TEXT FLY WITHIN
THE BOOK ONLY

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_156036

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

Osmania University Library.

.....Hydari..... Collection

Accession No. G.3771.....

Call No.....823.91

AS OTHERS SEE US

NEW NOVELS

EXPERIENCE — CATHERINE COTTON

BIG PETER — ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

PENDER AMONG THE RESIDENTS — FORREST REID

THE CROSS-CUT — COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

THE BEST GIFT OF ALL — ROWAN GLEN

THE PIT-PROP SYNDICATE — FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS

AS OTHERS SEE US

by

MARMADUKE PICKTHALL

LONDON: 48 PALL MALL
W. COLLINS SONS & CO. LTD.
GLASGOW MELBOURNE AUCKLAND

Copyright, 1922

Manufactured in Great Britain

FOREWORD

ALL the stories in this book are of the time before the war but leading up to it. Those who loved the British Empire in the East, as Englishmen in former days imagined it, will understand, for they have shared the author's progress towards disillusion as illustrated in the Eastern stories here. Goodwill and geniality towards Eastern peoples could hardly flourish in the shadow of the Czardom which still lies over England's Eastern policy. May it be lifted and goodwill return!

M. P.

BLACKBOYS, SUSSEX,
March 1, 1922.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE KEFR AMMEH INCIDENT	1
CROSS-PURPOSES	30
BETWEEN OURSELVES	49
THE BATTLE OF THE TREES	71
KNIGHTS ERRANT	86
MELEK	103
UNOFFICIAL	120
A MATTER OF TASTE	137
THE MARSEILLES TRAGEDY	154
THE HAILSTORM	171
HIS MAJESTY	187
THE DERELICT	201
REHOBOTH	215
CHILDREN OF NATURE	230
A HUNDRED YEARS AGO	248
THE RISING TIDE	261

THE KEFR AMMEH INCIDENT

THIS is the true history of the Kefr Ammeh incident which greatly disconcerted some of the English governors of Egypt, though no notice of it found its way into the newspapers. A number of fellâhîn were tortured by the omdeh (headman) of a place of some importance out of sheer devotion, as it seemed, to Mr Sandeman, the English inspector for the district. To the authorities the case appeared inexplicable. To me, who had been able to observe affairs at Kefr Ammeh from the Egyptian no less than the English point of view, the "incident," however startling, appeared not unnatural seeing the strange popularity which Mr Sandeman enjoyed there and the almost mystic awe which he inspired in the inhabitants. He was, in fact, a kind of fetish for the population, and that for reasons of which he personally had no knowledge, reasons quite independent of his rank as an official. The key to understanding of the situation came into my possession quite by accident, three months before George Sandeman's appointment to the district, when I visited Kefr Ammeh for amusement at the season of the Môlid of the local saint. On the first night of the fair I chanced to stroll into a circus-tent, where I was privileged to witness a most strange performance.

The ring was lighted by the flare of five tall cressets set at irregular intervals on its circumference. The large tent was crowded. Men and women of the poorer sort, with swarms of children, sat or sprawled upon the ground around the ring. Behind them rose a mist of black robes, white turbans, and brown faces, tier on tier,

from which there came the steadfast gleam of teeth and eyeballs. The audience was hushed, devouring with its thousand eyes the antics of some clever tumblers and a few conventional displays of horsemanship. Then came the clown, and there were murmurs of delight, since he was known to be the pearl of all his time for drollery. After mimicking an omdeh, a shawîsh and an Egyptian judge, oppressors of the poor, amid much laughter, he put his hand into the placket of his baggy trousers and fished up a wig of tow which he adjusted to his head. He then rubbed some red dust upon his face until it wore the colour of pomegranate-bloom, put on a Frankish collar and an old pith helmet brought to him by an attendant, took in his hand a cane and began to strut up and down stiffly with elbows raised, opening his mouth very wide and saying: "Wow! Wow!" at frequent intervals.

During his toilet you could have heard a pin drop in the tent; but now as he marched to and fro with that strange cry, a sigh arose: "What is he now? O Lord, inform us quickly: What is this?" and some one cried in accents of delight: "The name of God be round about us! He is become a ghoul—a sinful ghoul!"

A doll was thrown into the ring. With a shout: "It is my son!" the clown pounced on it and clasped it to his breast. He laid it upon one of two chairs which had been placed in readiness while he himself took seat upon the other, saying: "Rest thou there, my son, until they bring thee meat and milk and vegetables, all duly stale from having been enclosed in tins for many years!" And then the fun became so furious that those who witnessed the performance had no time to guess its meaning. Man after man came in, upon his feet, and the ghoul, with curses, made him go down on his hands and knees. "It is for your good," he cried. "We wish to see you all made equal under us. We teach you good behaviour. We are a just race."

At length three men came in at once. As fast as one

of them went down obediently upon his hands and knees, his brothers rose up on their feet, until the ghoul grew so infuriated that his mind flew from him and he knew not where he stood. Retreating backwards to his seat wow-wowing loudly, he mistook the chair, sat down upon his child and squashed it flat.

"Wâh! Wâh! My son is dead!" he roared, holding up the doll for all to see. Then from the mighty crowd there came a shout of laughter with cries of "May our Lord have mercy on him, O thou foolish monster!"

"Bring water!" cried the ghoul beside himself. "Bring water, sprinkle and revive my son. No, no! It will do harm. It is not filtered. Hi, there, you doctors! Bring my son to life or I will cut your heads off!"

"O atheistic monster!" roared the crowd. "Canst thou not see that thy misfortune is from God?"

"Down on all fours, beasts that you are!" he cried. "Convey my son with honour to the hospital!"

They answered: "It is useless, O khawâgah! He is truly dead!"

The ghoul then seized a chair and killed the doctors with it, which done, he once more gave attention to his child. His brick-red face became convulsed with grief; he opened his great mouth and howled "Wow! Wow!" He stamped his feet and tore his wig of tow. Then the men who had been killed rose up and fetched an open coffin such as Muslims use. "No, no!" he bellowed on beholding it. "Go fetch a tin. All meat must be preserved in tins or it goes bad."

They changed the coffin for a kerosene tin into which they thrust the doll, then ran away with it, the ghoul pursuing them with shouts: "The lid! Where is the lid? My son will spoil!" Just as they were leaving the arena they flung away the tin, the doll fell out, the ghoul, with "Wow! Wow!" seized his child in one hand, the tin in the other, and ran out after them; the play was ended.

The audience drew a deep sigh of regret. There

followed argument in whispers as to its significance. Some one said: "It was an Englishman." "No," came the answer, "it was nothing of the seed of Adam, but a cursed ghoul with some resemblance to an Englishman." A third exponent cried: "It was an atheist, and all the evil which befell him comically, was from God."

Kefr Ammeh, as I learnt, had no acquaintance with the English, though but a stone's throw from the town there stood a government rest-house where Englishmen occasionally came and spent a night. The sole exceptions were the omdeh, who had met with their inspectors, and the custodian of the rest-house aforesaid, a pious sheykh devoid of curiosity, who told his beads and gave scant heed to men who came and went. The watchman had not seen the clown's performance, but the omdeh had; and when the crowd emerged at length into the street of tents, alight and noisy underneath the stars, the latter was beset with eager questions. Was the tow-haired, red-faced creature with the curious voice an Englishman, as some were saying, or a ghoul?

A ghoul, most certainly, the omdeh said, the English being men of regal bearing, remarkable above all things for self-restraint. Yet some of the visitors to the fair from distant places vowed that the clown had played the English to the life. The men of Kefr Ammeh took the omdeh's word for it. What they had seen had been a ghoul most certainly; and the inadvertent squashing of his offspring, the derision which he met with in the end, had been the due reward of tyranny and atheism. It had been a moral tale unfolded comically, in the true Egyptian manner; and the fact that all points of its application were not absolutely clear made it the more attractive to the rustic audience, most of whom revisited the circus on the second evening of the fair, to see it and learn from it.

The clown portrayed the omdeh, the shawîsh, the judge, exactly as before; but when the people clamoured, some for the ghoul and others for the Englishman, he

ran away with shaking of the head. The clamour went on vainly for some time. At length a juggler sprang into the ring playing with balls of light, until their flying glitter attracted all those eyes, when murmurs ceased. Afterwards it was known that the Egyptian government official who had been sent to overlook the fair, informed of the performance of the previous night, had put a stop to it. This high-handed action fixed the clown's play permanently in the public memory. Men grieved for the suppression of a little drama which (as they said) combined amusement with religious teaching. They mourned their ghoul, and spoke much of him in the weeks which followed, laying stress upon the fact, as stated by the omdeh, that he had borne not the remotest likeness to an Englishman, to show the great injustice of suppressing him.

And then George Sandeman arrived at Kefr Ammeh.

Some children were at play one evening on the dust-heaps which extend between the government rest-house —a white, one-storied building in the open fields—and the little mud-built town adorned with palm-trees, when a foreigner, emerging from the rest-house, came upon them suddenly, exclaiming :—

" Where is the house of the omdeh ? "

The children all with one accord fell down upon their hands and knees.

" Security, O khawâgah ! Guarantee but my security and I will show thee," cried one braver than the rest.

" Be not afraid ! " the Frank replied ; on which the guide ran off as one who flees from danger. The children's game was at an end. They followed awe-struck.

A man who passed the stranger in a narrow place, stood staring after the tall, white-clad figure strutting along so stiff with elbows raised. He exclaimed : " I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the Stoned," and followed the weird apparition to the omdeh's house, which presently became a place of concourse. First one and then another of the village notables kept dropping

in till the reception room was full ; while at the doorway women, children and the poorer men gathered and stared intently at the foreigner. Was he, or was he not in truth their ghoul ? He had removed his mushroom hat which had enforced the likeness, and laid it down on the divan beside him. His hair was not like tow in texture, but it was of a light colour, and, ruffled as it was just then, recalled the wig of tow the clown had worn. His face was very red, though in repose the eagerly desired resemblance almost vanished. But when he opened his great mouth and showed his teeth and laughed their ghoul was present. The Englishman's " Ha ! Ha ! " which sent a shudder down the spine of every listener, was as near as could be to the mountebank's " Wow ! Wow ! " He bellowed every word as if his hearers had been deaf.

The omdeh used him with the greatest reverence, receiving with expressions of delight the information (conveyed in most peculiar Arabic) that he was English and had been commanded to reside at Kefr Ammeh for some months ; but while making much of him as host to guest, he stole dismayed, inquiring glances at his face. Another laugh, " Wow ! Wow ! " rang forth, and meaning looks were interchanged all round the room. But it was when, in reply to a polite remark to the effect that English people were the lords of justice, he declared without the least demur that that was so, and added : " If we seem like tyrants sometimes it is for your good," that strong suspicion leapt to certainty and exultation reigned in every heart. A murmur of applause went up from the group of common people at the door, which group had now become a crowd which overflowed the little courtyard of the omdeh's house. On the hush which followed this betrayal of emotion came a child's cry : " O my mother, lift me up that I may see the ghoul ! "

The Englishman at length took leave with loud expressions of goodwill, so loud as to seem menacing to all who heard them. A troop of little boys and girls

adhered to him with no worse object than to gaze upon his wondrous face. He told them to begone, and beat those nearest to him, when, seeing they annoyed His Grace, a village watchman dispersed them with his quarter-staff. The watchman wished to guard His Honour to the rest-house, but the Englishman commanded him to go back whence he came and, when he tried remonstrance, used obscene expressions such as the worst of men in cities bandy, threatening, moreover, to chastise him to the point of death.

The town was thrilled and deeply interested, with the feeling one would have supposing some remembered dream came true in every detail. Inquiry of the cook at the rest-house, when he came to do his shopping in the sûk next morning, elicited the fact that the khawâgah ate tinned foods and never drank a drop of water which had not been filtered. When this was known some women let their voices flutter forth in joy-cries, as is usual on occasions of festivity. The Englishman was certainly their ghoul. From that day forth he was assured of popularity. Though he was seen to be uncouth, devoid of manners as of understanding, and likely to prove dangerous at unawares, the people loved him and would crowd to gaze on him, hugging to their hearts the blest assurance that they saw his whole significance more truly than he did himself.

The Englishman was as strong as a camel and less sensitive, for he would ride like mad upon his business in the heat of noon, would exert himself sometimes with scarce a break from the third hour till sunset; and when he had by chance an idle day did not repose, but rode his horse for pleasure for an hour or so, returning from which pastime he would change his clothes and presently come forth upon the dust-heaps to fatigue himself still more. Armed with some curious sticks, he would take stand with legs apart and smite with all his strength a small white ball, pursuing it from place

to place until he lost it; when he would proceed to search for it for hours beneath the burning sun, assisted by the village youngsters, who were accustomed to observe his labours from some spot of shade, from which the offer of a coin alone could tempt them. If they came too close he beat them with his club, and cursed them in abominable language. They feared the beatings, but the language interested them. Their dreamy, serious eyes were always fixed upon his face, and in the earnestness of their attention they would mimic all unconsciously the strange grimaces which he made when bludgeoning the small white ball, which he seemed to look on as a sinful thing, his enemy.

He had a small white dog with black ears and a stumpy tail which attended him whenever he went out on foot, adhering to him like his shadow, walking when he walked, stopping when he stopped, always at his heel. This dog he loved above all other living creatures. When walking with it in the town, or out among the fields, he carried in his hand a monstrous whip, wherewith he was prepared to flay the pariah dogs if they attacked it. He spoke to it in gentle tones as to his soul's beloved, and once, when boys began to tease it and it gave a squeak, he beat and cursed the culprits so unmercifully that all the children who beheld the sight fell down before him.

"Whoso touches my dog," he roared, "I will hang him and his parents and defile their graves."

The children thought: "His dog is as his son. Please God, he will ere long sit down on it"—a contingency which seemed the less remote because the dog invariably kept so close behind him. All animals appeared to have his sympathy, except the pariah dogs aforesaid, which he persecuted. A boy had stuck a knife into a donkey to accelerate its pace: he flew in a great rage, chastised the boy and stole the knife. A man had lost his temper with a sullen mule: he lost his temper with the man, and threatened him with death and hell. Neither the mule nor the ass was his property,

nor could the manner of their treatment, by any way of thinking, be esteemed his business. But it was apparent that he could not help himself. At sight of beasts oppressed his mind flew from him, and in his madness he oppressed the sons of Adam. The men of Kefr Ammeh shrugged their shoulders, perceiving that the illness was upon him from the hand of God. The wise among them whispered that in regions where a beast is king one must expect dumb beasts to be preferred to men. The Berberine cook and butler at the rest-house told how the Englishman would take the small white dog upon his knees, and let it freely lick his face and hands; how it slept in the same room with him and shared his meals.

The ghoul, the small white dog and the small white ball had for the fellâhîn the charm of something magical, a mystery whose true significance was known to God alone. The children knew the ball, having all handled it, and they believed it to be made of human bones and skin pressed tight together. But a man, Selîm Ghandûr, who happened to encounter it upon the dust-heaps, declared with oaths that it was made of solid and essential fire. It had brought him near to death, but while he said the necessary prayers, writhing in awful anguish on the ground, the ghoul came to him with his mouth wide open, laughing "Wow! Wow!" and thrust a dollar on him. The ghoul was not a miser, very certainly. He rewarded all who did him service, and, having persecuted any one, would, when his wrath subsided, give him money. His intention, it was clearly seen, was not iniquitous. He often visited the omdeh's house, and honoured other houses when implored to do so. His awful voice and his blood-curdling laugh lost something of their terrors as they grew familiar. The omdeh, who had much to do with him as an official, pronounced him very simple, even brutal, in his methods, and very, very easy to deceive; though, while deceiving him, a man well knew that, did he but suspect a fraud, his vengeance would be terrible and all-destroying—

a knowledge which imparted zest to the shy game. He was, upon the whole, extremely popular, and thanks to his discerned capacity for wholesale murder if enraged, respected. The fellâhîn were circumspect in their behaviour towards him, for none could tell beforehand what small thing would raise his fury, or whether he might not go mad spontaneously.

One evening there arrived two other Englishmen upon a visit to the rest-house. The loud wow-wowing of their welcome could be heard afar. Thereafter, at the third hour of the night, most frightful sounds alarmed the waking town. A roaring as of wild beasts, in a solemn cadence, lasted for several minutes at a time; then came a moment's hush, then a fresh outburst. The people thronged the roofs and listened, stiff with fright.

"Perhaps," the children whispered, "our ghoul has sat down on his son, the small white dog!" The sweet conjecture was passed on from roof to roof. The men said: "He could hardly make that noise alone—not even he! Two others of his kind arrived at sunset. The probability is that they have drunk strong drink until they have become intoxicated, and thus roar in madness."

"If they are drunk, then make fast every door; remove the women to a place of safety!" counselled one old man, a member of the omdeh's household, raising his hands in anguish to the stars. "They will presently break forth to slay and ravish. I remember, years ago when I was in the army, how the Circassian and Albanian officers would thus sit up and drink until their wits forsook them; then, rushing out, would chase us with their swords, calling us (saving your presence) Nile mud and the accursed dung of Pharaoh. They would even run into the streets abusing all they met."

"Merciful Allah!" cried the omdeh, who forthwith despatched a runner to the rest-house to inquire if there was any danger of a massacre. The two Berberines, the cook and butler of the Englishman, assailed with such

a question, laughed contemptuously. In the manner of experienced stablemen explaining to some nincompoop the ways of horses, they told the messenger that Englishmen were most benevolent when thus elated. The dreadful roaring was the mode of singing in their country. They would roar till there was no more voice left in them, and then betake themselves like lambs to bed. This information, carried straightway to the omdeh, somewhat relieved the apprehensions of the people; but few were they in Kefr Ammeh who deemed it safe to go to bed that night.

From the English point of view George Sandeman was not abnormal. He sported all the small inanities and irritating tricks of manner, varying with the mode from year to year, which mark the youthful Englishman of good society. A man with men, a gentleman with women, he dressed well without foppery, adorned his rather jerky conversation with the latest slang, and was in some demand for dances in the Cairo season.

He having failed in the initial step to various careers, one of his uncles, who was in the Cabinet, had forced him into the Egyptian Civil Service, much to the annoyance of the British lord of Egypt, who hated to submit to private influence. Sandeman was put into positions especially designed to prove his incapacity. But somehow he survived successive ordeals. He did not love his work; his whole delight was in field-sports and in the pleasures of the town; yet he did not do badly. It had become apparent that the government would have to keep him after all, about the time when he was sent to Kefr Ammeh. Once there, his unexpected popularity, reported in high quarters, was set down to tact as an administrator, and his name was made.

"It's a rummy thing," he told me when I spent an evening with him at the rest-house, "but I believe the beggars somehow take to me. And I like them too in a way. Can understand how a chap like you, who's read

'em up, can find them interesting, and all that. Do, myself, in a way. They're all right if you know how to handle 'em. I go in and call on 'em and have a talk—treat 'em like human beings; but they jolly well know I won't stand cheek or any nonsense from 'em. That's the way. They're tricky, though; you can't see into them."

As an example of their trickiness or their opacity, I know not which, he told me how the omdeh had sent round one night, when he and two other Englishmen were singing school songs after dinner, to ask if there was any danger of a massacre.

"Now was that innocence or was it cheek? I ask you. What? When the cook came in and told us, splitting his sides with laughter, I felt pretty small. Didn't sing much after that, I can assure you! We had, of course, been kicking up a most infernal row, enough to frighten people who had never heard that kind o' thing. But I'm not so sure that message wasn't meant for cheek. D—d cheek, if it really was sarcastic. What? Yet he's a dear old thing, and quite a pal o' mine. They're rummy beggars."

He sat in silence for a minute, stroking the fox-terrier upon his lap, wrestling, it seemed, with some elusive thought.

"I tell you what, old man," he said at length. "I shall have to write a book about 'em some day. Started notes already. I come across some rummy things down here. I don't say I should ever print the stuff, but it'd be amusin' just to see what I could do. Keep me from going mad in this damned hole."

I praised the notion highly, being always eager to encourage the first shy movements of a mind in healthy flesh. He added: "I believe I've got upon the track of something—pretty big discovery, it seems to me—about the beggars."

He seemed desirous to be plied with questions. I, therefore, begged him, with effusion, to confide in me.

"You won't crib my notion? You've got to promise that before I tell you. Well, it may be nothing really—just an accident, or some other feller may have spotted it before—but I believe these beggars aren't quite men like we are—a bit nearer to the monkeys, Darwin and all that. What put me on the track was this—a rummy thing! If you talk to any of their youngsters a bit sharply, raise a stick to them or anything of that sort, it's ten to one they'll go down on all fours. As if"—he puffed at his cigar with zeal, manifestly struggling with a tough abstraction—"as if they felt safer, more at home, once they could get their hands on the ground. As if—some instinct, don't you know?—and all that! I never saw a man do it but once, and then he may have done it for a purpose, for he tried to lick my boots. But the little kiddies do it nearly always—nearer to nature. What? It's a queer thing."

He went on talking of the "beggars," as he called them, till we went to bed, which did not happen until after midnight. We met at breakfast the next morning, and then said good-bye, Sandeman going to his daily work, while I set off upon my journey to another rest-house.

I did not meet George Sandeman again until the following winter, when he was much in Cairo, having some relatives and hosts of friends among the fashionable visitors. Then, as it happened, we met rather often in attendance on a certain English family in which there was a very pretty girl. I may as well confess I offered marriage to the damsel, only to learn that she adored George Sandeman—a predilection which I cannot for my life explain except by the old adage about youth attracting youth. We remained good friends, however, and by her contrivance I was wheedled into something more than toleration for my favoured rival. In English society I must say that the said George appeared to great advantage, being evidently in his element, which I was not. I felt much more at home in Kefr Ammeh.

" How is your book getting on ? " I asked one afternoon, when I found him having tea alone at one of the little tables in the hall of the club.

" Oh, that ! " was the reply. " I still jot down a note occasionally. But I may tell you that I've chucked the great discovery—all rot ! I bet you knew that at the time, you secretive old beast—and wouldn't tell a feller ! " He laughed without a trace of animosity.

