a long time we've known each other now, dear man," she had said to him, tapping him on the knee with a finger. " And do you know there's nothing I love so much as being with my *old* friends ? ... I don't know whether it's because I'm getting old myself (of course I am !), but I don't want now to meet new people, or make new friends. Are you like that too, I wonder ? I love the old faces and the old voices ; they bring back so much to me. Though one's known one's friends for so long, they still have everything to give, haven't they ? . . . One meets an old dear friend, and nothing else seems to exist. I love them. . . . They're necessary to me. . . . Are you like that, too ? ... But I mustn't let you go on talking about yourself like that.

It doesn't do, with men. Let us talk about people : other people.

" Indeed, Birdie, let us. Nothing has so much interest for me as human nature. ' *Homo sum : humani nihil a me alienum puto* ' as one of these old chaps - was it Terence ? - said."

" Well, our host, for instance. What a remarkable man he is, isn't he, to have made this fine road ? Have you and Madeline known him a long time ? "

" Yes, some time now. We delight, positively delight, in his society. Madeline always calls him * the Magnifico.' "

" He's so fat now, isn't he ? Just like Napoleon, I suppose *he* thinks ! And what a lot of money he must have spent on this road ! . . . Very public-spirited, I suppose. . . . And how much he spends in England - squanders, one might almost say ! Think of that enormous old house in London (that sort of house is always very inconvenient, whatever you do to it), and that great barn of a place in the country (what a pity he doesn't know how to make a house livable !). And the motor-cars galore, and the pack of hounds, and the deer-forests arid moors in Scotland. . . . Of course, it must be very pleasant to be *able* to do all these things. . . . People like us can't do it now, can we ? Ramshackle is quite shut up, and we've had to send away servants who've been with us for years. It's dreadful for us." Lady Ramshackle winced. " And yet, do you know, I shouldn't feel, if we spent money as we used to do, that it was - well ... do you know what I mean . . . quite right? I shouldn't feel happy ! "

" My dear Birdie, I agree with you. While unemployment is stalking the land, if I may put it like that,

money should be spent as little as possible. I closed the Palace (I had only just opened it again) at once, directly the crisis arrived, so as to try, in my humble way, to help the general good. . . . Alas ! not everyone followed suit. All public works should have been shut down completely and all private expenditure cut to the bone, and then things would very soon have pulled round ! ... As it is, we are not, as the Prime Minister - it was he, I think, but, if I am wrong, correct me, dear lady - so ably phrased it, we are not [£] out of the wood yet. The economic blizzard has hit us at a moment which no man could have foreseen. The tornado is upon us. We have tightened the hawsers, shut off steam, lowered the rigging, given an extra turn to the wheel, and examined the propellers : but we are not yet out of the wood.' . . . Very strikingly put, and true, I thought."

" Of course, things are terribly serious, aren't they? But to my mind it's all the dole. It has ruined us - and Europe and America as well. . . . No one now has any money ; except persons like our host. It appears strange at first, to people brought up like us, doesn't it? . . . And how funny it seems to *want* a pack of hounds and a deer-forest, if you're not much of a sportsman, don't you think ? It's as if I were to try to run a newspaper."

" But we mustn't believe all the stories, must we ? ... I understand he really did *not* shoot that last gillie. . . . Madeline, who was there, assures me that people merely say it because he was so shaky and cried so much at the funeral. He's a very emotional man, one must remember . . . and there had been that other unfortunate experience. Of course, there's no question

about that one : but the family was most handsomely, we may say lavishly, provided for : a generous friend."

" After all, he *can* afford to do that sort of thing, can't he, Cyprian ? Think of all the people he's injured in riding accidents. . . . We always wish that we could provide for our dependants on that sort of scale. . . . He is very emotional, certainly. . . . But do you think *men* ought to be quite as emotional as that ? Can you trust them when the strain comes ? "

" Well, he's a determined man, too, you know."

" Yes, I realise that : he wants to come out and shoot with us in India. ... I don't know what to do ! You see, I should never forgive myself if anything happened to Rud : it's a woman's place to see to those things. . . . Besides, the children will be there, and even a spent bullet can finish a child. . . . And then the Indian princes are very nervous, and frightened of pain (you know what they're like - quite different from us). Or supposing he missed, and a tiger got him (which it might easily do), we should be blamed for it. Really, it keeps me awake at night sometimes. It's most difficult : one doesn't like to refuse, after all his kindness. . . . It's wonderful what a religious man he is, isn't it ? "

" Yes ; and more than ever since that last *serious* riding accident, when he cut his head so badly. My friend Sir Rudolph Cuttam (a truly enchanting physician), who attended him, tells me we ought not really to encourage these tendencies (of course, this is in confidence). It's not an easy position, by any means. And I'm afraid that Simpson here hardly understands . . . may discuss religion too much with him. . . . But

what can one do ? He is naturally religious. . . . And such a splendid patriot, too."

" If he's such a patriot, *why* didn't he turn out the last Government before ? He's a very powerful man. . . . But is power in the hands of the right people nowadays ? How *can* things go right when men like you and Rud are taxed to extinction ? . . . Still, I'm sure he always means well : and he's so kind-hearted, isn't he, Cyprian ? "

Now they had entered a long *wadi*, full of monstrous shapes in granite, dragons and giants and deformities, some of them several hundred feet high. It was singular, Miss Tether thought, how Nature loved to shape things, tracing maps and huge faces in clouds, and profiles in cliffs, and devising, out of natural stone, forms which were quite as ingenious as that of the Sphinx. She looked at them again and then, since there was a full moment's silence between Miss Lollygo and Mr. Fuller-Flitmouse, and because she had sat there without a word for so long, and perhaps it was not very polite - though neither of them had taken the slightest notice of her, had they ? - she spoke. " Have you ever been to Tunbridge Wells, Mr. Fuller-Flitmouse ? " she asked. " These rocks, though of course they're larger and more imposing, make me think so much of the ones there : the ..." (It was remarkable, Eric decided, with a tinge of his usual superiority, how English travellers could always be divided into two kinds : those to whom familiar sights in Britain recall greater and more curious ones abroad ; and those to whom a glimpse of every foreign mountain and ravine summons up the memory of a homely hill or valley in their own country. It was a matter of

temperament, he supposed. . . . Miss Tether, certainly, belonged to the second category.) And thus, having only just returned out of one reverie to the surface, she plunged down again, while her companions continued to talk to each other : but this day-dream was less pleasant. . . . Yes, those rocks at Tunbridge Wells . . . especially that queer one, the Toad Rock. . . . A pretty town, but not a place she had really cared for. . . . But then, it was the first time she had left home, and it was quite soon after mama's death. . . . And besides, at that time she had not been used to children. . . . And Elsie was a *difficult* child : not exactly feeble-minded, but - well, like her mother, Mrs. Gampton, inclined to sudden rages. . . . And it had been terrible when she had attacked defenceless animals and was cruel to insects (in those moments she was ungovernable, as strong as ten ordinary children). And herself had been unhappy, easily, too easily hurt - she was quite different now - so that it was unfortunate when Mr. Wimperley was made incumbent of St. Ethelbert's. . . . She had suddenly met him and his wife (Elsie was walking along at her side with her mouth open, she remembered) "in the Pantiles, and she had blushed and had not known what to do. Mr. Wimperley had tried to talk, but Elsie had been so rude. And Mrs. Wimperley (still dressed in mauve, very inappropriate) had laughed - or at least she had thought she had. . . . But the worst of it was that she wasn't angry, she had felt so sorry for poor Mr. Wimperley, married to a woman of that sort. Often she had not been able to sleep at night for thinking of it. And the memory of dusk in the church, as they had arranged the roses, had come back to her again, the faint scent of the roses and the very

smell of the prayer-books, that musty, comfortable odour, and the light lying in trembling, richly dyed patches upon the long, angular legs of the crusaders, and the pointed feet and carved eyes of their ladies. . . . It had been silly, very silly. . . .

For an hour or more after starting, the professor had sat crouched up in his corner as a mummy of pre-dynastic Egypt in its stone tomb, his eyes almost closed : but now he was transformed, more full of life than could possibly have been foreseen. Those driving with him were astonished at this new vigour. The sight of the stone circles had first roused him from the torpidity that had ensued on his efforts to find his hammer ; which, indeed, was now burning a hole in his pocket, for the old craving to tap and chip had descended on him. There were many phenomena to examine . . . the circles, the flints, lying about so alluringly in the glittering swelter of the desert surface (probably the fragments of nodules burst by the heat : but one ought to stop to make sure ; why was there always all this hurry ?) At another point, further on, near the rocky slopes of Sinai, rose numerous tent-shaped mounds of earth, not less than a hundred feet high. . . . Neither Professors Schneider nor Boguslavsky nor Petrovitch had mentioned them, so far as he could remember. What were they ? . . . He inclined to classify them as the remnants of moraines deposited by glaciers of the ice-age. . . . But how could he tell from here ? His heavy, bony face veered from one window to the other, pointing like that of a retriever, natural instinct and acquired training asserting themselves together. Moreover, so restless was he, and, alas ! so infirm, that Effie Sipwater and Father

Munnion, who were in the same car, became nervous lest the old man might fall out. And he gave still more trouble later, when once or twice they passed the remains of some little stone huts, which resembled beehives - Nawamis, the guides called them - and Father Munnion related how the natives possessed some absurd legend to the effect that the Israelites therein found a refuge from gigantic swarms of flies which pursued them. For once the professor heard: and the anger of the deaf, which lays upon the person who relates a ridiculous story because it is ridiculous, the blame for its content, seized him. What an old woman's tale ! It would, he thought, have been plain to a baby-in-arms that they were related to the *trulli* in Apulia; the *nuraghi* of Sardinia, the tombs, erroneously celebrated as those of Agamemnon and Klytaemnestra, at Mycene, and of the many nameless, broken shelters of the same species in Malta. They were, in fact, the houses of some once all-powerful and now forgotten tribes ; the same, perhaps, which, in the West, produced that race of warriors, clad in gold armour and wearing huge, semicircular leather helmets, of whom we find the lingering tradition in the so-called works of Homer. . . .

But Father Munnion did not heed the reproofs thus addressed to him. Although he had not wished to come for this drive, yet now a sense of tranquil enjoyment, with just a touch, for some reason or other, of expectation in it, possessed him. Perhaps it was simply that the few days' rest had done him good, but, ever since they had started, he had been filled with this sense of content, wrapped in that warm, delicious coma of the happy motorist in which thoughts and images dance and twirl in the air like brightly dyed feathers.

and then fade out of the play of the mind's beam, never to be recalled. . . . And his imagination was stirred by the number of caves and cells they passed. What a tremendous community it must have been, and one dependent on no man, asking for nothing, and collected here before St. Patrick had set foot in his own land ! . . . And how strange that the Lord, for His inscrutable reasons, had permitted it to fail, had allowed these hermits to be slaughtered and the ruins of their broken churches to crumble away slowly on the spurs of the mountain above them. . . . But then, they had been heretics : one was apt to forget that. . . . Here, however, Father Munnion was pulled back to the present-day-if anything connected with the professor could be referred to in such terms - for they had begun to climb, and were now passing some of the famous Sinaitic inscriptions, carved on the bare face of the rock, so that it required all the tact and persuasion of his companions to prevail upon the aged scientist to remain in the car. He was determined to get out and examine them, no matter how long he held up the picnic, for they burned in his old blood like desire itself.

As they glided above the wide base of Jebel Musa, whole systems of subsidiary mountain ranges became revealed. Some, though modelled distinctly, were at the same time so lacking in visible tokens of the animal or vegetable kingdoms that, had it not been for crag and battlement and pinnacle, for torn fangs and shattered windows in the living rock, all fashioned, too, in tones the least suspected, in flesh-colour or brilliant green and blue, every contour and indentation would have shown as though upon a model map in relief. It was all so clear, so defined ; and only very seldom

was the shape of a *wadi* faintly obscured by a thin haze of verdure.

The cars began to climb more steeply and, unexpectedly soon, they gained the level of the monastery. . . . T. L. was sorry they were not stopping to visit it now ; regretted that he could not linger there alone, with the few dried dates necessary to him for his luncheon, instead of having to see it later, in such, for the most part, uncongenial, overfed, and underspirited company. He liked the look of this collection of white-washed buildings and courtyards. They seemed, so far as he could see, to be disposed at random within high, fortified walls, and were dominated by a church tower which overshadowed the tall, disintegrating, and rather unsurmisable minaret of a mosque. (The monks, he now remembered having been told, had for many centuries permitted the Mohammedans to possess their own shrine within the precincts. And, indeed, to remind the stranger of this fact, were actually emblazoned on one of the outer walls the united signs of Cross and Crescent. As the result of this astonishing example of religious amiability and tolerance, their community was to-day the sole survivor out of countless others whose members, together with the anchorites of the lower slopes, had been cruelly massacred. Moreover, the old religion had to a certain extent taken its conquerors captive, for many of the *Towdra* in the desert below, though nominally of the Moslem faith, to this hour knew little of the Prophet, and, instead of performing the rites prescribed by him, sacrifice animals to the honour of great Musa, or Moses.) . . . Yes, he wished they were stopping. There was a quality which always appealed to him in monasteries, whether it was

the Certosa outside Florence, or one of those at Mount Athos, or, even, Dalai ; a kind of directness, a mingling of monkish simplicity and cunning, of discipline and independence, of asceticism and rustic comfort, not to be found elsewhere. . . . But he imagined it would look rude if he got out of the car (and, in spite of his principles, and the occasionally outrageous things which his duty to them compelled him to say, he was a courteous and most kindly man). . . . And soon the monastery sank below them, its pale, ribbed tiles making patterns against the surrounding rocks ; its garden spread out, an oasis of darkest green spattered with white blossom, where, against fretted cypress and glossy-leafed orange, a few late-flowering fruit-trees broke in spray.

Hence, too, the party obtained its first view of the pilgrimage steps, which ascend from the monastery to the top of the mountain. Three thousand in number, the monks assert that they were constructed at the order of St. Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. And now they became a feature of the journey, so often did the road wind by them. Thenceforward, at every turn, the prospect became more lovely, the associations more celebrated, so that even the guides condescended to cease their unending efforts to accentuate, by means of flourishing the numerous tributes paid them, their self-importance, and deigned to indicate a few items of local traditional history. Here, for example, was a small bubbling spring, by the side of which Moses had once tended the flocks of Jethro. And, further on, they crossed a ravine and entered a prim, green lawn, enclosed by gigantic walls of rock, crowned with a tangle of red and brown turrets and pinnacles, and

with one vast old cypress rising from its sweet, thyme-scented floor ; the Plain of the Cypress, where, near the centre, a stone slab marks the place of the revelation to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy of the elders of Israel. Still further, again, they reached the Chapel of Elijah, erected, so it is said, over the hollow from which Elijah emerged to receive the instructions of the Lord, how he was to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah to be prophet in his stead.

Without doubt the cumulative effect of such memorials serves to impress deeply the thoughts of the pilgrims as they climb up the interminable steps. Indeed, before they had attained the end of the road, the members of even so heterogeneous, so casually collected and comfortable a party as this, had been influenced ; because the associations of all these scenes had caused various figures, various phrases, to rise up out of the confused mass of biblical knowledge absorbed during childhood - which is still the background of almost every mind - and these in their turn rendered each individual more eager for the culmination of the mountain-top, whereon had occurred the greatest revelation, perhaps, of all time. Thus, when the cars had at last to be abandoned, though the little group, as it gradually formed, laughing and talking, on the stairs, appeared superficially to be regardless of the history of the place as of the magnificence of the stupendous panorama which lay spread before them, yet, on a closer examination, there was to be detected, in nigh every person who helped to compose it, an air of suppressed excitement.

A queer, perspiring, talkative procession it must have seemed to any onlooker as it straggled up the steps, whereon the prismatic wings of the sun beat with an unparalleled and shuddering brilliance which drew out of them their speckledness ; for their granite was mottled with various colours, red and grey, green and yellow. Against this pointillist background, then, can be placed a tail of figures, ever so diminutive in their scale. First strode - or, rather, waddled - Sir Levy, crowned with an Edwardian panama; the only solitary, still smarting from a quarrel with Tuey-in the same car - and directly in front of Madame Galactic, or, as he now already called her, " Hortenthe " : " Rude to me in my own motor-car ! " he repeated to himself with pathos. Sad and lamcntative as he was, he yet had soon out-distanced the others, for, despite his years, he could still move (as the Shereef remembered) at a surprising rate. After him followed Lord Pridian, looking plump in Empire-builder's dun-coloured suit and topee, with the Ramshakklcs (Birdie had expanded above her head a cream-coloured, green-lined parasol). Miss Tether walked in charge of Roderick : and behind them straggled, in pairs, the bishop with Miss Sipwater, Mrs. Hagworthy with Eric, Ninette with Dr. Acquarius, Father Munnion with Clifford, and Madame Galactic with the professor. The renowned medium, in a skin-tight dress which emphasised her old-fashioned, hour-glass figure and the sweeping curve of the many magenta ostrich feathers that floated from her hat, was not being successful in her efforts to wheedle the professor, whose head seemed, at each step, to be further forward from his body and nearer the ground, into carrying her trumpet for her. With his secret,

elephant-eyed smile, he either could not, or would not, hear a word. It was hard to say which.... She had lost Sir Levy and was very querulous and out of breath : and the cigarettes, with the pink stumps of which she was littering the steps - for she seldom stopped smoking, except at a *seance* - had not helped her. Moreover, she wished she had left her trumpet at home, for she felt nothing here : absolutely nothing. The air was dead and held no spark of magnetism in it ... nothing vital. She might as well be back at home in Laceyville. . . . After her there was a gap, and then the Shereef, in his green turban and flowing white robes, the only one of them about whose outward mien to-day there was any dignity, slowly mounted the steps, while behind him a retainer bore his praying-rug. Next came T. L., in hot corduroys ; Mr. Simpson, who was experimenting for the first time with his new missionary kit ; and Stuart, in blue Sovietic overalls ; and, dragging behind the rest of the party, Helen and Michael. To him, indeed, the air was filled with an unimaginable glamour and vibration, and he was pouring out his ambitions to her. She seemed neither bored nor interested, but occasionally surveyed some feature of his, nose, eyes, or forehead, with a critical and appraising eye. No . . . he was *not* bad-looking.

Michael was confident that he could make an excellent paragraph, two or three even, if " the Boss" would permit it, out of this picnic. Already he saw them in his mind's eye : " Lord Pridian is seldom thought of by the public as a *charming* man, a man who can make every guest feel at home : people connect him - and rightly - with great events, imperial schemes and secret history, with the making and breaking of

cabinets and kings. . . . Nevertheless, upon occasions, he can unbend and prove a most delightful host, full of kindness and sympathy, and none of those who were present will ever forget the little " - no, not picnic ; that sounded too ordinary to catch the readers - " informal cocktail-fork-luncheon he gave upon Mount Sinai. Indeed, unforgettable is the only word to describe it." . . . Somehow it sounded dull, wanted briskening up a little. If only there was a story. . . . He turned his eyes, seeking inspiration, to the sky : but it was empty, save for a single cloud, small and opaque, a smoky cloud, as it were, which at one side hugged the summit.

CHAPTER II

THE MOUNT

THE top of the mountain came as a surprise ; a flat, rectangular plateau, which, though not large, was more spacious than anyone could have suspected from the distance. (" Quite civilised," as Eric Fuller-Flitmouse, his unfailing sense of culture again coming to the front, remarked to Mrs. Hagworthy.) At one narrow end of it rose a white marquee, skilfully erected - the hot interior, of red and white stripes, seeming, like the belly of Jonah's whale, to engulf, rather than to display, the busy figures of Croucher and Minus: at the other, stood the more permanent features, chapel and mosque.

These places of worship were both built on a diminutive scale ; but, to some of the visitors, that a mosque should exist at all in so famous a Christian sanctuary was in itself startling. Nevertheless, there is no more venerated spot to the Mohammedans, for hither the Prophet rode before his call, and, from the steps immediately below, a natural cavity in the rock is pointed out to the faithful as the miraculous footprint of his camel. As for the chapel, it is one of the holiest shrines in the world, revered by all acquainted with the Bible : for was it not in a rocky recess at the side, where now lay a cloud, that Moses communed with the Lord when he received the Ten Commandments from on high ?

In the meantime, everyone had arrived at the summit and was talking. It was extraordinary, they agreed, peeping down over the ledge, how much higher this small, lawn-like space seemed than the monastery below ; a whole mountain higher. You would never have guessed it, people said, climbing those dreadful steps ; slow business though it was. And a sense of virtue now rewarded them for their efforts. It had been worth while ; what a superb, what a supreme, what a wonderful view !

And certainly, even Enfcion had to admit, the prospect was appropriate to its history. Terrible and austere, predestined for the events and revelations it had framed, this landscape, though possessing every kind of beauty but softness, was most obviously one which would give birth to severity and turbulence, prophecy and apocalypse, so that from here the constant rebellious murmurings of the Jews, lost far down in their deserts, their faveolate rocks and narrow gulleys of granite and porphyry, seemed as audible as the divine voice itself, which had spoken to Moses among these crenellated heights. Of all mountains in the world - and T. L. had seen full many - this was the one, without doubt, upon which the Lord would have chosen to descend in fire. . . . As for the view, it was of the order which affects physically him who looks on it, making him gasp as though he had witnessed an unexpected flight of rockets ; confounding him, turning him dizzy, as though he had attempted to master the conception of infinity.

First of all, perhaps, it was the quiet which assailed the senses : for silence, a positive and aggressive silence, welled up from the plain and poured back into

the ravines, so that every sigh from Helen, every suH-indignant rustle from Miss Tether, every drawling, raucous note from Ninette, seemed to shatter a glass sphere. And then, after silence, it was the distance : mountain after mountain, valley after valley, tumbled from beneath them into the shimmering and golden plain. No longer did these resemble the concave and convex shapes of a map in relief: on the contrary, from here it was as though the traveller had gained another planet, where life had scarcely yet been created, or where it had long ago died down, where the hills were modelled of other than earthly materials, while, in addition, for the making of the distant and discoloured arms of the sea some new, unfamiliar chemical formula had, too, been employed. So clear the air to-day, so motionless, that every mark and streaking on the mountains, every shade of them, was distinct, focused, it appeared, through some substance, itself transparent and impalpable, which isolated these features of the world from all impurities. No cloud, even - except one - shadowed the fleecy, trembling horizons. Only, quite near now, between chapel and mosque, nestled that little cloud which had been visible from below for so many days past. But the air up here was as calm as in the desert beneath and as warm, save that there was still a freshness, like the stirring of a feather, just under the thick hide of the heat; not a breath of wind which might set it afloat, so no wonder it clung there.

Not many of them, considering their number, remarked on it. Only the professor snapped angrily at Father Munnion, " That's a very queer cloud : though I'm not an authority on 'em myself, I can tell you some men would give a lot to see it. But none of you here,

not one, knows anything about clouds - or, for that matter, about skulls either. I can't make you out. Why do people like you take the trouble to travel at all?" And thus contemptuously dismissing his companions, he croaked to himself merrily.

Lady Ramshackle stood a little apart from the others, carrying on a conversation in undertones with Mrs. Hagworthy. Both of them for the moment ignored the view.

" Was it all right, Madeline ? " Lady Ramshackle whispered.

" Was *what* all right, Birdie ? What do you mean ? Do express yourself less vaguely ! " Mrs. Hagworthy grated back sharply.

" Well, I mean - how can I put it, dear ? You're so touchy.... Well, was it *all right* ? You were in the car with the Shereef, weren't you ? I watched him when he climbed into it, and, as his eyes rested on you, they had . . . well, that funny look. . . I've seen that look before. . . And, you see, they're not like *our* men. They're so terribly rough. I've lived in the East and I know what it means."

" Yes, people's heads are evidently full of that sort of thing out there."

" His *look* quite frightened me. ... If it hadn't been for Cyprian - dear, loyal fellow that he is - who said, * I'd trust *any* man with Madeline, ' I'd have stopped our car and asked you to get in."

" Quite unnecessary, Birdie, I assure you."

" You see, I know the East and its ways. However civilised they seem, they're all the same *underneath*. It's only a veneer. . . . They can be courteous enough on their elephants and camels, or in their howdahs,

but once inside a closed car with a white woman, *whatever* she may be like, it's different."

" Perhaps, dear, *some* white women call that sort of thing out in men . . . inside a car, I mean : I was forgetting, of course, it would be different on a camel," and Mrs. Hagworthy gave a little repressed laugh, like a spiral steel spring that has opened, and has to be clamped back.

" Of course, Mr. Hearnshaw was there, too, to protect you. I'd overlooked that. . . . Rather a * good-looker,' too, what, Madeline ? "

" What a curious expression, Birdie. . . . One you've picked up out hunting ; or, perhaps, still more likely, from the general. (Poor man, he's always on the look out for ' good-lookers,' as you put it, isn't he ?) And you think the Shereef *attractive*, too, by what you say? / hadn't thought of him like that. . . . We had an interesting talk about his dear little wife (it appears she's a great invalid), and then about books again. . . . He's such an admirer of Jane Austen."

" Veneer, Madeline, veneer, all of it ! Galsworthy and Jane Austen no more make a white man than reading *The Arabian Nights* would make Rud or your bishop into sheiks. Whatever orientals read, or pretend to read, they're all the same *underneath*. . . . If the Crescent were to be raised aloft to-morrow, *The Forsyte Saga* could go to . . . well, blazes, Madeline . . . and he'd be as wild and wicked as the rest of them. To him, our men are just infidels. As for us . . . well, you know what they call Christian women in the East ? No ? . . . Well, bend your head nearer mine, dear . . . yes, like that . . . and I'll tell you."

" The Boss" had now inspected the tent, and had found it so hot inside that he had commanded luncheon to be served in the open air, under the cool shadow of the chapel. Whilst it was being prepared, he advanced toward T. L., who was standing with Stuart and Mr. Simpson, and entered into conversation with them : nor did he allow himself, for a moment, to be intimidated by the all-pervading silence which was continually reinforced from the plains beneath. " Well, what do *you* think of it ? " he demanded. " I consider this view" - and here he indulged in an accustomed gesture, as if ordering numerous divisions to the assault, and at the same time specifying which heights they must capture - " to be the finest, most persuasive testimony to the truth, and even accuracy, of the Bible that it is possible for a man to be given. There's something sacred and holy in the very aspect of these mountains, something mysterious that makes a man believe in both hell and heaven : something which not one of us would care to challenge."