" Their dropping down like that was simply cheek. I guess you twigged that—eh ? I caught them grinning once or twice. That was enough. I've put a stop to it for good and all. God knows what made 'em take to it. The only thing that I can think of's this : You know I'm devilish fond of my small dog. The children started teasing just once. I let 'em know that I'd jolly well hang, draw and quarter the whole lot of 'em, with their fathers and grandfathers—and so I would, by Jove—if anybody touched my dog again. Well, to rag me in return for that, the beggars made believe that I was only fond of beasts—a bit of a beast myself, no doubt—and so dropped down like that for mercy—kind of sarcastic business, don't you see ? What first gave me a hint that they were not so simple as I used to think was the old omdeh sending round that night about our singing. Made me feel exceeding small, that did. So damned sarcastic ! He's a dignified old boy. God knows what they think of us, or what they see us like with those queer eyes of theirs. I must say I should like to know for once."

I told him that he seemed to me to be developing, however tardily, the faculty of abstract thought—beginning to " take notice," as our nurses say. He flicked a crumb of toast at me, and then continued :—

" They really are quite decent in some ways. About my shooting, for instance. There's good sport around the place. They give me leave to go just where I like, and clear the ground of kids and cattle for me. I have one really ripping gun, and always make a point of

cleaning it myself. You should see the beggars eye it! They've got a legend that it kills with every shot. I believe they think I worship that and my small dog. I have to row them sometimes just to keep 'em in their place, but on the whole I find 'em jolly decent. Only don't go saying that to Joan or her mamma. They're always fishing for an invitation to come down and see me. No place for women, as you know. Do put them off! I shouldn't know what to do with 'em"—he blushed profusely—"should feel ashamed, an utter worm before the beggars. Can't explain. You might come down and look me up sometimes. Come the first week next month. Our Môlid will be on, and if there's ever going to be fun in Kefr Ammeh, you'll behold it then."

I could not reply definitely to the invitation on the spur of the moment, but after a few days I wrote accepting it.

Alighting at Mastûrah station about ten o'clock one morning, I succeeded in procuring donkeys for my servant and myself and rode along the dykes to Kefr Ammeh. From afar I saw a line of tents much longer than the face the town presented, shining out against a palm-grove to the southward; discerned the flutter of innumerable small red flags and heard the hive-like murmur of the fair. Sandeman seemed pleased to see me. We had luncheon and then sat and talked till four o'clock, when we went out to pay a call upon the chief official of the fair. The crowd within the canvas town was dense, and Snap, the small white dog, was at his master's heels. He ought not to have been there, but we did not discover his attendance until it was too late to send him home. I noticed children calling out "Isnâb!" alluringly, and saw some of them stoop to pet the dog. They belonged to Kefr Ammeh. Strangers, who knew not Snap, were less considerate. Twice he received a kick which set him yelping, and Sandeman

turned round and used atrocious language. Wherever the man learnt it I could never guess.

" That's one thing I do hate about the beggars, and one good reason why I won't have Joan down here. They're so damned cruel. It never seems to strike them that dumb beasts can feel," he told me as we shouldered through the press. Our goal was the marquee set up by the provincial government in honour of the Muslim saint who sleeps at Kefr Ammeh, who slept there as a Christian saint before the Muslim conquest, and as a god of ancient Egypt long before the birth of Christendom. One end of the marquee was open to the crowd ; at the other, in the place of honour on a long divan, sat the representative of government, a black-bearded effendi, receiving the respectful compliments of divers notables. The atmosphere was reverent as in a church ; till Sandeman with loud " Ha, ha ! " strode in out of the sunlight, Snap at his heels, shook the official violently by the hand, nodded to all the company, which rose to greet him, and flopped down comfortably in the place of greatest honour, where Snap immediately jumped up beside him. The other visitors were mildly scandalised by the apparition of a dog on the divan above them ; the representative of the provincial government betrayed alarm ; until the omdeh of Kefr Ammeh, rising in his place, explained that Snap was not as other dogs which never wash but wander to and fro, eating all manner of abomination. This dog, he said, performed ablutions twice a day, lived in a house, slept in a bed, and fed on bread and milk and beans and onions. In all respects he was his master's soul.

The representative of the provincial government, thus reassured, and anxious to propitiate the soul of Sandeman, gave the dog a sweetmeat with his honourable hand, while all the notables showered praises on him. We drank a cup of coffee and some water, and ate sickly sweetstuff, while musicians squatting in the tent-mouth made a merry din ; then Sandeman sprang up abruptly, wrung the great man's hand once more,

touched his hat to all the others and marched out with Snap behind him.

I had overtaken him before I realised that half the men who had been sitting in the tent were coming with us, anxious, no doubt, to pay their court to one so arrogant. Those who were not fortunate enough to gain a place beside him attached themselves to me as we proceeded on our homeward way. Among these was the omdeh of the place, a fine old man in splendid silken raiment, who at once began to pour into my ear the praise of Sandeman.

The town, nay, all the country, were His Honour's servants. He was so strong and yet so generous, of such a brilliant and far-seeing mind and yet benevolent. Of a verity he was the marvel of his time for might and justice. A perfect Englishman, and all was said! All Kefr Ammeh loved him as men love the water-brooks. Would I be good enough to find out from His Excellency whether there was anything displeasing to him in the place; and afterwards let him (the omdeh) know, that he might have it altered. The population was, alas, uncivilised, however much devoted to His Grace, and might offend through ignorance of good behaviour. He (the omdeh) would far rather lose his right hand, he declared with vehemence, than that anything should happen to aggrieve that prince of Englishmen. There had been no disorder, praise to Allah, since his coming; but naturally there existed in the place a few bad characters, who might by some unhappy outbreak smirch its fame. One of the outlying hamlets, Mît Gâmûs, was a veritable hornet's nest of fearless brigands. He therefore begged me, as a personal favour, to persuade His Highness not to come into the fair again like this incognito, but with outrunners and attendants as became his state. Thus he would be guarded from the rude touch of the crowd, and the sweetest, most delightful of all little dogs would be secured from hurt.

I called to Sandeman to stop and listen, and bade the omdeh make his own request. He did so, but with

evident reluctance, and in broken phrases which contrasted strongly with the eloquence of his discourse to me. While he frequently declared his love for Sandeman, I saw that he was very much afraid of him. All the bystanders supported his petition, talking baby Arabic intelligible to the perfect Englishman.

"Does Your Honour think of visiting the fair to-night? Let him but order, and we will provide a score of men happy and proud to be his guard of honour."

"Who told you that I thought of visiting the fair to-night?" snapped Sandeman. He murmured: "Beastly cheek!" beneath his breath. "Why should I come out when I am comfortable in the house?—They seem to think their beastly fair attractive," he remarked aside. I told him that I thought the omdeh had some fear of trouble with the crowd.

"Oh, that's another matter. Then we'll come, you bet! But don't you tell 'em that," said Sandeman with glee. I told the omdeh and the other notables that His Honour felt no great desire to see the fair again. They seemed relieved, and parted from us with a storm of blessings.

"Seems quiet enough," observed my friend some four hours later, as we moved once more amid the multitude, under the flare of torches, deafened by a thousand discords. "Let's turn in somewhere, see a show or two. This place looks promising. Come on, old man!"

He paid down money at a wicket and we passed into a crowded circus-tent. Our entrance was unheeded by the audience, all intent just then upon the antics of a clown who held the ring alone. I recognised the jester of my former visit, and tried desperately to get Sandeman out again under pretext of the foulness of the atmosphere. But in a trice he had become absorbed in the performance as completely as the fellâhîn around us.

"That's our omdeh to the life! Look, just below us in the third row, there's the man himself, and all his family enjoying it as much as any one!" he whispered,

at me! Can't grasp their point of view, you see. It's pretty maddening. Makes one downright homesick. I've had enough of this. Let's get indoors."

My friend was nearly crying with vexation. I told him that in my opinion the beggars, as he called them, were afraid of him, and suggested that the frightful language he employed habitually might peradventure have something to do with it.

"Oh, that! They're used to that. They like it!" he made light rejoinder, and went on to enlarge upon the subject of the homesickness which seized him sometimes when alone with them. He told me the whole history of his love for Joan, which dated from his sixteenth year, described his home, his earliest recollections, his first ride to hounds and other private matters in a sentimental tone. There dwelt in truth a very honest, simple soul beneath his self-assertive outward shell. After midnight, in his study in the rest-house, he described to me the height of his ambition: "Two thousand a year. You can't ask a girl to marry you on less, and a little country house—I know the very place I want in Devon—among trees, you know—I love the drip of trees after a shower—with decent shooting and a few good neighbours—and Joanie! I should be a king, by Jove! And here I am in this damned furnace of a country, acting nursery governess to a lot of bally monkeys. But there, the beggars are all right. I'm feeling down."

At this point he had paused with one hand on his brow, the other stroking Snap, who lay upon his knees as usual, when a droning, nasal chant, uplifted suddenly, assailed our ears. Coming from just outside the house, it startled me.

"My old Ghafîr," said Sandeman. "He's at his prayers. Whenever I wake up at night I hear that noise. It's damned pathetic, the religion of these beggars. Fine, I call it!—He's a rum old boy. God knows who pays him for his job. He's never had a sou

from me, I know. I've a jolly good mind to give him something now."

He went to the window and called to the Ghafîr. The man came running. " O Ghafîr ! A sovereign for you ! Catch ! Have you got it ? "

" Praise be to God," replied a drowsy voice out of the darkness. That old night-watchman, who had kept the rest-house from its first foundation, was never seen again in Kefr Ammeh.

The Ghafîr had all his life been saving money, little by little, for the purpose of that pilgrimage to Mecca which, being pious, he accounted life's true aim. I gathered this, with other matters incidental to this story, afterwards from an Egyptian friend in Kefr Ammeh, who had been my host on more than one occasion of my visiting the place. The sovereign he received from Sandeman that night made up the sum which he had put before him as the minimum required for his long journey. He had hoped to set forth in another year or two. This godsend made it possible to start at any time ; and, as it wanted but a week of the departure of the yearly pilgrimage, he resolved at once to break the fetters of his worldly calling. By dawn he had made up a bundle of his few belongings, with which upon his back, and staff in hand, he set out for the railway station at the peep of day. Wrapped in the praises of the Lord, he stepped out gladly, never turning to look back at the white house which he had guarded faithfully for fifteen years. About a mile from his own place, passing the hamlet known as Mît Gâmûs just as the sun was rising, he met some young men going forth to work. One of them, who was leading two white water-buffaloes, hailed him by name, inquiring : " Whither away ? "

He answered with a phrase which told them that he was a pilgrim. The young men asked him who would guard the rest-house in his absence. He replied that

Allah knew; the house was in His keeping; all was well. At that those young men exchanged lightning glances, and sped him on his way with hearty blessings.

Beside a sakieh they stood and watched him trudging on, a plume of dust uprising from his heels; then one of them remarked: "The praise to Allah. The gun which never misses is without a guardian. Meet in the palm-grove at the fall of night. We must devise a stratagem." Another cried: "The stratagem is found already. Lo, the watchmanship is vacant, and we alone have knowledge of the fact! Let one of us become the watchman till our end is gained."

"Dost thou consent to play the part, O Mustafa?"

"At thy pleasure," answered Mustafa, a swarthy youth, a kind of servant to the previous speaker, who was called the Sheykh Ridwân. "If thou desire it I will go to-night and be Ghafîr."

"Capital!" exclaimed Ridwân. "Thou wilt make friends with the two servants and learn from them the habits of the Englishman. We shall await thee here to-morrow at this hour, for thy report."

The Sheykh Ridwân, aged seventeen, was a romantic dreamer. He had battened upon tales of strange adventure till the sober facts of life appeared unreal to him. He saw that quiet countryside as wonderland, and planned, while he performed his daily tasks, such exploits as had earned renown for brave and wily ones of old. Those exploits, being always well rewarded in the chap-books, he thought would lead perforce to high preferment and his recognition as the choicest spirit of the age. A mighty talker, of some eloquence upon his favourite subject, possessing, he alone of all his entourage, the power to read aloud from printed books; being, moreover, the son of a rich farmer, he had infected with his views a group of youths of his own age. They formed a band, united by most horrid vows. They pricked themselves with knives to get inured to pain; they prowled by night in order to get used to darkness. They thought of exploits which might make them

famous, and if they heard of any treasure greatly guarded, would instantly devise some plan to get at it, with no idea of theft, but simply that mankind might recognise their dauntless guile. On the few occasions of their action hitherto they had succeeded; but when, as happened naturally, they bragged of their success, the men whom they had hoodwinked made complaint against them to the father of the Sheykh Ridwân, whose anger gave the youths a sense of failure through injustice.

"When Ali El Masri performed his clever rogueries at the court of Er-Rashîd," said young Ridwân with bitterness, "those whom he tricked sought only to outwit him in return and, when they failed, became his servants and admirers. But these low dogs come fawning to my father. They have neither heart nor liver. May they perish utterly!"

Therewith he swore to be revenged on them. Their names were entered in the black book of the band, and never mentioned without solemn execration. Any game at their expense was counted fair. It was this admixture of revengeful spite with their romance which made the band the growing terror of the neighbourhood. The father of Ridwân, although indulgent to his son, alluded sometimes to the English as relentless rulers, without indulgence for the sports of youth, who would not scruple to arrest the band in its entirety and cast it into prison if they came to know of it; and since the coming of the English ghoul to Kefr Ammeh, the omdeh, through the fear of him, had threatened action.

The band had seen the clown's performance in the circus; they had seen the Englishman, the small white ball and the small white dog at play upon the dust-heaps many times. Moreover, two of them had served the ghoul when he went out to shoot, and so beheld the wondrous gun which never missed. But while the other fellâhîn surveyed the prodigy with awestruck eyes, as a mystery whose inner meaning would never be revealed in this low world, Ridwân's small gang, intoxicated

with romance, beheld him as a potent lord and possible magician—in fact, the only monster in the country. To overcome him by some stratagem would mean for them the moral lordship of the district. Ridwân's most cherished daydream was to picture the Englishman, outwitted by his skill, bestowing on him rank and honours as did monarchs of old days; and his disciples, taking fire from him as usual, saw in the English ghoul their road to glory.

At first their mind had been to carry off the small white dog, returning it after a while politely with a full description of the stratagem they had employed to gain it. But from the moment when they saw the gun which never missed, cupidity usurped the place of sportiveness. With such a gun the band would be invincible. And now, in the departure of the old Ghafîr, they saw their opportunity to get possession of it. Mustafa, after his first night as watchman at the rest-house, brought them hopeful news. He had been accepted as the new Ghafîr without a question. The Berberine cook, with whom alone he had held conversation, had asked him what had happened to the old Ghafîr, and, hearing he was gone upon the pilgrimage, had given praise to God. He had learnt from the said cook that the khawâgah was going to the capital to spend a night; Selîm the waiter would attend him thither, and the cook was thinking surreptitiously of going to Dumyâtt to see some friends. He had asked Mustafa to give food and water to the small white dog at sunset for fear lest it should die and he (the cook) be blamed; had asked him, too, to see that it was kept indoors lest it should stray, when equal blame would be his portion.

"To-morrow, then, towards midnight!" cried Ridwân emotionally.

At the time appointed the band approached the rest-house, armed with pistols, quarter-staves and rusty scimitars. First they crawled about the dust-heaps on their bellies for an hour to make quite sure that no

one of the village watchmen lurked in that direction. Then they stole up to the house.

Mustafa waited with the door-key in his hand. He opened for them and they entered, shuddering, in supernatural awe of their own daring. They closed the house door, lit a candle they had brought with them, and set out to explore the house. The small white dog, aroused from sleep, flew at them, barking, till in their terror they struck hard and made it dumb. For long they could not find the gun, search as they would. At last a queer-shaped case which they had passed repeatedly was made to open. It contained the treasure. With that in hand they went away again, creeping till they were out of earshot of the house, when they careered with horrid yells across the plain, in terror of themselves, such awful malefactors!

The Berberine cook returned next morning from Dumyâtt to find the small white dog a lifeless corpse and the gun stolen. He praised the Lord, then gashed his forehead with a knife, likewise his arm, and bandaged up the wounds. He then ran weeping to the omdeh's house, where in the courtyard he fell down and rubbed his visage in the mire, exclaiming:—

"Woe! Oh, woe! The house is broken open. The soul of the khawâgah, the beautiful, the priceless little snow-white dog, is foully slain. I fought with twenty. I was wounded, overcome. I am but now awakened from the swoon. O Allah! What to do? O Lord, relieve me!"

At that cry, the omdeh, the watchmen, and all the elders came together. They hurried out across the dust-heaps to the scene of the crime. The rest-house soon became the centre of a wailing crowd. When the omdeh, in tears, appeared in the doorway holding reverently in his arms the body of the small white dog, there were cries of mourning as upon the death of true believers. "Woe! Woe! O cruel day!" the people moaned. "Behold us ruined, shamed and made a dunghill. The good khawâgah will no longer smile on us. His goodness will be changed to fury. This

priceless little dog was as his son, and innocent of all offences."

"Wallahi, I will have the lives of all concerned!" exclaimed the omdeh in a frenzy. "See that this corpse be buried with all honour, as one that was the soul of our good lord. I go to telegraph the dreadful tidings to the mudîrîyeh. What can I do? My face is blackened till the Day of Judgment. I feel that I shall not recover from this great calamity. Nothing worse than a murder has been committed in my jurisdiction hitherto, and now some devils have assailed our lords the English. I must hasten to the telegraph. O High Protector!" In tears he ran away across the dust-heaps. In answer to the omdeh's telegram to the mudîr there came this message: "Inexpressibly horrified. Use all means to discover and arrest the miscreants. Am telegraphing to the noble victim of the wicked plot."

Immediately upon receipt of this command, the omdeh and the elders formed a court of law and summoned witnesses. The Berberine cook, under interrogation, mentioned the new night-watchman and his likeness. The man described was recognised as Mustafa, a well-known member of the band of Sheykh Ridwân. Exalted by his wrath and fear above all ties of neighbourhood, the omdeh forthwith sent the village watchmen with orders to arrest not only the aforesaid Mustafa, but also Sheykh Ridwân and all his house. The gang which had intimidated a whole countryside was captured easily and brought to trial in an hour. The father of the Sheykh Ridwân strove hard to intercede for him, offering vast sums of money for his liberation; but the omdeh raised his arms to Heaven, crying: "Allah witness, I am helpless to befriend thee now. The crime is too excessive. All the land is moved with it. The Government will wipe out Kefr Ammeh and sow the ground thereof with salt as a memorial, if before sunset it is not avenged."

"But what proof have you that any of these lads are guilty?" roared the father of Ridwân.

"They shall confess their guilt before thee," said the omdeh grimly; and he ordered Mustafa to be brought forward.

Ridwân, that high-strung youth, was weeping bitterly, which made Mustafa, who loved him as his eyes, more resolute in keeping silence under question.

"What, O son of a dog?" thundered the omdeh. "Thou wilt not speak? Thou floutest me? Wait only! We will find a way to make thee speak. Here, watchmen, take those three dogs who are grinning there, and give them each ten stripes with the nailed whip."

"By Allah, we know nothing of the matter," howled the prisoners; all saving Mustafa, who in his obstinacy seemed of stone. On him the omdeh's wrath was concentrated. "Ha, I will make thee speak!" he cried once more.

"Put out his eyes!" bellowed the crowd. "Tear off his finger-nails. Pull out his tongue to make him speak and save our lives!"

The omdeh, though he paid no heed to their advice, still thought it an occasion on which modern dilatory methods might be put aside. Mustafa was slightly tortured. His frame went rigid and his eyes turned over in his head, but not a word escaped him. Such fortitude destroyed the patience of the crowd. They spat upon him where he lay upon the ground.

"Where is the gun which never missed? Inform me!" shrieked the omdeh.

"Who slew with felon hand the small white dog? Inform me straightway!"

Mustafa compressed his lips and seemed to sneer.

"Then thou shalt forfeit thy right hand!" the omdeh cried. "My patience and my mercy are exhausted. The trial has already lasted for three hours. Here, make him kneel! Bring out the bucket of hot pitch. Now, O worst of malefactors, if thou confess not thou wilt lose thy hand of honour. Speak, I say!"

But Mustafa maintained a rigid silence.

The execution was just over when Sandeman thrust

his way through the crowd, which had been too much absorbed in gazing at the horrid sight to notice any one who came behind it.

The surprise at his sudden reappearance, the cries of sorrow and condolence, the indescribable confusion which arose when they discovered that the anger in his face was for the justice done upon his foe, prevented any one from thinking of the unfortunate Mustafa, who had swooned away; till Sandeman himself commanded them to carry the poor creature gently to the rest-house, and to fetch a doctor.

"He is a wretch unworthy of Your Honour's notice!" wailed the crowd. "He murdered in cold blood Isnâb, our chief delight!"

At ten o'clock that night, Sandeman came into my flat at Cairo in a half-hysterical condition and told me the amazing story: how his own omdeh had flogged three men and cut off one man's hand, in presence of a crowd and with the popular approval, all for pure love, as it appeared, of him (George Sandeman) and horror at the death of poor dear Snap! What in the world was he to do?

"Rummy beggars! Unaccountable beggars!" he kept muttering. "I'm deadly sick about it, yet I want to laugh. It hurts, I tell you. This business does for my career out here. I lose the best part of my income and all hope of Joanie. . . . If you'd seen what I saw! I can't make out the beggars. God knows what kind of a beast they think I am. When I was doing what I could for the poor devil, a chap came up to me, as pleased as Punch because he'd found a golf ball. Seemed to expect me to rejoice exceedingly! What does go on in their confounded heads?"

Late as it was, I called a cab and took him off to see the chief of his department who, by good fortune, was at home and able to receive us. I was the spokesman. Having heard the story to an end, he ordered Sandeman a glass of brandy, ere pronouncing:—

"I cannot see that you are in any way to blame for

this occurrence, Mr. Sandeman. The only criticism of your conduct which I have to make is that you ought to be at Kefr Ammeh at this minute and not here. You ask me what you are to do? Use your own judgment. You seem to have unbounded influence in Kefr Ammeh. Strictly speaking, I suppose we ought to make what is called an 'example' of your omdeh, but the case is quite unusual, in no sense exemplary. . . . I should think that you might let the matter rest, if rest it will. But I will take advice upon the subject. Good-night."

'I had to support Sandeman to the cab in wating. He seemed dazed and did not speak till we had driven off.

"Well, thank the Lord!" he sighed at length. "I breathe again. It's jolly decent of him not to go for me. . . . Poor little Snap! I used to say I'd kill the man who teased him even; but when I saw that feller's hand chopped off . . . Damned plucky feller! . . . He shall never want while I'm alive. . . . Don't tell Joanie anything about this business, mind . . . I'll go down and frighten 'em a bit, and then proclaim a general amnesty. It was the thought of punishment for the affair that turned me sick. They're like dumb animals, at times; they aren't responsible. And, say what you like, old man, they are ingratiatin' beggars! What?"

CROSS-PURPOSES

A STORY OF EGYPT

Six youths were tramping in a wedge formation along a dyke which stretched across the plain as far as eye could see in both directions between the fields of cotton and of sugar-cane, of corn and fodder-grass and bright green clover, with here a grove of palms upstanding like plumed lances and there a village like a cake of mud upon the landscape. The foremost was Suleymân Derwîsh; Mahrûs and Hamdi, sons of Yûsuf, walked behind him at each shoulder, the other three behind them in a row, keeping as close as might be to avoid their dust. The six had been released from prison that same morning; they had been walking since the fourth hour of the day now near its end; and lo! at last their village was in sight. Hamdi the son of Yûsuf improvised a song of gladness, which the others punctuated with a ready chorus.

"O abode of our delight! What save the thought of thee has been to us instead of water in the desert of our absence, cheering our hearts what time we did hard labour—we, the oppressed, pure innocents—with those who live in dungeons and in cells. There were others of God's creatures, swollen with pride, who ordered us about like dogs and carried guns to shoot us. We laughed 'Ha, ha!' at all their tyranny; the work seemed light to us, the food most excellent, because of thy sweet memory, O native place, gladdening our hearts like running water and the song of birds."

"Aye, by Allah! Say, O girls, have you forgotten the brave lads who gave you joy?"

"There is a smell of myrrh about thee, O dear native

place, a smell of camphor also and of burning dung. I die of the remembrance which thy perfume wakens—the thought of the great deeds which we performed in thee. The miser and the foul oppressor knew and feared us. The love of us was in all joyful hearts. The heart of every maid went out to us. We were the gallants of our time, the brave adventurers! Say truth, O girls, have you not mourned for us?"

"Aye, by Allah! Say, O girls, have you forgotten the brave lads who gave you joy?"

"Alas, our enemies set snares for us. They bought with gold the tongue of one who knew our counsels. We were taken, spat upon, insulted and dragged before the judge, the foul oppressor, who cast us into prison for long months. The doves, the very palm-trees, mourned for us; but we were dauntless, thinking of the home-coming and of the vengeance we would wreak on our most wicked foes. And now we come! We come! O sweet-lipped girls, O straight-backed girls, behold us!"

"Aye, by Allah! Say, O girls, have you forgotten the brave lads who gave you joy?"

The last chorus was bawled loudly by all six. An answer came to it upon the evening breeze, so faint that they stood still to listen with lips parted. Hands shading eyes from the darts of the setting sun, they scanned the distance of the road before them.

A little crowd was waiting at the foot of the mound on which the village and its palm-trees stood uplifted. The joy-cries of the women could be heard, incessant, thrilling. The young men sobbed, then broke into a run; and in ten minutes every youth was in his mother's arms, with father, sisters, wife around him, shouting blessings. To celebrate the triumph of their safe return, a procession was then formed, marching to the quaver of reed pipes and soft, insistent beat of little drums, which led them three times round the village before going in.

The flat-roofed houses and the palm-trunks stood out

black upon the sunset sky. The dogs all started barking and the cooing of the doves took on an anxious sound Their going was attended by a noisy swarm of children. At one point of the circuit, where the sunset light shone red on blind mud walls, the merry-makers came upon a group of elders of the village set in circle on a dust-heap. Astonished by the sudden noise of concourse, some of the old men were about to scramble to their feet, but the omdeh, who was present, bade them pay no heed to the disturbance. He himself continued smoking his nargileh placidly and talking as if no one save his cronies were in sight, though the procession paused before him for a moment making louder noise. When the crowd came round a second time, the council of the elders showed the same unconsciousness—an attitude which so offended the proud spirit of Suleymân Derwîsh that, on the third occasion of their passing by the seated group, he stopped and shouted to the omdeh :—

"Say, O Sheykh, hast thou no blessing for poor, ill-used men released from servitude ?"

The sheykh surveyed him coldly before answering :—

"I have this word for thee, O son of rashness ! Thou hast beheld the consequence of brigandage. Receive the lesson wisely and with reverence, and in the future keep to honest work."

"What trade shall I pursue ? Advise me, O my lord !" returned the rogue with mockery, for the reply enraged him. "Till thou, O Sheykh, didst throw me into prison, I was a gay, light-hearted youth, without malevolence. But now, by thy instruction, I am grown a man, and my intention henceforth is to work in earnest. What sayest thou to the business of a shroud-maker ? And wilt thou be my customer, O Sheykh ? All men must die—the praise to Allah!—so the trade is constant."

A burst of smothered laughter from the crowd acclaimed this sally. The procession thereupon resumed its way, passing in among the houses and dispersing. The music died, and night enwrapped the village.

Under cover of the night, a man with face well-hooded in a shawl stole from the shadow of the omdeh's house and, flitting through the alleys like a ghost, approached the dwelling of Suleymân Derwîsh. He fell down on the threshold of the room in which the brigand was at supper with his family, and lay there, writhing, while he murmured :—

" Forgiveness, for the love of Allah, and security ! I had no wish to do that deed of shame. They bribed, they threatened, they corrupted me. Since thy betrayal by my tongue, my conscience has not known one hour of peace ; at every meal my belly has afflicted me with awful pains ; I have not had one wink of sleep on any night ! Thou art and ever wast my soul's beloved ! I wished to make atonement, but too late. Ask all thy house here present, if I speak not truth ! Peradventure they may not have noticed it, but things were so ! "

The suppliant was a short man past the prime of life and rather stout, with face much lined, and little anxious eyes. His robe of very good material proclaimed him of superior station to the youth whose pardon he so humbly sought. In point of fact he was the omdeh's son-in-law, a man comparatively wealthy and of good position. Though he spoke in whispers, every word was clearly audible amid the hush which followed his appearance on the threshold.

" Is it indeed thyself, O Hasan, son of treason, O false friend ? " exclaimed Suleymân Derwîsh with bitter scorn. " Thou who didst reveal our secrets for a bribe, and bear such spiteful witness against men who trusted thee ? And comest thou to me with talk of pardon ? "

" Now Allah witness, I have made atonement," whined the prostrate one. " Are my sufferings nothing ? Are my tears, my inward torments nothing ? And my lack of sleep of nights ? Wallahi, every word I say is the extreme of truth !—are these all nothing in thy thinking, O my soul ? "

" Thou didst make me childless all this while ! "

exclaimed the mother of Suleymân. "For that may everlasting torments be thy portion!"

"Thou didst widow me for many weary months," exclaimed the brigand's wife. "For that may all thy offspring perish horribly!"

"Nay, curse him not," put in the old man of the house. "He comes here as a suppliant, he clasps our threshold. He was the author of a deed of darkness, and while our soul was absent in the prison we slew him daily in our thoughts. But now our soul has been restored to us—the praise to Allah!—it behoves us to show mercy and not pride, lest the Most Merciful withdraw from us his favour!"

"For the love of Allah, hear him, hear thy father!" moaned the wretch.

"Well, before Allah, I forgive thee what is past, O Hasan!" Suleymân Derwîsh at length vouchsafed disdainfully. "That means that we forego our lawful vengeance in thy case. But look well to thy footsteps in the days to come."

"O lord of bounty! O most generous youth!" suspired the grateful Hasan. "Let me kiss thy feet!"

He was in the act of crawling forward to perform that duty when the noise of men approaching made him spring up suddenly and with a hurried blessing disappear into the night. Three of the village elders hailed the house. On being pressed to enter, they complied, filling the place of honour in the little room. They had come to offer an apology for their apparent coldness out there upon the dust-heaps, on the passage of the festal train. They had been restrained from manifesting their unbounded raptures by the presence of the omdeh, who, for his part, viewed the merry-making as a personal affront, since it was he who, in the course of duty, had caused Suleymân and his five friends to be arrested and sent up for trial.

"Allah witness, we all love thee as our eyes!" murmured the spokesman of the three with nods and coaxing smiles. "We desire thy welfare above all

things. He arrested thee and cast thee into prison, so thou hast a grudge against him—it is natural. But, we ask thee, is it wise to flout him openly—the headman of the place in which thou hast to dwell? Thou puttest us, who are thy friends and his subordinates, in a position the reverse of comfortable. When we defer to him, as is our duty, thou wilt say, 'They wish me ill.' When we smile on thee, as our heart bids us, he, in his turn, will say, 'They are my enemies.' Think better of the matter, we beseech thee, for our sakes! His pride is deeply wounded. Go to him and ask his pardon. It is no shame for youth to ask forgiveness of old age."

These sentiments were much applauded by the people of the house, all save Suleymân himself, who answered sullenly:—

"I ask pardon of Allah. I will not ask the omdeh's pardon, to see him triumph in my self-abasement, thinking: 'The prison life has broken his proud spirit.' Never! I have now seen the world and talked with those who know the law, the new law of the English which is harder upon him than upon us. I know the limits of his power to harm me. He can cause me to be sent to prison once again. What matter? Prison life is not unpleasant. But if he overstep the bounds of his authority by but a hair's breadth, then I have power to drag him to the judgment and have him sent to prison in his turn. For me the prison is a merry jest; for him, disgrace. Now tell me, which is stronger, he or I?"

The elders plucked their beards and shrugged their shoulders.

"Well, may our Lord preserve thee!" were their spokesman's parting words. When out of earshot of the brigand he made haste to add: "May Allah quicken our intelligence to see where power resides at any moment and adhere to it."

Suleymân Derwîsh had many other visitors that night; some, like Sheykh Hasan, coming to implore his pardon for their past hostility; others, like the elders, to remonstrate with him lovingly upon his rudeness

towards the lawful headman of the place. In the intervals of serious talk, the gossip of the village on the one hand, the prison on the other, was retailed; while Suleymân himself consumed much coffee which, following on great fatigue, excited him. He had come back as a monarch to his own; the whole world sought his favour. He condescended to his people, boasting of the justice he was going to do, the vengeance he was going to take upon his enemies. Successive visitors observed his bearing with despair, behind the mask of deference which they assumed through fear. They had all hoped for him to die in gaol. Yet here he had returned with his companions, more arrogant than ever and more ripe for mischief. Were prisons then no longer hells on earth? Were they made pleasant places as these rogues asserted? Then let the Government reserve them for the law-abiding and the timid, that these might have some refuge from the bullies, who henceforth, very certainly, would rule the world.

The omdeh too had many visitors that night. Men went from the one house to the other without shame, esteeming it the merest prudence to conciliate both parties to a feud, where both seemed powerful. In the omdeh's house at midnight one made moan: "O Lord have mercy on us! This tiger-cub was bound and caged and we were safe. What miscreants have now released the brute for our destruction? We deemed ourselves well rid of him. Who dreamt that he would presently return in health and spirits, brave as of old and thirsting for revenge! At once, on his arrival, he insulted our beloved chief. Yet if we frown on him he will destroy our houses. O God Most High, instruct us what to do!"

The omdeh, for all answer, shrugged and turned away. He hated time-servers—mere reptiles who have no conception of the law of God nor any vision of the Day of Judgment. Their consciences were those of lizards, not of men. He, the omdeh, had been insulted grossly in his own village, yet these men, his colleagues, sharing in his honour, spoke of smiling on the rebel as

a thing of course. Ah, had this incident but happened in old days, before the English theorists devised their code of laws for Egypt, he, the responsible, despotic omdeh, would have known what to do! But such a thing could not have happened in those days. For years he had beheld disorder on the increase, not in one village only, but in all the land.

When all the rest had gone his daughter came to him complaining of the conduct of her husband, the Sheykh Hasan.

"He is with those gaol-birds," she reported, "feasting and making merry. O Lord! That I should bear the shame of such a dog. I went and spied. One glance! It was enough. Suleymân Derwîsh was boasting—May God notice and degrade him! He said that thou art now as dirt before him, since he knows the law; that he will henceforth order matters as he chooses; and if thou or thy watchmen lay a finger on him he will summon thee before the judge and have thee punished. O my father, show thy strength upon him, or I die of shame!"

A little before noon upon the morrow, after one hour's travel and some three hours spent in waiting in a crowded ante-room, the omdeh was admitted to the presence of the chief official of the province, who sat enthroned at a great desk, with two assessors seated at a lower level.

"Thou art the Sheykh Fâris Abd-ur-Fahman, Omdeh of Mashrûtah, is it not so?" questioned one of these. "And thou bringest tidings of importance to His Excellency? State thy business!"

The sheykh with downcast eyes described the home-coming to his village of six brigands, who had spent eight months in prison with hard labour as the just reward of many crimes they had committed; the insult put upon him by their chief; the way the people drew away from him, the omdeh, and cringed in fear before those shameless boys.

"Of old, before the legal code came into force, my fear was on my people, and we lived in peace," he stated

in conclusion. "If one did wrong I punished him in such a manner as to silence murmurs. The peace and order of the village were upon my head, and in return my jurisdiction was made absolute. The people knew that there was no appeal against my judgment. At first when the new code was introduced, the people knew it not and, bred up to obedience, still deferred to me; but now the rising generation becomes turbulent, having learnt that my authority is circumscribed by law. They know that it extends to this point and no further. They come up impudently to the boundary line, and mock me in the hope to make me overstep it. And therewithal, although effective power is now denied me, the Government still blames me for the misbehaviour of such rascals as much as formerly when I possessed that power. Is this justice, is it reason, O my lord? Since the code and not the omdeh has the power to-day, the code with its police, and not the omdeh with his watchmen, should keep order in the villages. Now I have laid my case before Your Excellency. What can I do to reassert my dignity, to save myself from further insult? I ask you, in the cause of all authority."

The old man stood with eyes downcast, hands hidden in his flowing sleeves, awaiting the reply of his superior.

"What can any of us do but trust in God? The code is on us all. We are quite helpless. Thy objections, being altogether vain, appear to me unworthy of a man of sense. They do but make us rage and beat our heads against a wall!" The voice of the mudîr was musical and friendly. The omdeh for the first time dared to look at him. He saw a portly personage with beard of iron-gray, whose face evinced good nature and good sense.

The sheykh responded to the strain of humour in the great man's tone. "Allah forbid," he murmured with a smile, "that I should criticise the code itself, O my dear lord! It is no doubt perfect of its kind. I do but say of it as Caracûsh remarked of the cat which Ali the

Jester made of wool and showed to him: 'It is a cat, a fine cat, yet there is something lacking.' Of the code I say it is a code, a fine code, but it does not work. It is—I crave forgiveness, O my lord, for speaking plainly in Your Excellency's presence—a thing imagined by ingenious men, and not at all the work of God, which is to say, a natural growth in this our land."

The great man laughed aloud, his two assistants echoing the mirthful noise, and, leaning over towards the omdeh, said:—

"Now, by my beard, thou speakest truth, and neatly too! Thy thought is mine in private. Be sure I will remember thee and try to help thee."

The omdeh of Mashrûtah made his reverence. Scarcely had he left the presence when the English inspector of the province stalked into the room, the air of bustle common to his kind detracting somewhat from his dignity.

"Who was that who just went out?" he questioned sharply. He was always asking questions, and the mudîr, accustomed to his ways, replied:—

"The omdeh of Mashrûtah."

"What was his business with thee?"

"He came to make complaint of certain difficulties—the usual tale."

Therewith the governor recounted briefly, in a tone of ridicule, the omdeh's griefs, adding: "This omdeh is an ignorant, old-fashioned person. He cannot see the beauty of a legal code which robs him personally of so much prestige."

He used that tone to gratify the Englishman, whom he regarded as of course a lover of the code. He was amazed when the inspector answered:—

"He is right. The code is not entirely a success. Here, in the country districts, crime is on the increase. It is on that very business I have come to see you. There is a new decree. Henceforth we may deport our village brigands, whenever we can catch them, without public trial. Only the charges need be verified."

The mudîr and his assistants exchanged lightning glances, expressive both of rapture and dismay.

"But, O my lord," the mudîr murmured gently, "do you mean to say that we may kidnap malefactors?"

"Precisely," snapped the business-like inspector.

"The praise to Allah! But are such measures legal? The Ministry has always laid such emphasis on strict adherence to the forms of law."

"It is efficiency before all things. Where pure legality proves inefficient, we must supplement it. A law is to be passed immediately, and we have permission to anticipate that law where need arises."

The inspector, always in a hurry, then marched out, leaving the mudîr to stare hard at his two assistants, first one and then the other, with round eyes of glee. At length he let his mirth have way, exclaiming: "Praise to God for this efficiency! The Lord preserve it to us all our days! For it has overcome the paralysing law, and made us government officials men again. But what a long way round they take to come to fact. In order to correct the code which was to banish tyranny, they institute a tyranny far greater than was ever known before the code existed. For what man living but prefers a flogging from the omdeh to banishment for life without a warning?"

Meanwhile the omdeh of Mashrûtah journeyed homeward. It in some degree allayed the perturbation of his mind to know that he possessed the sympathy of his superior. He had recovered something of his old serenity when, astride of his white donkey with its coloured trappings, he drew near his village. But in the palm-grove he beheld Suleymân Derwîsh sitting with several of his gang, much as the omdeh had been sitting with the elders on the previous evening when the procession formed in honour of those rogues annoyed him. For impudence, the young men remained seated even as the old had done, pretending not to see the omdeh as he passed. The habit of respect was strong upon them, adding a touch of awkwardness to their impertinence.

They nudged one another when the old man wished them a good-evening, but returned no answer.

The omdeh's rage returned upon him at their rudeness. The bad manners, even more than the rebellion, jarred on one who was himself the very pink of courtesy. For the welfare of God's people here on earth, for the honour of Islâm, there must be chastisement. Were mere lads to grow up lawless and uncouth, the slaves of their own lusts, for lack of proper discipline, merely because it pleased the English to set up an unnatural law instead of order? No, a thousand times. He had rather earn the censure of the Government, had rather end his days in prison than have his conscience kill him for neglect of his plain duty. He would do right in spite of all the whims of all the English. At worst they could but punish his old body, while God, his Lord and theirs, would guard his soul.

Alighting at his house, he called the watchmen and ordered them at once to catch Suleymân Derwîsh and his companions, naming the spot where he had seen them sitting in the palm-grove. A chance mention of his visit to the mudîrîyeh gave them to suppose that he had orders from the governor. He then commanded his own servants to unearth the great kurbâg—a monstrous whip—which had not seen the light for many years. This whip was held before him by a serving-man when the rebellious youths were dragged into his presence, struggling and protesting violently with tremendous threats. He quietly commanded that they should be stripped and bound, and each receive five lashes. At that they shrieked for mercy, cursed and prayed, flinging themselves upon the ground and foaming at the mouth like madmen.

The gateway of the yard was full of frightened faces. When all was ready for the execution the omdeh made a little speech in mild, paternal tones. And then the whip, uplifted in a watchman's hands, descended on the bare back of Suleymân Derwîsh, then on the back of Hamdi, son of Yûsuf, then on the back of Mustafa, and

so on, going up and down the line in measure, with "Heyli! Bismillah!" at every stroke, till every one had eaten his five lashes.

There were agonising shrieks and groans as well from the spectators as the actual sufferers. And then the victims were released, a writhing crew. Their relatives rushed forward and sustained them.

"It is against the law! We shall complain of thee, O bloody tyrant! Thou shalt be beaten, thou thyself, and put in prison—that I promise thee!" blubbered Suleymân, supported by his weeping wife and sisters. He alone of all the gang had fight left in him.

"Go, do what pleases thee!" replied the omdeh suavely. "But be polite or thou shalt eat another flogging."

The old man was majestic. None dared meet his eyes. When the victims and their friends had fled, men fell down and embraced his feet, proclaiming him the saviour of the land. His eyes ranged over the inconstant crowd with vast contempt and just a hint of pride, for which he asked God's pardon. He had a strong, half humorous desire to make these also taste the great kurbâg. The English might degrade him now, might cast him into prison, even kill him, if they chose. He was indifferent to life henceforward, having had his hour. Meanwhile Suleymân and his supporters, with a crowd of sympathisers, boys and girls, had rushed out of the village, mad with rage and grief, and taken refuge in a field of sugar-cane.

"O Lord, befriend us!" wailed their leader. "We are dishonoured, flouted, in the sight of all. Escaped but yesterday from cruel tyranny, we were rejoicing in the company of those who love us, most peacefully inclined and harming no man, when this shame befell!"

"Wallahi, our hearts bleed," his comrades moaned. "O Allah, witness our extremity! We, the bravest, the most self-respecting of mankind to be so treated! We writhe! We burn! Wâh! Wâh!"

"Now listen, all of you!" exclaimed Suleymân with

fierce decision. "I swear that I will never more lie down to sleep nor close my eyes till I have taken steps to humble to the dust this vile oppressor, and have made him taste the pains which I now suffer. He has done a thing illegal. The mudîr allowed it; but the English care no more for the mudîr than for a dung-beetle. I will make petition to the English, who will drag our persecutor to the judge. Then will we testify against him, saying: 'This horrible old man, this worst of tyrants, did seize on us when we were sitting quiet in the shade, and for sheer lust of cruelty did flog us till our blood bade fair to inundate the village.' When they behold him in the culprit's place, degraded, spat upon, all people will support our tale with acclamation."

"And I will say," chimed in another, weeping lamentably: "O judge, so cruel was that causeless flogging that one man of our number died. I am that man. I feel it certainly. God knows I shall not live another day."

"We must be careful what we say before the judge," exclaimed the sister of Suleymân, a girl renowned for wit. "Our stories must agree at every point. Every word must be made true beforehand by rehearsal, for judges and the people of the courts are cunning devils, who catch poor righteous folk in nets of questions."

At once, and weeping though they all still were, the mournful group assumed the likeness of a court of law. The sister of Suleymân became the judge, and one by one the witnesses appeared before her and were questioned. She prompted their replies, corrected, schooled them, weeding out discrepancies, until she had their testimony solid as the testimony of one man. By then their tears were dried and hope prevailed.

"I hasten to the capital this night," declared Suleymân Derwîsh. Some of the girls returned into the village to fetch food. They brought back news to their companions waiting in the patch of cane. The omdeh, being asked point-blank by what authority he had ordained the flogging, had confessed that he had acted

on his own responsibility, against the orders of the governor, whom he had seen that day. The tidings were received with howls of joy.

"Then I will go to the mudîr," declared Suleymân Derwîsh with satisfaction. "It is much nearer, and our vengeance will be felt at once. Come with me all of you and bear the witness which we have prepared and verified!"

They waited in the patch of sugar-cane till it was night, and then set out with song to keep up their courage in the darkness, the men repeating doggedly the name of Allah.