Tuey, whom, perhaps, the argument with his father had tired, scarcely troubled to-day to pick up the gauntlet thrown down in so debonair a fashion. " Yes, it's quite a fine view, isn't it ? " his grey voice scraped out. " But, so far as mystery goes, give me every time the Russian - I should say U.S.S.R. - steppes."

T. L. was determined, after his earlier weakness and melancholy, to ride his own horse to a finish. " Yes, Pridian, I agree," he started with unction, " there is *something* in this country . . . 'something. Who knows perhaps, just as really great men . . . Robert Burns, Moses, Napoleon, Chaucer, Spinoza, El Greco, Bunyan, and even Rasputin . . . have daemons in their bellies "

- and at this point he undoubtedly encouraged his beard to jut out at a resolute and even dare-devil angle - " so may this landscape have a daemon imprisoned within it, austere and integrant, fierce and vital ? We are at once compelled to acknowledge it as holy ground and, though not myself a Christian (I must own it, Mr. Simpson), I cannot but bow my head in respect before these wonderful hills and valleys and the worship to which they gave birth. They breathe out the very spirit of the Old Testament, and, without pretending to believe in its folk-lore, any more than I place any trust in the plausible lies of to-day's science, I admire its strength. There is nothing pale or palsied about this hard, mountain religion of the Jews, nothing of modern materialism, nor, on the other hand, of the New Testament sentiment which personally I find so cloying and repellent. We are not harassed with childish feelings of grief and repentance and forgiveness of sins : there are few rewards, no harps and haloes. You remember, Pridian, I am sure, the anger of Moses, returned from communing on the Mount, to find that the Golden Calf had been erected - as some say, in the very place where your elaborate hotel now stands - and how he was commanded by the Lord God of Israel to instruct those who had remained faithful, ' Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.' . . . Think of the sweep and austerity of it ! And the same magnificent character can be seen to underlie this country . . . the feeling of sacrifice - I mean, not self-sacrifice, but the sacrifice of animals, the offering of blood - of doing

duty, of fighting, with no bribe in sight of a heaven for good children who say their prayers."

Lord Pridian was so annoyed, so amazed, at the turn the talk had taken - which was the last he had foreseen, for he had promised himself to lecture ; and here, instead, he was being lectured ; and, as it were, on his own mountain-top - that he remained for the moment speechless. But Mr. Simpson felt he could not let these statements pass, and, all the more willingly because the bishop was out of both ear-shot and tongue-shot (it was most distressing : if only that organ would arrive in time !), set about Enfelson's conversion. Alas ! the sermon-stop was out again in his voice, and was apt, if he had only realised it, to spoil his arguments, however good in themselves. " I love, I admire, the Old Testament, my dear friend : and yet I must join issue with you " - (Pompous phrase, noted T. L. : one to be avoided) - " for to *us* its value is precisely that it leads up to the New Testament with its message of hope and love for even the humblest, yes, the humblest of sinners. Let us consider the *mattah*. The Commandments are magnificent, no doubt of it : but in the light of the Modern Churchman's knowledge, do they not seem a little outworn, depending on the word *fe-ah* rather than on the word *ado-ah*. When I leave, to preach the Gospel in Africa - and, alas, my dear Lord Pridian, that must be soon - it is the New with which I hope to capture the attention of the native. For, in its pages, the *posah-tihve* has defeated the *negahtihve*. How much wiser and greater, for example, are the words * Blessed are the merciful ' than ' Thou shalt do no murder ' ! . . . Our God does not resemble Baal, whose terrible worship He overthrew for ever ; a god

to which a sacrifice of blood was always welcome. The New Testament established a new morality throughout the whole world."

"I would like to believe in the truth of the Old Testament, in spite of its Jewishness : but I could never bring myself to submit to the doctrines of the New," T. L. replied. "I refuse to believe in an everlasting life, divorced from matter, just as, on the other hand, I refuse to accept the monkey-doctrines of Darwin and the evolutionists. Man is not, and was never, as other animals : yet there is an animal foundation to him, the consciousness of which he must never lose. All that he can ask, all that he can pray for, is to become no saint, no angel, no bodiless being plunged in eternal life, but, to the fullest extent possible, to become a man. And not even your eloquence, nor Lord Pridian's, will ever convince me otherwise, I'm afraid."

All his old dislike of T. L. had returned to "the Boss." Eloquence, indeed, when he had said nothing ! It was time that the conversation was smashed, and, after pulling himself together enough to answer, "I take my hat off to the New Testament," he put an end to it. "Come, gentlemen," he announced, summoning the marshals to his aid, "we must have our luncheon now. The body must be attended to, on this occasion, before the soul: or we shall have no time to see the wonderful old monastery and church down below. Look ! Luncheon is ready !"

The guests assembled round him, while their host indicated to them where they should sit. "Birdie, you sit on my right. . . then Lollygo next you... But where is Sir Levy ?" cried Lord Pridian, as he endeavoured to sort out of the crowd and identify him-

usually no very difficult matter. But, no ... he wasn't there.

He wasn't anywhere to be seen.

"Have you any idea where he is? He can't be far away.... Lollygo, Lollygo!" he called.... No answer reached him, except a remote and tremulous echo.

"He was only just ahead of us," Lady Ramshackle declared, "but, now I come to think of it, I haven't seen him since we reached the top. . . . Perhaps he went to look at the chapel or the mosque. . . . He may be inside. Go and look, one of you men."

Now, though, Roddy, who had been running all over the place, whistling and shouting, suddenly piped up, "I thought I heard him in the cloud there, mummy. It sounded as if he was talking to someone in a funny language. I couldn't make out who the other one was. He spoke in such a quiet voice."

But Miss Tether, who had followed Roderick at a little distance, to see that he did not fall over the cliffs, had heard nothing, either of Sir Levy or of the still, small voice which answered him. It must be the child's imagination, she asserted. Children were often like that (and she told him to sit down, and not to run about any more). And Lord Pridian, after counting the heads on his list, pointed out that Sir Levy could not have been conversing with anyone, for all the rest of the party was here. Nevertheless, he despatched two of his secretaries in the direction of the chapel to search for the old baronet: but they arrived back a few minutes later, to report their failure to find him. He was neither in the chapel nor the mosque. The cloud, though not very big, was so thick in substance that you could not see into it at all: but they had repeatedly

shouted his name and there had been no reply. Moreover, even supposing that, through some mistake, he had entered it, it was scarcely probable that he would have remained there. It would have been so damp.

" Perhaps he has gone to see what he can find," Miss Poppy suggested comfortingly; " you know what daddy's like. And he's often told us, hasn't he, Lord Pridian, of his belief that gold exists in this neighbourhood ? He's got a real *nose* for these things; so I expect he's only gone out to look for minerals. I've known him go out by himself like that before, several times, at Bethlehem : and it's seldom he comes back empty-handed."

" Anyhow, we can't wait. We must begin without him, that's all," Lord Pridian said brusquely. But, notwithstanding, he was secretly a little worried, inwardly blamed himself for having asked the Shereef at the same time as Sir Levy. They would never, never get on with each other, however much he might try to arrange it. He ought not to have invited them together. Further, he was all the more anxious because he had happened, a little time ago, to detect the Shereef and his retainer (after all, for what purpose had he brought one? Any of *thejebelijyehs* could have carried his rugs perfectly well) strolling in an almost too non-chalant manner into the mosque. They had stayed there, he only hoped in prayer, for a considerable time : while, in fact, luncheon was being got ready. And it was queer, what that little boy had said about a foreign language : very queer. If they had kidnapped so famous a financier, it might prove to be a very serious affair, both for him and for them. After all, one must remember that he was a member of the British House of

Commons, in addition to all his other claims to distinction. And we British could not tolerate an act of that sort, not for an instant.

" I hope," he confided in a low voice to the general, and nodding toward the Shereef, who was standing some way off, " that he and his Arabs haven't been up to any of their hanky-panky. . . . You understand the working of the oriental mind, Rudyard -1 don't pretend to - what d'you think ? " " No, my dear boy," Sir Rudyard answered ; " it's nothing .. just gone away out of sight for a moment, you depend upon it. Never dare try anything of that sort on you or me."

In the cool shade of the chapel, most of the guests were by now sitting down on stools and cushions brought from the tent. Round them was flung this enormous circle of mountain and desert, glowing under the full midday sun. But they scarcely glanced at it, so busy was their conversation. Michael, especially, was in good spirits, for already he could read, in his fully developed journalistic imagination, those captions, transcending his most secret hopes, on the front page of the *Daily Spy* :

FAMOUS PHILANTHROPIST LOST ON MOUNT SINAI
ALL NIGHT SEARCH BY BLOODHOUNDS
RAMSHAKLE ORDERS TROOPS OUT
(*From our Special Correspondent*)

Everyone talked. There was a quick, cheerful clatter and chink of plates and cutlery, where the native waiters bustled about, seeming to have ten black fingers to each hand ; and a constant running to and fro from the tent, within the evening glow of which - for so it seemed with the rich sunlight penetrating its walls-

Croucher and Minus could be discerned, mysterious figures of ritual, hovering over the white plumes of steam, which were soon to distil tea and coffee. With the faint drumming of biblical history in his ears, Eric Fuller-Flitmouse when he observed this shrine, ventured to make one of his little jokes, upon which he prided himself, to Madame Galactic. "How very appropriate on this spot," he observed; "it looks like the Tabernacle." But the clairvoyante quickly snubbed him. It was not a thing she often ventured on, but she felt it was safe: and, besides, she was still out of breath, and, consequently, out of temper. Moreover, she was, she noticed, to have sat next to Sir Levy: and he had absented himself. In his stead the trumpet lay beside her, void and useless. She had been obliged to carry it all the way up the steps herself, only, she complained, to find that there was nothing psychic up here. "It's not at all the sort of place that * Little Toucan ' likes, poor child," she added, "and I can't blame her for it."

Madame Galactic, however, was an exception. The meal began, in general, by being a gay one, though underneath, perhaps, existed a slight feeling of uneasiness. Of course nothing serious *could* have happened. And yet it was odd that, as the minutes went by, there still came no sign of Sir Levy. It was not that anyone, except his daughter, liked him particularly: but it is an unpleasant sensation when one of a party is missing and his absence remains unexplained and inexplicable. It may be anyone's turn next time, reflects each guest; though this phrase in reality is a euphemism for "my turn." . . . Every now and then, therefore, someone would advance to the mountain's edge

and call, " Sir Levy," loudly or softly according to temperament: for there were certain persons who were frightened to shout loudly, so much did they dislike, first the reverberance, and then the gradual dying, of the name, and the emptiness which followed. Hills and valleys offered them no slightest clue, no faintest response except this fading, little by little, of their own voices into silence. But, after they had returned to their companions, so fanciful a disquiet was not allowed, however much it had impressed them at the moment, to spoil the group-enjoyment : because modern man, now that there are few wild beasts, and no longer any gods, demigods, or devils in the world, is learning to put away fears of this order. They are pushed down, right out of sight, or may even tend to make people, out of opposition, grow more lively. Talk frothed round the table. . . .

And yet, after a time, it began to wither. From earliest morning the day had been very warm : but now a change was to be felt. The air was becoming still hotter, there could be no doubt; almost too hot to eat, or even to talk. How singular that at this great height, of over seven thousand feet above sea-level, there should develop such a peculiar, almost breathless oppression. Perhaps, as Effie Sipwater, who was used to mountains, suggested, the sensation was induced by too rapid an ascent... or, perhaps, they were merely going to have a storm.

Indeed, albeit the only cloud in the sky was still the familiar one in their immediate vicinity, it did seem as though, concurrently with the growing sultriness, a curious darkening of the air around them manifested itself. And, with this inspissation, there came to the

guests a lowering of the spirits, a lull charged with expectancy ; or was it simply a calming of the nerves, due to the unusual beauty of their surroundings ? To whatever cause it may be ascribed, certainly, by the time coffee was handed to them, most people had grown silent. But this rare tranquillity was not long to endure. Roddy had no sooner devoured his last Jaffa orange and consumed his final dates, than he started once more to sprint round the level top of the mountain (for, however much, and however lately, he has eaten, the first thing which every child asks himself is always, " When can I begin running about again ? "). Really, this time Miss Tether *did not* feel inclined to dog the wretched little boy's footsteps, so she contented herself with telling him not to move too far away : and, in consequence, he remained much too near, making everyone quite giddy with the rapidity of his circling. Moreover, the associations of the place, and its quality, must have produced some little effect, even upon him, because it was noticeable that his singing was now confined to hymn-tunes ; " Rock of Ages " and " Peace, perfect Peace " being, apparently, two of his favourites.

Alas ! the brooding and caliginous peace was destined still further to be destroyed : for, perhaps, spurred to it by a sense of rivalry, Ninette struck up and forced Clifford to do the same. First of all, to the stupid twanging and thrumming of their banjos, they chanted one of those old-fashioned, Gibson-Girl-cum-Christy-Minstrel ditties of the South :

¹¹ *Underneath de moon
Where you and I am sitting,*

*Underneath de moon
It's only Jilting
For you and I to spoon,
'Cos we're underneath de moon
And mammy's in de cabin and a-knitting."*

As their voices lifted these inspiring words, the almost indefinable local process which was at work, the very slowly increasing but none the less discernible obscurity that had seized upon this one spot - as if the lighting of a room, still more of a theatre, were being, though by ever so imperceptible degrees, darkened down - was most distinctly accelerated. And, as this became more obvious, the inane, vacuous sentimentality, combined with a sort of horrible, sickly cheerfulness of their song, became so markedly unsuitable to the scene that at last Ninette herself, though she may not have diagnosed its true cause, yet became aware of its incongruity and, with her heavy racial tactlessness, passed on to another, much more disruptive and repellent, kind of music. This time she chose one of the negro-spirituals ; those complaining, cringing, yet self-complacent prayers of stupid children. " All God's chillun got wings," she moaned in a deadly, lisping infantilism.

Darker and darker, and yet no cooler, grew the mountain-top ; strangely dark, considering its isolation, alone and unshadowed in blue skies. But, tenebrous as was the air, it nevertheless remained transparent, so that, through this deepening though impalpable obscurity, valley and plain, lying in their golden, glossy sunshine, could still be descried ; could indeed, perhaps, be focused with more accuracy, as if some object were being examined through smoked

glass. The gathering gloom, too, seemed in some perplexing fashion to dull the senses : for few people appeared at first to recognise the metamorphosis which was in action about them, but were content to sit in leavy attitudes, listening in a kind of numbness. There were, of course, exceptions. Lord Pridian, who was in some respects the most, as in others the least, responsive person present, kept on nervously glancing round the circle ; and Michael of necessity observed the alteration, although, being a trained journalist, he did not permit its origin or consequences to concern him. T. L. remarked it too : and also that, while this added diaphanous darkness gained strength, so the cloud, which still lay just within its range, at the back of chapel and mosque, assumed a more ostensible glow, as if the radiant core of it - which even from a distance, he had surmised, was now undergoing some similar and yet reverse process - was beginning to flare up as the light here began to die down, until it glowed like a furnace, its incandescence showing dully but very purely through the enshrouding smoke. . . . Yet not one of them, not even T. L., accustomed as he was to expressing himself, made any mention of those things which he saw or experienced. An inner censorship seemed to restrain all who were still susceptible to impression. Nerves, it is said, are given to human beings as signals, as mysterious antennae through which, since they can work in other planes of time, to establish contact with coming events : but here the feeling of numbness governed and interrupted every sensation. It was as though the line of a telephone had been cut. Of a sudden, in the middle of a talk, so that no further communication was possible.

Most members of the party, then, were unaffected by any change which was taking place. They were rather silent: that was all. Not music itself served to stir them, as it would have done on any other day, to conversation. This, however, did not hold good universally, for, all through the metallic accompaniment, and actually through the rasping notes of Ninette, it was easy to distinguish, at a little distance, the piercing, off-duty, gimlet-like voice of Miss Minnie Minus and the enthusiastic alto of Mr. Croucher, engaged in quick question and response, sally and retort. ... As for the guests, Madame Galactic had now relaxed to smiles, fatuous and replete, and was softly fondling with her plump fingers the trumpet beside her ; Sir Rudyard was finishing a glass of port ; the bishop was nodding foot and chin in time to the music, which, alone of those present, he appeared to enjoy ; Lady Ramshackle was at work on some embroidery ; the Shereef was playing with some large amber beads ; Mrs. Hagworthy had tightened her lips till they resembled some obsolete problem in Euclid ; Mr. Simpson was half-asleep, spinning dreams to himself of warrior-blacks helping with Christian eagerness to pulverise their own idols, and of vast and tangled swamps cleared to make way for lychgates, stone forts, and nicely lettered marble tombstones ; Helen was trimming up her lips in a rather lethargic fashion from a vanity-bag ; Effie was back in her first Cotswold home, listening to the cuckoo-clock stealing away her sweet hours, full of Pre-Raphaelitic embroidery and the music of Swinburne ; Roddy was eating again ; Miss Tether was quietly grappling with, she thought, one of her thunder-headaches; and the professor, overcome by

the heat and by the excitement of the drive, had fallen into a profound sleep. Nobody, not even Miss Poppy, pouting as wanly pleasant as a fish in her corner, seemed now to remember the disappearance of Sir Levy : certainly no one was in the least agitated about it. And this in itself was peculiar ; because, an hour before, there had been under the surface a current of disturbance, and by this time tremors of fear and bewilderment might have been expected to assail his comrades.

No : there was an unnatural, an almost paralysing influence at work : so Ninette de Nina explained it to herself. . . . What could it be ? Because generally her songs were so popular and, after all, she said to herself, it was not often that a little group of this sort would find a world-famous artist willing to entertain them so intimately. She decided to throw down her instrument with a screen-gesture of disgust, surprise, and injury. . . . Crash ! . . . But this histrionic display brought no reward. No murmur of applause from her little circle warmed her : there was no pretence of polite gratitude, none of that " Oh, pleeeeee go on " to which she was accustomed, even when her performance had been, as she phrased it, " a flop." And worse, Cliffy was in a bad mood. He had not wanted to sing to-day, and she could deduce, from the look of his chin, that he was going to be difficult when they were alone. (As she had told him before, it would be so much better if he held fewer chairs for her in public, and would try to be more agreeable to her in private. . . . Still, he was a cute kid. . . .)

Perhaps it was the heat which made everyone act in this manner : how quiet, how very quiet they were!

And, indeed, the darkness and oppression were so very marked that they percolated now to Sir Rudyard's consciousness, making him predict, as he examined the sky through a glass of port, "Mus' be storm comin'."

Thus, as they sat in a circle round the debris of luncheon, everything was outwardly peaceful, save for this mingled numbness and intensity of feeling. The atmosphere was, as it were, both charged and empty : the vacuum was ready for something to rush in. And it was in this fashion that all those present approached the strangest event of their lives.

When it occurred, it came on them with a tremendous and disintegrating rapidity. After Ninette had ceased her wailing, there had been hardly a stir in the warm, crepuscular darkness. Only Roddy was still galloping about in a, for him, rather subdued manner. Memories of church, for ever entangled with the history of Sinai, prompted him to continue singing hymn-tunes, and, in sad soprano, he was at that moment chanting "Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,"⁵ when suddenly he gave a cry and came racing toward them for safety. "Look, mummy," he panted, "he's on fire !" . . . And then they saw, behind him, Sir Levy, who issued from the direction of the cloud, dragging his heavy trunk along on its short legs in quick tumbling steps. . . . The first emotion was, in general, one of relief that he had returned, but this was transmuted almost at once into a mingled curiosity and concern. Something had happened to him. He was immeasurably changed. It was easy enough to see what Roddy meant. The skin of his face shone. . . . Further, as he drew nearer, through the darkling air, it seemed as if light emanated from his whole body.

His expression was transfigured, and in his new bearing there was a suggestion of the hierophant. Moreover, he spoke exultingly a language which no one, not even his own children, could understand ; and he spoke it naturally, for it was to be observed immediately that the sound of wheezing, lisping, and oozing had vanished from his voice and, in consequence, its modulation and phrasing were by no means devoid of dignity. Indeed, his own daughter dared not approach him, for there was no longer any semblance of kindness, any pretence to geniality about him, but a quality in its stead that was impressive and almost forbidding. . . . Embarrassment at last supplanted every other feeling. . . . Something was wrong with the old baronet : he showed no sign of recognising anyone present, neither Tuey, Poppy nor Madame Galactic. . . . What could be done ? ... He must be taken care of, but without any unpleasantness either to himself or his relatives : restrained until he felt better : and words must be said at this moment to ease the situation, to lighten it, and make it normal for other people. . . . In this predicament the bishop showed his presence of mind. " ' *Quantum mutatus ab illo. Quantum mutatus!* ' The doctors, I believe, always recommend rest on these occasions. He's getting on, my dear Horace, and it's been a very tiring day for an old man," he remarked to his host in a low voice, but not too low to prevent the rest of the company from identifying so ingenious a lifebuoy. " The Boss " caught it skilfully and was just endeavouring to lead Sir Levy to the tent, where he could lie down in peace and be guarded from harm by the *jebeltyehs*, when the general interest was diverted away from him.

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During these few seconds in which the bishop had been speaking, the darkness had enormously increased : and now the cloud at the back of the chapel was beginning to advance toward them through this murkiness with a whirling spinning rhythm. As the inner light glowed through, it seemed as if some huge, majestic being within, long dormant in its cocoon, were at last stirring, preparing to shed it and step forth. Up flared the radiance, while the cloud, owing to its motion, started, as it were, both to disperse and augment : its texture loosened and, at the same time, its walls enclosed them so securely that they were cut off from the world beneath. The mountains could no longer be seen, and the tent, near them though it was, had been swallowed up by the background. . . . (Again, just at first nobody felt alarmed. A mixture of inquisitiveness and of a most uncommon elation seized on them, rendering each person oblivious of his companions, his attention wholly concentrated upon what was happening. Thus, for example, at the first movement of the cloud, Lord Pridian forgot the sufficiently peculiar episode of the vanishing and reappearance of Sir Levy ; altogether overlooked him.) . . . In an instant rose little eddies and whirls and whorls of wind, which flashed papers zig-zagging up into the air, posing their white against the darkness, like the rolling of eyes in a dark face, and, snatching Lady Ramshackle's embroidery from her, flapped and shook it as though it were a flag in the breeze ; all these fantastic kites being flown to the accompaniment of smashing crockery. . . . (Even now, though fear was creeping into their hearts, there was time for startled cries and little else, so swiftly was the situation developing : and

these ejaculations were soon stifled in the roaring of a wind which might have been all earthly air rushing up into a universal void.) . . . Abruptly the gale dropped to a sinister playfulness, and the trumpet, Madame Galactic's trumpet, started to move, to sidle and lift itself, to describe circles on the ground, and then, rearing and winging above their heads, darted hither and thither until, steadying at a little over the stature of a man, it stayed there, outstretched, the mouthpiece of an invisible herald, while from its gaping cavern issued an unforgettably magnificent yet intimidating summons, something between the sound of a mighty wind and the sound of music, of flames, their red tresses uplifted for hundreds of yards, and of rollers breaking and pounding the night long against vast, crumbling cliffs, all mingling together in gigantic, bull-mouthed diapason.

After this call had itself died, but yet echoed among the unseen hills, Sir Levy, the skin of his face still shining, was observed bowing and salaaming after the oriental mode. He mumbled something, too, as if in reply : and comprehension, surely, as well as ecstasy, could be read in his eyes. But, apart from his muttering, the stillness, the ominous lull, was solely punctuated at intervals by Mr. Simpson's nervous, jolly laugh, which sounded, partly to prove to himself that everything was all right, safe, and correct, partly to comfort his flock ; by Ninette shouting at once to her husband, " Why ! Cliffy it must be a *stance*" and by the terrified exclamations of Madame Galactic, which plainly expressed genuine dismay and horror. " Oh ! What shall I do, what shall I do ? " the poor, fat, frightened lady shrilly repeated, over and over again, until, as

the naked light blazed up into its full splendour, her cries lapsed into incoherent sobbing. . . .

And now, indeed, many were amazed at the intensity of the light within the circle and of the murkiness outside it, which cut off entirely from these few people, inside their cloud, the stairs and the world down to which they led. A single false step would incur, at the least, a broken limb. It was impossible to get out, to escape in any direction : thus all of them, excepting only two or three, rushed in their alarm to the further boundary of the radiance, cringing away from it, cowering there in the silence. From beyond the obscurity, where reigned the ordinary life and glitter proper to the hour, there was now borne a great twittering and chirruping, a sound that pulsed, and rose and sank on springs, falling and lifting as though enormous flocks of birds were wheeling and forming and reforming and wheeling again, and sweeping up in expanding clouds and dropping down into thick contracting streaks of blackness, round the darkness inside which they could sense this blinding and appalling light : but, if it were so, something held them back from breaking through. Presently a strong wind flowed up again from the centre, rending apart the rocks, which could be heard thudding and hurtling down the mountain-side; although this artificial rolling of thunder sufficed neither to drown the crash of the falling tent, the cracking and straining and tearing of canvas as if the rigging of a ship were collapsing under the force of a gale, nor to overwhelm the cries of Minus, Croucher and the *terrified jebelfyehs* in the outer darkness. . . . The radiance continued to pitch its key still brighter within the limits to which it reached, and there sounded now the

authentic roar of thunder, a thousand times deeper and more rumbling than that which until this moment had passed for it. Lightning played about their heads, but they were unhurt: and from the distance was wafted an incessant pealing of bells, and, as it seemed, beating of metal gongs, culminating in tumultuous tintinnabulation. And then once more blared out the voice of the trumpet, exceeding loud, so that all the earth trembled, for it sounded long and waxed louder and louder. When this ended, Sir Levy again responded, automatically almost, you would have said, with a few indistinguishable words, and there followed a profound and emotional hush, laden with terror, to which a close was put by a voice that spoke.