It was still night when they reached the chief town of the province, but the muezzins were already calling up the dawn, which soon appeared. They went into a mosque to rest awhile, partaking of the food which they had brought with them. Then they repaired to the government offices, where Suleymân inquired for the mudîr. He was told that His Excellency was busy for the moment, being closeted with the English inspector. At that the girls trilled forth their joy-cries; all was glee. The degradation of the omdeh was assured.

The sentries and attendants, judging from their noise and numbers that the matter was important, sent in word to the mudîr, who soon received them.

"What means this concourse? What is your complaint?" His Excellency asked, in some dismay as they poured in.

"A terrible complaint, O lord of justice! The law is set at naught; oppression has come back upon the land; poor honest men are flogged to death, impaled and mutilated daily. In our own village, in Mashrûtah . . ."

At mention of that name the mudîr exchanged portentous glances with the Englishman who sat beside him; while Suleymân went on to tell his story. No sooner had he finished, than another of the suppliants took up the parable in order, as had been arranged. But the mudîr commanded silence.

" What is thy name, O buck ? " he asked of the first speaker.

" Suleymân Derwîsh, thy servant, O my lord."

Again the governor exchanged looks with the Englishman.

" What is thy calling ? "

" I am a farmer."

"Thou liest, dog, thou art a brigand ! We keep the record of such persons. Turn it up ! "

A scribe, who sat beneath His Excellency, at that command produced a monstrous book, opened it at a certain place and laid it before the governor for his perusal.

" Here are some hundred charges to thy name. For three years thou hast been a scourge and nuisance to the countryside. Thou art but yesterday returned from prison, and to-day thou comest hither with complaints ! What means all this ? "

" It is some other, surely, O my lord. The name is common. I am not a malefactor. The omdeh beat me near to death without a cause."

Suleymân Derwîsh began his story once again with fear of death upon him from the great man's frown. The others as a chorus whined their preconcerted testimony, till soldiers came and laid hands upon some of them, when there were howls of fear and bitter wailing.

The omdeh of Mashrûtah sat that evening in the courtyard of his house watching the antics of his little grandson, who was playing with some discs of cow-dung, calmly expecting the conclusion of his dignified, respected life. He knew that his enemies had gone to the mudîr ; and conscious as he was of disobedience to the code, conscious as he also was of rectitude, he never thought of moving to defend himself, but merely waited for the soldiers who should take him to the gaol. He felt no fear, indeed looked forward to his trial with a sort of eagerness, meaning to speak his mind upon the state of Egypt once for all in public upon that occasion.

He was thinking of the very words to be employed when certain of the elders came in hurriedly and told him :—

" Our enemies return. They seem dejected. Suleymân Derwîsh is not among them."

The omdeh neither moved nor spoke. He waited. Presently the sound of wailing grew apace, the courtyard was invaded by a crowd of men and girls, dusty and footsore, most of them with tear-stained faces. A girl—it was the sister of Suleymân Derwîsh—stood forth and said :—

" We have a grief against thee. Hitherto we had esteemed thee a just man, if stern ; but now we know thee for no better than an infidel. Thou wentest yesterday to the mudîr and he informed thee of a new device for getting rid of brave, unruly youths out of the villages. Thou camest home and thou didst cause Suleymân and his companions to be flogged. But thou didst not inform them of the reason of thy sudden confidence. Thou didst lie to them for their destruction, saying that the flogging was against the will of the mudîr ; luring them on to make complaint to the authorities. They went to the mudîr, and as a consequence Suleymân Derwîsh, my brother, Mahrûs and Hamdi, sons of Musa Yûsuf, Mustafa the hunchback, and young Ali are banished and enslaved for life. Now we put the question to thee. Hast thou acted justly ? Was not the flogging quite enough without the banishment ? "

" By Allah, right is with her," cried the elders of the village, while the common crowd gave forth an ugly snarl.

The omdeh knew he was in danger of his life. Once before—and only once—in all the years of his long pilgrimage on earth had he heard a village murmur as one man with rage, and then a family of twenty souls had been exterminated. Still he felt no fear, although the crowd was surging forward, and men were shouting :—

" Drag him out upon the dust-heaps ! "

He drew his little grandson to his side and held him

close for safety while he gazed hard at the sky between the palm-trunks, blue-green above the dark mud wall, and tried to realise exactly what had happened.

"Answer, O Sheykh," the people yelled at him. "Answer the charge or we will kill thee like a fly!"

His family and the more zealous of the watchmen gathered round for his protection. Already they were struggling with the foremost of the crowd, while he reviewed the wonders of his life. He had seen with equanimity the spread of Frankish influence in the valley of the Nile. The train, the telegraph, the telephone—he had beheld them all without the least surprise. What had surprised him was the atheism of the Franks in face of such discoveries, which made him all the more extol the Power of God. It was this atheism only that he hated in the works of Europe. When the English came he had perceived their good intentions, but shuddered at their errors, the result of atheism. They seemed to think it more important that the people of the country should resemble them in haste and greed of gain, should be governed in their manner and adopt their tricks for saving time than that they should lead the life of thinking and believing men. He had deplored but not resented all their interference with the villages. But now, as he surveyed their latest blunder, the life-long patience of his soul gave way, and from his heart he cursed them. He scarcely heard the clamour of the crowd, though men were shouting: "Kill him!" and a fierce fight was raging close at hand. His sole defenders were the people of his household and three watchmen. The elders of the village, his old cronies, were among the crowd. All at once his mind returned to earth. He stood up and demanded silence. There came a hush of curiosity. He cried:—

"I swear by Allah, before all here present, by the beard of the Prophet, by my life, by my salvation, that I knew nothing of the thing with which that girl has charged me till she spoke of it. I flogged those youths because I could no longer bear their insults to my old

gray beard. I knew that in so doing I transgressed the law, but was content to bear the punishment of that transgression. I never dreamt that they would banish men for life without a trial—they who prate of justice and equality. Alas, that I should live to see such tyranny! I go to-morrow early to the mudîrîyeh, and if the youths are not released on my petition, I shall at once resign the post of omdeh of this village."

"Our Lord reward thee and prolong thy life, O Sheykh!"

The crowd surged forward, friendly in a trice. The elders of the village stood once more beside their chief, trying to look as if they had not left him. One of them whispered in his ear: "It is enough, O dear one! Thou hast cleared thyself. Pledge not thy soul too far, I do beseech thee. We do not want those devils back a second time, when Allah in His mercy has relieved us of them. Praise be to Him who made the English think of something sensible at last! Those malefactors ruined business in the district."

"You are pupils of the English!" said the omdeh grimly. "As for me, I am old-fashioned. Let me go my way."

*

BETWEEN OURSELVES

THE P. & O. steamship *Marmora* was half-way on her voyage from Port Said to Naples. I lay in a deck-chair in the shade with a book upon my knees, between Tom Harris, a young cub in the Irrigation Department, and Sir Charles Duclay, K.C.M.G., one of the rulers of Egypt and a famous Orientalist; each of whom likewise lay in a deck-chair and had a book upon his knees. We were all three tired of reading, yet found nothing in particular to say to one another at the moment. Beyond the awning under which our chairs were stretched there was nothing to be seen but burning sky and tumbled sea—a sea which seemed opaque in its commotion and very nearly black as I surveyed it out of half-closed eyes, beneath the brim of a straw hat tipped forward till it touched my nose. Not far from us two groups of men and girls were playing at deck quoits. Behind us somewhere, a seemingly exciting match at bull-board was in progress. Coming from Egypt, we were out of all the fun; the Anglo-Indians quietly ignoring us, looking right through us when we moved within their range of vision, and generally seeming to regard us as some kind of "natives." We lay and read or sauntered up and down and talked, with thought of the next meal as of a coming great event.

We were lying side by side in silence, blinking at the restless sea, when an Anglo-Indian lady, neither young nor lovely, came along the deck. She seized upon an empty chair not far from us and began to fold it, evidently wishing to transport it to some other place. Duclay, as swift and graceful in his movements as a panther, was beside her in a trice. He was carrying the chair

in the direction pointed out to him, she seeming much embarrassed and, I thought, annoyed at his politeness, when an elderly man in khaki supervened and took it from him, with a curt: "Thank ye. Much obliged. . . . Where do you want it put, my dear?"

"Over there by Mrs. Mallinson, if you will be so good, dear."

The couple took no further notice of Duclay, who instantly rejoined us, chuckling.

"That was pretty cool, I must say," murmured Harris drowsily.

"They thought I wished to scrape acquaintance with them," explained Duclay. "They're old inhabitants, and we're new-comers. It's the same wherever there are English people."

He was silent for a minute, then remarked abruptly:—

"We are a lot of priceless hypocrites, we English!——"

"Speak for yourself," growled Harris, half asleep.

"We ourselves are so accustomed to swallowing the grain of salt which makes belief in our perfections possible that we forget to warn the peoples before whom we pose of the need for that facilitating condiment. The mind of Orientals—of Egyptians, anyhow—is as literal as A B C—intensely and enthusiastically literal. Our mind, on the other hand, is hyperbolical, doggedly and dully so, so much so that we go through life without an inkling of it. Imagine a man gassing about generosity, the abstract virtue, to another man who thinks he means to give him money in a minute! It was all right while we simply took and held by force. That was a simple proposition understanded of the Oriental. But when we got on to the magnanimous lay: 'conquest for the benefit of the conquered,' 'government for the benefit of the governed,' and began this preaching and protesting business, our literal-minded friend began to worry. His bright and singularly knowing eye was on us. He was perplexed and in the end enraged by our hypocrisy; more particularly since we joined

with Russia—a move which gave the show away completely. I can tell you a story of a man I know—a native—who was sentenced the other day to ten years' penal servitude, which illustrates exactly what I mean. If it won't bore you ? "

" It will," snapped Harris, who had turned his back to us. " Don't talk of Egypt. I want to wipe out the whole beastly country for the next three months. Oh, for a good Scotch mist and heather under me ! "

But Duclay had addressed himself to me, and I was glad to listen. He turned half over towards me in his chair, was restless for a moment while he sought a comfortable pose, and then began.

" Two years ago I spent the whole of April at the Mena House, recovering from an attack of sunstroke, the result of my own carelessness when up at Halfa on a visit. My wife had gone to England to her mother, who was ill, leaving me practically homeless for the time. I was fit for nothing, and forbidden by the doctor to do more than sit about and blink at life ; which made me irritable. The everlasting sunlight was a nightmare. I hated that damned sand and those confounded pyramids as something that was driving me insane. If it had not been for an American woman, unattached and skittish, who happened to be staying in the hotel, I should probably have died of simple boredom. She chose to play the ministering angel, and did her best to keep my pulses going. I was sitting out with her one afternoon in the veranda when one of the sufragis came and handed me a visiting card. It was that of a native professor in the School of Law—a very intelligent man whom I have known for years. Above his name was scrawled in English : ' To introduce Abbâs Lutfi Suleymân, my pupil and your very great admirer.' It was not the first time he had sent promising young men for my inspection, knowing as he did my curiosity about young Egypt.

"Excusing myself to Madame, I dragged myself along the veranda, meaning to have the interview indoors, but I had not got half-way before the same sufragi met me, followed by about the finest specimen of Eastern manhood that it has ever been my luck to meet. Even a Frangi suit of cheap material, a high collar, a garish tie and a pair of yellow boots too large for him, could not disguise his fine proportions and his grace of movement. Though his colouring was rather dark for an Egyptian, there was no reminder of the negro in his face. His lips were not too full, his nose was aquiline, his eyes were large and really beautiful. He seemed to me the pure Arabian type, entirely nervous in the same way that your thoroughbred Arab horse is nervous. The finest of those horses always strike me as alight. Well this man seemed alight as he ran forward and tried to kiss my hand.

"'I am so happy, sir,' he said in tolerable English. 'This is the brightest day in all my life. At last I am permitted to be near to one of those noble and good men who have brought civilisation and all blessings to our poor dear Egypt. I am but a young student, sir, but I do love the English more than I can tell. I think, sir, I would gladly die for them.'

"He said this with a beatific smile as, having put a stop to the hand-kissing business, I made him take a chair beside me at a little table; tapping on which I ordered coffee to be brought at once. You know what a fool one feels when slapped in the face with compliments of that description. Many men I know get downright rude on such occasions, thinking it all humbug, which it seldom is. Any one can tell the ring of a false compliment. We fail to make allowance for the capacity of young people of these sunstruck races for enthusiasm over anything and anybody. It always seemed to me a cruel shame for us to snub and terrify our wild admirers. Still I feel as foolish as another under admiration, and that man's admiration was a scorching fire.

"I laughed and said that we had tried to do a little for

the good of Egypt, not at all for the *beaux yeux* of the Egyptians, but because it suited our ambition and convenience.

"'Ah, don't say that, sir!' he cried out ecstatically, with tears of real enthusiasm in his eyes. 'I know well the generous work which you have done here. In my childhood I did learn it at the school from books, and since then I have seen it with my eyes—the noble work. You make everybody be polite to everybody. You say, there shall be no more rudeness, no more beating, no more fighting and low insults; if anybody rude he shall be punished. Civilisation. So we all become as brothers; so we go ahead. Many people do not understand your gracious goodness. I teach them that the English are their noble friends. It is in my thinking'—here he touched his forehead—'to write one mighty book in praise of all the English, that those fools may learn how devilish silly they have been.'

"I objected that our praises could not fill a book, that criticism of our conduct would be more acceptable. He did not seem to hear my interruption, but went on exclaiming:—

"'They shall see and know! I will instruct them. It is in my thinking to devote my life to this great service for my country: to extol the English!'

"From his coming to me with an introduction I at first supposed that, like every other student, he was after government employment. I presently remarked as much; informing him that the only way of gaining such employment was the high-road of competitive examination. With another beatific smile, he answered:—

"'I have no desire for an employment. All I wish is to write the beautiful sweet thoughts which come into my mind about the English, our too noble benefactors. I will write them and make everybody glad, and so grow famous.'

"I was in the presence of a genuine enthusiasm—one might call it mania, for I suppose a clever doctor could have cured him of it. As a child at school he had learnt

by heart those text-books, inspired by adulation of the conqueror, which glorify our work for Egypt, conveying the idea that we are angels sent from Heaven to benefit the world in general and the Nile valley in particular. Regarding education as a magic thing, and everything he saw in print as gospel truth at that age, he accepted that ideal view of us without the grain of salt desirable, and preached it to his parents and the other villagers who, not having had the benefit of modern schooling, hung for instruction on his infant lips. What strikes me as most wonderful—indeed miraculous—is that, as he grew up, his enthusiasm did not weaken. It was doubtless owing to the circumstance that he had not personally had to do with any Englishman until the day he came to me, except young Vardon of the School of Law—a weak-eyed and benignant creature. Thus he had reached the age of two and twenty, in a country overridden by the English, without a doubt of our angelic character!

"I asked if he was going to practise law. He answered, No. His one idea was to present his radiant vision of the English and their way of progress intelligibly to his fellow-countrymen. He was writing for *El Balad*, a new journal founded by a friend of his, and hoped that I would condescend to read his articles.

"We had got to this point of the conversation when the American widow—I say 'widow,' but believe she had a husband somewhere—came up and rather coolly took a chair between us. My visitor sprang up and executed wondrous bows. 'An English lady?' he inquired with his ecstatic smile, as if the joy of presentation to an English lady would instantly have cut the thread which bound him to this earth.

"'No; American,' I answered rather curtly, for I was irritated by the way she smiled upon my dark Antinous, already dazzled by her blonde effulgence. I dismissed him quickly, much to her disgust. She declared him afterwards to be the 'sweetest thing' that she had ever seen.

"Next day he came again, bringing samples of his

journalistic work for my inspection. As it happened, I was in my bedroom, lying down, so kept him waiting. When I went out at last to the veranda I found my fair friend sitting with him at a table, head to head over a newspaper spread out between them, her auburn chevelure in contact with his fez.

" ' I'm having my first lesson,' she called out to me as I approached. ' You never mean to say that you can read this script quite easily ? Mr. Abbâs is teaching me the letters. It's too fascinating. I guess I'll have real lessons when I come back here next winter.'

" She then got up and left us, Mr. Abbâs protesting that there was no need for her departure, which I, however, expedited with a frown.

" The articles he showed me had a certain eloquence, but did not touch this earth at any point that I could see. In one of them my name was mentioned with encomiums. He watched me while I read it, all on tenterhooks for my approval. I did my best to look extremely gratified, rose, bowed to him and murmured of unworthiness. He literally crowed for joy, and swore, I recollect, by Allah to write articles, a many, about nothing but my goodness. I had to speak to him severely to preserve my name.

" After that he came out by the tram two or three times a week to spend an hour at my instructive feet. If I encouraged his visits it was in order gently to deflate his too embarrassing illusion with regard to us. I took the American woman into my confidence about him, and found her sympathetic at the time, though I now know she was playing her own game. As I recovered and was able to get about, I found myself let in for various excursions, with Abbâs for guide ; and in a few days saw more of Cairo and its neighbourhood than I had seen in all the years which I had spent in Egypt. At last I went back into harness, the fair American retired to Switzerland, and Abbâs vanished from my ken until the following winter.

" Then—it was in December ; my wife was back ; we

had taken a new house on the Gezireh, and I was basking in the atmosphere of domesticity—he came to me one afternoon in great distress. The newspaper—*El Balad*—for which he had been writing, a pro-British organ, had been suppressed for no good reason. Would I bring the matter to the notice of the British Agency, and use my influence to put things right? I made inquiries, and was told that the newspaper in question had uttered an atrocious libel on a high official of the Khedive's entourage. I handed on this information to Abbâs when next he came to see me, and presented him with the report of the case, consisting of some fifty typewritten pages of dog French, which had been furnished by the Egyptian authorities on my demand. I have a lively recollection of the scene. It was late afternoon, and we were sitting in my garden by the Nile, where there was shade. Through the yellow blaze above the river we could see the masts and tumbled buildings of Bûlâc, and hear the hammering from the boat-builders' yards. The gardener was busy with a hose deluging each individual plant and blade of grass. My wife was up in the veranda at a table, reading.

"Abbâs, who, as I said before, was uncommonly good-looking, had that day chosen to disfigure himself by putting on a formidable pair of gold-rimmed spectacles —of which he seemed absurdly proud—though he was not short-sighted. It is queer how Orientals, when they imitate us, invariably pitch on something which we think unlovely. A man I know—young Farrow—had an accident which obliged him for some time to wear a kind of iron apparatus like a cage on his right leg. The notables of his district were always asking him how much it cost, and where they could buy one like it. Because some learned men have spoilt their eyes with reading and so take to glasses, glasses have been adopted as the symbol of a serious mind. I noticed that Abbâs removed them when he wished to read.

"'But,' he exclaimed, after studying the papers I had given him, 'they speak untrue. It was no libel

which we made. The case was so, as we declared to be. The gentleman of whom we wrote had persecuted righteous people, and stolen money from them with great wickedness. He leads, moreover, a most filthy, vicious life in private.'

"'A libel need not be a lie,' I told him. 'It is an attempt to injure some one's reputation by malicious statements.'

"'But, sir,' he wailed, 'by God, I beg you, look! All which we wrote was only to seek justice for men wronged most beastly, to call the attention of the English to a case of very horrid wickedness. It was for that they did destroy our journal. Will you not protect us from injustice? We love the English very much indeed.'

"He had resumed the gold-rimmed spectacles, which hid the childish candour of his eyes and made him an unlovely object. I grew impatient and spoke testily, telling him that, so far as I could see, the matter had been properly investigated; and that it was not our English custom to interfere high-handedly with the course of law, nor to support our partisans through right and wrong. I then laid my hand upon his shoulder and suggested we should go and have some tea. I was afraid that he was going to cry, he seemed so crestfallen. However, by dint of talk on general subjects, and flattering him up a bit, we managed to restore his spirits. My wife gave him a rose when he said good-bye, I escorted him a few steps, and he went away as happy as a king.

"Two days later, in the afternoon, he called at the house, but went away again on being told that we had visitors. He left word with the doorkeeper that he had serious news for me, and would seek the favour of an audience on the following morning. In fact, next morning, when I got down to my office, he was in the ante-room among the usual crowd of suitors; and hardly had I sat down at my desk and begun to glance over the pile of correspondence there awaiting me, when my

secretary came to tell me that a young effendi was clamouring to see me instantly; which young effendi, so the watchmen told him, had been hanging round the place since early dawn. To have done with him, I ordered him to be admitted. He seemed terribly excited, and at the sound of his own voice saluting me, burst into tears. He cried :—

" ' It is a libel, sir, and not one word is true. What shall be done to those who work such beastliness ? ' With that he handed me a sheet of notepaper covered with his careful English writing.

" ' That,' he said, ' is the most true translation of what those devils write against me in that wicked journal.'

" I kept the document as a rare jewel of Egyptian journalism, and generally carry it about with me in a pocket-book. I may have it on me at this minute. Let me look."

" You made too much fuss of the fellow," growled Harris drowsily. " It doesn't do to let 'em hang around. They get swelled head. I should have choked him off at first, and saved a lot of trouble."

" It would have been more merciful," said Duclay gravely."

" Ah, here's the document I was looking for.

" ' From the Arabic journal (*Nil.*)

" ' THE MALODOROUS EVIL-LIVER.

" ' There is a youth well known to all of us, the son of a dog, a pimp and lickspittle, who gives himself grand airs towards his fellow-countrymen while gluttonously devouring all the dirt of all the English. Any one would think when they do hear him talk that he was

the son of noble and illustrious people. That is not the case, by God alive. His father was a dog who fed on carrion, his grandfather and his ancestors were pigs most perfectly defiled and damned with very wonderful complete damnation. All of us know his mother. His sisters are much loved by us, but not respected. Therefore we have little veneration for this child of shame and product of disgusting sins. Therefore we urge and importune all honest people to beware of him because his contact and his conversation bring defilement. He is well known to the police as thief, spy, evil-liver and suspected atheist. We ourselves beheld him lately seated with a pompous air among the infidels —himself the worst—on the terrace of Shepheard's Hotel in the company of an English lady, one of those who are renowned for the impartial distribution of their favours in return for gold. Whence does he derive his wealth ? Nobody knows, but it is very certain that his wealth is gained by some obscene, nefarious traffic. We have written to the English woman he frequents, warning her to guard her jewellery when that low thief is near. Do you inquire his name after this full description ? His name is Abbâs Lutfi Suleymân. We hereby call upon all true believers and Egyptian patriots, and adjure and entreat them, to spit in his face whenever they encounter him, and also to chastise him with a perfect beating ; and hereby furthermore declare that we ourselves will bear the legal cost, if any, of such righteous action.' "

" Abbâs was sobbing and exclaiming in my office all the while I was deciphering this gem of literature. When I had finished, he cried out : ' Oh, sir ! What shall I do to come to justice ? Is this not a libel greater far than that for which they have suppressed our journal ? If they did suppress our honourable journal on account of publication of the hidden truth, will they not suppress this filthy one for publication of so

many open falsehoods detrimental and disastrous to my reputation ? '

" He went on to point out that the libel was not directed only at himself (Abbâs), but also at ' that gracious lady, the companion of Your Honour in your time of illness,' who had shown the wonderful and splendid kindness to allow him to approach her. An English lady !—(It was of no use my insisting that she was American)—a sweet, amiable lady !—a gentle, civilised, delightful lady !—to be so insulted ! It made him shudder for his country. It was execrable ! He asked me to take vengeance upon her traducers and expel them from the land.

" I had heard that the American widow had returned and was at Shepheard's, but had not seen her. My wife had called, but did not seem much pleased with the acquaintance, and I had cause to feel offended with the woman. She had written a book——But more of that anon. It seemed that she was playing the same sentimental game with poor Abbâs which she had played with me. I washed my hands of her ; and felt not at all concerned for her share in the libel, though I was extremely sorry for her victim upon all accounts. I had read as bad things often in Egyptian newspapers, had come indeed to view them as mere commonplaces of the vernacular press ; but I had never before encountered one of the victims. The spectacle was really harrowing. I told him that he had his remedy at law, advised him to consult a lawyer and then closed the interview.

" From that day onward for about a month he was my bugbear, haunting my house and office, dogging me in the street. He was having a rough time of it, and looked on me as his protector. You know the ragging spirit which takes hold of the Egyptian at the sight of any one bewildered, especially a simple soul revolted and demanding justice ; how they send him from pillar to post, hustle and bedevil him. Well, poor Abbâs made such a cry about his wrongs, betrayed so candidly his fool's belief in abstract justice, that the Arabic press

received him as a godsend, and the various legal lights whom he consulted held their sides. When he made his application to the *Parquet* he was assured with seeming gravity that the libels of which he complained—they were now legion—were not aimed at so respectable a man, but at another and ignoble person of the same name. He paraded his despair through all the cafés of the town, meeting everywhere with a delusive sympathy, which urged him on to fresh exertions for the town's amusement. His one relief was in the society of the American, who made him welcome, being glad, I fancy, to get the services of a good dragoman for nothing. With her he for a time forgot his anger and perplexity, and felt himself a highly favoured individual. One afternoon, when I was down at Shepheard's calling upon some one else, I saw him with her at a table on the terrace. Old Jones was there. He came across to me and growled :—

" ' That woman ought to be shot. Ought to be kicked out of the country ! Never would have been allowed in Cromer's time ! In front of everybody ! It degrades us all ! '

" I too was vexed, but my annoyance was for the Egyptian, whom I judged more likely to get harm from her than she from him. I had sized her up pretty completely since our tender parting at the Mena House. She had published a book in which I figured as the love-sick hero—a book full of our conversations, which she must have noted at the time. She was what she called ' studying Egypt.' Having dealt with the English official side through me, she was working at the young Egyptian through Abbâs Effendi, inducing him to take her to all sorts of dreadful haunts he would never have gone to by himself, and making love to him in her desire for Oriental ' atmosphere.' A dozen such as her come out to Egypt every winter ; women who make fools of men for copy ; modern vampires ; may the devil fly away with the whole breed of them !

" I tried to give Abbâs a hint of her true character ;

but he, poor fellow, was beyond the reach of hints. At mention of her name he grew delirious. It was more on her account than on his own that he demanded justice on the authors of the libels; for all his outings with her were reported in the native press, and special correspondents watched the steps of Shepheard's day and night.

"I did my best for him in high official quarters—gave him a note of introduction to old Puffing Billy; the case being more akin to his department than it was to mine. I had a line the self-same day from Puffer, telling me that my protégé was mad. Abbâs had mentioned that he 'loved' him (Puffer). I was begged to keep the ruffian to myself in future.

"'I fear, sir, that His Excellency was intoxicated,' was Abbâs's version of the interview. 'He talked to me exceeding strange, exceeding different from a noble English gentleman.'

"He had, in fact, advised my injured friend to go to hell and afterwards to punch the heads of his insulters severally—a proceeding which, as Abbâs very justly pointed out, was quite uncivilised and quite against the law which Puffer and the rest of us were there to see enforced. I told him that old Puffer was the best of men, but irritable, and having very great affairs to manage for the public good, might reasonably feel aggrieved at being bothered by an individual. But my pacific explanations were becoming threadbare.

"One evening our friend came out to my house in desperation. My wife, who caught a glimpse of him, was quite alarmed. He had, it seemed, approached a high official of the Khedive's household, to whom he had been introduced by one of his admirers—for it had transpired from all this pother of his persecution that he had a following—a score or so of real disciples who admired him blindly. The said high official, instead of giving him a serious hearing, had laughed aloud, advising him to go and make it up with all his libellers. Worse still, he had indulged in rude remarks about the English.

"'Surely,' Abbâs pleaded, 'you will now take my part against these wicked fellows who wish to weaken your authority in Egypt.'

"Then at last I saw that it was necessary to expound to him the real nature of the British Occupation and its history; how we were there for our own ends, and not the good of Egypt, in the first place; how in Cromer's time much good had been achieved, chiefly because the Khedivial Court had been kept under and no British official thought of playing to the gallery; but how at length, when all was going well, the authorities at home, scared by the outcry over the Denshawaï executions, had handed back official patronage to the Khedive as the easiest way of quieting the situation; since when, though we had ostensibly reversed our policy at the command of Mr. Roosevelt, we had continued playing to the gallery both in Egypt and in England; whence these tears! The real power in purely native matters, such as his complaint of libel, was now with the Khedivial Court.

"'But do the noble English nation bear such things?' cried out Abbâs in horror.

"The English as a race, I said, knew nothing of them.

"'Then I will go to England, I will teach them,' he exclaimed, jumping up like one demented. 'They shall no longer be maintained in ignorance by the wicked and malevolent Foreign Office.'

"He seemed resolved to start that very minute.

"'But the journey will cost money,' I objected, 'and life in England is as dear as here in Egypt.'

"'No matter, I will get the money,' he cried out in Arabic. 'Upon so holy and humane an errand, what can stop me? The English shall no longer be deceived. I will instruct them!'

"I let him rave, fully expecting that his resolution would go off in words. In point of fact he started that same week, without seeing me again. I got a letter from him some days later from Marseilles, in which he praised my candour and my magnanimity in letting him

into the secret of events which had long puzzled him. He was going, he declared, to make the English understand, and so save Egypt from complete destruction. The money for his journey was subscribed by his disciples, but the American woman also gave him fifty pounds, as he himself informed me afterwards, in order to get rid of him, as I suppose, for she was talked of in connection with a Russian prince who had turned up at Shepheard's.

"Well, I forgot him till we were at home last summer, when he called on us at a hotel in London. His brown complexion had then lost its clearness and the kind of healthy glow I had admired in Egypt. It looked muddy. He still wore gold-rimmed spectacles and was as talkative as ever, but he struck me somehow as discrowned, degraded. It was the first time I had seen his face without the fez.

"I took him out to lunch and let him talk. He showed me cuttings from a number of strange periodicals which I had never heard of, containing articles which he had written since he came to England, and repeatedly assured me he had not been idle. 'Very good and noble people' had received him; he had lectured on the state of Egypt before various crank societies, and was in a fair way to become renowned as an authority. He had grown conceited, I observed incidentally, and very domineering in his tone. In conjunction with his down-at-heels appearance it was quite pathetic. He gave me his card, on which was printed: 'Representative of the Egyptian nation,' together with an address at Bayswater; whither I went one afternoon to see him.

"It was one of those streets of fairly decent-looking houses which have fallen almost into slums. A barrel-organ was in full blast when I turned into it, and swarms of noisy children were at play. Arrived at the house, I was shown by an impudent-looking, rather pretty girl, with dirty hands, up to a room upon the second floor, which evidently served Young Egypt's representative as bedroom, smoking-room and hall of audience, and

had not been swept, I should opine, for several days. The girl went in without knocking, and I heard her cheeky tone towards Abbâs. She addressed him, I remember, by the name of 'Monkey-fice.'.

"He had been sprawling on a squalid bed, but sprang up as I entered, and made me welcome, quite without embarrassment. He apologised for his surroundings, which, he said, were temporary. He was moving to more suitable apartments in a week or two. 'Congratulate me!' he exclaimed. 'I am invited by a lord to dine with all the high nobility and to instruct them.' No end of newspapers were scattered on the floor. He picked up one of these, exclaiming: 'I see that that most amiable lady has arrived in London, at the Piccadilly Hotel. I think to visit her this afternoon. Will you come too? She loves you very much. It will be like the old days.'

"I should have scouted the suggestion pretty certainly but for his mention of the old days, which conjured up the vision of his natural surroundings. He had come from blazing sunshine and clear air to that vile hole. Poor wretch! I went with him to call upon the vampire lady.

"The visit was a failure, as far as any hopes Abbâs may have had of it were concerned. The lady smiled on me, but positively scowled at him; asked me in an aside where his good looks had gone to, and told me for the love of all things reputable to make him burn his bowler hat and wear a fez. She had lost all interest in Egypt, it appeared, discoursing much of Russia and the Russians—her new field of 'study.' Just as we were going Abbâs murmured something, and she went apart with him. I don't know what they said, but she looked quite uncompromising, and Abbâs emerged in tears from the short interview.

"'The English are not altogether as I thought,' he told me. 'They are, I think, too cold and cruel and too selfish ever to be sympathetic to the generous Egyptian people.'

"That was his first confession of a disappointment. I guessed he was in straits for money, and had hoped for something from the generosity of the American. When I asked him, in the street, if he had any pressing need, he burst out sobbing, and confessed that he owed more than twenty pounds to his landlady. But that was not what made him so unhappy. His landlady's daughter, the saucy girl whom I had seen, had loved him at the first, but now despised him. Poor fellow, he was amorous and trusting—defenceless as a kitten against English avarice. The lodging-house damsel had taken him for a prince at first. Well, I got him away from the Bayswater slum into a more cheerful bedroom down at Chiswick, at the same time doing my best to persuade him to give up the conversion of the English and return to Egypt.

"He replied that he had written much too freely of the powers that were in Egypt to find any comfort in the prospect of returning thither. He hung great hopes upon the dinner at Lord Vereling's house, to be followed by a sort of drawing-room meeting at which he was to speak. I've known Vereling well for years—we were at school together—a well-meaning crank who always picks up the lost dogs of politics—and drops them. I was not at the dinner, but I heard about it afterwards from Vereling and some others who were present.

"Abbâs, as I have told you, called himself the representative of the Egyptian nation. Now, as it has happened in most summers of late years, there were three or four such self-styled representatives in England, each of them claiming to speak from the great heart of Egypt, and anxious to indoctrinate our politicians with his private views. All of them by misfortune were at Vereling's dinner or the meeting afterwards; and as the others were superior to poor Abbâs in age, rank, wealth, and everything that you could mention, they all made common cause against him as a bumptious puppy, when they heard him laying down the law about

the state of Egypt. One after another they took Vereling aside and very gravely warned him that the young man was a rank impostor of no influence whatever; one who would not be received in any good Egyptian house, proclaimed him *homme néfaste!* and *canaille premier ordre!* and bade the noble host keep watch upon his silver. Vereling, with his nervous dread of being taken in, took fright and washed his hands of poor Abbâs. Then one of those other representatives replied to a letter which Abbâs had written in a daily paper, flatly contradicting every statement of the hapless author, whom he declared to be 'not in the position to know anything whatever of affairs in Egypt.'

"Abbâs had sent to every Englishman who seemed inclined to help him copies of the various libels which had appeared against him in the Cairo press. His enemies got hold of some of these and published extracts from them, when replying to Abbâs's article, to show the kind of character he bore at home. On a frantic appeal from Abbâs I wrote a letter to the same newspaper, in his favour. But it came too late. By that time he was catching it all round from people who had once been kind to him. He was scouted as a rogue and an impostor.

"'Can I not get justice even here in England?' he asked me when he poured his troubles in my ear. 'Is not what those devils say about me shameless libel? You say that to get justice costs much money? I—I have no money. What then must I do? The English are then wicked. It was false all which they taught me in the school. They have no love of justice. They care nothing for the good of Egypt.'

"I did my best to calm him, but without success. He sat quaking like a person in an ague fit, and moaning; 'I cannot get justice—I cannot get justice,' till my nerves were all on edge.

"'My mind is quite distraught,' he gasped at length. 'I wish to vomit. I greatly fear that I shall hate the English, who are one hand with the bad people of my

country. I fear that I shall be compelled by my conscience to join the violent section of my young compatriots.'

" I told him not to lose his head and be a fool; told him that we had all been young and too enthusiastic; had all been through our period of disillusionment. To all that I could urge he only shook his head.

" Inquiring at his lodging two days later, I heard that he had left without a word, and having to some extent stood surety for him, I paid his bill.

" I saw him once again before I went to Egypt, quite by chance. I was staying for a night in Paris, and I happened on him in the street. He was walking with two other young Egyptians. As I was quite alone and rather dull, I asked them to come back with me to my hotel, where I ensconced them in a quiet corner of the lounge, with cigarettes and plenty of black coffee. Abbâs then thought it necessary to inform me, in a set speech, that he was thenceforth a relentless enemy of British rule in Egypt. The Balkan raid on Turkey was beginning, and already there were Christian war-cries in the London press. He said that it was clear to him that the English, as a race, were foes of El Islâm. His two companions murmured their applause at intervals, showing their teeth and the whites of their eyes. The English had beguiled the Children of the Nile with talk of justice and civilisation into a bondage far more dreadful than the mere subjection to a foreign yoke, secretly undermining their religion and their nationality. We were great and powerful, but God was greater, he informed me. He and his friends were the servants of God, pledged to frustrate our evil purpose and destroy us. The two others, his companions, chimed in eagerly with stories of the treatment they had met from certain Englishmen.

" Not to be outdone, I also told them stories of the way I too had suffered from my own compatriots, admitting that we were a stiff-necked, uncouth crowd. They laughed at my remarks and got quite friendly. In the

end they were polite enough to say that, if only all the Englishmen in Egypt had been just like me in all respects, there would have been no need for any Nationalist movement; every one would, have been happy as in Paradise. I watched Abbâs, who looked much better than in London, but had become extremely grave and taciturn. I really was intensely sorry for the fellow, and could not get away from an unpleasant feeling that his misfortunes were my fault to some extent.

"Two months ago I went to visit him in prison, where he lay awaiting trial. He and one of the young men whom I had seen with him in Paris had returned to Egypt as the agents of that great conspiracy, whose aim—as the police reports asserted—was to blow up simultaneously the Cubbeh Palace, Casr ed Dubbâreh and the Savoy Hotel. Abbâs did not at first seem pleased to see me.

"'You deceived us,' he said gloomily in Arabic—'like all the others, you deceived us! You did not mean the half you said, and yet you spoke so earnestly—like all the English! The curse of God upon them—liars! hypocrites! All your civilisation, all your comforts and mechanical contrivances are false as are your words. God knows that there is nothing steadfast in this world but suffering. Your purpose is to wipe out all the Muslimîn. But you are of this world; while we are God's, and unto Him we shall return.'

"I tried to say some cheering words to him, and he responded with a sudden burst of tears. He fell upon his knees and then began appealing to me in heart-broken tones. At first I was too much astonished at the outburst to hear distinctly what he said; he spoke in such low tones I imagined he was asking me to intercede for him. He seized my hand and kissed it, seeming very eager. Then I found that he was urging me to take some step for my own safety, was warning me apparently of some great danger. What was it? I bent down my head to listen. Then I realised that he was adjuring me, for my soul's good, to leave the English and become

a Muslim and an Oriental. It made me wince as if I had been stung."

For some time we were silent, staring at the sea. Harris, whom we had imagined to be fast asleep by that time, cried indignantly:—

"I don't like your story—not a little bit! I wonder Duclay has the face to tell it in that cool, complacent way. None of the bigwigs strike me as quite honest nowadays. They hobnob with the natives and don't care what becomes of 'em. They only want to make a good show for themselves, are ready to enter into any dirty compromise to make things last their time; and after that the deluge. What we want is straight men."

Duclay appeared astonished by this outburst. Under his breath I heard him murmur: "Balaam's ass!" "I'm glad you see the point," he answered blandly. "But will you tell me how I, personally——?"

"Oh, you're hand in glove with all the others," answered Harris vehemently; "you let things go on. A chap in my position can't do anything to stop them; but you could. What are you doing, I should like to know? Studying the torture of a wretched Arab—like your vampire woman! Why couldn't you have kept the fellow at a distance or, if you liked him, taken up his case? The Anglo-Indians you were sneering at just now are quite all right. They may be stiff and rude, but they are honest. They don't profess affection for the East. You, Duclay, with your knowledge and your understanding, could not be in Government service now if you were honest."

"The sense of your remarks is not quite clear, my too excitable young friend," said Duclay, smoothly vicious. "But in so far as I can grasp it they seem quite uncalled-for." He was going on to murmur something very cutting when a sudden clangour near at hand made speech impossible. At once his frown relaxed. He stretched himself and yawned luxuriously. The same good-temper came on Harris and myself. It was the luncheon-bell.

THE BATTLE OF THE TREES

DOWN in the wady there were streaks of verdure, with here and there the pink of oleander-flowers. On the mountain-sides grew thistles blue and yellow, and a thorny scrub. In all the landscape there was nothing to be called a tree except, high up beneath a towering sun-bleached crag, one solitary terebinth, of which the shadow made a spot as black as ink upon the burnished heights. That was a sacred tree, and of its goodness served as sundial to the people of two villages, ten miles apart, which lay concealed amid the wilderness of tumbled rocks.

Abdullah and Mahmûd, reclining in a nest between two boulders on a jutting crag six hundred feet above the glen, were forced to crick their necks in order to consult it. Having ascertained that it was past the middle of the afternoon, their eyes returned to keep close watch upon the valley, becoming as the eyes of hunters, sly and eager.

Through the glen from end to end, there wound a new white carriage road; beside which, at a point immediately beneath their eyrie, was a camp of workmen, just now as busy as a hive of bees. The navvies were preparing to move on. The finishing touch which they had given to their work was seen in a line of telegraph poles, which ran as far as eye could see in both directions, crowding in perspective.

"Praise be to Allah! They are going," whispered Abdullah son of Hasan, to Mahmûd his brother. "This night, in sh' Allah, we shall reap the harvest without danger, as a child might pluck wild berries. It is wealth for both of us. Never in my life have I beheld so many trees! How many are there, think you?"

"A lot of tens," returned his brother sagely. He could not count beyond the sum of ten.

Abdullah hugged himself. "Fine trees," he murmured, "tall, straight, thick, solid, all that man could wish! They must be worth two Turkish pounds apiece, whether for firewood or for carpentry. If we succeed in gathering but ten to-night, behold us both rich men!"

"We can get more than ten," replied Mahmûd. "Our father will be with us and our mother and the girls."

"Remember that we have two axes only!"

"Bring pick and spade as well and dig them up. The camel and the ass between them can bear more than ten, supposing that they make three journeys to and fro."

"With my share of the riches I shall buy a gun. The one I have at present is old-fashioned. Then I shall go and try my fortune with the brigands."

"That would grieve me, O my dear one, for our father needs us. Stay in the village and buy sheep and goats."

"Nay, but my soul desires to see some fighting."

"Have patience. We will fight together. We will form a band!"

While they thus talked the tents below them had been packed and placed upon two trolleys drawn by mules. The workmen piled their baggage on another trolley, and took seat. The train went off with merry din of bells.

The watchers rose and went back to their work in what was called a field, a kind of pocket in the rocks which held good soil. Abdullah guided the light plough, whose pointed share but scratched the surface of the ground; while Mahmûd drew it, stopping often to pick up loose stones and throw them on a cairn hard by.

"They must be mad to leave that wood unguarded," mused the latter, wondering.

"They could not guard it all," replied Abdullah. "There are tens upon tens upon ten of trees—uncountable!"

" Our father will rejoice when we inform him."

" Our mother also. What a stroke of luck ! "

The shadow of the heights across the wady was drawing near them up the mountain-side when they set out for home, Mahmûd the serviceable carrying the little plough. The village where they lived was hidden like the field among the rocks and boulders. In olden times, the march of conquering armies through the glen had taught the fellâhîn to hide their cornfields and their dwellings as cunningly as small birds hide their nests from depredators ; even in these days warlike Drûz and raiding Arabs would ride by occasionally with hawklike gaze upon the heights for plunder. To a first glance the village, even when in sight, seemed part of the surrounding rocks.

As the young men drew near to it they saw an elder with white turban and a black and white striped cloak leading a donkey half concealed by brushwood, a blue-veiled woman following with a second load of brushwood on her head.

" Wait, O my father," cried Abdullah, girding up his loins to run. " O lucky day ! The infidels have gone. The trees are ours—a forest—for the felling ! "

His parents sat down on a rock and waited while he ran to them and told his tale. Mahmûd came up more slowly, with the plough. The old man, as he listened, scratched his ear. He said :—

" Your plan is good to take the trees, my children ; but bad to keep the treasure to ourselves. The trees are many. Labour as we might, we could not hope to gather more than one kirât [1] of them. And tidings of our exploit would be sure to get abroad, provoking envy. The sheykh of the village would denounce us to the father of the road. Whereas if I reveal our project to the sheykh, the village will be with us. With two hundred of us working as one man, with tens of axes swinging, in one night we shall have garnered all the poles—ten times ten tens and more ; and thus our

[1] Kirât (cf. *carat*), the twenty-fourth of anything.

share, upon a fair division, will come to more than we could hope to gather by ourselves."

The youths, though disappointed, bowed to his decision; and the four moved on into the village where, having stabled the donkey, they went out on to the threshing-floors—the only level place above the wady. Out there upon a ring of green beside the village spring, which gushed beneath a ruined arch well-lined with maidenhair, a number of the elders sat discoursing while blue or white-veiled women filled their pitchers at the fountain. The father of Mahmûd approached this group with confidence, smiling and rubbing his two hands together. He was drawn at once into their conversation, which grew animated. The two boys at a little distance watched and waited. Presently the headman of the village beckoned to them to draw near, and said: "You are good lads, and lords of high intelligence. Be sure that we shall not forget you when we portion out the spoil."