But not all of those present, it transpired later, heard this voice, so still and small was it.

The next event, however, admitted of no subsequent dispute. The voice, if it were one, ceased speaking and the trumpet was dashed to the ground. Thunder fell back on them and the whole mount quaked*. There was a flash, unparalleled in the splendour of its coruscation, and out of a little, trailing cloud of glory tumbled the two stone tablets of the Law. . . . Silence ensued, and a thick, breathless, all-pervading darkness, which, within a moment, lifted to plain, matter-of-fact daylight; although it showed most of the party still straining and crouching as far back as possible, their backs turned to the Commandments and their hands shuttered across their aching eyes.

The professor, the Shereef, and Father Munnion were the only members of the party who had possessed the courage - or the curiosity - to remain where they had first stood, in the circle of smashed and littered

plates. . . . The old priest was standing up, gazing at the miraculous stones with such an expression of tranquil happiness on his troubled, care-worn face that it seemed to glow, the light upon which he had looked abiding in it ; there was something static in it, too, as if its calm, mild beauty would endure for ever, the stone head of a medieval bishop caught in the last rays of the setting sun. The Shereef, on the other hand, looked proud, jubilant; for some reason or other, triumphant. As for the professor, protected by his deafness from revelation as from all else, he had only woken up at the last flash. It still puzzled him : he was examining the stones intently, with surprise, and with, too, a certain degree of consternation. (There had been something unprofessional about the phenomenon. It had broken all the definite rules which Science had established for its conduct.)

The silence continued : a silence, as it were, of shame - the shame, perhaps, which the unworthy experience when true light breaks in upon them : but, through it, Minus and Croucher, recovered from the shock of the falling tent, were continuing their conversation as though nothing had been amiss. " Boscobel said that ? . . . Never, the dirty little liar ! Just you wait till I see 'im. I wouldn't touch him, not with a barge pole, I wouldn't." Sir Levy was lying by them, in a fainting condition, but for several minutes they ignored him and his plight: though after a time Miss Minus produced, as if by sleight of hand, brandy, eau-de-Cologne, and a burnt feather; and, for her contribution, Mrs. Hagworthy hurried to offer her treasured lavender-water.

Meanwhile, according to their temperaments and to

the degree of guilt, where their previous behaviour was concerned, which they now registered, the guests, one by one, crept, walked, or swaggered back to look at the two tablets, large and handsome stones, and to decipher the script on them, (It was noticeable, in example of the two extremes, that T. L. now bore himself with a superb air of braggadocio, while Helen was more quiet in her manner than usual. Dr. Acquarius, too, maintained the semblance of his accustomed calm.) As they gazed, they finally shook off the clinging remnants of their fright and stood staring, all of them, with in their eyes a vacancy similar to that which mirrors the mind of the people grouped round the victim of an accident, or of the lethargic crowds who, hour after hour, even in wet weather, lounge open-mouthed in the street, to watch a few workmen laying down or taking up a pipe. . . . But soon their expression changed, first as a general rule, into one of gratified curiosity, and then into one of pleasant self-satisfaction. . . . But not a single individual, out of the whole group, commented on that which he saw ; on that which he read.

It was the bishop, again, who in the end broke a most awkward silence ; a silence which was becoming the more difficult to break, the longer it endured. (Better, he had concluded, to reserve one's opinion : an unfailing rule in the government of life.) " Quite a storm we've had, haven't we ? " he demanded of the world in general, with his usual broad-beaming benevolence. And then, addressing Lord Pridian more particularly, " Don't you think we'd better make our way back, Horace, before it comes on again ? . . . We shall have to miss the monastery, I'm afraid : or we may get wet this time. . . . And, though I don't mind for myself,

Madeline catches cold so easily - don't you, my dear ? " From this, he branched again to a wider application of the theme, for, fixing the shifting glance of his vague blue eyes upon the far desert, he remarked " There's one good thing ! The country needs it. ... I expect the farmers could *do* with a lot of rain. Come, Horace, let us commence the descent ! "

" The Boss," beyond speech still, pointed at the tablets. And the bishop, since he saw that the fat little Welshman was working himself up into one of those unfortunate emotional states which the Celts so love - for he was covered with sweat, his lips were trembling, and all the nerves of his face flickered under the coarse yellow skin - and because he could interpret these signs, and wished to ward off trouble, added in a low voice, " You see, Horace, we can't take the stones down ourselves : and the *jebeliyebs* would only drop them. They won't come to any harm here, for the present, I think : and, with your great gift for organisation " (*that* ought to help) " and wonderful talent for leadership " (*that* should clinch it), " you can arrange, when you have returned, to have them packed carefully and conveyed safely to the hotel this very night. But take my advice, my dear boy, and when they arrive keep them under lock and key for the present."

Slowly the descent began. The bishop headed it, escorting Mrs. Hagworthy and, between them, as though they were afraid he would escape, marched the newspaper-baron, captive. Sir Levy was quite himself again, despite his physical weakness ; which was so marked that Father Munnion, who would have preferred to be free for his mind to concentrate on other matters, felt himself obliged, since none of his other

companions volunteered their aid, to help the old philanthropist down the steps. People were, apparently, inclined to avoid him : perhaps anxious lest he should again suffer an attack of that same kind, whatever it might be, which had so recently prostrated him. Even Madame Galactic would have nothing to say to him. . . . (But, then, she was angry, upset, blamed him for the whole affair : her trumpet - and that sort of apparatus was expensive - smashed to atoms on those rocks, no credit for " Little Toucan," and all because of that old fraud's silly way of carrying on. If he was in the same line, if *he* was a medium too, why hadn't he told her so before, and then they could have been pally about it, instead of allowing, and even encouraging her, to make a fool of herself with all those tales of Rameses and Cleopatra and " Little Toucan's " adventures in Egypt ? It wasn't fair ! A regular old humbug, that's what he was ! . . . And the worst of it, she confessed to herself, was that at first sight she had taken such a fancy to him !) . . . Howbeit, Sir Levy appeared to recall nothing of his recent behaviour, and certainly retained no traces of it. He spoke few words, it is true : but these at least were pronounced in his ordinary tones, couched in his usual phraseology. And, though so obviously exhausted, his geniality and kindness were much in evidence. " Muth⁵ave fallen athleep in the thun, m'tear," was his own innocent explanation of his former rather erratic deportment.

It was interesting to observe how people, as they climbed down the steps, fell instinctively into ark-like couples; Ninette and Clifford, Sir Rudyard and Birdie, Miss Tether and Roderick, T. L. and Effie, each person sought the one he knew best, as though in an attempt

to free himself of a shame which only the most intimate sympathy could dissolve. The whole procession was wound up by a brown pack of *jebeliyehs* battling down the stairs, and finally by Croucher and Minus. . . . You might have thought, throughout, that she had not noticed the tablets : but, as she reached the top of the stairs, she turned to take one last glance, regarded them for a moment with an appraising eye, and said, " To my mind, Gerald, they'd be better with a nice, carved-stone, ivy-border : they don't look finished somehow." For answer he threw his arm round her and, for the first time, was not repulsed.

The steps were hot, burning to the feet as though they had never been exposed to darkness, and upon them the sun beat his wings with an unabated vigour. But, though it was still near the middle of the day, not later than three, nevertheless the endless gradations of hills, bearing the tangled ruins of churches and convents on their spurs, the distant valleys, now lying like the promise of a shadow upon the slopes, the tall, fantastic monsters, into which the rocks, by some process of devouring wind acting through whole aeons of time, had been fashioned, were all bathed in a light so serene and tender that it seemed by its quality to belong to other hours, to those either much earlier or much later, while into the distant desert, too, had crept tones, of such delicacy that the eye could scarce isolate them, of rose and lilac. Otherwise nothing had changed, except that earth and sky were unshadowed by a single cloud, and for the first time for so many days it was possible to appreciate the full beauty of Jebel Musa's summit, its exquisite line. Thus many of the party reflected as they looked above them to

where the cloud had lain for so long, for no one spoke. And, as they descended into this loveliness and silence, this enchanting silence, so different in its nature from that of a few minutes before, their nerves quickly steadied. Life was just the same, its values not permanently altered : silence was again no thing compact of horror, alive and positive, but a pleasant, a gentle, negative ; an absence of noise.

How quiet, how deliciously, gently quiet, it was ! . . . Only from aloft and far away was borne, to those who could hear at so great a distance, a faint tapping. A woodpecker, you would have said ! But science knows no fear, and the professor had contrived, without his absence being remarked, to remain on the mountain-top, alone, after the others had gone.

" Very queer markings," he croaked to himself, as he hopped round the tablets, examining them, " very queer markings these stones have : I can't make them out at all. Of course, thunder-bolts are an old-wives'-tale, exploded long ago. We know that : but yet, these aren't meteoric . . . must have been smashed off one of the rocks . . . but they're not felspar, or horneblende, or mica-slate* (there's nothing crystalline about 'em). And the markings seem so regular, strangely regular. . . . They're not gneiss . . . and ... no ... they're . . . not. . . granite. They're too friable for that, much too friable. The stuff seems to ... crumble . . . into . . . powder ... at ... the . . . least . . . touch. It's a pity ! I'd like to have brought back a bit for dear old Plunket-Bloundle at the Athenaeum. . . . Poor old chap, he has so few pleasures now, and he used to be so active. What a brain ! And this would have given him something to get his teeth into ! . . . Never mind,

I'll take him back some of the powder. It may afford a clue to *him*, though it wouldn't to anyone else, I'm afraid. Very perplexing ! " And, slipping the hammer back into one of his pockets, he finally produced from another a large, tough envelope and then carefully shovelled some of the dust into it. ... Having replaced this in a pocket, he shambled toward the steps - a wrinkled and reflective head thrust forward, as that of a tortoise from its armour, out of his large, stiff, winged collar - and began to descend. ... It was extraordinary that the action of his legs, at once so swift and haphazard, should support him, far more, enable him to move : but he hurried on and no accident befell. Down below, he could see now through his misty, ancient eyes that they were waving and beckoning, and, if sound could have penetrated to him, he would have heard the cars hooting out their signals. . . . They had been anxious about him, poor old man, forgotten and solitary, on the top of the mountain, and were angry with themselves for not having noticed that he had been left behind.

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When at last the cars drew up noiselessly before the hotel, Green-face, Slate-face and Yellow-face ran, tripping and smiling, out of the door to meet them, like three acrobats taking their applause after a particularly daring and intricate turn. Lord Pridian's eye, they felt, was upon them, and all their superciliousness had melted to fawning as, insect-like, they hovered round the returned guests, asking questions, of which the answers could not by any possibility interest them. And it was annoying to have to hand out, when walking up the steps of the hotel, the correct replies, not

over cool and not over enthusiastic, to their formal enquiries ; they hoped you had spent a pleasant day and that everything had been to your satisfaction? . . . Also it became necessary, not only to find replies for these brightly-hued beings, but to talk with each other, as if nothing had happened, or, rather, as if (they corrected themselves hastily in their own minds), as if the day had not been so tiring a one. Of course people hate being compelled to chatter when they are exhausted : and to be obliged to begin, suddenly, artificially, after this manner, for it had been a silent journey back, was yet more of a strain. Nevertheless, except for Madame Galactic and Mr. Simpson, most people seemed contented, inwardly pleased, as though having seen what they wanted to see, while T. L., indeed, was now too excited and elated to speak. Never had anybody undergone a more complete reversal of mood. Michael, on the other hand, seemed a little depressed, and as they went upstairs - for nearly all, on arrival, retired directly to their rooms - Helen smiled at him and said, " You've got your story all right now, Micky." But, despondently, he replied, " It's no good. The public wouldn't stand for it. It has no human touch."

Of all the ladies, Lady Ramshackle alone remained for a little time downstairs. She sat at a table in the Egyptian lounge, writing. " Major-General Sir Rudyard Ramshackle, D.V.T.O., etc., and Lady Ramshackle," she scrawled elegantly in a well-thumbed copy-book, underlining aptly here and there, " have *pleasure* in recommending All Hussein. He is a smart-looking man and seems *sober*, reliable, and of good character. He conducted them to the summit of Jebel

Mftsa (identified by the ancients with Mount Sinai) and back in safety : an enjoyable and *unusual* trip which they strongly advise all other visitors to undertake, in spite of the fatigue which it involves. The effects of light and shade were unforgettable, and the view of the desert below was most *soft* and artistic. They were fully satisfied with the drive and with Hussein's arrangements *throughout*. Further, they are pleased to be able to take this opportunity of placing on record the fact that he is kindness *itself* to animals; which is unusual, alas, in these regions. One word of warning : the weather is variable and it is advisable for the visitor to bring a light *wrap*, however bright the day may appear."

CHAPTER III

HOME'S BEST

THAT night, according to plan, Lord Pridian entertained to dinner in his private sitting-room a bachelor party, consisting of the Bishop of Newborough, Dr. Acquarius, Father Munnion, and Stuart Lollygo. When originally he had arranged it, this mixture of persons had seemed daring and Corsican in the extreme : but, by the time the evening arrived, its incongruous elements were altogether lost sight of, overshadowed by greater events. Nevertheless, only when the dinner-table had been removed and they were sitting at ease in armchairs, by large blue windows open on the hot night, with, beside them, vast, inverted glass domes, containing at the bottom a thin layer of golden brandy, did any single one of them refer, dare to refer, to those matters which, no doubt, had all along engrossed their secret attention. And, even then, Father Munnion at once rose to leave them, alleging in explanation that at present he was not at liberty to discuss the happenings of the afternoon, though he need not hesitate to declare this much ; he concurred with Lord Pridian in thinking them of supreme and transcendent importance.

After' the priest had gone, " the Boss" asked suddenly, " **Cyprian**, did *you* hear the voice ? " . . . The bishop ~~saw~~ saw trouble on its way and decided to temporise.

Certain in his own mind that he had heard no voice, he yet was not going to admit it with Lord Pridian in his present condition. In order to be able to persuade him to take up a reasonable attitude, it was better to stand on the same ground as himself. He could not be sure, he said ; it *might* have been a voice. In fact, sometimes, turning things over in his mind afterward, he was under the impression that he *had* heard a voice. But at the time, no : he thought he had not. One was bound, in all honesty, to put to oneself the question, Is it, under the circumstances, probable ? And, then, one was compelled to respond with an unqualified negative : No ! ... Scarcely probable. Certainly he had heard no words. No : it seemed more reasonable to assume that it was a sound *resembling* a voice

. . some natural cause producing an effect, which must at first appear, to those ignorant of its true character, to be supernatural . . . after the manner of the singing statues, what were they called now, in the Egyptian desert? You never could tell, in such parts of the world as these, what phenomena you might not run across. . . . But of every phenomenon, it must be remembered, there was to be found (if you sought long enough, of course) an explanation ; a scientific explanation. (We must never forget Science.) *Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*

Tuey admitted that he had caught nothing of the voice at the time, but, after the later episode of the tablets, which had - you might think, rather unexpectedly, considering his principles - filled him with exultation, did not quite know what to believe in this respect. The other occurrences had been undeniable, and he hoped and trusted that Lord Pridian would see

to it that the whole world was made acquainted with them. The tablets, on which were graven the Commandments, stood as evidence to all men. He had not been given time to study the Decalogue in its entirety, but, of those laws he had read, there could be no gain-saying : and, without doubt, each country, when the truth was thus cried and placarded from on high, would conform, model its conduct of private and public affairs accordingly. . . . (The bishop regarded the Bolshevik curiously : but the mental condition of the press-baron was too exalted and too set to allow him to draw any inferences from the fact of so apparent and immediate a revolution in Tuey's views ; to ask himself, for instance, what meaning this dry, narrow-faced man had deciphered from the stones, as he peered at them through his steel-rimmed pince-nez ?)

Dr. Acquarius, when his turn came to be interrogated by " the Boss," bubbled over with excitement, so that he could hardly phrase his somewhat contradictory sensations and beliefs. He had not heard a voice : but then, he had been very frightened and was not ashamed to own it : he knew too much of the powers of Nature for such a tremendous manifestation of them to leave him unmoved. As for the stones, he looked forward to inspecting these more closely : but he must confess, at this point, that not only had he been frightened, but that his whole attitude toward religion had been affected. Brought up in a cool Lutheranism, though he had always treated religion seriously, he had never hitherto felt compelled to believe implicitly every story in the Bible : but now, after the minute examination of the tablets which he promised himself, he admitted the possibility that he might have to revise

his outlook. At the same time, all miracles, if their occurrence was truly attested, were to a certain extent capable of some physicist explanation. . . . They would be none the less miraculous for that. He had always, for example, been conscious of the miraculous nature of his own gift, even though of recent years it had been lifted out of the magics to occupy a place among the sciences. Thus they must take into consideration the probability that the mystery of the happenings on Sinai, inexplicable as they were at the moment, would be solved one day, in the light of the scientific knowledge that must accrue to us in the near future. Some enormous source of power had been tapped unconsciously : of that he was sure. Perhaps the stones had always been there, somewhere and somehow imprisoned : perhaps a stone-diviner had called them up - or, rather, down - just as a dowser can evoke the waters ? Any of them - who knows ? - might have been responsible for the formidable force unleashed : Sir Levy, it might be. The faintness which all present had seen fall upon him when the cloud cleared, very much resembled that which attacks a diviner when his labour is over. . . . Perhaps he was unconscious of his gift, himself. . . . Then, again, though the voice had eluded him, at one moment a great ringing and swinging of bells and gongs in the distance had undoubtedly reached his ears. At the very time of its happening, this had called to mind a recurrent phenomenon in the vicinity of the neighbouring Jebel Nakfis, whither he had journeyed quite lately in pursuit of his calling. There an identical sound was often audible, but only, he had been informed, in dry weather ; the explanation of this mystery Being similar to that of the

singing statues which the bishop had cited (and if they could succeed in uncovering new springs of water, with which to irrigate the desert, it would, beyond doubt, die away for ever). One must remain, he presumed, in a state of agnosticism, tinged with wonder, until all the circumstances had been examined.

Lord Pridian was the sole member of this group of four men, so it proved, who claimed to have heard the voice and to have understood a few, at any rate, of the words it spoke. At first, then, when he discovered this, he was inclined to be angry, reiterating, "Well, I heard it : and nobody can tell me I didn't. Mayn't I believe the evidence of my own senses ? "

"Horace, you must *not* excite yourself," the bishop replied, "or you will make yourself ill. And you have your duty to the country and to the Empire to consider." (That should steady him down : yes.) "It has been, I'm sure, a most fatiguing day for us all, and one should never, under such circumstances, embark upon controversy. Let me implore you not to tire yourself, but, instead, to sit quietly in a chair and jot down your impressions while they are still fresh in your mind." •

Tuey and Dr. Acquarius now said good night, but the bishop stayed on for a little. (It was better to try to find out a little more, so as to be able to calculate what action he was likely to take : for there would be action, of that one could be certain with a person of so ... well, hysterical a temperament.) And since they were alone together, Lord Pridian confided in him. Albeit the first phrase \hich the voice enunciated had escaped him, he had heard, with the utmost distinctness, the austere, famous, and revered phrase :

" Which have brought thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

The bishop, inside his own mind, did not know what to make of it. . . . Horace was so certain : himself was confident that he had not heard a voice and he didn't like this hearing of voices ; a common symptom of approaching mental disorder. (And he looked ill.) Still, one must be fair. Things *had* happened. . . . Perhaps the plump little chap had heard it, after all : but, unlike Lord Pridian, himself almost preferred *not* to believe the evidence of his own senses, when it was against common sense. That the words *might* be couched in English, he was willing to allow : though, of course, Horace was not seldom disposed to let that Empire business run away with him (certainly, though, old Lollygo had not talked English in his response). But - which had more weight - they were inappropriate and far from original, while, on the contrary, the single Commandment which he had contrived to read seemed to him to show a comprehensive grasp of many problems of the day. However, he mustn't show his feelings, must try to keep him quiet.

" Most interesting, I'm sure," he observed non-committally. " Most interesting. I did not remark the words myself, but I won't attempt to deny that I read some of the writing on the tablets. Indeed I am at present endeavouring to regulate my behaviour in conformity with what I read-or rather had time to read (by no means an easy hand, my dear Horace). But we must have the support of science. The whole matter must be probed, basically investigated, and submitted to a modern and scientific analysis."

" We can look at the tablets this very night, Cyprian.

I've sent a lorry, and my two best night-secretaries (Ai at shorthand) in charge of the workmen ; picked men, who came here from England to erect the church. Their packing is unrivalled, and they've taken electric equipment with them. They've already been gone two hours." Here " the Boss " took a square, folding platinum watch out of his pocket: of which toy he was very fond, for he thought it created an effect of business-like, super-man energy, though in reality it occupied a far longer space of time to produce and open than any ordinary watch. "It's eleven now. They should be back by four. You and I will wait up for them."

" No, my dear boy, no ! To-morrow is time enough. You must not overstrain yourself." (Nor can it be refuted that upon this evening Lord Pridian was in a state of exaggerated nervous irritability.) " You need sleep; all the sleep you can get."

But " the Boss " was not thus easily to be soothed. " How ran you even mention sleep, Horace," he protested, " when you know that we have been the vessels of Revelation ; that we are the chosen medium for a New Gospel ? And we must spread it far and wide." Here he gave way to a sweeping rhetorical gesture across the wide empty spaces of a great Empire, a blazing-the-trail, all-red-route movement with one arm, over eternal snows and across measureless wastes, which was unfortunately, out of scale, ill-calculated for the miniature size of the sitting-room, so that he knocked several silver-framed photographs off a table and caught his hand a sharp rap against a honey-comb moulding. When order had been restored, he continued, apparently with the same degree of rhapsody,

though with a less illustrative manner : " Far and wide. How *can* people *sleep* after such occurrences on the mountain-top ? This very night we must gather us all together, and draw up our plans for a world-campaign. If they rest, then they must be aroused. We must sound the bugles and the war-drums against sin and sloth. ..." At that instant each of them gave a start, and Lord Pridian stopped talking, for there penetrated to their ears, though vaguely, the victorious throb of drums. . . . Was there to be another and more intimate apocalypse ? But, no, the deep rolling died. (In fact, it issued from the apartments of the Shereef, higher up.) " We must waken them. How dare they lie down in idleness, when they have received a direct mandate, have themselves received the call to a position of overwhelming responsibility and trust ? " He stopped, but, thinking he had better bring in that phrase again, to test if there was immediate reaction in sound, as there had been a few seconds previously, added loudly, before the bishop could interject a word, " I repeat it. We must sound the bugles and the war-drums against sin and sloth. We must . . . "

This time there was no response at all : no martial music flashed out its retort. He would, no doubt, have continued to perorate in this strain for an altogether extravagant period, since his old electioneering form was coming back to him and such eloquence affords relief, had not his companion decided to interrupt him. (He had, the bishop inferred from that last sentence, been reading Winston Churchill again. It was never a success, made him much too circusy.) Besides, the bishop possessed a very just instinct as to when to cut short and contradict " the Boss," and when to let him

have his head. There were occasions when it was wiser to permit him to intimidate, and occasions when it was necessary, in self-protection, to show fight. It all depended. But the present, he deduced from experience, was no moment for sycophancy. It was better to stop him now. . . . There was no one else present : so it would not be of consequence, even if the dear fellow chose to become offensive about those prayers, for example, which he had helped to compose. Really, it could do no harm. He would pit his House-of-Lords manner against Lord Pridian's Albert-Hall, would be conciliatory though firm ; not provocative, by any means. But, first of all, it was essential, as in all hysterical cases, to administer a slap.

" Horace ! You seem to me very jumpy to-night ! Have you seen something ? " he asked brusquely ; and then proceeded more gently, " I shouldn't do anything hasty, if I were you. It's better not to rush too swiftly to conclusions. According to the story you have related to me - and of course, I allow myself no doubt of your *bonajides* - the fact comes out quite clearly that we have *not* all of us experienced the same thing. We haven't discussed that side of the matter so far, and we will not enter upon it now : but, supposing that the writing on the tablet constitutes, as you say it does constitute, the New Decalogue, - and, mind you, I am willing neither to confirm nor to confute that notion until every avenue has been explored to the end and every problem surveyed from all possible angles - how can you, nevertheless, be certain as yet that we have, all of us, read the *same* Commandments ? " His face, as he said this, took on that blank, unknowing mask of accidental prophecy which, subsequently, an audience

always remembers. Probably to himself the words conveyed nothing, were an idle excuse born of the moment; for he continued, " In any case, the same words mean different things to all of us. Those are the doubts which assail me, and which to-morrow - to-morrow afternoon - when we can scrutinise the tablets at our leisure, it must be our task to elucidate : Yes. Assuredly therein lies the crux. . . . But even if you *are* right - and upon that point I must, as I have stated, reserve my opinion - even if they are the New Commandments, and you are already cognisant of their gist and direction, I would still urge you to sleep on them, if I may put it like that. (There's often a lot of wisdom in these old proverbs.) ... In any case I entreat you, don't waken these poor people now. They are tired out, absolutely tired out : and a man of your experience, a man of the world, knows full well that he cannot place reliance upon either the impressions or the discrimination of tired folk. . . . No, if you *must* review recent events in public - though at this juncture I deprecate it - then ask them to join you after church (Simpson appeared to be so upset this evening, that I think I may have to take the service myself) and stay to luncheon. I know that you cannot be hospitable enough for your own pleasure ; and, before that meal, we can all have a little talk. That would be the best way, a little talk : far the best way. For by that time, I take it from what you tell me that the tablets, or whatever name we ought to call them (*there* truly is an important question, which should be settled with nicety from the very outset) will have arrived. . . . And try yourself, my dear boy " - here he introduced that bedside manner, which was so much

in demand, so greatly appreciated by readers of the Pridian press - " not to think too much about it before then, not to worry your head about it : banish it from your mind to-night, so that to-morrow you may bring a cool and unbiased judgment to bear upon the manifold problems which this occurrence presents to us." . . . The episcopal tactics of mingled onslaught and conciliation had swept all before them ; and, according to this counsel, discussion was postponed until the next day.