The sheykh then rose and all the elders with him, crying: "Yallah! Set to work. The night is near."

Within two hours the village was in motion, streaming down into the valley under cover of the night. A crowd of children led the way on the rough track. Then came the sheykh and his five sons on horseback, a servant with a lantern throwing light for them; then all the able bodied men the village boasted, armed to the teeth and carrying axes, leading with them beasts of burden of all sorts and sizes; and lastly a long train of women and young girls, some of them balancing pitchers full of water on their heads, clapping their hands in rhythm to a joyful chant.

"It is like a night of Ramadan," exclaimed Abdullah, speaking to Mahmûd, his shadow. "This is no labour, but a feast with lights and music. My heart beats proud within me. I desire to fight. O Allah, grant that some one may oppose us!"

The scene upon the road, when they came down to it, was gay and busy. Those who had spades or axes set

to work at once upon the nearest poles. These, when hacked down or rooted up, were carried by the crowd of helpers to where the little herd of camels, mules and donkeys waited. The hewers then passed on to other poles, the women and the swarm of children moving with them, until they were some distance from the point where they had first come down.

The women doled out water, slabs of bread and salted melon seeds to every one who craved refreshment; and work went on beneath a running fire of jokes, accompanied by songs and merry laughter. Suddenly, no one knew exactly whence, awe fell upon the throng. Voices were hushed instinctively, and in the silence the sound of other axes could be heard distinctly, together with the murmur of a crowd no great way off.

Some boys, sent running to spy out the land, returned with news:—

"It is the folk of Kefr Hamad. They steal trees from us."

"The thing is filthy!" cried the sheykh with anger. "It cannot be borne. Come, O my children, let us shame those robbers!"

"Praise be to God, we fight, we fight at last!" whispered Abdullah fiercely in his brother's ear. Drawing an ancient sword, his father's gift to him, and waving it aloft with yells, he started running.

The sheykh and his attendant horsemen galloped off, the whole crowd following as best it could.

Abdullah was not far behind the horsemen, but, already, when he came upon the enemy, a heated altercation had begun.

"These trees are ours of right," the sheykh of Kefr Hamad was contending vehemently. "This is our territory. Your land does not extend beyond that rock."

"All on this side of the torrent bed is ours, as well thou knowest," cried the sheykh of Deyr el Hûr, with indignation. "Therefore the road is ours, with all that grows by it as far as eye can see from hence by daylight."

"Thou liest, O devoid of manners as of principle! The road is the Sultan's and free to all. As for these trees, they are outside the law, being the work of infidels."

"The land is ours, I tell thee, the trees too."

"The land is the Sultan's, the trees are for all comers."

"Son of a dog!"

"Degraded pimp!"

"I know thy mother!"

"O thou clot of dung!"

The speakers could not see each other in the darkness. Other voices then took up the quarrel. The men began to push each other forward, while the women in the rear of either party shrieked offence. All at once a gun went off; a child's cry followed; there was panic. Every one who had a gun or pistol let it off amid a storm of execration, screams and yells. And then the fight began in earnest, the two armies closing in without the room to swing an axe or lift a scimitar. They kicked, scratched, tore and even bit each other. Abdullah, fighting with his wits about him, full of joy, soon found his strength prevail amid that terror-blinded throng. He tried to keep Mahmûd in sight, but lost him and, supposing him to have been killed, smote with redoubled fury. Managing to free his axe he brought it slantwise down upon the turbaned head of an opponent, and laughed to find it sticking in the skull.

The men on either side were drawing off by that time, their thirst for murder slaked. And then the moon came up; they saw each other; and sudden shame came on them, with the fear of God.

"It is your fault, God knows," cried out the sheykh of Kefr Hamad, very bitterly. "O sons of greed, O tyrants and oppressors, to claim our trees as well as those you have of right."

"In all this wady every tree is ours by law," returned the sheykh of Deyr el Hûr, sobbing loudly. "The fault is yours for daring to oppose us. Behold the fruit of your contumacy! Are there not corpses on the ground

between us ? Henceforth, unless the balance is adjusted, there must be war between us till the Day of Judgment. Go, take the trees ! We give them to you out of pity, O you poor doomed wretches ! For every man of ours that you have killed or wounded here to-night, be sure that we will kill ten men of yours ! "

" Men, say you ? You have killed a woman—cowards that you are ! "

The glen was filled with noise of lamentation. Abdullah had espied Mahmûd and run to him. They stood together, stained with blood from head to foot, holding each other's hand, and waiting for some new event.

The folk of Kefr Hamad moved away, carrying off with them the poles which had been lashed already to their beasts of burden ; while those of Deyr el Hûr began, with tears, to load their animals with those which they had felled. That done they also streamed away towards the village, bearing their dead with them.

Abdullah saw with wonder that the people were departing homeward though many of the trees in sight were still erect. His heart beat faster. The sheykh of the village had acclaimed him as a hero publicly, and now he saw a hope of winning private fortune. He and his brother both had axes, with which much execution might be done before the morning. Calling his mother and his sisters, he commanded them to lead the camel and the donkey home, unburden them, and bring them back at once to fetch another load. That done, he bent himself to work, as did Mahmûd, his shadow. Before the dawn they had sent two loads home, and in addition had amassed a heap of poles too big to carry. Five of these they managed to accommodate upon the camel. A sixth they chopped in lengths and stacked upon the donkey's back. The rest, with the assistance of the women, they dragged and carried to the torrent bed, and there concealed beneath a scatter of loose stones.

Then, weary but content, they climbed up to the village, which they reached as day was breaking.

They slept all day. When they awoke, it was to find that they were persons of importance, who had till then been treated as mere senseless boys; and Abdullah, the imaginative, dreamt of sovereignty. He charged his mother to demand for him Nesîbeh, the daughter of the Sheykh Rashid—a girl who by her beauty and her arrogance had snared his soul—and went his daily round as if the world belonged to him, attended always by a group of courtiers, weak-minded, servile youths who thought it bliss to be with him. He hungered for more fighting, and the times were favourable. Warfare was in the air. The men of Kefr Hamad raved of vengeance. One day, when he was passing near their village a bullet grazed his ear. Another man from Deyr el Hûr was set upon among the rocks by ruffians armed with scimitars, and done to death. A girl of Deyr el Hûr was violated. Shots had been fired at persons from the village while at work in the outlying "fields." Abdullah organised a band of desperadoes to avenge these insults. One night he even raided Kefr Hamad, killed a man or two and carried off the daughter of the headman of the place, whose house he entered. This girl he handed over to the sheykh of Deyr el Hûr, who sent a messenger to say that he would have her killed in the most shameful manner known in history unless the Hamadis at once paid over fifty Turkish pounds or their equivalent, and swore thenceforth to be subservient to Deyr el Hûr.

On that the father of the girl, with other notables of Kefr Hamad, invoked the overlord of all that region, Ali Bey Terâwi, who rode one morning from his castle of Judeydeh, twenty miles away, accompanied by many cavaliers, his sycophants, to the lone terebinth upon the heights of Deyr el Hûr, where deputations from both villages awaited him. The lower branches of the sacred tree were hung with strips of clothing, new and old, the votive offerings of generations of the mountain people. The great man sat down in the shade beneath those rags, upon a carpet he had brought with him. One of his servants held a parasol over his head for

dignity; another kept off flies and other insects with a silken swish. His courtiers squatting round him on the carpet, applauded all he said. He questioned the contending parties patiently for half an hour, and then informed them that their quarrel was all nonsense. The poles belonged of right to neither village. They belonged to him. He commanded them to make peace instantly on pain of his extreme displeasure. The captive girl must be restored to Kefr Hamad, which village in return must pay ten pounds to Deyr el Hûr as indemnity for damage done to life and limb, and each village must pay twenty pounds to him in compensation for the trees. The sentence was at once accepted. The sheykhs of the two villages ran forward and embraced each other; the girl was handed over to her father, and an instalment of the money paid. The great man rode away contented with his morning's work. He had not noticed the small gesture—it was hardly noticeable—which in every instance had accompanied the vows exchanged for his delight—a jerk of the left thumb over the left shoulder, signifying "Backwards," which rendered all those vows of no effect. More potent than that scenic reconciliation in the cause of peace, was the fear, which shortly came upon both villages, of vengeance from the fathers of the road.

On the very day of peace-making, two unbelievers in a carriage drawn by horses had been seen examining the places where the trees had stood. And two days later more of them appeared, examining and measuring and taking notes.

A man of Deyr el Hûr, espied by them among the rocks, was asked by their interpreter if he knew anything about the disappearance of the poles. He said that he did not, but thought it was the work of gypsies or of Bedû—wandering, wild people who have no respect for anything.

The trees had been chopped up and hidden with great care, yet fear lest something should transpire to

show their guilt was lively both in Deyr el Hûr and in Kefr Hamad. It grew to horror when some soldiers came and camped beside the road, protecting a new gang of Frankish workmen. The business of the latter gave much food for speculation till it was seen that they were putting up more trees. Then there was laughter and thanksgiving that such fools should live.

"Praise be to Allah!" cried Abdullah rapturously. "By their folly I shall soon be able to obtain my bride."

The parents of his heart's desire had sworn that they would not take less than fifty Turkish pounds for her, or the equivalent of that amount in trees or other property. The store which he had buried in the wady might be estimated as worth thirty pounds at most, and was not all his own, belonging partly to Mahmûd. It was therefore necessary to procure more wealth immediately before some richer man should come and buy Nesîbeh. The conduct of the girl herself excited him. When she met him, going to the fountain, or saw him pass her father's doorway, she would taunt him, saying she was not for him; or throw him a bewitching glance of her great eyes and, when his eyes responded, burst out laughing. He would get her, or else kill her and himself, he swore it.

"By Allah, I will fight and conquer, slay and rob for her," he told Mahmûd. "I will bring the wealth of all the country to her father's feet. And when I get her I will tame her finely, little serpent that she is!"

In truth, he was prepared for any rashness.

The workmen would not this time leave the poles unguarded, he considered. They or the Turkish soldiers would stay near them for a year at least. Whatever guard they left, he would attack and overcome it with his little band.

"I will pounce down on the soldiers while they sleep," he told his brother. "I will kill a dozen of them ere they find their whereabouts. With twice ten lads like thee behind me I am sure to win."

"You cannot find so many," sighed Mahmûd, whose

mind was literal. " But I and those thou knowest will be with thee."

The brothers were prepared to fight against tremendous odds, and only waited till the work was finished to attack the trees. These seemed from what a man could gather from the heights—for none ventured down into the wady since the troops arrived—even taller and more solid than the former crop. The fathers of the road would guard them strongly, the villagers surmised with deep regret. What was their amazement, then, when they went out one morning, to see the glen quite empty, the soldiers and the workmen all clean gone, the long procession of fine trees quite unprotected in appearance.

No doubt it was some stratagem, they thought. The soldiers would return at night and lie in ambush. But when upon the next day and the next the glen remained deserted, the men of Deyr el Hûr were minded to go down and reap the crop. Abdullah had convoked a council of the village notables, who hung their hopes upon his valour and his gift for strategy, when a messenger arrived from Kefr Hamad with these words :—

" In the name of Allah, Merciful, Compassionate, the word of the sheykh and notables of Kefr Hamad to those of Deyr el Hûr. To-night let us go down to reap the trees. Let there be fair apportionment beforehand. Give us half, and peace shall be between us evermore."

The sheykh of Deyr el Hûr cried : " What is this ? The trees are ours by law and ancient right. Since the men of Kefr Hamad beg of us, we grant them five, in pity of their indigence."

To these high words the messenger replied : " Then have I yet another errand to your honours. My lords of Kefr Hamad challenge you to fight a battle, your braves against our braves, in presence of the people, with swords and axes, this evening in the wady. The side which wins shall gather all the trees, and shall be lord over the other till the Day of Judgment."

The headman and the elders hesitated, something

scared; but Abdullah urged them to accept the challenge, pledging his life that they should be victorious; and in the end their answer was: "It is agreed." Abdullah then assembled the young men of valour, looked to their weapons, and instructed them. Two hours before the sun set all was ready, the villagers began to go down towards the glen. As Abdullah came out of his doorway fully armed, the headman happened to be riding down the narrow way between the hovels, and his cruel mistress to be standing at her door hard by.

"Thou art our lion, our one hope," the sheykh called out to him. "Spare no effort, I adjure thee, to secure our victory. By Allah, I will pay thee gold for every wound thou takest."

The youth, with head erect and flashing eyes, looked proudly at Nesîbeh, who laughed jeeringly, and said: "Our lion seems to me much like an ass!" He ground his teeth. His heart beat in his head. He swore to win the day, and make her his.

The scene of combat was a level space beside the road, but hidden from it by some intervening rocks. The women, children and old men of either party sat up upon the stones. The able men stood ranked in the arena, the champions in the forefront of each host.

When all was ready, a huge brawny man of Kefr Hamad stood forth and with a yawn proclaimed that he was thirsty and desired much blood to drink. He was a butcher and saw many sheep before him. Why did they tremble? It would soon be over. He would undertake to finish any of those bleating milklings in less time than it takes to draw a tooth. He brandished an enormous antique scimitar.

A man of Deyr el Hûr strode to meet him, with fierce insults. The shouts of the two armies, each seeking to intimidate the other, were blood-curdling, while the champions danced defiance in the usual way. It was some time before they closed, but when that happened the Kefr Hamad man was instantly victorious. His

opponent lay upon the field with head half severed. There were howls of triumph on the one hand, bitter wailing on the other.

"My thirst is not yet quenched. Here stand I! Lambkins, come!" called out the victor.

Mahmûd, the brother of Abdullah, ran out and attacked the boaster furiously, without the prelusory dance and insults, being mad with rage. The giant appeared shaken for a moment by the sudden nature of the onslaught, but he soon recovered. The battle had not raged five minutes when his adversary was disarmed and forced to kneel. The monster then bent back the young man's head upon his knee, drew a long knife from his girdle and, with a grin at the dejected host of Deyr el Hûr, he cut his throat. That done, he flung the body on the ground, and kicking it, crying: "Another! Bring another! for my thirst is great. Ha! These struggling weaklings grudged us half the trees. The right was with them. We will take them all!"

For a minute the scene swam before Abdullah's eyes, he seemed about to swoon. The brother whom he loved above all else on earth lay slain before his eyes, as fowls are slain. He heard his mother and his sisters wailing; his own heart was dead; but suddenly his wits grew more acute than he had ever known them. He saw the way to kill the monster—saw it quite distinctly, and without emotion. The trees—to win the trees—was his one painful thought, and incidentally his brother's death should be avenged. He had noticed that the Hamadi was heavy, that he fought in one position and did not turn quickly.

As swift as thought, Abdullah darted out and ran straight towards the challenger till almost within reach, then gave a sudden swerve and circled round his adversary. Round and round he ran, now drawing in to try a blow at the bewildered giant, now darting far beyond his reach, for ever circling till he saw the monster was half-blind with rage and growing giddy. Watching

his opportunity, he darted in and, stooping, hamstrung his opponent neatly with his axe. Then, springing clear as the big man swung round upon him, lurching forward, with a yell of pain, he darted in again and with a lightning flourish of his axe, smote down with all his strength. The blow fell on the bare nape of the giant's neck, and it was final.

Deyr el Hûr sent up a shout of joy, and before the conqueror had time to wipe his forehead he was assailed by all the host of Kefr Hamad. His own people rushed in to the rescue. His father, though an old man, stood beside him, fighting bravely with an ancient sword. Abdúllâh's one thought was to kill and kill again. Even when his father fell, he felt no grief, but smote the man who killed him and pressed on. Remembrance of the trees and of the girl he loved was in the background of his mind, as something which might still be saved amid the wreck of happiness. He was wounded in a dozen places ; blood streamed from him. It seemed to him that all his veins were open, yet he fought on with undiminished zest.

The sun had set before he slew the giant. Before it grew quite dark the foe was in retreat, the field was won ; the trees were theirs, and Kefr Hamad would for evermore be subject to the men of Deyr el Hûr. Abdullah, to his own amazement, felt elated. He had seen his brother and his father die, but he yet lived ; the sequel of their life on earth was in his hands ; no end of trees were his, with which to buy the girl Nesîbeh and make his name respected far and wide. Most of the villagers were gathered round the dead and dying. Beneath a crescent moon already near its setting, the keening of the women filled the glen. Some dauntless spirits cried :—

" The trees ! The trees are ours. On to the trees and cut them, to assert our right. Thou, O Abdullah, art our chief, the bravest in the land. It is for thee to strike the happy blow ! "

They led Abdullah to the nearest tree. The hero was

beginning to feel faint from loss of blood, his brain was sometimes reeling, sometimes ominously still. Yet he was proud to strike the first blow at the trees, the cause of all the fighting which had brought him so much honour and such bitter woe—the trees which were to win for him Nesîbeh, the one pleasure left. Nerving himself with a tremendous effort, he threw up his axe, swung it above his head, then brought it down upon the tree.

A shock went through his frame from head to foot. The pole gave forth a dull, metallic sound. The axe glanced off, he heard a murmur of astonishment with disconcerted laughs from his companions, before he fell upon the ground insensible. These trees were hollow iron painted over.

KNIGHTS ERRANT

THE great Sheykh Hamadan, chief of a whole nation of the desert Arabs, sat in his tent towards evening with the leaders of his host. At the tent-mouth appeared a throng of shrouded heads, with black tents on a sun-red slope beyond. With face in shadow from his flowing head-shâwl, he frowned and held his beard in a firm grip of anger. His eyes blazed. On a dead silence he let fall the words :—

" Bring hither Rih and Rihân."

After some scuffling in the entry, two young men of gallant bearing were pushed forward.

" Where is the saddle of the tax-farmer ? " the chief inquired.

The young men looked at one another and then shrugged, as who should say : " So small a thing ! "

" The saddle of the tax-farmer," observed Rihân, in the sly tone of one who would try fortune with a joke, " is interposed between the fattest region of his person and his horse's back."

But no one laughed. Rih and Rihân exchanged another glance. Their proud demeanour vanished all at once. The evening sunlight and free air appeared a great way off.

" By Allah, we know nothing of it," whined Rihân ; " but we will seek it if it is Your Honour's will."

" Aye, by my courage," whimpered Rih in servile ecstasy, " Rihân and I will find it though it be beneath the sea, or held by giants, at the roots of mountains."

" Speak but the word, O King of Kings ! " pleaded Rihân, as burning to set off.

But even as he spoke a saddle, highly padded and hung about with silken tassels and much gold

embroidery, was brought into the tent on a man's head and shoulders; and the bearer cried:—

"Behold the stolen, O our Sovereign Lord!"

"Where found?"

"In the tent of Rih and Rihân."

The chief's gaze scorched the culprits!

"Sons of a dog," he cried; "you knew that we had given a safe-conduct to that townsman."

"Nay, that, by God, we knew not!" cried the young men eagerly; and many persons in the tent supported them in this contention, declaring that it was unlikely that they could have known.

"However that may be, you lied in answer to my question. Do that a second time and you shall die a painful death. Is my justice to be set at naught by dogs like you? Out of my sight!"

The youths slunk off dejectedly, threading their way as in a dream among the tethered horses and the tent-ropes till they reached their own abode, a low, black tent of camel's hair. Creeping inside, they wept together in a tight embrace. Then Rihân fell and ground his face into the dust, while Rih cried out to Allah for redress.

They were cousins, of the sub-tribe of the Billi. It was but two months since they left the pastures of their people, to join the armies of the sovereign chief, hoping to gain renown. Already they had won distinction in the warlike pastimes of the camp, and in a battle with the Bani Sakhâr they had unhorsed two champions, and gained two noble steeds of Kheylân breed. At tilt and tourney there was none to beat them, nor yet at shooting at a mark from horseback. But the prize on which they built their hope of lasting fame had been the saddle of the tithe-farmer.

When riding out one day in search of exploits, they met a man on horseback, armed to the teeth with every kind of weapon that could by any means be stuck or slung about his person, seated upon that monstrous saddle which in the sunlight could be seen afar. This

person was attended by a troop of Turkish soldiers; but these, being ill-mounted, were a mile behind when Rih and Rihân accosted him, inquiring in a friendly way how much that saddle cost, who made it, and why he was condemned to ride on such a cumbrous thing.

For all reply, the horseman called them sons of dogs, and bade them haste away or they would get a beating from his armed attendants. Such language from a townsman being insupportable, Rih and Rihân had seized the boaster, one on either hand, and swung him clear out of the saddle to the ground. Rihân leapt down and sat upon him, while Rih removed the gorgeous object from the horse's back. Then they re-set him on his naked steed, and were themselves remounting when the soldiers, summoned by the great one's cries, came within range. Then, for a moment, there was fear from bullets, and the cousins crouched along beside their horses' necks; but soon their thoroughbreds had borne them out of danger; and up before Rihân was set the saddle of the tax-farmer.

It was for this bold deed that they had been insulted and disgraced. The chief had played a dirty trick on them in sending men to search the tent, while they were absent. They had been ready to give up the prize at his command. He should have let them do so, to preserve their pride.

Some of their comrades came with words to comfort them, but such commiseration made them wail the more. When the last visitor had gone and night enveloped the great camp, Rih and Rihân, still sobbing, faced the question: what to do?

Their fame was ruined in the tribal chivalry. The head of all their race had proved a churl. It might be, as the visitors had claimed but now, that Hamadan had raised their nation by his discipline. "But that is not our object," blubbered Rih. "The nation's power is no man's glory. We might as well be in the Turkish service, moving together at a shout, like silly sheep."

"There is but one way to regain our honour," said

his cousin. "We must invade the settled country and there do great deeds till all the world re-echoes with our fame; till the Turks entreat us to desist and make alliance with them. Sheykh Hamadan himself shall send an embassy to beg us to return."

"Yallah!" said Rih. "Let us depart at once. My soul is dead until we quit this place of shame."

They crept to the tent-mouth and listened. Jackals were howling on the hills around, but in the circle of the camp there was a silence broken only by the coughing of a horse, the snarling of a dog occasionally. The cousins stowed their few belongings into saddle-bags, then stole out and prepared their horses for the start; loosed them and led them cautiously to open ground beyond the tent-ropes. That done, they left the chargers lightly tethered and stole back through the camp with bated breath.

By the pavilion of the mighty chief, against the wall of camel's hair, they stood and breathed defiance with an inward speech.

"This day thou hast dishonoured men of worth, O proud Emir," said Rih within his soul. "The day will come when thou shalt go upon thy face to those heroic men and lick their feet."

"The scorn that thou didst heap on us, O man devoid of manners as of sense," Rihân soliloquised, "is not a tithe of that which men of honour feel for one like thee. I spit between thy eyes: I pluck thy beard and, as an earnest of my high contempt, I cut thy tent-rope."

He had pulled a knife out from his girdle to perform this threat when, a slight noise within the tent alarming them, the cousins fled, proceeding snake-like on their bellies till they reached the horses. They knew the standpoints of the watchers and avoided them, retreating northward on soft ground till out of earshot of the camp, when they climbed up into the hills in a direction south by west.

At dawn they saw before them a great lake with towns and villages upon its farther shore, and rode down to

the water's edge, where it was easy going. Near the lake's southern end they found a camp of half-bred Arabs, who received them with due honour as superiors. The adulation of those mongrels, the relief of boasting, restored their spirits and their self-conceit. Again they rode into a mountain country till they gained a ridge from which they saw the mighty sea rising from far below them to the eye-line like a great blue wall. Along that ridge a road meandered, and upon the road were Turkish soldiers marching northward in close bands. Having no wish to answer questions, Rih and Rihân rode down into a wady and there rested till the foes of chivalry had quite gone by. Returning to the road, they came to a large village, where they were horrified to find more soldiers halted.

An officer approached, asking to know by what authority they rode, thus armed for war, along the Sultan's highway.

Rih and Rihân looked and perceived they were surrounded, save at one point only, where a laden donkey stood across the road, its owner talking to a white-veiled woman in a doorway.

"Thou wouldst see our permit for these weapons?" asked Rihân, assuming an appearance of extreme stupidity.

"Aye, by Allah!" said the officer, the soldiers and the fellâhîn in one derisive roar. Rih whispered to Rihân, then shouted:—

"Yallah! Read it! It is written on my horse's left hind-hoof." He cleared the donkey and its panniers in a leap, Rihân beside him. Before the soldiers could recover their surprise and fly to arms, the two knights errant were but specks upon the road.

Thereafter, having had their lesson, they avoided villages and gave up their first intention, which had been to go into the Holy City and make vows for their success, and also challenge the polite inhabitants to single combat on the town meydân. The government had no regard for chivalry and, if they fell into its hands, they might

be made to drill or work like slavish townsmen or low fellâhîn. They made their vows one morning at a lonely shrine upon a mountain-top from whence they saw the Holy City afar off. The guardian told them that it was the tomb of Prophet Samuel. Neither Rih nor Rihân had heard of him; but since he was a prophet, he was good enough. Though both were Muslims by profession, they knew nothing of the form of prayer, their practice of the faith consisting only in swearing by Allah and the Prophet upon all occasions and reciting the belief when challenged by the guard at night. On this occasion they prayed simply:—

"O Allah, grant us victory and great renown!" standing before the mosque of Prophet Samuel and looking towards the city which they feared to enter. That done, they rode again towards the south.

At length, descending on the fertile plain which lies between the mountains and the sea, they found a pleasant village amid olive-groves, to which the people, terrified by their appearance, made them welcome. Here were no marplot soldiers, no base-minded governors. The foes of chivalry lurked afar off at Jaffa and at Gaza. It would take time for news of any feat of arms to reach them and arouse their ire. The nature of the country too was favourable for campaigning; for the plain was not dead flat, but well diversified with hill and valley, marsh and woodland, and miles of sand-hills all along beside the sea. The mountain gorges were at hand for hiding. And the land was rich. The soap and oil merchants of Jaffa, Gaza, Lydda, Ramleh were always going to and fro among the villages, from which they got their wealth, with bags of money; so were the Christian usurers who supplied seed to the fellâhîn in autumn, and claimed a large share of the harvest in return when summer came. Rih and Rihân decided to redeem this pleasant land from dull prosperity and render it illustrious by warlike deeds.

They pitched their tent in a secluded dell below the village, disdaining here as everywhere to sleep in houses,

and made the fellâhîn bring food and fodder. Men, women and children gathered round and listened to their boasting, half amused, half awed. The cousins questioned of the country and its wealth. At length Rih said :—

" O sons of water-melons, which grow fat exceedingly and yet remain attached for life to one small stalk, hear what I say ! I am the great Sheykh Rih and here is Rihân, my cousin. Our presence brings renown to this your land. Your village and your conversation please us. We shall stay among you, returning hither always from our valiant exploits. Become our helpers and grow rich beyond all dreams. Betray our secrets by a breath and we destroy you utterly. The choice is there. What say you, O devoid of spirit ? "

The people hesitated for a minute. One exclaimed :—

" Bear witness, that we may be sure that you are Muslims and will not make us partners in some hateful crime."

Rih and Rihân bore witness loudly, and Rih added : " By the Koran, we are the best of Muslims—we pure-blooded Arabs. The Prophet—may God bless and keep him !—came of us."

The village preacher muttered in his beard: "And that, by Allah, is the greatest miracle ! " but few of the assembly heard him : and none heeded. So the pact was made. Rih and Rihân became as lords in all that country, for no one of the fellâhîn dared stand against them ; and the friends of order were far off in Gaza. At first there was much secret murmuring against their lordship, because of the supplies of food and fodder which they claimed of right. But after they despoiled a certain usurer, who was returning on the road to Jaffa with a train of camels, of all that he had taken from three villages in return for seed provided in the autumn ; when they repaid both corn and money to the fellâhîn, the two knights errant were acknowledged to be lords of goodness deserving of the best that could be set before them.

The scene of their first triumphs was the tract of sand-hills between Ramleh and the sea. There they charged down on peaceful wayfarers, and trains of mules or camels, with appalling cries. They waved their lances in the air, or fired their guns, till their opponents, scared to death, fell prostrate on the sand, begging them for the love of Allah to take all they had. Having gone over all the goods and taken what seemed best to them, Rih and Rihân would condescend to spare the people's lives and, as they rode away, would say, exulting: "Praise be to Allah, who has given us the victory!"

After a season of such prowess without one reverse Rihân assumed the title of the Conqueror, while Rih informed his sycophants among the fellâhîn that they might thenceforth call him the Redoubted Monarch.

Rih had a weakness which Rihân deplored. He loved the daughter of a poor fellâh of Yebna, a girl with roguish eyes and a small tree tattooed beneath her underlip. Rih left her in her father's house and only visited her there occasionally. Rihân would certainly have washed his hands of him had he become a house-dweller.

"What have we to do with women?" he would cry impatiently when Rih went off to visit his beloved. "Till we have earned eternal fame we should abjure their pleasures, save only in the way of vengeance on some hostile house. When we have gained our object we will marry two princesses"—meaning the daughters of some Bedawi of long descent—"and raise up seed of honour. Are there not sufficient half-breeds in this land already that we, the noblest of the noble, should increase their multitude?"

The half-breeds of his condemnation were the broken Arab tribes which wander in the settled country for protection with their flocks and herds.

Rih gloried in his weakness. On their warlike expeditions he would sing interminable songs in praise of Leylah—"for all the world," observed Rihân disgustedly, "as if she had been some princess of lofty

birth." His love demanded bracelets of blue beads, also a silken robe for his delight, also a head-veil and a pair of yellow slippers ; and Rih, who knew no comfort when she frowned, ventured into Gaza, though he feared the government, for, people said, a price was on his head. He dismounted before coming to the town at a friend's garden, and there hid his horse, which far more than himself attracted notice in a land where every beggar is a judge of horseflesh. Then he passed the gate, sauntering through the perfumed markets where the merchants called to him, spreading their choicest wares to tempt him, upon either hand. The many colours in the shade were pleasant to his eyes, his nostrils opened to the scent of musk and incense. He felt in no great hurry to complete his purchases, and when at length he had bought everything that Leylah wanted, it was growing late. Then he remembered an injunction of Rihân that he should try to find out if the government was moving ; so he went into a tavern full of people, dropping his head-shawl so as to conceal quite half his face. He sat down in the darkest corner and drank coffee.

Rih and Rihân were then in every mouth, for they had cut the road along the coast to Jaffa ; and Rih was shocked at the ill names those townsmen called them.

" You will see," said one. " The end of such men is already written. A party of shadirmas will set out from Jaffa and another from our city simultaneously. They will sweep the road. Those sons of dogs will either be destroyed in battle, or else be taken captive and securely hanged. Such miscreants deserve to lie unburied. They are food for fire hereafter. Curse their father ! "

The applause which followed this insulting speech struck Rih like blasphemy. These townsmen were indeed devoid of honour. They lacked the fibre which responds to valiant deeds. The vileness of their talk so fascinated him that when he left the tavern it was night.

He hastened to the city gate, to find it shut. He prayed

the guards to open for him; but they only laughed and, knowing from his accent that he was a Bedawi, declared that it would do him good to spend a night enclosed. He told a woeful tale of how his wife lay sick and he had come into the town to purchase medicine. One of the soldiers then held up a lantern and took note of his appearance.

"By Allah," he exclaimed, "this is the greatest villain—Rih and Rihân in one! And we shall gain much glory by his capture."

"Rih and Rihân are malefactors!" shouted Rih, though even in his terror the word hurt his throat. "I am a poor peaceful herdsman of the tribe of Malaha." He named one of the broken clans which haunt the villages.

"Malaha wear the shawl upon the other shoulder," laughed the corporal of the guard.

They pounced on Rih and carried him into their den. "Methinks thou comest of a tribe which for a while has sent no soldiers to the army," remarked the ombashi when they had set him down.

Then Rih forgot his noble origin and all his fame; remembered only that he was the prey of soldiers in a kind of dungeon, and in immediate danger of three years of drudgery. The vision of his bride awaiting him in breezy Yebna, of his horse tethered in the garden near at hand, came to increase the horror of his plight. He fell upon the ground, he shricked and blubbered; he embraced the feet of those base Turkish soldiers, hailing them lords of kindness, kings of men. They roared with laughter. And in the end they let him go for two mejidis. That was the hardest part of it. His agony of terror, his despair, had been uncalled-for. The soldiers only wanted a small fee, receiving which they opened the town gate for him, wishing him a pleasant journey and a happy night.

Humiliated to the dust, he found his horse and rode towards Yebna, cursing the day that ever he was born.

But as he journeyed in cool air beneath great throbbing

stars, his soul revived and in his mind there grew a story of appalling danger and triumphant cunning, to redeem his shame.

Rihân was deeply interested in the news, which Rih had gathered in the Gaza coffee-house, that slaves of power were soon to march against them. For many days they were in great anxiety, watching the distant outlines of the country when they rode abroad.

One morning, after a successful foray, they went down to the gardens of Wadi Elmeyn to feast on oranges and sugar-cane by invitation of the fellâhîn; hiding their horses, as their custom was. They were sitting in the shade beside the bridle-path, devouring oranges, when four shadirmas (Turkish troopers) came in sight moving in their direction. The servants of the government were mounted on kadîsh, the common horses of the town, mere beasts of toil. The heroes and their entertainers quickly disappeared into a patch of sugar-cane. Only the gardener remained, sitting in the shade beside the water-tank. The soldiers, coming up, asked leave to enter and pluck oranges.

"Do me the kindness!" cried the gardener politely. "All is yours."

The soldiers got down off their horses and went in, leaving their guns and other weapons on the saddles. They asked for tidings of Rih and Rihân, and the gardener in confidential tones assured them that the brigands were resting in a certain village not far off. "Then we shall catch them before night," exclaimed the four shadirmas; and thereupon they ate till they could eat no more and lay down in the shade, made sleepy by the hum of bees. Hearing their snores, Rih and Rihân with their familiars came stealing from the patch of sugar-cane. The soldiers were fast bound when they awoke, exclaiming: "I seek refuge in Allah!" like people who suppose themselves to be bewitched.

Rihân addressed them with imperial mien:—

"O poor, manged dogs," he said; "does the Caïmmacâm, your master, think that Rih and Rihân, the

greatest heroes of the age, are creatures like to you, that he lets you out of his protection in so small a number? Does he think that mules like those"—he pointed to their common horses—" are worth the half or quarter of a thoroughbred? Come, O my cousin, let us place the saddles on these men who are but asses, that they may bear them to the governor with our defiance. We dare His Excellency to ride forth like a man and meet us in the field with lance and gun."

The saddles were then taken off the horses and fixed upon the backs of the dejected soldiers, who were driven, thus accoutred, to within sight of the Jaffa gardens. There Rih and Rihân unbound their arms and left them with barbed words of scornful pity. The common steeds, the swords and guns, thus captured from the government, they sold by auction to the fellâhîn.

That victory increased their honour, and their boldness grew; though for a while, through prudence, they forsook the sand-hills and shed their glory on the inland roads.

Then came the time of pilgrimage to the Prophet Reuben, when the road along the coast was more frequented than at other seasons of the year. A fellâh of Shahmeh, coming from the Gaza market, told Rihân that several parties of importance were about to start for Jaffa from that city, hearing that the sand-hills were now clear of brigands, and relying on the crowds of pilgrims for protection if they should appear. Among these would-be travellers was the son of the Cadi of Gaza, who had said, when people begged him not to risk his life, that his father's reputation as a righteous judge secured him like a charm in all that country.

Rihân was in Wadi Sarrâr when he received this news. He galloped off to Yebna, where Rih dallied with his low-born bride.

" Oho! Is that the case? " cried Rih, affronted. " Do they think we should be daunted by a thousand of their chanting pilgrims? Do they think we care a doit for

their old doting Cadi, or esteem him just who has condemned so many lights of chivalry to common work? Well, they shall learn!"

His wife besought him to be cautious, for she knew his rashness, and knew also the prestige attaching to the Cadi's name. She was a pious girl, and feared the judgment of the Lord if Rih should interfere with pilgrims on the Prophet's road. But he made light of all her scruples and remonstrances. He and Rihân replied to all who would dissuade them, that they had been insulted and defied, challenged to show their prowess by ignoble townsmen.

The sanctuary of Nebi Rûbin (the Prophet Reuben) is a noble mosque uprising on the edge of marshes by the sea. It boasts a harbour, a small village, and some cultivated lands, but the mosque alone is to be seen from the main road, which runs to landward of the marsh, beneath the fields of Yebna, which rise up to meet the flat-roofed village on its hill. The day had been intensely hot. The Cadi's son and his attendants rested in the shade at Ashdod, intending to pursue their way by night. Rih and Rihân, in Yebna, had wind of this through their informers; and did not go to watch the road till after dusk.

It was full night; the crickets in the stubble of the cornfields were silent save for a short note occasionally; hundreds of jackals over all the countryside were howling, answering one another from hill to hill, when Rih heard human voices drawing near the rocks on which he stood. He fired his pistol in the dark and was himself astonished, rushing forward, to see a man fall off a donkey close before him.

"Bâtil!" (a bad shot), he cried. "God knows I did not mean as much as that."

At the noise of the pistol-shot, the travellers dispersed in all directions. The son of the Cadi was left quite alone, huddled upon the ground beside his ass, which had not moved a step. Rihân rode up, dismounted, struck a match and lit the lantern which he

carried with him. They searched the dying man, who groaned and prayed incessantly, and found a sum of twenty Turkish pounds.

"Tfû, aleyk" (contempt upon thee), muttered Rih, spitting towards his victim with intense disgust. "Thou, an effendi, a person of consideration, to start upon a journey furnished with so small a sum! . . . What of the donkey?" he subjoined reflectively.

"It is a poor one. Better leave it!" said Rihân. "Already they are howling there in Yebna. Their noise outshrills the barking of the jackals. And such is their respect for their accursed Cadi, that Allah knows but, in their consternation, the low-born curs may turn on us, their benefactors. Up and away!"

The cousins mounted and rode off.

The folk of Yebna howled through all that night, but no man of them dared go down on to the road till daybreak; and then, when they beheld the dead man lying huddled and the donkey standing by him with dejected head, they looked at one another and declared:—

"This true believer is the victim of an accident. His ass was frightened by some jackal or hyena appearing from behind those rocks; and he fell off and died. If a robber had attacked him, he would certainly have taken this strong donkey, which is worth four pounds at least—and he had all the night in which to drive him—if not this robe of silk which clothes the body."

They raised the corpse and bore it up into their village where it was washed and shrouded, and then buried reverently to the chant of the Khatib and wailing of believers.

The place where this crime was committed being midway between the towns of Jaffa and of Gaza, there was a dispute between the Caïmmacâms of those two cities as to jurisdiction; the magnitude of the occurrence making both averse to taking the blame. But the Cadi, father of the murdered youth, a man of influence, telegraphed to the Mutersarrif of Jerusalem and the Wali of Syria, superiors of both the Caïmmacâms, for

help and protection. The Wali sent a squadron of cavalry with orders to bring Rih and Rihân to Damascus, dead or alive.

Then did our heroes lead the life of hunted beasts. The horsemen were distributed among the villages and never rode about the country save in force. The cousins were obliged to shun the haunts of men. Their friends among the fellâhîn provided them with food and fodder secretly; but most of the villages, whose sole desire was for protection, were now their open enemies, conspiring with the Turkish soldiers to entrap them. Warned by their spies they fled from place to place, too proud to leave the country tamely after all their boasting, yet anxious not to be surrounded and cut off from flight. Even their allies among the people urged them to depart. If they remained the end was written: they would forfeit life.

"We will challenge them to single combat, one after another, and prove that we are their superiors in feats of arms and horsemanship. These riders are no better than those asses whom we saddled and sent back to Jaffa with our challenge to the governor. By Allah, we will spit upon them," the two heroes boasted, with heads still full of tales of Antar and of Khâlid. But the fellâhîn, with pity and contempt, rebuked their folly. The villagers had lost their old respect, and dared advise them now as equals. This change was very bitter to the cousins, more especially to Rih, who had been wont to plume himself on the devotion of those people. But a dose more bitter was in store for him. He ventured into Yebna to embrace his wife, who, far from showing pleasure at the sight of him, flew in a rage and called him ugly names. He beat her soundly, till her father and her brothers came and held his hand. His wife, dishevelled, weeping, cried that she had always loathed him, declaring that the meanest peasant was his master in the arts of love. He was a boaster, selfish and vindictive, and a coward. "Coward! Coward!" she kept harping on the hateful word.

"Better divorce her," said her people, "since the case is so." And Rih pronounced the sentence of divorcement under their dictation.

At once, to his surprise, their aspect changed. They drove him from the place with blows and insults. He wept with fear lest they should call the soldiers; and as he slunk away he heard the voice of Leylah crying: "Praise be to Allah, I am rescued from that stinking Bedawi."

With teeth still chattering with fright, tears streaming down his cheeks, Rih rode by secret paths until he found Rihân, who told him that he had received a warning from the petty tribes to flee the country upon pain of death. That was another insult hard to bear. The cousins wept upon each other's neck. It was as if the creeping things of earth had risen up against them and become redoubtable. Fear chilled the very marrow in their bones. By race they were afraid when people ceased to fear them.

The soldiers lived upon the country, and it was known that they would not depart until the heroes had been caught or driven out; so all mankind was now opposed to chivalry. Yet still the cousins lingered, fleeing on from lair to lair, not knowing in the morning where to lie at night. At length the Turkish captain, weary of scouting, gave command to sweep the plain. The game was up.

"We must do something to secure our fame!" the cousins moaned.

They then implored some fellâhîn of Shahmeh, who undertook to help them once again upon condition that they straightway left the country. The captain received information that the brigands were in hiding at a certain place. He went there with his men and learnt from one who stood there that the cousins had that minute galloped over an adjacent hill. The squadron rode off in pursuit. As they drew near to Wadi's-Samt in fine array, they saw Rih and Rihân to all appearance dying of fatigue, though the fact was they had but that

moment started, having spent the night in Wadi's-Samt. As soon as the pursuers came within earshot, Rih wailed out :—

" O lord of kindness, halt your men a moment. We would parley. Our horses are outdone. We cry your mercy."

Thankful to see the end of his long task, the yuzbashi agreed good-naturedly, and gave the order ; when Rihân, rising in his stirrups, cried :—

" We dare you to a match on the meydân before us." He waved his hand towards a stretch of level ground. " Gallop, O sons of dogs, and you shall learn whether Arabian horses ever know fatigue."

The heroes darted off. Their steeds were fresh, while those of the pursuers were already tired. The Turkish yuzbashi soon had the chagrin of seeing the two rogues pass out of sight.

" Another victory ! " exclaimed Rihân. " Thanks be to Allah ! "

" The crown of all—a deed whose fame will live for ever ! " blubbered Rihân.

And heart in mouth, with frequent tears, they galloped southward towards the desert, afraid of every speck on the horizon.

MELEK

BEHIND the city on the shore of the blue gulf there is a hill of cypress-trees, where in mysterious shade amid the gnarled gray stems the tall, slim headstones of the Muslim dead, inclined this way and that, are like a natural undergrowth. On sunny afternoons the glades are populous with groups of shrouded women like white ghosts, and separate groups of fezzed or turbaned men seated around the sepulchres of their relations or walking slowly in the shadow of the trees. Within the grove among the tombs, itinerant coffee-makers and the men who sell salt nuts and sweetstuffs do a thriving trade, and on the summit of the hill from which the trees recede, affording a wide view of sea and mountains, stands a small kiosk with many stools and tables set around it where coffee and all kinds of sherbet can be had.

At this spot, on an afternoon in May of the year 1908, five Turkish officers were seated with their swords between their knees around a crazy wooden table on which stood a carafe of water, five tumblers and five coffee-cups, long-footed and devoid of handles, on as many plates. It was a Friday, and the space before the tavern was well filled. From time to time one of the officers half rose and laid his hand to his lips and brow, smiling in response to some acquaintance who had caught his eye. The group of five appeared quite gay and careless. They sat outside the throng, upon the brink of the descent. The whole vast panorama of the gulf with all its guardian mountains lay before them in strong sunlight. The leader in their conversation was a captain of dragoons—a blue-eyed, weather-beaten man of dark complexion—who kept one hand upon his heavy black moustache. He wore an Astrakhan cap and a light

blue tunic much befrogged; the others wore the scarlet fez and dark blue uniform. They kept their smiling faces turned towards him, laughing out occasionally; and yet the matter of their talk was very grave. The captain of dragoons, with a slight smile, was saying:—

"He is doomed. The duty of removing him is laid upon us five here present."

There was a moment's pause while all gazed out over the sea, striving to realise the news in all its bearings, for the man to be eliminated was the military governor.