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Elsewhere, the volume of life, common to the hour, had dwindled. But the emptiness of the dining-room had in no way deterred the professor from indulging in his usual pranks, effected by his powers of secret merriment and one-sided conversation, on Green-face, Yellow-face and Slate-face ; had on the contrary, offered him, perhaps, as these members of the tail-coated tribe circled round him in prescribed and ritual flight, a finer and more spacious field for their display. . . . He was yet puzzled by those stones . . . most irregular. But he had enjoyed his outing to-day, and was laughing to himself immoderately. He was, moreover, totally unaware that the room was void of guests, for to him it was pressed full and overflowing with geological strata, flint instruments, and petrified shells, while every table was occupied by gay, alluring skeletons, from the earliest ape-man to his most differentiated descendants, drawn from places so remote and far apart as Java, China, and Piltdown. . . .

Notwithstanding, it was empty, very empty : because, as the result of so fatiguing a day, many of the men and all the ladies, were dining upstairs. Even

Miss Tether was absent, for Lady Ramshackle had retired to bed, and so the governess had elected to remain in her bedroom, there to make herself some strong tea, with the aid of a spirit lamp given her by a former, and for once grateful, pupil, and to eat some English biscuits ; a real treat. And, indeed, what else could she do ? For she could not very well, she felt, sit about downstairs by herself, with all those horrid Egyptian managers watching her like a snake watching a mouse. . . . No, that wasn't it. . . . Now, what was it ? . . . Like a cat watching a rabbit, or whatever it was ? But it didn't matter. . . . Circling round her in that disagreeable way, like hawks ready to swoop on . . . on what ? Rabbits again ? A ferret, that was. . . . No, a bird of some sort. Really, she was afraid she was growing absent-minded, a grave drawback in the teaching profession. But, of course, she was tired to-night. The tea would revive her. . . . That storm ! But it was better to take things as you found them ! Where had she put the Ncstle's now ? And, anyhow, what she meant was that there was always to her something *creepy* about Orientals . . . (all except the little Japs : they were different, plucky little fellows, with their love of tea and hot baths and battleships)... *creepy*. No doubt it was silly of her. Grandmama had been just the same, though, and Aunt Lily too. . . . But then grandmama had been through the Indian Mutiny, which, of course, had made her nervous . . . and in those days, too, the natives had been far less educated and there had been no railways. . . . But, after all, she could not help it : they made her feel creepy, and, if she felt like that about them, it was better, far better, not to have dinner, but, instead, to stay up here, eating

a few of these delicious biscuits. (She nibbled one appreciatively.) How they reminded her of home ! (When she went to stay with Hermione, there were always a few, placed in a box disguised as an eider-down on a table by your bedside, in case you should need them in the night.) And, one by one, these crisp but nostalgic delicacies enticed her thoughts homeward, until, by the time she had finished her second cup of tea, she had decided to answer Hermione's letter. It had only arrived this evening (wonderful how short a time letters took nowadays !). She had better, perhaps, peruse it again first. . . . New writing-paper. . . . They must have finished the old " Rectory " stock at last. . . . Very nicely done. . . ." The Lilacs, Chuggleford, Hants. . . . Wednesday." (Such a mistake to omit the date.) " Private " (underlined). . . . With an eye practised at skipping - through long experience of leaving out passages that were better left out when reading aloud to children - she encouraged it to flutter over the words of the opening sentences, sipping lightly their content as a butterfly wings its painted way from flower to flower, comparing this honey of the rose with that of the jasmine, until she reached the more interesting portions . . . (but under the heavy and genuine honey lay, every now and then, a dash of poison, for her sister could not refrain, in spite of her real affection for Miss Tether, from occasionally administering to her a sharp jab) " . . . est Penny . . . your last ... so quickly . . . answer now in ... air post . . . well . . . thankful . . . but . . . asleep on empty bottles . . . stipend inevitably cut. . . . Crisis ... no sign . . . improving. . . ." (Ah ! that's better : we're coming to it now.) "... Such delightful travels you have

been enjoying ! How fortunate you are to be able to roam the world over, in such congenial company and with no cares. Often I envy you your life, and wish that I too were free ; but the countless little troubles and responsibilities connected with a family of young people prevent me from obtaining any real liberty : I must stay here, organising the house, superintending the garden, assisting Thomas with his new work, and helping to arrange those little bazaars, treasure-hunts and yo-yo soirees, which go to make up the sum of life in the country : and then, as I sit at home, I think of you, Sissie dear, at Venice one year and in Egypt the next!

" And what can I tell you that even begins to rival in interest your travellers' tales ? Further, to some degree you seem to have inherited papa's talent for description. (Who that read it, can ever forget, for instance, that passage about mediaeval life in Niiremburg, the time he went to Germany ?) It is a thing which no one can acquire : It has to be born in you. (In the younger generation, Octavia appears to have inherited it.) You seem to give one only the essentials, and yet produce the fullest, most artistic, effect. We all think that Roderick is most fortunate in having such a teacher.

" And I envy you your time walking the streets of Cairo (it has always been my *dream*) almost as much as your talent for describing the life there. But now , " must tell you something. You are aware that, since Thomas's *last* misfortune, which obliged him to give up his living, he takes a small class in preparation for the varsities . . . just three or four boys . . . young men, I should write, perhaps. Well, the other day, he again

had a bad fall, and I took them for him in English. And I hope that you will feel a little *tingle* of pride, when I tell you that, as an example of how English *should* be written, I read them that passage. . . . And how the dear lads *revelled* in it ! I was positively taken aback by their appreciation - though I have always held that if one *knows* how to manage boys (as evidently you do, dear) it is easy. But that, again, is a thing *born* in a person, I think. One of them even came up to me afterward, and said, ^c Mrs. le Quillet, I should like to meet your sister. She must be a real sport, ready to go anywhere and do anything. And *pretty* too, I bet : or she wouldn't have been offered the job. I visited Madame Julie's myself, when the Pater and I were in Egypt last year, and it's a jolly well-run show !' From a young man like that, real praise !

" While the boys were at home it was nice holding the class here. There was no awkwardness, and, though strangers, they were all able to find companionship in our little family circle. . . . But now our tiny house seems sadly depleted. Quentin and Percy-he hopes to be an artist, and I hope so too, because I always think *Percy* is-such an *artistic* name-but it is strange how differently the two boys have developed, for Qiientin is mad on mineralogy ; a real Tether in his tastes - have gone up to Oxford, Vincent and Valerian have returned to Sandhurst. (How time flies ! Do you realise that they will be sixteen on the fourth of July next ?) Phineas goes in September, and Victor in January. Septimus, all being well, is to attend a day-school in Chuggleford for the time being : and I *teach* the girls. *Such* hard work (but good practice, if ever we are able to set up an establishment, as we used to

plan). Myrtle is too young, of course : but you would never recognise Rosebud, she has grown so pretty.

" Poor papa ! He still cannot go out much, and is in consequence forced to lead a very quiet life. I am afraid that Thomas's last relapse was a great shock to him. He looks older (but then, as I tell him, one must remember that at eighty-nine one is not so young as one was). Still, he preached last Sunday, and dear old Lady Pendleshoes drove over from Nestorly to hear him. Quite like old times.

" And now to turn to your affairs, dear. I am grieved to hear that that odious little Minus still keeps up her vendetta. (Has she any *foreign* blood, I wonder ?) What a nasty person she must be. If I were you I should ignore her. Show her the kind of person you are!

"It was curious to hear that a Mr. Enfelon and his aunt are with you in the desert. Papa used to know an old Mrs. Enfelon, a most cultivated old lady, it appears, with a lace cap and a lot of brass-work that she had copied herself from *old* models in Holland. You must remember to tell her grandson about it, as it would be sure to interest him. I think it must be he : for, by all we hear, he was a sad grief to his grandmother, went to the bad, wrote poems, and ended by wanting to marry a " (here there was a moment of suspense while Miss Tether was obliged to turn over the page)
" Swede. She is so thankful that she was able to stop it in time. If it is the same one, I have never read any of his books. But two, at least, were banned by Mr. Minney - you remember the young librarian with the nice smile - and the bishop had to burn one, I am told. . . . But what times we live in ! We need strong

men, do you not think ? Papa says he would like to see either Sir Rudyard or Lord Lloyd as dictator.

" Do write and give me the news of your picnic. It ought to be an experience, if it eventuates.

" The weather continues bright, but the late frosts are doing much harm. The post is just going. No time for more now, dear.

" Yr. affect^{ate} sister,

" HERMIONE.

" P.S. - How small the world is ! Do you remember Cuthbert Wimperley ? They've been given Suncaster. Fancy, he is a canon now : and Eileen has much improved, grown quite nice-looking. Such jolly young ones."

It was funny; the postscript quite upset her. Another cup of tea. What an exhausting day : and so hot still (and the smell of juniper.) ! But, with the cup of tea beside her, she took up her stylograph to reply, toyed with it for a little, since she did not feel inspired. At last she wrote.

" The Aaron Palace Hotel, Sinai.

" DEAREST MOONEY, - Your letter was most welcome, and I hasten to answer it, tired as I am, so that it may catch to-morrow's air-post. *Tired* I write : for we have only just returned this evening from the picnic.

" You have written such kind things to me about my little bits of description that I hardly dare venture now on any of those small *touches*, which give the atmosphere of a region, do they not, for fear that you may be dissatisfied with the result. Besides, I am quite

conscious that I can never hope to equal, or even approach, papa in that *genre*. . . . Still, I must do my best. What can I tell you ?

"To start at the beginning. We left the hotel, shortly after eight o'clock this morning, in several automobiles : in each of which was a native guide wearing a tarboosh (I wonder if you are like that, but I never could *trust* them ?). For a full two hours we motored through the desert, a most wild and desolate scene, full of *sand*.... How can I picture it for you more vividly ? Try to imagine Dartmoor - indeed, I was being continually reminded of it-only without any heather or grass, and with *camels* instead of those dear, shaggy ponies : and not a sign of 'the Wild Rott^c Deer.' I was disappointed, too, in the wild flowers : nothing but *immortelles*, which look sweetly pretty, I always think, with a marble gravestone, but, somehow, make no *effect* in a large space. Soon, though, we began to climb Mount Sinai : most impressive and rocky, and with what wonderful biblical associations ! In the end, we found ourselves at the *top*-which was interesting, too, in a way. (The outlook from there very much recalled, I thought, the view from the spur of the Cotswolds - dear old Cotswold days, there is nothing to approach *them* anywhere - overlooking Cheltenham, only, of course, with none of the houses or pretty church spires. To me, there is always something about a spire : *what is it*, I wonder ?) And there we found an'excellent luncheon waiting for us. ... But the weather changed suddenly, and the effects of the storm, though most *original* and affording a wonderful idea of the powers of Nature, were alarming. In consequence, we were forced to return without seeing

the monastery (is it not a *coincidence*, dear, that it is called St. {Catherine's, like the school we still hope to found some day? Yet it is for boys - men I should say - not girls. I always thought, did not you, that a monastery was named after a *male* saint?) and arrived here, after a happy day, an hour or two ago.

" To-morrow Divine Service will be celebrated at eleven : and some say the bishop will preach. Quite a treat for us, if it be so. But I fear I shall have to take Roderick out before the sermon. He is too *young* to appreciate eloquence at its proper worth, and kicks his feet about and shuffles, in a way that is painful to those near him as well as disturbing to the preacher.

- " I feel I am *always* talking about *myself* in my letters to you : but Minus has been less offensive for the past few days. Lady Ramshackle, however, has to-night sent me a message, intimating that she wishes to speak to me alone, to-morrow after church, for a few minutes ; which, she says, will be sufficient to transact our business. (It must be, I think, about that *rise* of salary which she agreed to consider after a year had gone by. Probably they wish to start it *sooner*.) And I intend then to make a personal protest to her concerning her maid's conduct. It must stop.

" How I love your letters, with their news of home — of you, papa and the dear chicks. I am bringing back some *curious* pebbles, which I picked up myself in the desert, and if polished (is old Mr. Girasolle, the lapidary at Suncaster still alive? He would do them nicely, I am sure) might make into a very handsome necklace, and, together with the beads I bought in Cairo, may be quite a help to my god-daughter when she is old enough to go to dances. (There is nothing

like originality, I am sure, for making people take an *interest* in you.) Also I am bringing back (I do not like to trust it to the post) a fine piece of *isinglass-stone* from Sinai, as a coming-of-age present for Quentin. (How curious is his love of mineralogy : but it is not Tether, I think. It must be Ticklethwite. You remember papa's cousin Georgiana - and her real keenness at an advanced age ?) But pray do not mention these little gifts - I want them to come as a *surprise*.

" Your affect^{n^{te}} sister,

" PENELOPE.

" P.S. - Of course I remember Canon Wimperley. I am so glad he has got on."

By the time Miss Tether had signed, addressed, and stamped her letter, ready for the morrow, the majority of the visitors were peacefully asleep. But there were exceptions ; a few lights still burned.

Minus heard a sound floating up on the breathless air and interrupted her conversation. Touched by Croucher's heroism in rescuing her from the falling marquee during that extraordinary and awful storm, she had relented, had agreed to marry him. To-morrow she vowed to give notice for the last time : further, a sop to jealousy, she had pledged herself, during the whole of the final month's service which would ensue, to refrain from all darning of Sir Rudyard's socks on the compensatory condition that he, Gerald, solemnly engaged henceforth no longer to chant, or even whistle, Bolshevik anthems, and never to ask her to accompany him to Russia. " I don't want any of your Commis-sars," she said. " Give me a good old London bobby every time." But now she looked out from her high,

black-velvet watch-tower into a nothingness pricked by the faintest, twinkling lights. The thin shivering of tambourines, like reeds sizzling under the wind, reached her from somewhere below. " That old witch Madame Whatsermme must be at 'er tricks aglne, by the sound of it ! 'Aven't we 'ad a miff of it for one dl ? Why, I declare, hafter this hafternune, I'd be frightened even to lett 'er look at me 'and, letterlone tell me forchune," she remarked, her voice, now diamond-pointed, scratching the night.

No imputation could have been more unjust. In reality the noise was wafted from the Shereef's apartments, whence the muttered, reverberant beat of arums, punctuated by the tinkling rattle of tambourines, still issued without cease ; their rhythm, moreover, seeming inspired by an almost fanatical triumph and jubilance. Luckily for the peace of most of those sleeping, his suite occupied so many rooms that this music, emanating from the middle of them, and thus widely buffered on both sides, only faintly pulsed into their dreams, tinging them with a martial or corybantic dye. But, nevertheless, though during other evenings she had heard nothing of it, to-night it penetrated only too easily to No. 44, directly beneath, where Madame Galactic, wrapped in an old pink kimono, convulsed with purple chrysanthemums, sat in silence, open-mouthed, open-eyed, trembling, the nerves flickering under the dimpling skin of her fat, childish face. The spiritist could not sleep to-night. She felt frightened, terrified : terrified of her own trade. It had turned on her. . . . Tambourines . . . she was sure it was the sound of tambourines . . . and drums . . . muffled drums . . . again ! And there, once more !

And yet she had locked them up, more than an hour ago, together with her psychic castanets, her cards and crystal globes, her tea-leaves, planchettes, her smaller and unwrecked trumpets, her entrails of india-rubber for hieromancy, and wax candles for ceromancy, her special ectoplasm, patented, manufactured on the pattern of a folding tape-measure and adapted to previous concealment in the mouth, her bunches of luminous artificial flowers, designed to blossom suddenly in the hushed darkness of a *stance*, and all the other minor ingenuities and amenities of her profession. . . . There they were again. Tambourines ! She would recognise the sound anywhere. ... It was hard, yes very hard. Here she had been, labouring at it all her life, and now it had obtained the mastery over her. For the rest of her days - and nights, she supposed - she would be afraid of the very instruments upon which her bread depended. . . . This afternoon had come to her as an overwhelming shock. It had been the genuine goods, all right. She knew them when she saw them, if they were other people's jobs : though with her own tricks, manifestations as she called them, she found it difficult on occasion to be certain whether the whole twelve out of a dozen were counterfeit or not. Because she was obliged to work so continually and with such exertion, that often, in a day when there had been no time, even if there had been inclination, to attempt the real thing, she was yet left doubting in the end whether a few things which occurred had not been authentic phenomena after all ?

Originally she had frightened herself into the trade, for she was by nature superstitious - or psychic, as people said now - and with her visions and whatnot,

and her excitement over them and talk about them, it had not been easy afterward, turning them over in her own mind, to tell where the truth ended and a lie began. (That was the worst of the business, it enticed away your reason.) It had all started, she thought in her more honest moments, like this. . . . She had been born and brought up in New York, of Irish parents (name of Healy) in a crowded home, which provided her with little education but a heap of life. No time to worry about anything. And then, as a pretty girl of seventeen, she had married a business-man, fifteen years older than herself, who lived in the Middle West. Her parents, though they were poor, did not like the marriage, for he was not a Catholic, and, out there, she soon lost the habits of mass and confession. It was odd that she lost them, since she had no friends in Laceyville and could not make any : and he was away on business all day except on Sunday, which was spent in an orgy of transatlantic, " little-girl " uxoriousness. Her utter lack of all interests combined with the loneliness and emptiness of her life to fabricate for her various psychic faculties, which had then seized on her, serving to convert her life into something intensely perturbing and exciting, not only to herself but to the few people in whom she confided. Through her new gifts, she found friends and disciples. Her large old - it was old and large in Laceyville - house, built in 1864, resounded with creaks and tappings and delicate footfalls, with rustling and flitting shadows of unknown but ineffable significance : how could she estimate now how many of these dim spectres had been projected into the surrounding emptiness by her own starved imagination ? Some of them, she was sure, as

she looked back, had been genuine, and she had developed the power to communicate - or to be able to think that she could communicate - with them. Thus her fame had spread through the innumerable American societies concerned with the supernatural, and by the time her husband's business collapsed, in the great slump of the 'go's, she had been in a position to earn her own living - and his. For thirty-five years and more, she had been supporting him (and Prohibition had made him into a still more expensive luxury) and for twenty-five of these she had been dwelling in Europe. During that period her quandary had been a singular one, she reflected. Since she had grown celebrated and happier, and had made an army of admiring acquaintances, there had been a perpetual and progressive falling-off and failing in the quantity and quality of the genuine manifestations which she could produce : but, in order to remain happy and celebrated, and to retain her acquaintances, she had been obliged to continue to produce them. In a state of intense emotion, how was she to know whether they were genuine or not? And she often used, for her own comfort, to pose to herself this further question: "If I - the instrument, originally, I believe, of powers which human beings cannot understand - now consciously produce phenomena, who am I to challenge their authenticity ; when, for all I, or anyone else, can tell, something genuine may creep into them ? In any case I offer the spirits an *opportunity* to speak."

To-night she could not soothe herself. She was possessed and governed by horror. She had, she owned it, originally frightened herself into the trade, and now she was frightening herself out of it ! Previously, at any

rate, she had always looked upon such things, psychic powers and manifestations, as hers to command : but here she was at the end of a lifetime devoted to them, unable to read, think, or sleep ! ... It was *as though* the marionettes at a puppet-theatre, suddenly taking on an independent life of their own, had revolted and were presuming to menace their creator and manager, who had hitherto invested them with all their semblance of reality, or as though a snake-charmer were now bitten by a snake, whose fangs himself had long ago removed. In fact, the position as she saw it held all the terror, but none of the beauty, that pertains to the story of Pygmalion and his statue : and, alas, it was not love which was offered her by these things in rebellion.

And what, she demanded of her heavy shadow on the wall opposite, could she do ? Goodness knows what will happen to me now ! she repeated. She was too old to start, or even try to start, a new profession. What *could* she do ? Perhaps some charitable society connected with her work, the Spiritist Eleemosynary Aid. Corporation of Manhattan, for example, might, since she was so famous, grant her a small pension on which she could just support life (as for Silas, her husband, he would at last have to fend for himself: she could not be expected to kill herself on behalf of a man who never gave a thought for her !) but, at that, they would probably expect her to give demonstrations from time to time. Or again, she might, in bold pretence, claim some allowance for research from the " This-World-and-Beyond Study Association of Massachusetts " ; but though she might have no intention of experimenting, at least she would

be compelled, for appearances' sake, to be continually surrounded by all the accustomed attributes of her profession : and *that*, she was sure, would be more than enough in her present nervous condition, to drive her over the edge. . . . Or she might, of course, be able to sell the good-will of " Little Toucan " to some younger woman. But she scarcely liked to do that, in case, after all, there *was* something in it. (She didn't want to be no better than a slave-driver, like those wretched Southerners !) All the same, " Little Toucan " must be regarded as capital : she could not afford to be too squeamish. Moreover, she would be glad to be rid of the child : because, whatever lay ahead of her, she was *through*, definitely through. She would - must - quit, in spite of her poverty ; for she had never gotten any savings, was not used to saving. In her profession you had to spend, had to show a nice style in living ; nice rooms, kind-o'-oriental, with lots of lacquer and divans, smothered in cushions with dragons on them in gold thread, and mountains of crystal and beads. Incense, too, and joss-sticks: and, well... artistic robes; something out-of-the-common. (After all, she'd never been one of those cheap, paper-chrysanthemum, lodging-house clairvoyantes, dressed in dirty velvets, who give you cheap jewellery with your fortune, so as to avoid prosecution : not she !) No, she had been compelled to wear handsome, striking clothes - things, you know, with a certain, psychic *chic* - and to buy all the best stock.

And there you had it : the equipment of a famous and fashionable spiritist was expensive. You couldn't get it just anywhere. Very expensive, because the things you weren't able to make for yourself you were

obliged to obtain in secret and at one single establishment, and its owners could thus force you to pay any sum they liked. It was different for a clergyman : now, Mr, Simpson, for instance, could go to any ecclesiastical outfitter and find whatever he wanted, from brass eagles down to gaiters, from chasuble to speckled straw hat; there was no secrecy about it. But with her religion (for Madame Galactic in her self-pity reverted, whenever it suited her, to a belief in the authenticity of her revelations) you had to be careful : positively persecuted it was ! So they could make you pay whatever they liked : and if you didn't pay you could do without ! That was all (and you couldn't work without the proper paraphernalia). Sometimes, even, they would blackmail you by threats of exposure. And what could you do, then ? Nothing !

Yet, here she was, haunted (Lordy ! There were those tambourines again !), haunted ! But she was off to Paris to-morrow : that much was certain, whatever it cost. All she hoped was that the darned things wouldn't follow her on trains and boats : she didn't want to walk #bout like a crazy non-stop jazz-band, with everyone staring at her. Really, she thought she would go mad soon, would become a raving lunatic. How, even, was she to keep going until morning ? If she started to read, the words formed themselves into groups, as auguries, or a passage would suddenly stand out from the page with an evil significance ; if >he began a letter, and paused a moment to think what to say, her writing would trail off into sinister automatic messages, penned in " Little Toucan's " well-known band. Whenever she touched the cards, to shuffle them, the ace of spades fell out of the pack ; and finally,

when she had set out her patience, the cards had proceeded, by their association and placing, to tell her fortune, so that she did not dare to persist in the game. . . . There was no escape, no refuge. She hesitated even to ask for a cup of tea : for no doubt she would find all sorts of prognostications in the disposition of the leaves. . . . It was driving her to drink : that was what it was doing. (And every bit of it was that old humbug's fault : she had entertained such hopes of him, too : but she had not seen a dollar of his money, the canting, horrid old screw ! She heartily wished that she had never seen him.) Magic or no magic, she meant to have something to drink. . . . With wine there were the lees, and auguries to be deduced therefrom (oinomancy was a perilous affair). No. It had better be a high-ball, she supposed ; and she advanced toward a cupboard. How her hand was shaking ! She could only just control the gurgling, splashing syphon. (Would the water fall to the left or right of the glass, she wondered ?) . . . So she continued to wait in fear and faintness. But, gradually, the whisky revived her, until by the small hours, a triumphant sound of mingled packing and bacchanal, of crackling tissue-paper and defiant song, rose from her room to intermingle with the music of drums and tambourines down-wafted. And, indeed, from the distance, it must have seemed that these sounds were connected, for whenever the tinkling and quivering of the bells was loudest, so too, in response, grew the volume of crinkling and of chant.

But Father Munnion was the only other visitor awake, and no echo of them reached his ears, though he was so near both the sources of disturbance. He was

writing his report, and his emotion was too strong to permit him, isolated after this fashion by his enthusiasm, to hear such things. . . . He stopped for a moment, seeking a word. . . . His Latin, he was afraid, had become rather rusty lately, since at St. Katherine's he had been wholly concerned with Greek documents for months past. He was tired, and excited as well he imagined, so that the words would not fly to him as was their wont, sometimes, on less important occasions. Nevertheless, it was most necessary for him to be explicit : he must clothe his story in phrases that would carry conviction. Otherwise, if his account were a failure, devoid of that feeling of inner truth which it must be his aim to convey, the Holy See would, of course, pay but little attention to the Miraculous Revelation. . . . There was the danger ; because it had been so unexpected. And every miracle, however tremendous or however trivial, whether a shower of rose-leaves through falling snow or the raising of a dead man from his mortal lethargy, needed to be confirmed. No wonder, indeed, in a day when even the Church was not altogether free of the modern sin of self-advertisement (think of the middle-aged priests in England, who were now professional humorists on the staff of the evening papers or employed to broadcast dangerous nonsense on the radio !) so that there were some, even, who were more forward than they should be with the reporting of miracles ; miracles which must for ever remain unsubstantiated for want of testimony, and the mere mention of which in the Press would tend to bring discredit on the faith. . . . Fortunately, he believed that his quiet life as a scholar, irksome as he had lately complained that he found it,

would protect him from being the object of any suspicion of this kind. The authorities were aware that he had never sought notoriety. Further - which must silence all disbelief - the tablets existed for all men to see, and, for all who were skilled in Latin, to read. (How magnificent, the old, stark, uncompromising phrases had looked !) To-morrow, perhaps this very night, they would be here : so Lord Pridian had promised. And then, by some means or other, the newspaper-proprietor must be induced to present them to the Holy Father. . . . It might be difficult, for he was an obstinate man : but, on the other hand he was emotional - and, in his way, religious ; naturally religious. In conversation to-night, moreover, he had admitted that he had been able to read the Commandments, so perhaps, if Father Munnion talked with him, the fact that they were couched in Latin might persuade him, not only to offer them in all humility to the Vatican, but to abandon his heresy and be baptised in the true faith ? . . . The old priest sat there, neglectful for some minutes of the Latin word which he must hunt down the tangled glades of his mind, back to his youth, when all these trees had been planted : for the wonder of the afternoon was upon him, and he could scarcely believe that to him had fallen the honour and joy of announcing this transcendent Revelation. . . . And then, that in the announcing of it, he should have to seek for words ! He must proceed with the report at once : but first he wandered to the window for a little air, stepped on to the balcony. There was no hint, no suspicion of a wind, yet the scent of orange-blossom from the adjacent groves was borne up to him on warm gusts to attack

the senses ; and, glancing below, he noticed that the fans and fronds of the palm-trees were paper-thin no longer, but now seemed cut from thick, ruffled velvet, for the moon had risen and was pouring down its milky cascades upon the darkness, letting them flow like fine rain through every opening and interstice in leaf and bough, until even the undergrowth was soaked in this glistening radiance. It flooded the sand beyond with a pale and hazy tawniness that lightened a little, instead of deepening, toward the horizon. Even the brightness of the stars was to a certain extent eclipsed by this soft and pearly splendour, but it was still possible to trace diagrams, joining pin-point to winking pin-point ; diagrams the significance of which neither astronomer nor scientist, preacher nor poet, will ever gauge. . . .

Father Munnion contemplated them, thinking how small was his knowledge of this darker half of every twenty-four hours. Yet, in these regions, the night exhaled a mystery, a warmth of feeling that made them seem less barren, less devoid of all hope, than in the day-time. How little he knew about it : which were these c'onstellations, what, even, their names ? Vaguely the sound of them drifted through his mind : nursery names, Great Bear and Little Bear, or names like temples shattered by the dying thunder of the antique world, the Pleiades, Orion and Cassiopea ; angular, tailed shapes. Which were they, did they show to-night ? And, as again he turned their syllables on his tongue, just as a miser might drop his hoard of shining, golden coins, one by one upon a marble slab, for the pleasure of their heathen music ; Venus and Jupiter, Mars and Saturn ; the Gemini ; Orion and

Cassiopea ; hope sprang up in him, and he wondered whether, after the Revelation of to-day, Christianity might not return here, to these lands where religion had been born, and whether, indeed, it might not conquer still the very skies, so that these pagan stars and constellations, in spite of the legendary glamour attached to their beguiling names, would yield their places to the Holy Saints and Martyrs. The moon, mother of the night, would be Madonna ; those four planets, so brilliantly luminous, the Evangelists, and yonder would shine Saint Cecilia and Saint Theresa, St. Peter and St. Paul, St. James the Greater and St. James the Less, and countless other blessed names. And standing then, above the mingled rustling swarthiness and chalk-white pallor, he allowed himself to dream for a further instant of this final conquest, mild and benevolent, and of an altogether different night, when the stars would be the nails of the cross, and this furry, satyr-eared darkness would be fugitive from its ancient home, expelled for ever by gentleness and prayer.

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CHAPTER I

RETURN JOURNEY

THE machine was noisy, much noisier than Madame Galactic had anticipated, though its expanding and contracting bellow and reverberation possessed, she recognised, advantages for her. This was an initial flight, and, being to no slightest extent air-minded, she was afraid : but, notwithstanding, her terror was considerably less in degree than that from which she had suffered during the entire night, and of a quality, in comparison, straightforward and unobjectionable. The drums and tambourines of those endless hours might still, she admitted, be rapping and tinkling even up here, but at any rate the kindly engine muted them with its lion-mouthed roaring. She was a practical woman, and did not care how much the spirits went at it and enjoyed themselves, so long as she could not - and did not - hear them. Indeed, she began to dread the first landing more than thus hovering in space, lest the instruments should be audible again as soon as the engine stopped on its swoop to earth : and supposing withal that she was spared this horror at Alexandria, yet, after her experiences, she would be in fear of it, just the same, at Athens and Brindisi, Naples, Marseilles and Paris. . . . However, she had left the tin trunk safely behind her at the hotel and had previously pasted on it labels, inscribed in huge letters, "*Jfet to be*

Forwarded" and *"Please Destroy"* (She had not wanted to explain herself more fully.) And so she hoped that, even if this second injunction were neglected, nevertheless, should any spirit regard the contents as a challenge to virtuosity, it would confine its music to the desert; which, whatever you might do, must remain a haunted region, full of mirages and similar misleading tricks. Now she looked below.

They were leaping blithely above the domes and minarets of the hotel. Already this diminishing, dissolving group of gaily coloured soap-bubbles was spinning from beneath her, and the landscape, flattened and unreal, slipped away as though it were a rug, which, having been spread out, was now in process of being rolled up. . . . What a relief! Down there she might have been at school again, with a crowd of girls and mistresses she disliked, the very sight of them making her nervous and weary, but forced to stay in their company until the end of the term : here, on the contrary, she was speeding off through the sky. A new sense of freedom began to inspire her. . . . She was pleased, too, thinking the matter over, that she had never troubled to answer Lord Pridian's invitation " to luncheon and a talk." Well, he and all his silly secretaries (a dirty bunch !) could now, between them, discover that she had vanished . . . flitted. And she hoped they would feel sore : for it was not as if they had been nice to her, always spying, complaining, and questioning, and carping at " Little Toucan." Testing, they called it ! But she need not waste her time on them, none of them, any longer.

All the same, it had not been easy to walk out of the hotel bravely. She was conscious that she had visibly

flinched while creeping down the marble steps from the front door. First of all, three mulatto children of varying bright hues were producing from the shade of a dappled eucalyptus-tree near by a convincingly life-like imitation, upon whistle and wooden rattle, of the sounds which were haunting her. Originally this had deceived her : and then, the very moment that she had comprehended, with satisfaction, its source and nature, the music, unmistakably genuine this time, had broken out from a bedroom window - her own, or the one above it: she could not be certain which. This had caused her, she knew, to hurry too quickly toward the flying-ground. . . . She wondered who had seen her go? As she had flown over she had made sure that there was no one on the golf-course and that the tennis-courts were deserted. But probably the old humbug had been prowling about again, spluttering in his horrid, thick voice which reminded one of a damp rocket striving to go off. . . .

The hotel had suddenly grown much further away. There was nothing underneath now but a dented mattress of sand, edged by those grotesque mountains (she had seen enough *of them*, too, thank you). . . . Still, it was a lovely day : so clear that the extent of view was only limited by the capacity of the human eye to see. The mountains were close, their contours defined as though you were focusing them through opera-glasses, the surface of their burning masses of rock, streaked and checkered with black and gold and green and purple, seeming peculiarly motionless under their glaze of heat, as though for ever unaffected by evaporation. As for the sand, it was an ashen sea which had engulfed the world, except where floated, here and there, small

islands of palm-trees, their brittle, curling verdure showing dark against this leonine hide. . . . Somehow or other, she thought, everything looked different to-day. (Perhaps it was due to the intense heat. And how thirsty it made you ! Why, even up here, where it was cool, she was thirsty. But no wonder, after last night : and she wished she had ordered a drink before leaving.) The very desert looked different: probably, she explained to herself, because she was viewing it thus from an unaccustomed height and angle ; that was all. . . . But, as her puzzled gaze rested on it, she perceived wherein the change consisted ; on the surface of this vast ocean rippled little currents and tides of movement, circular and enclosing. What could they be : a mirage ? Did the airman see them too ? . . . And then she understood. . . . Of course, they were native horsemen, Arabs : but their clothes and the horses they rode were so well matched to the sand as to be nearly invisible. The action of them alone betrayed their existence. Manoeuvres, she surmised : and, oblivious for the instant of drums and tambourines, wished - how much she wished - that she had waited to see them. Because she loved anything military, and only last year, during a summer visit to London, a few psychic friends had driven her down to Aldershot - and the country there much resembled this, suited to the same sort of thing, she supposed - to see the torch-light tattoo ; a wonderful spectacle ! These troops, she thought, as her eyes strove to follow their movements, must be clever, too. . . . But had the airman noticed them ? He would, naturally, be disappointed to miss them, so she shouted, in her anxiety, at his tilted, helmeted head. But no answer came back to

her. Of course, she ought to have remembered, the merciful roar of the engine prevented one from hearing anything. (Extraordinary, though, how after a time one ceased to notice it.) All the same, watching him, she concluded that he, as well, had observed the tactical exercises which were in progress below. . . . You could scarcely see the hotel now. She gave a last glance at its group of bubbles lying on the horizon, and wondered again who had seen her leave? . . . Well, it was peaceful up here, now that she had grown used to it, and the spiritist nodded, until the thunder of the engine masked at last a somnolent and very animal, as opposed to psychic, music.

CHAPTER II

SUNDAY MORNING

DOWN below, T. L. was sitting by himself, in the shelter of the verandah. The current of air, born of the rush of the machine, as it passed quite low over the hotel, made him drop his glance from the stentorian, gigantic insect down to where this ever so transient but none the less grateful wave of coolness swept through the heavy foliage of the garden, lifting up the leaves so that you saw their backs, ash-green and buff and silver, fluttering aloft as though they were the hands of a crowd in a Greek tragedy : but soon they settled, plump and green again, if yet a little trembling, upon the faunal air, full of the thick sweetness of orange blossom, which did not permeate the whole atmosphere, but lay on it, in odorous pools and clouds of an altogether peculiar density. In the meantime the airplane had shrunk to a distant, dancing mote in the eye, and its aspiring roar had declined to a faint purring, in itself pleasant, but enraging enough when considered from Enfelson's point of view ; as merely another maddening theme in the already maddening symphony of sounds in which he was immersed.

The author admonished himself severely on account of his own stupidity. Why had he come to sit here again ? Previous experience should have sufficiently warned him. But, from his window, the warmth,

lying like a breathless and brooding golden music just under the shelter of the leaves, and the electrical trilling of the cicadas, which ever imparts a feeling of expectancy, lured you into the garden, making you uneasy indoors, eager to be out and, as it were, at the heart of things. And then, once outside, the enchantment faded ; the heat and noise were seen to be intolerable.

In addition, to-day he was (how could he help it ?) too agitated, too exalted, to think properly : the processes of his mind had become over-rapid and in consequence faulty. But noise, he decided, was even harder to bear in hours of intense elation than in those of utter despair. He threw his notes down upon the table. . . . And the heat ! (May, he had been advised beforehand, was too late to visit Sinai : and yet how would he ever have forgiven himself, if he had failed to be here at that tremendous moment ?) Yesterday, of course, had been curiously exhausting. Indeed, as the result of it, he was obliged last night, for the first time after many years, to abandon his cultural exercises : however, as he had said in excuse to Effie, who, after th'at which had come to pass in the afternoon, would be disposed to blame him for it ? The physical strain had been not less than the mental, because, undoubtedly, the Revelation had drawn something out of them ; so that the Presence could make itself felt, it had been necessary for him, too, to give of his strength. . . . Never mind : now, almost at once, he could return to cooler regions and to his disciples, with the overwhelming, the almost incredible, news. . . . To think of the future, though, was almost more of a burden to the nerves than to allow oneself to dwell

upon the present, however irritating. It was better to concentrate upon the morning round one.

This morning was Sunday again. Some lines of George Herbert's insinuated their rhythm into his mind:

*The Sundries of man's life
Thredded together on Time's string
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal glorious King.*

The Sundays of a middle-aged man's life, he remembered, amounted to six or seven solid years of them : too thick a chunk. Further, whatever the virtues of an English Sunday as such, certainly they needed, for their proper appreciation, a temperate climate. The exaggerated noise and heat, here particular to the seventh day - where, apparently, it was always hotter and more noisy than were all the six days which had preceded it rolled into a detestable one - were distracting. Certainly they were alike, these tropical Sabbaths, as the beads of a necklace. (Indeed, the vista of them produced a genuine conception of eternity, only, perhaps, thus to be focused, by means of 3 monotonous rhythm, repetitive of detail.) This Sunday, for example, might be any single specimen of those he had spent here, save that to-day more people than usual had gone to church.

The congregation included, he had noticed, Sir Levy and Miss Poppy, the last couple one would have expected to find attending a Christian place of worship! It was extraordinary : and he could not help pondering on what, now that the service, to which they were listening at this moment, had been so uncompromisingly condemned from on high, they could imagine

was the point of sitting there. What object did it serve? How could they reconcile their behaviour this morning, their stilted clothes and faces, with the Revelation of a few hours previously? . . . Of course it must be remembered that people in general hate to be proved in the wrong. Their conduct at this moment might be just mildly defensive. But there were some, he realised, who would struggle on behalf of their wrongness; who would fight fiercely and unscrupulously. The bishop, to instance one individual alone, would never of his own accord confess the facts, still less acknowledge the supremacy of the new doctrines: because, not only did he represent a vested interest of the most strongly entrenched and pernicious order, but was constituted, by Royal Warrant, one of those who held a monopoly in English sanctity and virtue. If he was not in the right of it, then the whole State was a lie, from top to bottom. . . . And the State would fight: you could depend on that. . . . There would be persecution again, and many would suffer martyrdom for the sake of the truth within them, before that truth triumphed for ever.

Now he allowed the soaring, purring speck to carry his eye up with it, above the garden, wherein leaves of many varying designs, plain and bold as those of the banana-palm, or subtle and intricate as those of the tree-fern, revealed to human eyes the fascinating perspectives and complicated green vistas reserved in less tropical regions for the whirring insects that hum and drone down the aerial valleys of a flower-bed, in which one leaf, veined like marble and cat-furred with tawny velvet, can give shelter; while a blossom, nodding gently its cup, a huge inverted dome, blue and

immense as the ocean, or vast and rosy as the sunrise itself, can stun with an unimaginable weight; above the camel-coloured tents of sand, and the fleecy trembling horizons that yet hemmed one in so securely, to where Jebel Musa, or, as most assuredly it was, Mount Sinai - streaked and slashed with colours, as though they had been painted to disguise its shape, which was nevertheless perfectly defined - upreared its naked bulk, to-day unblemished by a single cloud. In these climes fine weather does not necessarily imply blue skies, but this morning the heavens were blue and exquisitely vaulted, proclaiming allegiance to the Mediterranean world rather than to the ill-balanced, ill-proportioned firmament, which hangs with such leaden weight above the sweltering, rhinoceros-hided continent of Africa.... Yet the heat was African.

It was Sunday morning in Africa. . . . You could tell it was Sunday. At the back of the hotel dragomans were shouting hoarsely, calling guttural-sounding names, " Achmet " and " Hussein " and many others, and Arabs were haggling in circles, moaning piteously, over chickens, which emaciated as stylites, strove, cackling and flapping, to elude their dark grasp. Green-face, posed against an appropriate ground of encrusted porphyry and yellow onyx, was wearing a morning-suit and black satin stock-tie, in the glossy depths of which, nestled an enormous diamond, exactly repeating the cold, viridescent and reptilian fires that illuminated his own cheeks, and was whistling and singing, with the matutinal ardour of an errand-boy, the chorus of a popular song, " Othello was a fellow with the girls," the while Slate-face and Yellow-face disputed near by at the top of the steps (T. L., though

he mused idly on the possible cause of this quarrel, remained in ignorance of its genesis. . . . But it was thus. They had broken open Madame Galactic's tin trunk, and were now divided about the ownership of its treasure trove. Slate-face, an affectionate father, naturally wanted the drums, trumpets, and tambourines for the use, respectively, of his blue, brown, and purple infants, now confined, so far as artificial noises went, to the whistles extracted from Christmas crackers, and the wooden, swinging rattles with which a kindly American visitor, who had collected them off the tables after a gala dinner on board a liner during a pleasure-cruise, had provided them. These instruments, he asseverated, would be a distinct addition to the miniature orchestra now assembled beneath the flickering shadow of the eucalyptus ; for, though it was marvellous how much noise the blessed, tiny things could make, considering the poverty of their resources, yet, with the addition of these, they would be able, always, to keep the visitors in a cheerful, unquerulous mood. It was too quiet here. And the visitors loved them : anyone could see that. . . . But Yellow-face would not give his consent. Fraternal in his feeling, as deeply as Slate-face was paternal, he desired drums, trumpets, and tambourines, all, to be handed over to the hotel orchestra, of which his maroon but elegant brother was the leader. . . . And then, who was to get that bunch of lovely, luminous flowers ? A still more ferocious wrangling ensued.) A rumba, played on the gramophone - probably, he thought by Lady Helen - added its emotional but insect-like droning to the monotonous castanetted music of the cicadas; the camels had keyed up their whining, lazy complaints to

a pitch higher. A loud and rhythmic series of oaths reached him from the top floor of the hotel, where Effie was engaged in her exercises before the open window, and fanatical sounds of jubilation poured out of a room situated somewhere among the many apartments of the Shereef. (Still at it. People stated that it had never stopped for a minute all night ! Now, T. L. liked the Shereef and respected him - he was a fine, natural being - but, all the same, he asked himself, what in heaven's name had happened yesterday to please any follower of Mohammed ? It must simply have overturned every belief he held : and he was by no means stupid. ... It was queer, very queer. . . . But then, if it came to that, why did people so different one from another as Lord Pridian and the bishop, Tuey and Lady Helen, Father Munnion and the professor - nearly everyone except Mr. Simpson and Madame Galactic - all appear so elated and happy ? What could the New Commandments have spelt to them - either to those who, in the days which had heralded yesterday, were regarded as pious, or to the admittedly hedonistic - but a complete negation of their lives and refutation of their beliefs. . . . Why, then, did they parade this semblance of being at peace and of rejoicing ? To fight the better, he supposed.)

From the church sounded, bittern-like, the voice of the bishop. (Simpson was too ill to take Morning Service. Yesterday had, one could understand, upset him terribly.) So distinct was this hollow booming that it was easy, even from here, to follow the order of worship. T. L. remarked that the Decalogue had been omitted (wise old bird, that !) and in its place had been introduced an extra hymn : a gloomy affair,

seemingly, but he could not discover which it was, for English voices, when hymn-singing, adopt a special accent that disguises the shape of the words. He listened intently, thinking, even as he did so, how singular a waste of time was this, sitting here, doing nothing, when the most important work of his own - or, indeed, of almost any - lifetime lay just ahead of him. Nevertheless, he continued to search his mind for the missing couplets to fit into the tune. Many offered themselves, the harvest of those long, wasted hours in school-chapel, only to be rejected. . . . And then, a line rolling along in heavy bluster to end in a sudden panicky hush, stamped itself out in his memory. He remembered now, perfectly, that dramatic *piano*, and the caution issued immediately before it in his hymn-book :

And give, for wild confusion, (p) peace.

But which was it ? He still could not recollect: until a couplet, inflated into shape by the accompanying music, after the fashion of a toy balloon, or a bicycle-tyre that is being blown up, all at once stood out:

*O, hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.*

Of course, that was it. " *For those in peril on the sea !* " What a sense of fitness, he reflected ironically, lay behind this equivocal choice. It would not have been difficult to distinguish from a still greater distance the barrack-square voice of Sir Rudyard, borne up on the asthmatic wheezing of the harmonium, played compulsorily by one of " the Boss's " secretaries. The

tones, too, of Croucher, now for the first time during many years compelled to attend church, and of Miss Minus, blended in unison. But, to one who had heard her sing before, it would have been plain that her voice exhibited more stridency than on previous Sundays : its respectful sweetness was a little less ostentatious. . . . And the whole tissue of sound was punctuated by a faint, persistent chipping : the professor, employing his time, no doubt, in some scientific research.

How hot it was ! Really, T. L. reflected, you would judge that nothing had happened ; that this Sunday was the same as last, in no way raised up from the common rut. Yet, whatever your opinion of the events of yesterday, and from whatever angle you approached them, surely they had sufficed to destroy the lifelong conceptions of each individual who was present? Even in his own case, regret must be mingled with rapture ; rapture that his teaching had received divine support; regret that during the years previous to the Revelation he had been too obtuse to comprehend and obey his calling as a prophet; a prophet in the old biblical sense. Never until now, when the evidence of his senses had compelled him to a belief in it, had he been able to accept all this old-fashioned, Jehovah-business of the Testament. On the contrary, he had vehemently attacked his chief disciple, Lloyd Carruthers, for introducing it into his doctrines behind his back. How the fellow would crow in a few days' time ! For Carruthers was incurably aware of a mystic inner consciousness, a process of revelation within himself. And when this had connected T. L., in some inexplicable fashion, with Carruthers' other favourites, Keats,

Lenin, St. Francis of Assisi, Giotto, and John the Baptist, and had, moreover, first urged its instrument to write two whole volumes devoted to this elusive and transcendental theme, he had felt that it was time, in spite of the honour it had been intended to do him by association with such names, to protest. And protest he did, with vigour and gusto : but the stronger his language had become, and the more lewd - according to the obsolete pre-yesterday opinion of the world - both in personal discourse and between the covers of books, the more had Lloyd, on every possible occasion, attached the name Enfelon to the tail of his other great men, and the more tomes had he composed and published on this, his chief thesis. To remove the ground more completely from under the feet of his follower, T. L. had still further increased the obscenity of his work : but old Lloyd had remained loyal, horribly, adhesively loyal. It had been irritating, beyond words irritating : because to this day T. L. denied that Keats had ever possessed a daemon in his belly ; or anywhere else, as for that. He detested all that beaded-bubble sort of trimming, and much preferred Shelley. Further, himself did not at all wish to be represented as weak and tender. Virility, rather than sweetness of singing, was that upon which he set a value and which he was destined to pattern to the world. He did in various respects, he thought, resemble somewhat Augustus the Strong, Danton, Robert Burns, and Savonarola : to these names, in conjunction with his own, he would not have objected. . . . But now, how could he deny the authenticity of Carruthers' revelations, already, as they were, in part proved true? " A prophet," he had said, and written, scores of times!

He wished he had listened to him. Indeed, he felt more than regret; abiding sorrow at his own lack of faith, which for years past, and especially in the last few months, he had allowed to sap those latent powers of prophecy that Lloyd had divined and himself had disclaimed. His lack of the needful confidence had turned him into a coward, stricken with such blind stupidity that beforehand he had foreseen and expected nothing of the apocalypse, and, thus totally unprepared for it, had cringed away from the majestic spectacle, just as meanly as had his lily-blooded, spineless, overfed companions. How he yearned now to have answered the voice, to have grasped the meaning it sought to convey (some further development, no doubt, of his doctrines), and to have held a conversation ; how intensely he wished that he had stepped courageously into the centre of the whirlwind and while the lightning illuminated a countenance at once peaceful and rugged (to himself he practised the appropriate expression), had remained there, a solitary figure in the vortex, communing with the Presence. He ought, of course, to have read out the Commandments to all those present at the Revelation, and to have refused them permission to descend the Mount until they had heard the truth in full; more than that, had openly acknowledged it as the law and had sworn on their lives to uphold it. How he longed to be able to relate to his disciples that thus, after this striking and distinguished manner, had he behaved ! (To-day he could not in sincerity tell them so : though already his mental picture of that which had occurred, its outlines softened in some directions, hardened in others, was, in fact, transformed.)

Notwithstanding his failings, he was, he knew now, a prophet. Doctrines and temperament could suddenly be seen as in accord with this calling. A prophet, more than a prophet; he could not gainsay it. ... And, in spite of the heat, he would have liked to go out into the Wilderness, and there for a time dwell by himself, trying to think things out (perhaps, after all, he did resemble St. John the Baptist?), while living on locusts and wild honey. Alas ! this was no time for such ascetic indulgence : he must return home to inform, first his disciples, and then the entire world, of *that which had come to pass* (better avoid biblical phraseology, he had resolved : but it insisted, by itself, on floating in his head and creeping on to his lips) - of what had happened, in fact. . . . Yes : complete solitude, and an immersion in Nature, however arid, was his one intense desire ; to leave even Aunt Effie behind and spend the days and nights in strenuous wrestling with his daemon. (But when he had confided to her this craving, she had only replied that it was very silly, since he was sure to catch cold !) He should be alone, moreover, that he might employ his hours in the recital of, as he had feared formerly, those nigh extinct Saxon oaths which were now publicly to be substituted everywhere for prayer.

Under the circumstances, these being the things after which his spirit hankered, it was a bore and a nuisance, to say the least of it, that he was obliged to attend this luncheon of Lord Pridian's and the antecedent discussion. Yet, in his new position of responsibility, he could not have refused. Though, of course, he understood the significance of the invitation ; they wanted to talk him round, and by means of flattery and

self-abasement, mingled, no doubt, with a few attempts at bullying on the part of "the Boss," to induce him to edit, emend, and suppress. Their tactics would be amusing to watch. He was inclined to presume - indeed, he was sure - that the appearance of satisfaction which each person had so carefully cultivated, and now so obviously displayed, was one instance of them. But he would decline to be taken in : nor, for an instant, would he permit himself to be coerced. Confident in - and of - divine aid and sanction, he would never consent to yield in the slightest degree. Moreover, he was determined not in any way to help Lord Pridian or the bishop to save their (and here he seized the opportunity to practise a few of the lost words which he had disinterred from our frank Teutonic past) ugly faces.

He repeated the adjectives over and over to himself, until his difficulties were all forgotten and he levered his beard up into the air, the while he laughed happily. . . . How extraordinary, how miraculous, it all was ! That he had chosen, quite fortuitously, to come here, a place unlikely for him to visit, constituted very much more than a coincidence : as did the fact that, unsociable as he liked to think himself by nature, he had in this instance agreed to form one of the picnic party. . . . And, since yesterday, what a revolution had taken place. All along, from the days of his earliest boyhood at Coldtrickle Hall, his father's school (in his mind he corrected it quickly to a miner's cottage), he had experienced in his own blood the rhythm of the earth, and of the seasons through which it passed, and had in consequence ever denied a feather-kinship to the seraphim, singing in angelic

soprano the devitalised hymns of an Anglican heaven, while, on the other hand, he had been conscious and convinced of a blood-kinship to the animals : though with this difference from the usual Darwinian outlook ; that he could not accept a direct evolution from them, and so had, in excuse, introduced into these theories an element of the inexplicable. For his attitude, many in both camps had, in the past, blamed him : but now, no longer obliged to be a rebel against divine authority as against temporal power, he could face all mankind with his testimony. ... He laughed again and softly ran his fingers through his sparse, silky beard. What a revolution since yesterday morning, when he had questioned whether, after all, he was not on the wrong track, had almost wished to give the whole thing up and live quietly in some remote village, where the mingled oaths and incense of his disciples could no longer reach him. There were moments, moreover, when he thought he must have dreamed these events, so astounding were they, or have been the victim of hallucinations, had not Effie witnessed them too. . . . And Effie ! She did not appear even pleased or elated by such wonders. At this very instant he could pick out, from among the other sounds of the morning, the business-like song of a sewing-machine. He had no doubt as to what that humming portended ; she had stopped her experimental exercises and was using that horrible, buzzing engine which she had managed to borrow from the Austrian housekeeper. At work upon a new dress ! What an unmasking was it of a woman's mind. There she had been yesterday, ordained to share in his company that . . . what could one call it ? ... greatest marvel and

wonder. During the period it occupied, she had been beside herself with terror, much more frightened than himself. But, directly it was finished, he could almost see her nerves settling down, so that, when she had climbed into the car - for he had watched her - she had become her everyday, unruffled self: and by dinner-time, though it was only fair to own that she had preferred to stay upstairs in her room, she had, all the same, been quite ready for her usual milkless tea and lettuce-leaf. (In a spasm of annoyance with her, he asked himself why she never grew fatter? Any other woman would, on so healthy a diet.) It was typically, superlatively feminine conduct.

What so particularly provoked him in it was that she so plainly, in her own heart, regarded the entire affair as the responsibility of her nephew. He had originated his doctrines - as it now transpired, under divine guidance - and she, as his aunt, had loyally seconded him. But she was not going to worry her head about them ! It was his duty to reconcile them with, and, when necessary, adapt them to, events. (And some adaptation, he admitted, must be made, for hitherto the existence of so direct and' personal a God had never been acknowledged.) It was, in her opinion, for her nephew and companion afterwards to announce the Miracle. . . . She proposed, in fact, to leave the thinking to him and in the meantime to pursue her own placid life, to proceed with her exercises, her sewing, and her eating, and with her preparing of a new edition of *Adult Life Among the Smaller Mammals* (there had been a danger of a ban by the new Home Secretary), as though nothing of consequence had occurred. That, he was willing to admit, was in a

sense part of Woman's instinctive wisdom : but, a thing more definite, she had even written letters to her friends on the very night of the Revelation, in which she had made no mention of it at all ! Doubtless she complimented herself on her circumspection : however, he had been obliged to object, to warn her of the consequences ; because, if she wrote in this strain, his disciples would naturally question the news when he proclaimed it, asking, " But, Enfeloni, why did Effie say nothing about it at the time in her letters ? "

Yet what would he do without her? For the enraging side to this discretion was that she made such a perfect witness, carrying away always a more correct and detailed memory of any occurrence at which she had been present than did those others who were in her company. Take the Apocalypse of yesterday : Effie had received a quite different and, he was already beginning to think, a much more accurate impression of it than his own. Himself, for instance, it appeared, had, as she saw it, played his part in a stronger, a more heroic spirit than he had been aware of at the moment. And how often is the best evidence that of the onlooker, who has more opportunities of observing the events that are taking place round him than has the protagonist! . . . Yet who could tell? Probably his companions, who had been privileged to participate in this unparalleled miracle, would return to misrepresent his demeanour to his disciples. In no way comprehending the processes and stages of misery through which he had passed so lately, and which had undermined, as he knew now, his assurance and his gift of prophesy, they would, perhaps, incline to treat

it with disdain. . . . More especially, of course, would this be the case with the vested interests ; the bishop, whose occupation would be gone, and his like. They were troubled by no scruples ; would stoop to anything, stop at nothing. . . . Fortunately his reputation precluded them from any chance of success : doubts would not arise, for his disciples knew him so well. They would always take his word, accepting as the truth anything he told them. (And, indeed, apart from the somewhat romantic view which he took of his own birth and upbringing - one that had originated solely, he saw now, to help the cause - had they not every reason to do so ; were they not fully justified in their faith ?) But, more important, there was the irrefutable evidence of the tablets themselves ; witnesses who could never henceforth be silenced. And he laughed happily to himself again.

Nevertheless, there were other dangers, he realised, beside misrepresentation of fact. By the passive quality of his behaviour he had allowed the bishop to obtain the initiative ; who, however, could not, if he would, falsify the writing. Nor would he dare Attempt the destruction of the stones. No, the old man's efforts to slay the truth would be confined : he would have to fall back on persuasiveness, because the ecclesiastic stood in a certain awe of " the Boss," and Lord Pridian's respect for any divine manifestation was too fervent to allow it. ... T. L. found it hard to surmise in what manner the newspaper-peer would receive the meaning of the Commandments as a whole (they would be here very soon, he supposed, looking at his watch - indeed, they were later in arriving than one would have expected, even had some slight delay or accident

occurred). From something he had let drop in talk, it was obvious that he had read only a single clause : which one could it be ? And himself, too, wished that they had been more distinct, more easily decipherable, so that he could have digested them, by now in their entirety. He allowed his mind to play for a space with conjecturing the nature of the rest of the new Decalogue. . . . But how, precisely, did the wording run, of those that had been clear ? He strove to recollect it.

The Third Commandment had stood out: "*Thou shalt take the Name of the Lord Thy God in vain*" : and at a first glance his brain had artfully supplied the negative, on this occasion omitted, which had always hitherto been associated with this familiar exhortation, so that for one appalling moment, until his eye had corrected his mind, he had imagined that the New Commandments might not, after all, be new and in conformity to our times, but might merely consist in vacuous repetition. . . . Next, however, his eye had lighted upon the one above it, bearing much less resemblance to any of those revealed to his predecessor Moses on the same mount: "*Thou shalt not be repressed, thou shalt not make to thyself inhibition or complex ; neither thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates*" And then, "*Thou shalt bow down before Dark Gods and worship Them*" And, "*Remember that thou hast Red Blood*" On the second stone he had read : "*Honour thy Father, who embodies the principle of the Dominant Male, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee*" . . . This was all he had been able to unravel yesterday : nevertheless, brief and

few though they were, these Commandments constituted an almost exact summary of his own teaching. With the proclamation of these laws from on high, all his doubts were resolved for ever. Though unaware of it, he had been a prophet, despite his numerous weaknesses, his hesitations, his weary questioning. . . . Poor old Lloyd was proved right . . . and how often he had rated him for it !

It was curious to look back. He had ever refused in the past to admit the existence of an omnipotent being, who, through the medium of the Commandments which he had revealed to Moses on the Mount, had shown Himself to be so archaic, so out of touch with the men and women of our age, so feudal, revengeful and, in a way, feeble, for all His threats : a being, too, so vague in intention that His name could be bandied about in support of their various pet theories by sects and persons whose views, except in their essential repulsiveness, were as divergent as those of the Wesleyans, the Jews and the Catholics, bishops, scientists and socialists, the Kaiser and President Wilson, and further, the heads, past and present, of every nation in Christendom, while, all the time, the truth was solely that the Deity had been misapprehended and misinterpreted. He had now stepped forth from His cloud, a great modern God. . . . There was only one little detail, perhaps, which T. L. would have liked to have seen ordered in another fashion ; he could not refrain from wishing that so horrible and rotund a little property-octopus as Sir Levy could have been left out of it altogether. . . . After all, the Commandments were written in English, so why, just for the sake of tradition, drag in a Jew ? (And how pleased

the British-Israelites would be at the conjunction !)

Apart from this minor error of judgment, how complete and lovely the whole idea, and its execution, had been ; how beautiful was the very *sound* of the Commandments, not in the least archaic, really. As a writer, he reminded himself, he had all his life advocated precisely this return to the use of the second-person singular, with its mingled intimacy and directness of address : and though it might not be strictly accurate to state, as he pretended, that in the collier's cottage which his dreams and the consciousness of his failings had built for him, he had been brought up to use "Tha" and "Thee," it was at any rate the absolute verity that, as a child in the industrial north, he had heard these words constantly employed around him in shops and trains, in the street and among the crowds watching a football match. ... He was tired, so his mind homed all the more easily, and again he saw the dusty paths, paved with jade-green clinkers, between high straggling hedges of hawthorn, the rusty steel of the canals, with their rank tangles of yellow and blue flowers, and the grey pyramids of the slag-heaps : again he smelt the hot, damp smell of the cinders, uniting with the scent of stocks and carnations during the long summer twilight.... He did not know for certain, even, whether the old school still stood. If it did, and became a place of pilgrimage, the results of his deceit - and for the moment he admitted it to himself as such - might be very awkward, since all visitors must see plainly that this ugly house of solid bricks, with its stone bow-windows, plate-glassed, its grimy, speckled laurels, and asphalt spotted like the skin of a Dalmatian dog, bore no resemblance at all

to the dwelling of a miner. And his father, who now lived in Surbiton, would encourage, nay, positively urge people to go there, for he possessed not the slightest concern for the literary fame of his son, and hated both his outlook and his methods of expressing it. In particular, the old man had been furiously angry at having been portrayed as a hewer of coal, whereas he was, he declared, a man of culture and standing. (Oh ! that gentleman-complex of the English middle-classes!) T. L. had, indeed, only just contrived to persuade the editor of the *New Stagnation*, fortunately a friend of his, to suppress a letter which his father had written to that journal, enclosing a sort of Pre-Raphaelite family tree, stunted in height but most informative, together with a great amount of family-pride, bluster, and attempts to justify himself and his life. It would have caused a stir in literary circles had it been published.

With such a parent it was impossible to attempt a reconciliation. He had experienced efforts of the sort before. . . . Never again ! To begin with, Effie and the old gentleman fought with each other the whole time. But she would never let him visit his father by himself; and her exercises, practised regularly over a period of years, had remarkably widened and deepened her powers of obloquy, so that old Mr. Enfelson always hobbled out of the room, slamming the door after him, and sometimes, even, blubbering. And then, being, of course, very carnivorous, a great meat-eater, whenever he endeavoured to make up a quarrel, he would, so to speak, kill the fatted calf instead of plucking a specially grown, vitamins A and D lettuce-leaf, so that another, and more severe, outbreak of hostilities was ensured.

And, as a matter of fact, one could never find anything to eat there at all, was practically starving by the time one left. . . . Once, though, reversing his tactics, the old mischief-maker had essayed to break up the friendship by creeping up to T. L. and insinuating that he had found the remnants of some cold beef in Effie's bedroom. Too bad ! . . . And she asserted that her brother-in-law had placed it there himself. He had always hated her, and now, she added, he was trying to kill her as, no doubt, he had killed her dear sister. Certainly a gnawed bone had been discovered, but she maintained that it had been left there by Jock, old Mr. Enfelon's Aberdeen terrier ; a story with many singular aspects. But he was impossible, absolutely impossible.

Now his mind reverted from such distasteful reminiscences to the scenes of yesterday, the greatest event of his lifetime, and, more than that, of many thousand years. (The tablets ought to be here soon.) Yesterday, only yesterday : but how far removed was he from the miseries of it. Think how he had suffered in the morning, on the drive there ; think of his doubts ! But now the world *must* listen to him, because he was armed with authority. He need argue no more, neither seek to convince with soft words : that stage was over : he was in the right, and that was all he need say henceforth. . . . Yet, to look round, you would judge that nothing had happened.

It seemed just an ordinary Sunday morning, indescribably hot (but then, every day here, it was as though one came to the heat for the first time, unprepared for it, unaccustomed to it); too hot to attempt the notes which he had intended to draft in time for

the discussion. He must rely on his memory, instead : and perhaps after luncheon he would be able to obtain a little quiet: for he ought to write an account of the Revelation as soon as possible. . . . The noise ! No great city could emit more noise than this little oasis, muffled by deadening sand for many miles around. . . . The hymn, it was true, had ceased its bluff moaning - comparable to that of a bearded sea-captain, who at last, under the pangs of toothache, gives way to sobs - but episcopal booming had taken its place. It was the beginning of the sermon : " The eighteenth and nineteenth verses of the twelfth chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews :

" ' For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

" * And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words ; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.' "

It was obvious that the bishop was enchanted with these phrases of his text, from the unctuous manner in which he rolled his tongue round them. So pleased was he, indeed, with the latter part, that he could not apparently refrain from repeating it over again, sonorously scoring with his voice the negative : " ' Intreated that the word should *not* be spoken to them any more.' And why, dear brethren," he continued, " should St. Paul - Paul the Apostle, who was formerly called Saul - make use of these solemn words ? Assuredly he was no coward ; he who had given up his life to the Lord, and had possessed the courage to change his faith and surrender his wealth. Yet he writes : ' Intreated that the word should *not*

be spoken.' Now, why ? " . . . So that was his game : hedging again ! It was plain enough. . . . But T. L. meant to make sure that the mitred old hypocrite should for once yield up the truth, even if it had to be extracted from him with ferocity under the eyes of all men. He was resolved to leave him no refuge for his double-dealing, and his eyes rested on the further landscape, where, from the sand which billowed round its base, rose Mount Sinai, its naked austerity of outline seeming the one bold, significant fact in a sea of doubt and uncertainty.

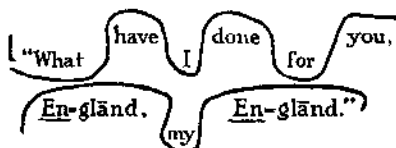
The booming died, smothered by other sounds. Now the professor came tumbling round the corner of the verandah, on his ancient matchstick legs, looking, in his cross way, happier than ever. To-day, quite a colour, too, glowed in his cheeks of withered parchment. (How had the Revelation affected him ? Too old, probably, to take it in.) " Good morning, Enfelon, good morning," his rusty voice creaked out. " Have you read this ? " he added, holding up a large volume. " Russington's latest: *Relativity within the Atom*. Sold seventy thousand already, Fm told. Of course, you can't always depend on him : but this is a capital little treatise : light, you know - only five hundred pages in the book - but written in really good English. Well drawn diagrams too." . . . Father Munnion, T. L. observed, had not come down yet. On Sunday morning, as a rule, he was to be seen here about this hour. . . . Poor man ! The events of yesterday must have fallen as a blow of overwhelming force on one of his life and convictions. But yet, if it was not too late in life for him to face a new conception, he could serve the new God as faithfully as the old. And T. L.

would not forget or overlook him ; was going to make a point of commending, and even promoting, those, however faulty their principles hitherto, whose previous careers had earned his approval. He had decided last night in this respect to be neither ungrateful nor ungenerous. . . . This train of thought continued for a little, and he turned the problem over in his mind, trying to adumbrate for himself in what manner such persons could most usefully be employed. But his reverie could not endure for long ; how was it possible to plan the future when there was so much noise ? . . . What was it now ? He listened.

Miss Tether, as she had forecasted in the letter she was writing yesterday evening, had in the end thought it wiser, although the bishop was preaching, to take Roderick out before the sermon. He was at present reciting his daily lesson to her, near by under the verandah : but, since she had at one time enjoyed lessons in elocution from a retired actress, and in consequence possessed the strongest views on how poems should be rendered, she declaimed, in effect, almost as many lines, and as often, as her charge.

"No, Roderick," she corrected him. " The first verse was quite good : but pray do not say, ' IngPnd, my IngPnd,' as if the '*Ing*' rhymed with 'sing' or ' ring,' and then swallow the rest of the word. If you wish to get the best out of the poem, it should be pronounced ^c En-gland, my En-gland ' : first of all ^c En * to rhyme with ^c when' or ^c ten,' followed - after a slight pause - by ^c gland,' a soft but lengthy sound, to rhyme with * wand' ; like this : ' En-gland, my En-gland* and remember to lift your voice up and down at alternate words, and to hold out your hands

clasped together in front of you after the second line....
Ofcourse you can do it - there's no such word as 'can't'
 in *our* language, I'm glad to say. Perhaps I'd better
 show you, like this :



Let there be plenty of lilt in it, and don't be afraid of letting yourself go. And end the verse on a specially high note. It produces a far finer effect. ... I can remember making several of the elder girls cry, when I recited it at a school concert at Miss Mindlesham's."

" Why did they cry, Miss Tether ? I thought you said, when I slapped Deirdre the day before yesterday, that one ought never to make girls cry ? "

" Don't ask so many questions, Roderick. Now you may resume your recitation at the commencement of the second verse. ... No ! No ! That is not right. . . . First of all, it is *not*

• *When shall he rejoice again.*

The poet spells the word in this instance a-g-e-n (that is what we call 'poetic licence') and the sound of the second syllable (be sensible, Roderick : of course I've told you what a syllable is ... no, not a silly bull, a syllable : you will quite muddle me, if you go on in that fashion) the sound of the second syllable is the same as I told you to make with 'En' in 'JEw-gland.' Interesting, I think, because it shows that my pronunciation of -En-gland is what the poet, Mr. Hinley,

entended (what a stupid slip !), I mean, Mr. Henley intended. And then, it is not

*Such a breed of mighty men
As come forward' from one to ten.*

How could it be ? The fine swing of the whole thing is quite spoilt. Besides, it means nothing. It should run:

Aas come forward^ waane to ten.

Where *did* you find the ' from ' ? "

This was the question Roddy had been waiting for. " Nurse told me to put it in, please, Miss Tether," he replied immediately, proceeding to indulge in an imitation of her talking, which was so life-like that it conjured up the mortal image of her enemy before the governess's angry eyes. " The ole gal's got it wrong agine, ' One to ten' means just nothink : but * *From* one to ten ' means a lot, just don't it ? Nowi-dise the hours is, I know, in mos' plices from twelve to three and, agine, from six to eleven ; but, in them disc, mos' probable they was from one to ten : and that's what'e meant, orlright, and little blime to 'im. And a much better, more contented set of men they was, I should si, before that ole Pussyfoot kime along."

" On this occasion, Roderick, I shall most certainly report the woman to your mother for interference. She has no right to do it: and I do not know what she means. . . . Now, try that verse ag-en : and put more heart into it. Let your voice swell out on the word ' *bugles*' like this :

Dowhn theyeahs onyahr bugles blohn . . ."

Here Miss Tether gave a start, for, sure enough, albeit from ever so far off and from many directions, was borne the faint but unmistakable sound of bugles ; although a little late, as if through faulty synchronisation. ... It must be of her own imagining, she thought at first. (But at a considerable distance out in the desert, the sand rose in little spurts and puffs and spirals under the hoofs of the Arab barbs, as the bugles blew, and, while they galloped, their riders took advantage of every tent of sand for cover, bending low over the saddles, so that they could not be detected.) When Roderick spoke the line, however, no appropriate music, however remote, materialised to help the force of the lines. So it must be just dramatic instinct - and training, of course - which enabled her to summon up the atmosphere with such reality that one seemed actually to hear and see the things of which the poet wrote (that was the best of elocution, when carefully studied and combined with a rare natural talent). Roderick, she was afraid, would never learn, to whatever extent she helped him, to call up these effects - it was reserved for the magic of great art.

T. L. had not noticed the musical accompaniment, which had thus so obligingly offered itself to Miss Tether's genius. He was thinking what a shame it was that Roddy, a nice, genuine sort of boy, should have to learn all this old-fashioned patriotic stuff by Henley - yes, a nice boy, but Deirdre was superior to her brother, resolute to enter the world unhampered by complex or inhibition. The dexterous manner in which she had objurgated the bishop would have reflected credit on the toughest north-country

game-keeper, brought face to face of a sudden with the most elusive and talented poacher in the district: yet she was barely two years old. She should go far. Soon, however, he supposed, had events pursued their wonted course, governesses would have been called in to stem her natural flow of language, and then to teach her these wretched compositions, so dear to all their hearts. But children of her sort and Roddy's should now have their reward. This kind of recitation must be banned, and, in its place, they should be encouraged to acquire and declaim one or two fine, outspoken pieces by Chaucer, a few selected prose-passages from Urquhart's *Rabelais*, a lot of Burns, (red-blood, there !) and some of his own poems ; such as that early free-verse work of which his disciples were already so fond, 'Ithyphallic ' . . . but nothing else, without a special authorisation. . . .

Hark to that booming again. A long sermon and, though no doubt he was not yet cognisant of it, his last, old facing-both-ways ! . . . The noise was really stupefying. *Thcjbelfyehs* were banging and buffeting in the bedrooms, and water gurgled in every pipe, the camels were no less querulous, and the voices of the directors were raised in altercation : Slate-face's children, too, were rattling and blowing on their instruments with all their previous abandon, over there, where, under the hot fingers of the sun, the tall and solitary eucalyptus exhaled a pharmaceutical fragrance. And now, an Arab love-song - he presumed it to be one - was wafted from the courtyard to outshrill and outshout for a little all competitive sounds. . . . At the same moment Mr. Simpson came round the corner and sank into a creaking wicker-chair by his side.

How ill he looked ; really ill ! From his pallor it was to be deduced that all night long he had been wrestling in prayer, until his two supplicating profiles were almost merged in one, while from his eye, both bright and searching, it could be inferred that on this occasion the electric hare had given him the slip, finally and for ever. It seemed that his apparatus of jolly, public-schoolboy humour lay shattered. He made efforts neither to cheer nor impress : and hardly possessed the strength even, except in bursts of exceptional eloquence, to indulge in his usual pronunciation. Shock had imparted to him, at last, a certain simplicity. Thus, instead of a fatuous opening remark, such as, " I am glad to see, sir, that you are making the best of our weather here," he merely said, in a broken, pleading way, " Good morning, Mr. Enfelon."

Uncongenial as T. L. had always found his company, to-day he was almost sorry for him. Of course he must have suffered terribly : the whole of that philosophy of tenderness and pity, which only yesterday morning he had tried to expound, his playfulness, his literary-competition #nd paper-game religion had been both shown up and blown to pieces in one instant. Mr. Simpson was, in fact, too unnerved to attempt conversation, but remained there in silence, listening to the symphony around him. (He, also, as among other sounds was carried to him from above the drumming and tinkling of triumph, wondered, as he thought of yesterday's Commandments, why, of all people, the Shereef, that elegant adept in murder, should be so happy, so boisterous ? ... All night, they said. But *what* had pleased him ; what could it have been ?) Meanwhile T. L. conceived a sentiment of actual pity

for him. He was not so bad, poor man : his failings, such as they were, in all probability arose from a stupid education and upbringing. It was not fair to blame him for them, therefore. And he decided to speak to the clergyman frankly : it was better to be frank.

" Well, Simpson," he opened, " I am afraid you took rather a knock yesterday. You'll soon grow accustomed to the new state of things, though. And let me tell you this for your comfort; we can find work for everyone genuinely willing to help us and humanity in the general reconstruction that will now ensue. But we must return to essentials and call things by their proper names."

" It *has* been a shock to me, Mr. Enfelon : you are quite right. You see, I'd arranged to begin my work, all based on the doctrines inculcated by the New Testament, in the Congo this very month : but what can I do now ? "

" To be outspoken, Simpson, that is, in any case, the last place in the world where the natives need teaching. Instinctively they hearken to the Red Blood and its wisdom. They have never lost their innate cultural rhythm, and have always heeded the injunctions of the Dark Gods. For your labours, on behalf of the new creed which will develop, you must select another, and more fitting, scene."

" I don't quite understand, Mr. Enfelon. But I'm afraid I'm very stupid this morning. Really, I don't feel at all fit for this luncheon party. It was very kind of the bishop to officiate for me : otherwise I don't know what I should have done. You see, I know now that I have been at fault all along, for I have not approached religion in the right manner."

Despite the folly of his previous opinions, it was nice and generous-minded - "jolly decent," to use one of his own phrases - of him to come forward in this manner and confess his errors. Enfelson only hoped that the others would be as sensible, willing to be guided by this admirable and straight-forward example. "I know, I know," he answered, "but you are still a young man, and there is plenty of time in front of you in which to mend your ways."

"But I don't feel that I can bow to this new - or, rather, old - creed, however obviously and however often its truth is demonstrated. I hate revenge and despise the spirit which prompts it. All my faith was founded on the New Testament. Yet, when I am present at the chief Revelation of the past three thousand years or so, what do I see but a repetition - in English, it is admitted - of the Ten Commandments ; negative things, every single one of them ? If this is the cruel truth, I prefer to ignore it and earn the eternal fire in which now we must once again place credence. How can I, an old public-school man, accept such out-woahn beliefs, and ones so contrary to all that I have been brought up to respect ? It would not be playing-the-game to face uneducated natives with such doctrines of perdition."

During the few moments which this speech had occupied, T. L.'s pity for the young clergyman had been intensified. ... So, surprise at the Revelation, and terror at the method in which it manifested itself to them, had turned his brain ! Nor was any good purpose to be served by trying to put him right, by seeking to convince him, using argument and exposition : for he was, the new prophet comprehended,

dealing with a victim of hallucinations, or, in plain terms, a lunatic. . . . Poor little man ! There was nothing to be done: but, nevertheless, he would attempt to measure the strength and precise nature of his delusions by putting a question to him.

" Did you see the writing distinctly, Simpson ? "

" Yes, I saw each familiar Commandment graven there. (I can't make out what Lord Pridian means, when he says that he ^c could only read one of them.) It was a tragic experience. . . . What can I say or do ? ... Have you, Mr. Enfelon, ever by any chance read Dunne's *Experiments in Time*, or that charming book, *An Adventure*, by the two old ladies who, some few years ago, encountered Queen Marie-Antoinette sketching in the gardens of the Petit Trianon ? Sometimes in the night I hoped that the Revelation was in reality an adventure of that kind ; a mechanical repetition of a previous event, into which we happened to stumble ; a phenomenon inexplicable at present, but plainly the result of some aberration in the Time-stream or in our adjustment to it. That is my only chance. Perhaps science will rescue me (it has done a lot for the Church lately). And great as was, I am sure, the honour of being one of those Assembled on the Mount yesterday, I would rather have it thus."

T. L. was by now so distressed for him, that he thought it better to change the conversation. " Never mind," he said, " the tablets should be here by now " (he looked at his watch). " They're very late. But when they do arrive, we can accommodate ourselves to their teaching at our leisure." ... The sound of voices reached them. The party was returning from church.

They advanced in twos and threes, headed by Lady Ramshackle, who at once walked up to Miss Tether, and said : " Perhaps we had better have our little talk now. It won't take long and it is wiser to get it over. Please send Roderick upstairs to nurse until we're ready for him."

Typical that, Miss Tether thought, of her delicate consideration : she would not even discuss a rise in salary in front of the child ! Her heart glowed. , . . But alas ! this morning found Lady Ramshackle, as a matter of fact, in none too good a humour. Sweet, ethereal and wispy as she was, she possessed, withal, a temper flexible and enduring as steel. Mount Sinai had been very exhausting ; and though she had woken up feeling gentle and Pre-Raphaelitic, Minus, after pulling back the curtains, had quickly altered that mood for her. Approaching the still drowsy figure of her mistress in her tidiest, most formal manner, she had opened the day with the announcement, " M'laidy, I should like to give a month's warning."

Lady Ramshackle shook the lingering sleep from her eyelids and accepted the challenge. (After all, she surely might 'have waited until later in the morning : it was not as if she had never given notice before ?) " What is it this time ? " she asked sweetly. " I can't think who you can have found to quarrel with here ? I thought we were safe in the desert ! (Indeed that is the chief reason why we came here.) Is it poor Miss Tether again ? "

" No, mai laidy. Me and Croucher, Mr. Lollygo's man, 'as decided to get married."

" Really ! I'm glad to hear it. Many people here thought, from your behaviour, that you were secretly

married already. ... Of course, Pm only saying what I heard. It has nothing to do with me."

Minus's lips started to tremble, and the hairs of her fringe, as though they were the serpent-locks of Medusa, a little to writhe. "Ai'm a respectable girl, mai laidy" she began in a tone of shrill menace "Ai'm a ..."

"A *what*, Minus?" Her mistress cut her short impressively, with an air of majestic but startled enquiry. "A *what* did you say? And please don't shout such things."

"A respectable girl, mai laidy," reiterated Minus less firmly, somewhat wiltingly.

"A *what*? . . . A *respectable* girl, you said? . . . I should just hope you were, Minus : or you would not have been in my service for long. . . . Now I don't wish to hear any more complaints : so please take the morning-paper in to Sir Rudyard, and tell him, when the time comes, to be sure not to miss Lord Leaning's death. . . . And during the morning I will consider how I can give you a character. . . . Don't interrupt. Of course you will want one."

What a nuisance she was ! Generally it was Miss Tether, but last time, Lady Ramshackle remembered, her mind sweeping back to a bird's-eye.view of these other occasions, it had been about the food in Cairo. She had found out, she said, that "by raights" she was "entaitled to fish every day," and, it being denied to her, had threatened to leave. But at the end of her month, she should go, whether finally she*wanted to or not.

Nor had this incident with Minus been the only annoying one. On opening the latest paper from England, she noticed that the All British Yellow Cross

Association for the Prevention of Suffering in Animals had lost an action, which, on her advice, they had initiated. - It was that shocking case ; a man who threw a heavy book at a poor little dog which was biting him in the leg. - The society's lawyer, prosecuting, had demanded a year's hard-labour as a minimum sentence: but the brute had got off scot free! And when this disgraceful miscarriage of justice had been announced, and some fervent supporters of the society had, in consequence, rushed at him as he was leaving the court, and had, very rightly, knocked all his teeth out, *they* had been arrested ! What, really, were things coming to ? Why, you would think that dog-lovers were in the same category, where the law was concerned, as anybody else ! And in England, too. It could not have occurred ten years ago !

Such were the happenings, such, more or less, the reflections which had contributed to her present mood. When, the previous evening, she had written that note to Miss Tether, it was true that she had merely intended to tell her that she must make arrangements for taking Roderick back to England (he had, his mother thought, been long enough abroad). . . . But she was now disposed to blame Miss Tether and Minus equally, for the disturbances of the morning.. .. Oh, these feuds ! She was sick of them and would henceforth take the initiative into her own hands. If they wanted trouble, they should have it, in rich measure. . . . Besides, as she pondered on what she would like to say, she became more and more convinced of its truth, and now became determined actually to say it. It was with a sense almost of enjoyment, therefore, that she began to speak to the woman. . .

But she must not let her see that she was put out: no, firmness and sweetness, welded in curious, honeyed combination, must be her weapon.

"Miss Tether," she began, her severity inlaid with large, carefully polished chunks of charm, "I have something to say to you : and we had better confine the matter to as few words as possible : so you need not answer me. Please do not think that what lies before me is an easy, far less a pleasant, task : it is much more painful for me than for you." (Teach her to be a governess, that would !) "I have been speaking with Sir Rudyard, and he agrees with me that it is time for the boy to have a tutor. That, you must understand, is the reason we shall give for parting with you ; because we do not wish, by revealing the truth, to make it impossible for you to obtain another situation : and the affair in Venice last year, in conjunction with this one - if it leaks out - would be enough to spoil any chances you may still have. Perhaps we ought to be more scrupulous : but there it is, we do not feel that we want to bar your way. At the same time, in fairness to both of us, I must *tell you* the truth. I hope I am not narrow-minded, but, for weeks'past, I have been much displeased at the reports that have reached me of your extraordinary conduct in Cairo. There may have been some mistake ... I hope so. (No : it was not Minus : please leave her out of it altogether, though I may add that, as a result of the constant friction between you two, I have been forced this morning to give her notice.) I hope so, I am sure : but that we need not discuss. Except for the events of yesterday, we should most probably never have brought it home to you : but they have put a different

complexion on the affair. And it *must* have been premeditated : since for days past you had been agitating to take the child to the picnic, because he would 'learn such a lot.' We were always against it from the start: and I remember my husband saying to me that it would only put ideas into the boy's head. But, even then, we were certainly never prepared for what actually took place " (here Lady Ramshackle altered her tone of saddened remonstrance, and charged into the fray with banners flying), " and after that *disgraceful* scene - on the *mountain-top* too - both of us, as his parents, feel we cannot entrust our little Roddy to you any longer. I have *never*, in all my life, been called upon to witness anything that approached it : I could not have believed it possible. (Don't interrupt, please.) You can leave as soon as you wish, and we will pay, of course, your month's salary in full. . . . Where a child's welfare is at stake, money is as nothing. (Both Sir Rudyard and I feel that, very strongly.) And you need not say good-bye to the boy, or have any explanations with him : we will *explain*, after you have left.... Now I will say no more, or I might say something I should be sorry for later.... Call the boy down ; for nurse always has a lot to do."

CHAPTER III

IN STONE FOR EVER

MICHAEL looked happier to-day. His professional ambitions held merely a secondary interest for him. This morning Helen had whispered, " Darling, I'll take it on ; because, since yesterday, we both know that I shan't be breaking a Commandment, even if sometimes I do forget that we're married : but you must keep it in mind, and not behave jealously or angrily : for things are different." Michael had gathered from her tone that the last part of her remark held some esoteric significance, and although, only a few days ago, he would never have suspected her of any such thing, grasped also that it was inspired by religious conviction, however unconjecturable in form or origin. He remembered, too, that he had often heard people declare, in commenting on her life, that her nature had always, in spite of every manifestation, possessed a deeply religious side to it. ...

As for himself, yesterday had puzzled him. He did not understand it at all, and was prepared to abandon the debating of its meaning to those who did. Helen had asked him last night, " What did you make of them, Michael ? " and he had answered truthfully enough, " They were all Greek to me, my adorable." One he had seen, it was true, which had seemed to stand out boldly in clear cut letters : " *Thou shalt bear*

false witness against thy neighbour" But, when he had added this fact, she had told him that, though he was a journalist, he must not attempt to throw ridicule on sacred subjects. So he had said no more, had not insisted on his good faith. Except from a professional point of view, he had tried to banish the whole thing from his mind. He did not understand it, nor what Helen had sought to convey, when she had consented to marry him. In love, it was better to exist for the day, and to leave the examination of motives and principles, and the personal manner in which they were accommodated, for the judgment of a cooler, inevitably cooler, dawn. They concerned him no more than - since she had spoken - did his future : for the generation to which he belonged is precisely the one that most discounts the insensate materialism of which, by its elders, it is so frequently accused. Brought up from childhood to support its bankrupt and usually greedy parents, heedless of the miseries of the morrow as of the glories of the past, it lurches insecurely from one day to another : money it desires sometimes for a banner, a token of success, as once upon a time was a title bestowed, but, if no longer thus impelled by a sense of inferiority, money becomes valueless to it, except in small quantities and with no great machinery of living dependent upon it. . . . Not for a moment, then, did he wonder how and where they should live, any more than he endeavoured to comprehend how she felt or what she meant. No ; they had spent a pleasant morning in playing the gramophone, and had forgotten the flight of time. . . . But, as soon as they had realised they were late, Helen had remembered that she must make up her face, so that they were yet

later, and subsequently, on the way out, Michael's training had asserted itself, and he in his turn had further delayed, to jackal round the hall in search of food, new visitors. He craned over a marble slab to consider the floor-charts, and, as on every other occasion of his prying, Green-face, Slate-face, and Yellow-face rose goggling at him from their glass tank. Prodigious, the manner in which they were always there, when he did not want them to be, though at any other time they were lounging about outside ! He ignored them. . . . There were no fresh visitors . . . but one name was missing, he was certain. . . . Whose was it ? He consulted his note-book. . . . Madame Galactic. . . . So she had left, had she ?

Nevertheless, when he joined the group on the verandah, he said nothing about her disappearance to Lord Pridian, since he noticed the full strength of their party to be further depleted by two. Father Munnion had sent down word to " the Boss " that he was still engaged on official work, and his duty therefore prevented him from accepting the invitation, but that he knew his host would understand and excuse his decision, even though, so much had he hoped to be present, he had delayed it until this late hour ; and the Shereef, from whom it was apparently impossible - albeit the letter had been delivered to him last night - to obtain any answer, however many servants knocked at his doors, had not as yet made an appearance. (It was odd.) He could not be asleep, for the music had increased in volume. Fewer tambourines perhaps : but from here the drums reached them quite plainly. Indeed, it sounded at times - a phenomenon due, doubtless, as the bishop suggested, to some mysterious

illusion born of the heat - as though a distant and muffled rolling and percussion could be distinguished - felt, perhaps, rather than heard - all round them.

The rest of the party, however, was gathered there, sitting round a long, as Ninette termed it, refractory table. (" I do just love these refractory tables. They were turned out of the old monasteries, weren't they ? ")

Cocktails had already been offered : but some sort of group-instinct had led everyone to refuse them and to choose sherry in their place, as more in keeping with the occasion. Michael scanned their faces : most of them, he thought, looked solemn ; as though they were school-children summoned before the headmaster. Only Ninette was smiling, and had brought, he noticed, her banjo with her again. Inevitable. . . . He jotted down the fact in his note-book, concealed on his knee under the table so that no one could suspect it. " To her numerous friends and countless admirers, Ninette de Nina's banjo is as familiar and popular as the sound of her voice. * Syren ' they call her out in Hollywood. . . ." Very few people were talking, though he heard Clifford say to Mr. Simpson, " So we *were* right about Sunday games, padre."

The young clergyman looked nonplussed and answered, " What do you mean, Mr. Hearnshaw ? "

And the golfing champion had replied, " Well, what about the alteration to the fourth hole - Commandment, I mean ? You know . . . how does it go now ? ' *In it thou shalt play golf, thou and thy* ' - whatever it is - '*for six days* . . .' and so on. You know, padre." . . . Michael could not follow it at all, and Mr. Simpson had seemed more bewildered than ever.

At last Lord Pridian stood up to make an announcement. (It was an opportunity for a speech, and he liked speaking.) Obviously, he pointed out, some delay had occurred in the transportation of the stones. Probably the lorries had encountered some slight mishap, broken down somewhere. But they would arrive soon, or tidings of them, for a secretary was waiting at the telephone for news, and another was posted along the road. Yet, as there was still no sign of the tablets, and because there was so much to settle, he thought it advisable to wait no longer before beginning the discussion. They could verify the few things that needed verification at that later stage when the graven stones stood before them. Himself did not wish to say much in this wonderful, very historic hour. They must, each of them in their own hearts, have realised by this time how much they had been honoured by - Destiny, should he say ? - in allowing them to be recipients of Divine Revelation. Their names, the names of both men and women, would go down to history, for evermore emblazoned on the oriflamme of a nation's - nay of an empire's (here, in throwing out his palms toward the audience in proud gesture, he knocked over the bishop's glass of sherry and was compelled as the result of this incident to stop and apologise) - glory. For, though foreigners had been present (and were present, of course, to-day) and, further, were made heartily welcome, with typical Anglo-Saxon warmth and generosity, yet he thought he could say that, on the whole, it had been an overwhelmingly British, an all-British, performance. Could faint-hearts doubt that their names would be for ever memorable and remembered like those of the Twelve

Apostles, of Raleigh, Drake, Frobisher, Nelson, Winston Churchill, Wellington, Kitchener, Rhodes, or like the names - what were their names, by the way : for the moment they eluded him ? - of the glorious Jameson Raiders ? «(What an oddly assorted list of heroes it was, as it stood, thought T. L.) Their names, all of their names, the names of men and women too, would be henceforth honoured until world's end ; and, he might add, after. . . . Names of men and women, he had said. And here they reached a point where he might perhaps be permitted to pause, and call the attention of the ladies present to a fact, for them all-important : that, so far as his knowledge of biblical history extended, they were the first members of their sex to have been treated in this way. They had - and it must be very gratifying to them - at last been called by divine authority itself to a full equality and co-partnership with man. (And, as an old but, he hoped, not unenlightened opponent of - as it had been called - the Flapper Vote, he would like to assure the ladies present that, in consequence of this manifestation of the divine opinion, he now felt compelled to modify his own views.) But what a responsibility, for both sexes, was theirs to-day ! Yes, honour was theirs, but what a responsibility ! Honour was founded on duty ; and a great duty, as a great honour, was theirs to-day : careers of endless labour, as of endless opportunity, wide and boundless as the spaces of that great wind and wave - oh, yes, wave - swept Empire which they served with their varying degrees of efficiency and talent, lay before them in the future. Already the world lay waiting at their feet for their decisions. Soon in all the great world-capitals the news would be

ringing out - originally, it was true, announced by the *Daily Spy* ; again - he might say so without vanity - first in the field. Indeed, he ventured to make this statement in no spirit of boasting or bragging, but as a tribute to all those, whether great or humble - the editor in his office, the linotype man in the composing rooms, the paper-boy in the streets - who had helped him in the romantic triumph of the great modern newspaper they had built up together ; that great organ of sound British opinion. But now he would detain them no longer. Few of those present had been able, or had been given the time, to read the Commandments in full, so he would now call upon the bishop to tell them what he had read. They were all anxious, he knew, to hear their episcopal friend, and to receive the momentous message which he would assuredly address to them in this hour of unsurpassed importance.

It was plain to the bishop that Lord Pridian was keeping himself in check, holding himself back for a more fervent and flowery oration later on. And for once the bishop almost regretted this restraint. He did not at all wish to speak next or to formulate anything at all. . . . Most injudicious at this juncture. . . . In result, he spoke blandly, but not with so blithe and sun-shot a solemnity as was his wont. He declared that, after due consideration, taking every point of view, first separately, and then one with another, he had been driven - it might be a trifle reluctantly - to the conclusion that it would be much wiser not to speak ; in fact to leave matters where they were, until the tablets arrived and all could see for themselves. What~was it the poet said ? . . . " *Littera scripta manet.*"

Those old fellows - though, in an age of free-verse, people might make mock of them - contained a deal of wisdom (Yes - No ?).... "*Littera scripta manet*" . . . Let them, let all his friends, ponder that beautiful and, it seemed to him, profound phrase. . . . He, too, had been granted but little opportunity of reading, of studying, of digesting the tremendous words which they had seen written yesterday. A miracle like this, which occurred only once in three thousand years, deserved to have more, surely, than three minutes devoted to it ? (Yes, he thought so.) He, for example, had not, in the very short time that had been at his disposal, been able to grasp the Commandments, as it were, "*in toto*" Time had been rapid in his flight ("*tempus fugit*" as the old chap said), and his eyes were not now so good as formerly. He was not as young as he was. Ha-ha ! (T. L. wondered why old men always dissolved in laughter when they said this : and, as for that, why they always said it ? Was it, in each case, because they could not themselves but believe that they were the one exception to the rules of mortality ?) Moreover, it, was a difficult, a very difficult, hand to read.

But Lord Pridian insisted. There was much to be achieved to-day. And, because the bishop saw that his mind was made up, and his chin set, and that therefore - unless willing to risk an explosion before this large audience - it would not do to contradict him in the manner of last night, he gave way with as much of a pretence to good grace as he could achieve at the instant. It was a nuisance, almost an imposition, having to speak in this heat, which seemed to be ever increasing : and after he had already delivered 5* long

sermon. . . . However, he stood up weightily, his black figure showing itself as a ponderous nineteenth-century monument against the few feathery palm-trees that flickered so lightly out of the noonday glare behind him. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began* in rotund, complacent tones, "since you press me, I will tell you what I saw, though I am confident that most of you saw it - and more - for yourselves." It was clear, from what he said, that any doubts he had entertained last night - if, indeed, they had, for a moment, been genuine - as to the manner in which the Commandments had appeared to different individuals, were completely forgotten in daylight. "But, first," he went on, "I should like to point out, with all due deference to those friends who are not, perhaps, altogether of our faith - I do not blame them for it: don't think that, please : *humanum est errare* ' - how particularly the Commandment which I was fortunate enough to be able to decipher appears, to my mind - and therefore, my friends, without doubt to the minds of many others, for I make no pretence to exceptional imagination ; none, I assure you - to establish the Church of England as the selected instrument of Redemption.* I had only time to reap the wisdom of the First Commandment: but how modern, how concise, and, in the best sense, serviceable it is : how suited to our everyday needs, how truly couched in good, sound, everyday English. Think, too, on the simplicity of its conception : ' *Safety First!* ' "

The bishop was plainly unprepared for the hurricane which, all unwittingly, he had precipitated by this enunciation of what he had read. As for T. L., he was spellbound by the audacity of the old humbug. How

did he dare to invent such a perversion of the truth, such a monstrous lie, when he must know quite well that in a few minutes, at the most, the tablets themselves would be there to confound him ? But, thus confident of ultimate triumph after so brief a lapse of time, he did not at once join in the uproar which ensued. Everyone, it seemed, was shouting at once ; except Effie, who, he noticed, was contentedly embroidering a rose in purple silk upon a classical garment cut out of brown holland, and poor Dr. Acquarius, who was holding his ears.

Above and under the general din of anger and consternation, the voice of Lord Pridian rose and fell. " You are mistaken, Cyprian," he sang. " I saw the First Commandment. Surely you have not forgotten ? It was ' *Buy British?* You must have mixed it up with a later one : or perhaps you missed it altogether. (You complained of the difficulty of the script.) Certainly it does not seem, as you've got it, to go with either of the two I read. The other one is in my notebook. Where is it now ? Here. . . . It runs : ' *Thou shall not buy foreign goods: neither meat, neither wheat, neither butter, neither wool, neither wood, neither automobiles, nor anything that thou needeth : for the Lord made the British Empire and all that therein is ; wherefore hath He blessed the British Empire and hallowed it?* " "

The voices soared up to a crescendo : but still " the Boss " sounded, both high and low, above them. " I think, Cyprian, you had better withdraw your statement until the tablets arrive, and it can either be dismissed or confirmed." . . .

T. L. felt sorry for Lord Pridian. His case was different from that of the bishop. He looked ^{sa^}qfhUe

distraught: so the author determined not to intervene at present, but to wait until the tablets could speak for themselves. When, however, he saw that the bishop was going once more to open his mouth, he altered his mind and stood up. "Ladies & gentlemen," he roared as loudly as his frail physique would permit, "I do not wish to tell you much at this stage. Soon you will know the truth. But I must register a formal protest against the particularly poisonous distortion of it with which the Bishop of Newborough has seen fit to furnish us."

"The Boss," in the delusion that T. L. was supporting him, cried out, "Mr. Enfelon, you are right. We will serve the flag together : but let us restrain our emotion until we are again privileged to read the Commandments." . . . And T. L., in return, was pleased with Lord Pridian for this answer : a decent man, he thought, in spite of his faults and of very grave errors in the past. . . . He would remember it to his credit in the days to come.

Tuey, also, was on his feet, grating away until he had obtained a hearing. "So you are trying to filch the bread of the workers from them again ?" he bawled. "I read the Commandments, too : not all of them : but enough to know the truth, and to prevent you from conspiring together to hide it. I'll tell you to your faces, so that you are forced to blush for your own lies, what I read : ^c *Thou shalt have no God,* and '*Thou shalt not honour thy father or thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*'

"*Giveth Thee*" he repeated, his tongue rejoicing in the congenial dental sounds ; "and you've stolen it." He seemed to grow paler and thinner in proportion

to his mounting excitement, as though it exposed him to some almost visible process of further desiccation ; while, on the other hand, the face and ovate crown of Sir Levy, obliged, though still weak from yesterday's exertions, to listen to the antipathetic opinions of his son, continued under the strain to swell and ruddle richly, after the fashion of an octopus forced, in its crafty search for food, to adapt its colour to new surroundings. " And what do you make of this ? " Tuey demanded anew, his dry voice gaining strength as it sawed painfully across the air : *" Thou shall covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt covet thy neighbour's wife, and his servant, and his maid, and his ox, and his ass, and everything that is his ! "*

" How will you explain *that* away ? "

It was interesting to note how, in Tuey, the innate desire of the Jew for religion and authority had in this matter combined with the equally racial but opposing instinct to question and reject. All the latent religious feeling in this arid man was now inspiring his aridity, bestowing an arrogant force upon his disavowal of religion. That he was under the impression that he was divinely authorised to repudiate divinity, was symptomatic. Even were there no God to choose a people, yet was the people chosen to deny his existence. And this mystic awareness of infallible backing imparted to him an altogether unexpected and spluttering force. So yisulting was he, so haughty and domineering in his manner, that all his companions became irate, shouted back at him. It may be too, that the heat, which was mounting to a climax, so that the garden behind them seemed to He under an almost palpable glaze, rendered everyone more willing to take ~~on~~ ~~face~~.

Even Miss Tether could be heard protesting ; and the memory of the feuds of a few moments ago seemed obliterated. " Sit down at once, Mr. Lollygo, and don't presume to bellow at us in that offensive way," called Lord Pridian, interpreting the general feeling. " Cyprian," he appealed, " say something to him."

The bishop, happy to be no longer the cause of offence, and determined to place the responsibility on other shoulders, gladly interfered on behalf of his patron. " Dear sir, may I ask you," he boomed above the striving and warring cries, " to sit down, and, in biblical language, hold your peace until the tablets are here ? . . . *Hiatus valde deflendus*. But there is time, plenty of time for everything . . . and then, I am sure, you will be willing to admit that you have been mistaken, or, shall we say, misled ? And now let us invite your dear father to describe what he saw."

" Thaw nothin m'thelf," blurted out Sir Levy ; and then added, more slowly, his rich voice taking on an exceptional gravity, while he made a very real effort to overcome the idiosyncrasies of his diction, " but if what many of you thay ith true, may be money in it. Might ship ⁵em to America : but let me tell you, my friendth, you'll need organithathion."

He stopped, and the bishop again took possession of the unseen chair, before anyone else could seize it. " Then let us, until we have the Blessed Stones with us, ask for a *scientific* description, and, in so far as it can be explained, explanation of yesterday's strange events. I shall request Professor Crotchster - a very eminent man, for whom we must all, whatever our personal views and feelings, make it our duty to obtain a 'iopectful hearing - to tell us (without of course in

any way committing himself to any one line of thought) what he thinks." This was, indeed, a brilliant stroke of episcopal policy ; because not only was the whole matter thus shelved for the moment, but, since the bishop was compelled, in order to make the professor hear at all, to roar with the full strength of his well-developed lungs, it enabled him after this fashion slowly to shout the others down to a silence, yet with perfect politeness, without their being able in any way to take umbrage or to attack him about it. " Professor," he thundered accordingly, pausing lengthily between each word, partly to make it clearer and partly to gather strength for the next effort, " It - is ; I - have - ascertained ; the - wish - of - all - present - to - be - given - an - expression - of - the - scientific - view. (Here he stopped, actually out of breath, but pulled himself together again for a final attempt.) " What - do - you - make - of - the - stones ? "

" Don't shout at me, man : I can't hear you, if you yell at me like that," snapped the professor in return.

The bishop was a little dashed. It was disheartening. But it was only right to persevere. He tried again, before any one could have time to start a fresh quarrel. He concentrated, a little more softly, on the last sentence." What ? ... do ... you . . . make . . . of . . . the stones ? " he repeated.

This time the professor grasped his meaning. " Very friable antf flaky," he croaked. " Unduly so." But nothing more would he say, for he alleged that no words reached him, despite the numerous and diverse methods, ranging from shouting down to baby-talk, which, being usually regarded as first-aid for foreigners or the deaf, were now adroitly practised on him. The

bishop was annoyed, since he had always cherished a very special tenderness for science, and had often publicly professed his belief in it as a cure for human ills. After all, for what purpose did it exist, but for the rational elucidation of mysteries ? It was there, so to speak, as a last but never-failing resort; a permanent way-out, when all other methods had been tried in vain. And besides, a little professional talk, full of names which, though they carried a vaguely business-like air with them, were sufficiently long and incomprehensible, would swiftly have calmed the wagging of restless, riotous tongues. . . . Lord Pridian's eye, moreover, was on him again. What could he do ; what could he think of now ? After the scientist, the soldier. He would appeal to Sir Rudyard to address them : that was it. (All the same, he wished the tablets would come ; though heaven alone knew, he reflected, what would happen then. . . . Too bad of Horace to mismanage affairs in this way !) " We must have patience, friends," he boomed out again, " until the tablets arrive : and, since they are transported hither under the direction and supervision of one whose genius for efficiency and organisation" (here he allowed a balefully benevolent eye to rest for an instant on " the Boss ") " is celebrated - justly, I am sure - we need not expect to have to wait for more than a few minutes longer. . . . But, even so, let us make the most of the short time before us. The professor, having delivered so valuable, if brief, a scientific summary, we now, all of us, I am certain, would appreciate the views of the distinguished - indeed, I may say famous - soldier, who so fortunately happens to be in us in our little desert community to-day. . . .

Sir Rudyard, will you favour us with an account of what you saw ? "

" Saw same Ten Commandments," the great general responded, " as Pridian here told me other night. One alteration, Jiough, brings 'em a bit up-to-date. Sixth read : ^e *Thou shalt do no murder ; except when dressed in uniform, issued under the War Office Regulations.*⁹ Makes things easier, doncherno ! "

Helen, darting a swift look of surprise at him between her long down-turned lashes, at once objected. " Sir Rudyard ; I saw the old Commandments too. But didn't you notice, there were only nine of them ? " Birdie was also attacking the reliability of her husband's memory, though in an undertone. " You've made a mistake, Rud," she urged, " and you ought to correct it immediately. The Sixth Commandment was, as you say, rewritten : but it went quite differently - not at all as you saw it. Aimed, I should think, against those horrible, torturing old vivisectionists ; scientists, as they call themselves (and she directed a pebbly look of hatred toward the beaming professor ; a look which glanced off him with no effect). It did not mention murder this time at all. It simply ran : ' *Thou shalt not kill the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, or the fishes of the sea, neither shalt thou cause them suffering, except for eating or for sport: for the Lord blessed sport and hallowed it:* ' "

" All right, Birdie old gal, we'll talk 'bout it later," Sir Rudyard answered calmly. He did not want to interfere, or say any more, though to him war and sport were all one ; save only that war was the higher manifestation, the purest form, of sport.

Albeit the discourses of these two distinguished

persons, scientist and soldier, had proved, if not actually unsatisfactory, at any rate too sparse in their information ; yet to a limited extent the bishop had gained his object. Himself was in no further way implicated, and the tumult on the verandah had died down. It could be seen, though, that tact was still required, and that a single unfortunate remark might cause this outward calm to be destroyed in another explosion of rage and contumely. . . . Notwithstanding, for the moment at least, people seemed less anxious to quarrel, more willing to listen, and, confident in the infallibility of their own eyes and understanding, to await in comparative peace the triumphant vindication of their views, and of the statements they had made, which the advent of the tablets would assuredly afford them. Some were amicably talking together; a great change.

" Did you read the New Commandments, Mrs. Hagworthy ? " T. L. was enquiring, quietly but offensively.

" I didn't worry my eyes by trying to, Mr. Enfelon," she retorted. " I came straight home and read the old ones over again. One can't do better than that."

Dr. Acquarius was conversing with " the Boss " and Lady Helen. He could not claim to have read the Commandments, he said, and he would abide by the decision, when the time came, of those who had been best able to read them : but the point about them which made him most marvel and give thanks, was the miraculous fashion of their appearance. Had any members of the party, he wondered, experienced yesterday a peculiar tingling sensation in their hands and the calves of their legs ? According to his own

interpretation of events, he would have expected, as their precursor, some such physical phenomenon : and he would have liked to collect data about it. Then, again, the script was to his eye curiously antique in style : from this he would be inclined to deduce. . . .

But before he could adumbrate his theory, Eric Fuller-Flitmouse had interrupted him. He did not pretend, he lowed, in his voice which was, as it were, that of former happy cattle munching flowers and green herbs where stand now the squares of Bloomsbury, to have *read* any writing. Its message, as a matter of fact, did not interest him. But what did seem to him of transcendent importance had hitherto escaped mention ; he alluded to the beauty of the calligraphy. Its exquisite quality had affected him so much, that he had been blinded to its content, and was still oblivious to any meaning it offered for the world - if it did offer one. But, indeed, nothing it said could be so important as the beauty of its saying. It must be regarded as a work of art, and nothing more (what more could there be ?) : a design based on script. Just consider, for example, the manner in which the writing was placed on the stones, its spacing, its disposal over them ; a supreme work of art. " We *must* have them for the Museum," he continued. " I cabled to my chief last night to that effect : but I've had no reply yet. You know what he's like. Alas, the old man only cares for ivories. But, whatever happens, they must be acquired for the nation. And I don't think we can pass the time better than in discussing how this could be arranged."

Eric possessed, in an unusual degree, the capacity to exacerbate, without intending it, his fellows. I* was

partly the cultured, consciously cultured, mal-accentuation of his syllables, and partly the sterile point of view it so completely translated, which was responsible for this unfortunate gift. Consequently, this suggestion of his irritated, in their present nervous condition, nearly everybody in the room. Alas, he now aggravated his fault by adding, to the world in general : " I make no claim to have mastered the sense of the writing, so perhaps you will allow me to indicate something rather amusing." (He produced " rather " as if he were a roaring lion, and then suddenly swallowed the final syllables of " amusing,"⁵ as if, all at once, turned mouse.) " Those of you who were able to read the Commandments - for that is what you say they are, I think ? - seem in every case to have read *different* ones, ha-ha ! I wish my brother Aubrey were here. It would interest him very much. He would tell you, I believe, that the meaning you extracted from the designs on the stones was either, as in dreams, the meaning which your sub-conscious mind put into them, the fulfilment of a wish ; or else a clear and most remarkable instance of mass-hypnotism." . . . Now, herein resided his offence ; this was the first time it had occurred to any member of this little group that all might be genuine in their claims, and yet all in error ; that there might be no deliberate lying, no active wish to smother the truth ! The result was a spontaneous but concentrated attack upon Eric : for though people had succeeded for a whole quarter of an hour in keeping their tempers, it had been due to an iron restraint. Now it snapped, and even those who were generally as mild or controlled as Miss Tether or Dr. Acquarius, Porz, i^ollygo or Clifford Hearnshaw, did not hesitate

to charge, in the very forefront of the shock troops.

They were sick to death of the very name of Aubrey, everyone yelled. As he hadn't been there, couldn't he be left out of it? Other people possessed brothers, didn't they and were not always talking about them in that ridiculous way? Nobody had asked him, either for his opinion, or for that of his idiotic, still more idiotic, brother: so why introduce them? His brother had been absent in any case, and, after all, most of those present were twice as old as he was, and older than the two of them rolled into a singularly unpleasant and obtuse one. And then, "Art, this," and "Art, that," and "Art the other": what was needed was to be practical, not artistic . . . absolutely sick of it.

Eric quailed before this storm, for the results of his witty conversation, though nearly always the same, yet were always unexpected by him. But, as if any quarrelling was too great an effort in this heat, the voices soon faded and broke off. It was not so much that the disputants were quieted, as that their energy had been dissipated. The identical semblance, however, of a lull was produced. It was time, they felt, that the tablets were brought: and the bishop, in a spasm of irritability, came very near to informing "the Boss" of the extent to which he condemned his organisation as faulty. . . . Better not, and he just succeeded in mastering himself.

They noticed, after the noise of their cries and shouting had thus abated, that, though there was still no sign of the Shereef, the drums and tambourines continued to rattle and rollick in wild unison from his apartments. (Would he come? He could not, they supposed, throw much light on anything - only an

examination of the tablets could do that - but it was strange, this absence of his.) " They *must* be *enjoying* themselves up there," Lady Ramshackle observed to Mrs. Hagworthy. " What wonderful spirits Orientals have, in spite of Western talk of their being ' impassive ' and ' inscrutable.' Just listen to the rhythm, such lilt and gaiety ! " ... and yet, she wondered aloud, wasn't it veneer, just veneer, again ? . . . Further to a few of those gathered on the verandah, it was as if through this music, and through the droning heat, sequined with the chattering, chalk-white lights of a desert noon, there just penetrated to them, though muffled by the sand, a more dispersed and general throbbing. (Was it a Moslem festival to-day, perhaps : that might account for it?) ... How hot it was : every day grew hotter.

T. L. and Aunt Effie were silent. His predominant emotion had changed once more from anger to sorrow : and both of them were anxious to help their companions face the truth when the clock struck for them to do so. Apart from the bishop, who was in an evil, hypocritical category of his own, what need was there for any public humiliation ? But their softness was not reflected in the common mood. Most people, though outwardly at peace, raged within : and, as the strength of their voices was recruited by a period of rest, they became, albeit they remained listless for the moment, in a condition in which any spark would fire them. . . . Alas, it was now while they were in this state, that the door opened, and a harassed, fatigued, unwashed, and unshaven secretary stumbled into the light. He addressed Lord Pridian. " There's been a **mistakv**, I am sorry to report, sir. We have searched

the mountain-top all night, every inch of it, but there is no trace of any graven tablets. We've looked everywhere, high and low, and all we could find to account for their disappearance was some powder, as if a stone had been pounded to bits."

The effect of this statement was immediate and immense, as though a person unseen had pulled a string, and had thereby set in motion a quantity of machinery, which had been previously laid ready. Shouting began again, louder and more piercing : denunciations were hurled across the table, and there were appeals, even, to physical force. Only the professor remained sitting where he was, laughing to himself gently. You might have assumed that the announcement, together with its consequences, were affording him amusement : but you would have been wrong. He had not heard a word of it, and was merely living over again, in his imagination, some flinty triumph of long ago, when he had utterly put to rout, before the assembled fellows, a rival palaeontologist. ... It had been a great day: and at that time applause had been sweet, ringing in his ears. But now he was cut-off, an old man on an island of eternal silence : and, in just the same manner in which nothing reached him, as he sat there, of the commotion and turbulence surging around him, so, reversely, those engaged in it were prevented by their activity from becoming aware of any change in their surroundings ; for their senses were focused entirely within this very instant of time, and on the doings within their own circle, and in consequence they perceived neither the increase in the sultry heat, nor the sudden toning down of the shuddering, white lights outside the verandah,

nor the nearing sounds of stifled percussion, which seemed, as it were, to advance from all quarters, centring on this little group, nor the concurrent rhythm of galloping hoofs thudding through the softness, nor the puffs of sand which hung like ghosts behind it; nor even did they suffer that curious apprehension which informs men of their being spied upon, the gradual boring of invisible dark eyes into the body. This brown, this darkest brown, gaze, this cautious peering, between the slats of the fig- and palm-leaves, between the fronds and fringes of the tree-ferns, an occasional rustle of the large leaves, the stealthy tread of naked feet, creeping ever closer, passed altogether unheeded, so concentrated were they on - as they deemed them - their own affairs.

And, indeed, their brawling had grown worse in the last few minutes. The crusading spirit had descended upon most of them, and Commandments of all kinds were being bandied across the table. Each individual, whatever in normal hours his character or creed, had for the nonce become transformed into a servant militant of the one and only true Church ; a redoubtable warrior for Virtue, Right, and Justice. Sir Rudyard and Mr. Simpson, Mrs. Hagworthy and Effie, Eric Fuller-Flitmouse and Clifford, were all shouting, one at another, as though demented ; Tuey and " the Boss " had already come to blows, while Michael endeavoured, with little success, to separate them ; and, for once unexpected in her behaviour, Miss Tether, perhaps upset by her recent talk with her employer, was screaming in a most aggressive fashion at the cowering Miss Poppy. As for Lady Ramshackle, her experience of the meetings of the All British Yellow

Cross Association was bringing its own reward, and this wistful, Burne-Jones figure was laying about her impartially with her parasol, in the most formidable and accomplished manner : because she had learned long ago that, in such outbreaks, this was the most effective method of calming her friends, and that, subsequently, you could sort them out. In this laudable endeavour, Ninette, fresh from starry battles in the studios of Hollywood, joined, with enthusiasm and a surprising certainty of aim. Finally, T. L. was insulting the bishop ; who himself was now roaring, rather than booming. (But in the depths of that inner isolation which denotes the artist - even in his pandemoniac moments - so that, outside himself, he can observe himself, not least when most under the tyranny of an idea and actually fighting for it, T. L. thought how curious it was that Slate-face and Green-face did not run in to stop this riot : for the verandah would be wrecked if this sort of thing endured many minutes longer. . . . And yet, in spite of the ferocity of the scene, he reflected, you could tell it was Sunday ! But how much darker it was growing !) The fierce seething of all this quarrelling, then, shook the plaster domes ; until frightened tarantulas sped down from the leaves of palm-trees in an unbroken and silky drop.

All at once there sounded a whistle, as though a football-scrum were being called off by the referee, and, ever so quietly, figures sidled hither, or clambered softly over the wooden railings, from all points of the compass. But though they thus encircled them, these alert and bearded men at first made no attempt to hinder the Nazarenes or to stop them fighting among themselves, but watched with curiosity, and whispered :

together, hazarding here and there, you would have said, a bet on the result. . . . There came the tread of endless marching feet. But even then the visitors did not cease from their shouting and hitting, so immersed were they in their own immediate interest⁰ : and not until the kettle-drums broke out deafeningly, drowning their cries, did the white people pause in their disputes. , . . The Shcrecf, cool and reserved, his white robes, flowing round him in peaceful folds, and crowned with the green turban, held up a slim, brown-wristed hand. Instantly the drums hammered to a full stop, and, in the ensuing silence, he spoke in English, his low and gentle voice betraying its slight accent, or, more precisely, its alien rhythm, more obviously than was its wont.

" Gentlemen," he said, " you are my prisoners. For yourselves you saw the tablets and what was written on them ; ' *Id ildha illa-lldh, wa Muhammedur-rastilu-lldh** There are those among you who can read Arabic : and they, no doubt, translated to the others, how on the first was written, ' *There is no God but Allah.*' ; and, on the second, ' *And Mohammed is the Prophet of God*' And now my men report to me that, in your rage against the truth, one of your number has destroyed the sacred stones, battering them to pieces with a hammer. This deed, like all else, is the Will of Allah, but no penalty, I think, exists, which would be too severe for such an impious act, especially since you were privileged to witness with your own eyes the Revelation. Fortunately for you, you Nazarenes have a man to deal with who is versed in worldly affairs : one who goes to Vichy every year for the cure, takes an enlightened interest in the Turf, and is proud to be a

member of your Book Society. I love your Galsworthy, your Walpoles and much that the West offers, and would not, remembering these things, treat you too hardly. . . . I give you, therefore, twenty-four hours in which to choose your fate : death or the adoption of our creed. This clemency, I need scarcely say, does not extend to the Jew, for whom my people have long been waiting." (He spoke a few words in his own language to two of his retainers, and Sir Levy, suddenly humble and docile, allowed himself to be led away.) " But," the chieftain pursued, " I must warn you that any attempt among you at escape, is doomed to failure. Don't ring the bell, Lord Pridian ; the hotel is in our hands. Indeed, I may say that I hold you captive partly for your own security, for, since last night, when news of the Miracle spread, the Holy War has been proclaimed in many neighbouring cities, and there has been a general uprising, accompanied by many massacres and much fighting."

He turned to Lady Ramshackle. " Ladies," he said, " there is no use in trying to save your souls. What are you but the daughters of dogs ? Nevertheless, since you were sent into the world to keep men company and give them their delight, you shall be permitted to join my household upstairs, where, if you persuade yourselves to be reasonable, you will be kindly, and even lovingly, treated."

He gazed upon them, and it seemed as if tentacles writhed out toward them from the slimy, brown depths of his eyes : softly his lithe long fingers caressed the handsome curves of Mrs. Hagworthy's figure, and smoothly strayed down the flattened contours of Effie Sipwater's back. " You are fine women, you two,"

he commended ; " and in these days," he added, " no Circassians are to be obtained, either, as you say, for love or money." . . . He issued a short order, and the guards sprang forward : he clapped his hands and an old man, with the pallid and wrinkled face of an old woman, and carrying a large bunch of jangling keys, waddled, bowing and salaaming, on to the verandah. The chief eunuch now took charge of them.

But, even as the men were being chained ankle to ankle, and the protesting ladies, though still struggling, were being conducted upstairs to where the tambourines shrilled and tinkled out in ecstasy, even as Miss Tether, in her despair, called across the din to Lady Helen, " It's worse for *me*, *you've* been married ! " the desert began to launch another of its age-old attacks upon the habitations of man ; a sudden, dashing assault, perhaps as a feint to distract attention from its steady, step by step, day by day, encroachment. Sinai and its crags were swallowed first, blotted out as the sun grew darker, then red and defeated. Doors banged, windows rattled convulsively, and curtains flew out like proud banners. The desert was coming : and men dwindled in importance. Soon the whirling spectres of its advance-guard rose threateningly on the hot wind. Sand filled the air, seeped, trickled and filtered in at every orifice, gradually taking possession. Nothing and no one existed, had existed, or even could exist ; nothing, save this burning, dark, desiccating confusion which now confined the Aaron Palace Hotel and its occupants. Perpetually the sand mounted higher on the wind, far over the hotel, until, above this dense flat level of obscurity, mysterious, gyrating shapes elongated suddenly on the air ; questioning

•
phantoms that, lifting themselves on bold, menacing wings, writhed up, as if exploring this blue, serene, and flawless vault under which the level lawns and jagged fangs of the mountain-tops were still bathed in pure and tender light, to ascertain whether or no it was a void, whether any being dwelt therein, and if he, too, could not thus be smothered by the flying, stinging particles ?

CHAPTER IV

POSTSCRIPT

So they die out of our sight ; but fade they not from the scroll of History, whereon their names are blazoned. It was now that Modern Science played its part ; and thus.

The airman who piloted Madame Galactic over the desert reported at once to all the chief stations the fact of his having witnessed a concentration of troops, singular in that waste land : it had seemed to him as if horsemen from all directions were closing in on the Aaron Palace Hotel.

No time, the European nations felt, was to be lost, and squadrons of armoured airplanes were immediately sent out to preserve or to restore order. With this end in view, the destruction by bombs of Jerusalem and Damascus, Mecca and Ispahan, ensued. But these acts, however prompt and statesmanlike - for, in such matters, to act first is to act best - did not, as had been confidently anticipated, at once quell the disturbances. It has often proved difficult to foretell in what direction the backward peoples will react, when suddenly brought face to face with modern conditions : and on this occasion, to the surprise of all Christendom, the Holy War flamed up throughout the East. The Governments, whose bombing airplanes had in more than one instance been wantonly attacked

by native populations, now referred their case to the League, which found itself powerless to intervene, since the war was technically a revolution and not a war at all, having originally spread from the territories to which its mandates had been applied. After a long consideration of the fresh legal points arising out of this quandary, the proceedings had to be adjourned indefinitely, owing to the necessity of closing the council chamber to repair the ravages of the death-beetle. Russia, alone, denounced the revolt as a war, springing from capitalist aggression and imperialism, and decided to support the Orient in its battle for life.

Soon the troops were moving like grey lice again over the body of the world. Immense flocks of airplanes, mechanical vultures, hovered above them : and the top-hatted representatives of armament firms were attending intercession-services in the quaintly gargoyle cathedrals of all the great cities. Unwieldy Lord Mayors rocked in their gold coaches through cheering crowds, and statesmen, brave in council, reaped an ample harvest of applause. Like carnival-figures, above the tumult rode the equestrian busts of plush-faced field-m Marshals, ribboned and crowned with plumes ; the loudest music blared from dawn to dusk along the granite embankments of brown rivers, to re-echo among numberless slabs of white marble, and tears, temporarily replacing the crystal drops of gin that ooze from stained nickel stoppers, fell plentifully within the brilliantly illuminated, Tudor interiors of the reformed public-houses. Manufacturers of gas-bombs and nitrates, knives, torpedoes, germ-tubes, armour-plating (and musical comedies), faced the future with set jaws, but without flinching, while the

conscientious politicians were now able to divest themselves of their shares, though not of the policies that had prospered them. A bomb was thrown in Wall Street, which now wailed no longer, and wrecked a church and hospital : fluctuating prices were registered in Tokyo. Mr. Gandhi appealed for more, much more, love ; was arrested, released, re-arrested, and subsequently declared a fast. There were black Communist riots in Johannesburg, and a dark green seething of discontent extended from Rio de Janeiro to the depths of the Amazon valley : but the weekly journals were full of war-poems, and the chief apostles of white, as opposed to dusky, enlightenment were by now securely entrenched in their bomb-proof, concrete tunnels of imaginative propaganda, determined to fight to every finish but their own. Liberal opinion, too, was unanimous on behalf of a war which was to make the world yet safer for democracy.

But none of these happenings was so direct a consequence of the capture of the Aaron Palace Hotel as the personal repercussions now to be related. Fortunately the Bolshevik championship of the East produced no studious mirroring among the English admirers of Russia, for the execution of Stuart Lollygo and Croucher had, on the other hand, wrought all European comrades up to a pitch of enthusiasm for the Cause, just as the appalling fate of Mrs. Hagworthy and her husband stiffened the upper lips of every member of a Church of England, truly militant, even though it must fight shoulder to shoulder beside the deluded victims of Romish superstition. (The bishop's last words, " We must attempt sincerely to look at every side of the question, in all its aspects, and from

every angle," were produced in facsimile upon the coloured tin-lids of the chocolate-boxes, bestowed upon each private soldier as a Christmas gift from the reigning house, and Father Munnion is now St. Terence of Sinai.) A'ter a like fashion, T. L.'s death roused many literary men - more especially those who had for years been steadily endeavouring, through the medium of the columns of the weekly literary reviews, to kill his writings and deprive him of a livelihood - to an unparalleled fury : their prey had been stolen from them by savages, and the lady-novelists howled aloud at the monthly dinners of the P.E.N. Club. Public subscriptions were raised to secure for the nation a miner's cottage in his memory, and fittingly to crown this effort an active and winsome archbishop accepted it on behalf of the British peoples. Aunt Effie, too, was not forgotten ; and a statue of her, very simple, with the one word " xxxx " on its pedestal, now graces the straggling street of a Cotswold village. Then, again, the cruel end of Professor Crotchester constituted that mysterious patriotic phenomenon, a clarion-call, to scientists alj over the world, bidding them drop any creative labours in which they might be engaged and, instead, fogus their intelligences entirely on the invention of a thousand new methods of death and destruction, whether lingering or immediate : and it is gratifying to be able to announce that enormous developments were made in the direction of wholesale slaughter, both by means of rays and bombs based on the principle of atomic energy. Hollywood, too, was outraged, and joined in the new crusade with utmost abandon, shooting the greatest propaganda-films ever devised, which portrayed the indignities and tortures

inflicted on their beloved star, Ninette de Nina, and her no less popular husband.

As for the death of Sir Levy, its consequences, in their magnitude, might have been deduced from the preponderant influence he had wielded in so many spheres of action during his lifetime, and, because they were so appropriate a sequel to a career of public service inspired by a wide vision of the world, Jewry was united against its opponents. Although it is said that the subsequent response was disappointing and even meagre, there was a call to arms from every synagogue in the West : except in Germany, whose masters blamed Sir Levy, because of his race, for the war itself, and decided accordingly to throw in their lot with the Eastern group of powers. Amid the stalwart cheering of Prussian women, an enlightened dictator announced a policy of " repression, brutal and barbarous in its severity " : and, after the delighted applause, with which such adjectives are invariably greeted in that land, had at last ended, the crowd repaired to the part of Berlin in which it could burn and plunder the homes of all the most celebrated and austere-living Jewish scholars and professors, beating them, if they were found, into a state of unconsciousness, and ill-treating their wives and children (German civilisation had once again to be saved). Fortunately the banks and business houses escaped attack.

Sir Rudyard's death, too, had an effect. As was becoming, a lot of illiterate Indians were found, in the more remote spaces of that vast country, who could be - and were - induced to fight in a special Ramshackle Native Division. Many posthumous honours were awarded to him, and a bronze plaque, bearing a bas-relief

of Lady Ramshakkle, in hunting kit, stroking the head of a grateful camel, was erected by public subscription and designed, from a favourite photograph, by the sculptor-son of a great Pre-Raphaelite. It stands near the Bird Sanctuary in Hyde Park, and on its base are engraved her last recorded words, " Better Death than Dishonour." But many admirers of the dead Englishwoman took exception to the bronze camel, which when compared with its representative in the Zoological Gardens, was seen to differ greatly from it in various measurements and especially in the rendering of its hair. Indignant letters were received by countless editors. . . . There were other, lesser, results of the tragedy. . . . One of Miss Tether's letters to her sister was auctioned, on behalf of war-charities, at Christie's and fetched a thousand guineas : but her brother-in-law, the new Bishop of Newborough, who attended the sale after luncheon, sustained a bad fall on leaving the rooms.

Out in the East, life continued in much the same fashion as ever, despite the war. . . . One must not question th^e Will of Allah. . . . But Lady Helen, though she had lost Michael, at last discovered in the domestic sphere, amid the odours of attar of roses and the hookah, a useful vent for her hitherto undisciplined activities. . . . And, to this day, Lord Pridian, no longer fat, but haggard and mouthing, rides unharmed among the Bedouins, a prophet and leader of men : for his affliction, the first symptom of which was perhaps, as the bishop had deduced, the hearing of voices, had now become emphasised to a point where, not only had it saved him from a terrible and ignominious death, but, as ever in the Orient, it exacts respect and affords

position and immunity. . . . At home, the *Daily Spy* has doubled its circulation.

As for the Miracle, the Apocalypse on Sinai, the report gained credence in the East, and is still sometimes talked about round the fire on a cold winter's night in the desert. But the rumour, when it reached the Western World, was treated with contempt. Had it been true, Madame Galactic would, of all people, have known about it, and heralded the news. Banquets to her, sole survivor in the Western hemisphere of that gallant little band, were attended by the elder statesmen, veteran generals, and great Victorians of all kinds, and were staged, to the popping of champagne-corks, amid gold plate and inward-growing chrysanthemums, Romneys and heraldic banners, in every official acropolis. But, at her own request, all buglers, drummers, and military music were dispensed with, so as to save more money to spend on the war. . . . Alas, she had suffered too deeply to proceed with her work : though spiritists all over the globe spread the tidings of how, her glance resting one night upon a crystal, she had so surely seen a future full of spears and dark horsemen that, since no single one of her companions would pay the faintest heed to her warnings, she had chartered an airplane in order to fly to Europe and inform the world of its urgent and immediate danger.

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