"He has somehow got to know of our arrangements, as the capture of the secret post to Smyrna indicates; for the messenger was faithful to his charge; of that the proof is that he died defending it," pursued the captain with affected carelessness. "It is to assign positions in this patriotic task that I have summoned you. According to our rules the actual slayers must be people unacquainted with the victim in order that their action may be quite impersonal. Rustem Bey, as his near relative, is thus excluded; and so am I, who know and love the man," he hesitated, with a look of great compassion in his eyes, before he added: "But Rustem Bey must frame the project, for he, alone of all of us, frequents the house."

Rustem Bey, a youth with face of Grecian beauty, olive-skinned and brown-eyed, threw away the cigarette he had that minute lighted and took another from the silver case which lay before him on the table. For a moment his set face betrayed his anguish. Then, controlling his emotion by an effort, he said:—

"Ready."

"It is in the cause of Allah," said the captain gravely. "The Lord of Right have mercy upon him and all of us."

"Allah have mercy on him!" murmured all the others.

Then, for the benefit of any one who might be watching, the dragoon gave a guffaw and slapped the shoulder of his neighbour, a young gunner, half a negro, who

responded with a grin of teeth and eyes: and, pushing back his stool, declared :—

" We must be going."

Amid the compliments of parting he contrived to whisper in the ear of Rustem : " Walk with me to my horse down there among the trees," and murmured to the others : " Leave us." The remaining three then mingled in the crowd of pleasure-makers, seeking out acquaintances, while the dragoon and Rustem Bey descended to the cemetery.

" My soul is grieved for thee," the former said, laying his hand affectionately on the young man's shoulder ; " and those above me in the work would fain have spared thee this great ordeal ; but the need for action is immediate, and there is no other way. Of one thing I am glad on thy account ; it is that he is what he is, a man of noble character, who fears not death. So there will be no meanness in the tragedy."

" One thing perplexes me," said Rustem Bey with studied coolness. " I do not see how I can well perform my portion of the task without confiding our design to one who is not under vows as we are. . . . I mean my sister," he concluded after a long pause.

The captain frowned and tugged at his moustache.

" She might reveal the secret," he said dubiously.

" She will reveal no secret : I would answer for her with my life ! But it is likely that she will oppose us in this matter, since the man we have to kill is her own husband."

" Well, if there is no other way, inform her ; we must take the risk. But bind her by an oath of secrecy."

" Accept my warmest thanks. May Allah guard thee ! " answered Rustem, as the captain of dragoons sprang up into the saddle.

Left alone, the young man wandered in the shade among the crowded headstones, pausing to decipher an inscription here and there.

" The rose is circumscribed, a simple flower-ball, but its perfume fills the room. Brief is the life of roses

yet their scent survives them for a day or two. Such is the power of a kindness, such its memory."

"In life he praised the Lord continually, and by the blessing of the Lord his death was sudden, without fear or grief, caused by the bullet of an enemy."

"Hast set thy heart on any thing of earth? Know that that too will pass away, O man!"

For the Turk there is no horror in the thought of sudden death: it is desirable. The society of devotees to which young Rustem Bey belonged "died daily," having dedicated all that they possessed; their life, their dear ones, to a sacred cause. The death in contemplation for his brother-in-law was that which every brave man would desire to meet. If Rustem shuddered and was filled with horror at the thought of it, it was from doubt of his own fortitude rather than compassion for the victim. Ali Haïdar Pasha was not to be pitied, even in imagination; his manly figure faced the world too squarely. But Rustem Bay was called for the first time to take a leading part in the great work which had for object the creation of a free and happy people and the liberation of Islam: and the call was of a kind which he had not expected. He was sad; so sad that he was loth to quit the cypress-grove at length and face the town.

Upon his way to Ali Haïdar Pasha's house, as he was passing by a café in a fashionable street, a hand was thrust out to detain him, and a jolly voice exclaimed:—

"'Haste is from the devil,' say the Arabs. Come, sit down! Rash counsels always go with hurrying feet."

Half-angry, the young man was dragged into a chair, and found himself confronted with the laughing face of Dehli Reshid Bey—"mad" Reshid Bey, so called from his eccentric manners—a man of wealth and high connections, who made mock of everything—the last man Rustem wished to meet just then.

"It is a bad thing, soul of mine, to hurry in these days," began the joker, "because it is the mark of certain people who are not in favour."

"I ask your pardon. I am very busy," pleaded Rustem, trying to escape; but Reshid Bey prevented him, exclaiming:—

"Stay with me but a minute! Hear a story! . . . I had noticed how it was the way of certain people to walk about with rapid steps and with a look of business, and how other people, soldiers for the most part, seeing them of that demeanour, ran and whispered in their ears and were despatched on errands."

"The truth is you have noticed nothing of the kind," cried Rustem irritably.

"By Allah, I have seen it! But first hear my tale. One day I walked precisely in their manner, for experiment. A kind of beggar-man came up and whispered: 'Let what will be, be!' I caught the vein and answered: 'If what will be or will not be may be, then let the form of being of what will or may be, being what alone it can be, be.' He raised objections, saying: 'But the Powers of Europe . . .?' I answered: 'May they burst!' That gave him comfort, for he smiled and blessed me, and departed quickly as if reassured. . . . And that, my friend, is what you call new light! . . . Nay, stop a minute, mannerless! There is much more!"

But Rustem Bey had made good his escape and was already many paces distant, fleeing desperately from that nonsense which annoyed his brain. Even the usual traffic of the streets, the careless common life, was jarring to him.

In a deep lane of high blind walls he stopped before a gate and rang a bell which hung there. After a while a negro opened to him, and he passed into a flowering garden, where he had to wait until some women, who were visiting his sister, chose to go. He waited for an hour in agitation, pacing a length of path between two judas-trees: and then his sister came to him, a slender figure veiled in white, emerging from a thicket of white lilac. Her eyes grew bright at sight of him; she hardly smiled. He noticed the accomplished ease of her demeanour, the grace of one accustomed to command

as to obey ; beheld the wife of Ali Haïdar Pasha, a great lady, in one who until now had seemed his girlish sister.

She led him towards a bower of wistaria, which was her summer-house, while he, to break the subject of his visit, assumed so sad an air that she was forced to ask what ailed him.

He answered: "I have serious news;" and then he paused, uncertain for a moment what direction to pursue. The nonsense uttered by mad Reshid Bey kept running in his head like a refrain, distracting him.

They sat together in the arbour, the long tassels of wistaria hanging as a coloured fringe between them and the evening light.

" My sister," he began at last, " dost thou remember our old talks together there at home, beside the Bosphorus, and how we longed for the regeneration of our country and, through our country, of Islam ? I told thee many things in those days, and thy heart was with us."

" I have forgotten nothing," said his sister, motionless.

" The matter has gone forward since our talk of those days ; and the end is near. The King of England meets the Czar at Reval, which means that our old friend among the Christian Powers will soon join hands with our relentless enemy. The condition of our country seems indeed past hope. All is corrupt and rotten, in the tyrant's hand. The nations, gazing at us, see no sign of life ; they hear no cry. What wonder, then, that they account us dead, and now take measures to divide our heritage ? We must arise at once, or all is lost."

The girl's hands, clasping and unclasping nervously, alone betrayed her interest in what he said. She watched her fingers, keeping her eyes hidden.

" My sister, is thy spirit with us ? " he inquired, with anguish.

" Aye, to the death ! " she answered, with a husky voice, raising her eyes to his. They spoke a passion which amazed him.

"My errand is no less than death," he murmured; "and we crave thy help."

"Command, say rather!" she replied, with fervour.

Rustem's lips were dry. He moistened them awhile before proceeding:—

"We are in great danger from the efforts of a certain personage, who is a strong supporter of the tyranny. By some means he has come to knowledge of our methods. The secret post to Anatolia has been seized, our agent slain; another of our messengers has been arrested on the road to Seres. We know the man who ordered those arrests. What must be done?"

"He must be killed at once," she answered.

Young Rustem hung his head and murmured:—

"Thou hast said it! The doomed man is no other than the master of this house."

"Allah have mercy on him!" muttered Melek Khanum, and after that sat silent a long time.

"Does that disclosure alter thy resolve?" he asked at length.

"By no means," she made answer in a dreamy way. "It is impersonal. His body stands between our land and a great light. Let the light shine! . . . Who kills him? Is it I?"

"No, praise to Allah! But the slayers are appointed. They require thy help."

The lady sat immersed in thought awhile before she said:—

"To-morrow night he sups with certain friends, not in the selamlik out of doors, but in the house. The room in which the supper will be laid has three large windows looking on this garden. The shutters of the middle window will be open. My lord the Pasha sits quite close to it. My own slave Ali, whom thou knowest, will keep the garden gate from sunset onward. He will have orders to admit the man or men who, asking for admittance, say 'For freedom.' He will show them where to wait concealed, until the time arrives."

"I offer thanks, my sister," murmured Rustem

miserably, her calm arrangement of the work of slaughter having chilled his blood. How she must hate her husband, was his thought. But something new and stern in her demeanour forbade confidences ; and while he still sat wondering what next to say, a shadow fell upon the path before them, and Ali Haïdar Pasha came into the arbour, bowing his head beneath the blossoms of wistaria.

His wife rose up to welcome him with seeming pleasure, while as in duty Rustem sprang to the salute. He was preparing to depart immediately, but Melek by a secret gesture bade him stay.

"We were discussing the new revolutionary ideas, Pasha Effendim," she said casually, while Rustem wished the ground would open and engulf him. "What, may we ask in confidence, is your opinion of them ? "

"The question is soon answered," replied Ali Haïdar Pasha pleasantly, tucking one foot beneath him on the sofa which was in the arbour, and playing with the chaplet which he always carried. "I think these young men—I suppose them young although, for aught I know, there may be graybeards with them—build all their hopes upon a fallacy. They think the Powers of Europe are sincere in their expressed desire to see our land reformed by us upon the model of their institutions. I know that they are not sincere, and I can prove it, for wherever any one of us has worked resolutely for the improvement of the administration or the good of the inhabitants, one or other of those Powers has vexed him and procured his downfall. In my opinion the one way to foil them is that adopted by our Padishah (whom God preserve !)—namely, to keep up an appearance of corruption and decrepitude while striving to increase our fighting strength by every means, and fostering a fierce Islamic spirit in the ranks."

"But we were saying that, by all accounts, these young men are good Muslims, and are seeking the same object, only by another way ? "

"I do not doubt it. And their way is more desirable

and would be better if our plight were other than it is, and if the Powers of Europe were not watching us like beasts of prey, content to wait while they suppose us dying. At a sign of health they will assail us all together."

"That, I hear, is what they say will happen as things are," sighed Melek Khanum. "The King of England goes to meet the Czar at Reval."

"Allahu Akbar!" said the Pasha, with a shrug. "If danger threatens us from any quarter we shall not face it better for a change of institutions which, for a time at any rate, must make us weak."

"I am glad to know your true opinion," answered Melek sweetly.

"They may be right, I quite admit it," added the old soldier. "I mean they may have power to work a miracle. God may be with them, which would alter everything. But I personally, with the wit entrusted to me, think them wrong. And if I thought them right in their conclusions, my plain duty as a soldier, bound by allegiance to the person of the Padishah, is to oppose them—aye, and crush them if I can." He held his right hand clenched a moment, laughing lightly. "Art taken with their flaming doctrines, soul of me?"

"Greatly, I confess," said Melek thoughtfully.

And Rustem left them arguing the subject amicably, as something purely academical, remote from both.

"She hates him and desires his death," he thought, with horror; then, with a glow, exclaimed: "He is a noble man! There is no baseness in him for a cause of fear. May I be just as he is when I come to die!"

He met the captain of dragoons that evening, and made full report. His portion of the work was thus completed.

That night he could not rest at all, and all the following day his brain was in a whirl. He shunned his friends, and did his duty as a Muslim thoroughly, praying at the five appointed hours in private and in congregation. After nightfall he could bear anxiety no longer, and

went out from his lodging to the crowded main street of the town, where cafés were ablaze and strains of music floated. After walking up and down awhile, irresolute, he entered a gay haunt, full at the moment of the blare of "Hiawatha," played inaccurately, but with gusto, by a band of Greek performers. Looking around him on the seated crowd, he caught a glimpse of Dehli Reshid sitting at a little table in a corner all alone, and went to join him.

"Why thus solitary?" he inquired as they saluted.

"I had a crowd here but a minute since," replied the joker, "but they retired because my madness came upon me, drawing too much attention to our table. That was because they bored me with their 'Deign to consider, Bey Effendim!' and 'Bey Effendim, if you will but condescend to look with leniency on your slave's opinion!' Braying asses!"

"What news is there to-night?" asked Rustem eagerly.

"The King of Greece, they say, devoured a fragment of dead pig for supper!"

"But seriously?"

"I have sat here since the hour of sunset surrounded by the kind of imbeciles I have described—Waiter, bring coffee, and those cigarettes—What tidings should there be? The world goes on."

"That too will pass," said Rustem, with a shrug.

He did his utmost to seem careless both in speech and manner, but all the while his ears were strained to catch the sound of any outcry or disturbance in the street. His eyes kept furtive watch upon the door. At length he saw a man he knew, an officer of the police, come in and look about him as if seeking some one. Rustem stood up and beckoned to the man, who came then to their table, but would not sit down.

"Thy looks are grave," said Rustem. "Is there any news?"

"There is," was the reply, "but if I tell thee, for Allah's love do not divulge the matter till to-morrow. Ali Haïdar Pasha has been shot at, while he sat at

supper. By good luck His Excellency happened for some reason to lean sideways suddenly. Thus the first bullet only grazed his cheek. It broke a glass thing in the centre of the table, and some fragments flew into the face of hunchbacked Hasan Bey, who sat upon the other side. A second shot was fired, and then a third in quick succession, but those were intercepted by young Hilmi Bey, the aide-de-camp, who rushed to screen the Pasha with his body. He is severely wounded and, they say, will die. May Allah heal him!"

"May Allah heal him!" muttered Rustem Bey and Dehli Reshid in a breath.

"The leaving open of the window and the private door into the garden," pursued the captain of police in the same tone, "points to the complicity of some one in the house with the assassins, who made off immediately. One of the haramlik slaves is missing, and we have to find him. I come from thence, and, as you can imagine, I am worried, since the burden of the whole affair is laid on me. I am at present looking for Huseyn Effendi. Have you seen him?"

"No, by Allah," answered Dehli Reshid. "He has not been here. . . . And if he had been here I should not have informed thee," he murmured amiably to the back of the departing gendarme. "I would not help that treacherous spy to earn a beshlik."

"Allahu Akbar!" murmured Rustem in his soul. He saw the cause to which so many lives were dedicated in the greatest jeopardy, for Ali Haïdar Pasha would take vengeance certainly, not for himself, but for the loyal aide-de-camp. His face and hands betrayed his agitation.

"My soul," said Reshid in a meaning whisper, laying a hand on his companion's arm, "I have a great advantage in my house—a most commodious cellar with a secret entrance, ever at the disposal of those friends of mine, who cannot hide their feelings in a public place. Such persons should not live above the ground. Forget not what I tell you; you may find it useful.

I greatly fear you have embraced the creed of 'Let what will be, be!'"

"I know not what you mean," said Rustem hotly, annoyed that anybody should have guessed his secret. But Dehli Reshid Bey, with all his oddities, was not the type of man to be distrusted, so his wrath expired.

"Nay, slay me not!" replied the joker coaxingly. "Truly, my cellar is a cool and pleasant place. It is good for men to go beneath the ground occasionally, in order to get used to it before they die; and—tell it not to everybody!—there is wine there."

Rustem was forced to laugh. He lingered a few minutes, for politeness, before taking leave.

With mind a prey to harrowing anxiety, he went back to his rooms, deeming the hour too late for him to call at Ali Haïdar Pasha's, although he doubted whether he ought not to do so, whether it would not be thought the duty of so near a relative. He lay awake all night debating the small question whether his going would have roused or lulled suspicion, while his heart was heavy with the dread of ruin for the cause he served. Early next morning he repaired to Ali Haïdar Pasha's house, and found his sister walking in the garden. The Pasha, she informed him, had already gone to the seraï. She too, it seemed, had had no sleep that night.

After describing in impassive tones the whole fiasco, she went on to discuss their present plight.

"Yesterday afternoon," she told him, "I despatched a slave of mine in haste to Monastir, unknown to any other of the household, bidding him travel thence by devious ways to Stamboul, and thence to Geykos, to our father's house. This I did in order that suspicion might be led astray. The police to-day are seeking that man only. But Ali Haïdar Pasha is not thus deceived. He knows the real nature of the deed, and will not rest till he has taken vengeance for the hurt done to poor Hilmi Bey, who yet may live, we hear this morning, though his wounds are bad. The one way to forestall his vengeance is to poison him."

Her brother made a gesture of extreme repugnance. Melek noticed it.

"Nay, I should be the one to do it!" she remarked, with a peculiar laugh. And Rustem, knowing that it must be done, was forced to acquiesce in the disgusting project.

He went off to his military duties. Returning to his lodging after noon, he found a man from Ali Haïdar Pasha's household waiting at his door, the bearer of a note from Melek Khanum:—

"Be good enough to come to me without delay."

He went with fear, supposing all was over.

He was shown into a little ante-room of the haramlik, and waited there some minutes ere his sister came.

She told him in a weary tone: "We are recalled. My lord is summoned to Stamboul immediately. Already he has gone on board the steamboat. I and the household follow in a day or two. The news of the attempt upon his life alarms the despot, who greatly values his devotion and integrity. I sent for thee to tell thee. Nothing can be done at present."

"Since he departs, we have no grief against him. We all respect him as an individual," said Rustem gladly.

"Is he able to disturb our project from Stamboul?" she questioned earnestly.

"Not more than fifty or a hundred others! It was here, in the position which he filled, that he was dangerous. This is the heart. . . . My sister, I beseech thee, speak no more of killing. It is horrible. By Allah, I cannot endure to hear thee name the deed."

Rustem showed great emotion. She observed him curiously, giving a little laugh, it seemed, of some contempt. He supposed she had expected him to be as heartless as herself.

But as she stood before him in the middle of the little room, stroking some roses in a bowl with nervous fingers, he noticed that she was a lovely woman in the flush of youth; and found excuse for her. Young as she was, the marriage with a man so old might well have

seemed to her a gross indignity. He remembered now that he had felt a wave of pity when first he heard of her betrothal to the great field-marshal. Yet Ali Haïdar Pasha was a figure in the world, and the position of his wife was reckoned enviable. She might, he thought, have taken that into account.

Upon the following day he went again to tell her with authority that the doom against her husband was revoked. She seemed indifferent; and when he saw her for the last time on the day of her departure she spoke of nothing but the journey and her troubles over luggage.

She and her husband filled his mind for a day or two, and then were driven from it altogether for as many weeks, for a little after their departure it was rumoured that the King of England and the Czar together had determined to destroy the Turkish Empire, the former moved by indignation at the despotism which disgraced that country, the latter by his ancient greed and wickedness, or so the revolutionaries thought. The word went forth to strike at once.

Niazi Bey and Enver Bey, young officers till then unknown, took to the mountains with a few devoted followers; and so did Rustem and the blue-eyed captain of dragoons. From place to place they went among the Muslim and the Christian villages, announcing a new era of fraternity and winning thousands of adherents from the men of both religions. The fedaïs never doubted of success; their faith spread through the mountains like a wind-borne fire. In less than three weeks they had forced the Sultan to restore the Constitution, and the guns of Monastir and Salonika thundered to salute their victory. But in the first week Rustem Bey was taken prisoner, having ventured all alone into the town of Resna to get news. Against his expectations, he was not shot there and then, but sent to Salonika for examination, under guard. There must have been some friends among his escort, for at the Salonika railway station there was some confusion, and a soldier told him to escape into the town.

But he was still in danger. He dared not go near any of his former haunts. The mountains where the Revolution spread triumphant were a long way off. Choosing deserted alleys in the poorer quarters, he wandered for a long time aimless, racking his wits to think of some safe place of refuge when, by strange good fortune, he ran straight into the arms of Dehli Reshid Bey, emerging from a doorway, who asked no questions, but led him in and exchanged clothes with him. The house, it seemed, belonged to one of his dependants. That done, he led the rebel to his own kiosk, down to the famous cellar, which was furnished like a room.

In spite of the precaution taken in the change of clothes, some word of Rustem's place of refuge must have got abroad; for that same night the house was searched from ground to roof. The cellar only escaped notice, the entrance to it being cunningly disguised. Two hours after midnight Reshid came and told his friend that all was well. Among other merry jests, he had induced the searchers to crawl upon their bellies down a filthy drain. He gave a lively imitation of their spluttering and cursing, and of the zeal with which the slaves had squirted water on them in the garden court. He clapped his hands, calling for lights and eatables; and the two friends sat and feasted until day returned.

Rustem remained in hiding till a certain morning when the city shook with the report of cannon fired at intervals. He was wondering greatly what the noises meant, when Dehli Reshid burst into his dungeon and embraced him in a comic rapture, crying:—

"'Let what will be, be.' It is the Constitution! Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Justice for all, and general imbecility. Come out, my son, and drive with me and see the joy."

The fugitive emerged once more into the light of day. The carriage was already at the door. They drove through the main streets, beflagged and crowded. Soon Rustem Bey was recognised. A surge of shouting, happy people stopped the carriage, dragged the young

man out and raised him shoulder high, amidst a roar of acclamation. Dehli Reshid became anxious for the safety of his hero-friend.

He stood up high upon the box beside his coachman, and thus conspicuous—a small, fat man of middle age—commanded silence.

"My friends," he cried, "and brothers in delirium, this creature, Rustem Bey, whom you exalt so highly and acclaim, has all this while been hiding in my cellar. By Allah, that is all he has been doing these two weeks. If I had known that it conduced to such tremendous honour, I also would have hidden in my cellar. I would have that known."

The people laughed aloud and cheered him madly, and in so doing they let Rustem go. The towzled hero scrambled back into the carriage, saluting right and left as it moved on.

"How dare you talk like that about my hiding? It was downright insult," he exclaimed, "why did you say it?"

"To save your life, my lamb," said Dehli Reshid drily. "A little more, and they had torn you limb from limb. . . . Be calm. . . . And now our destination is the steamboat office, where we shall book your passage on the first boat to Stamboul. I wish you well, for you are not devoid of amiable qualities, and the flavour of my cellar is upon you like a charm. I would not have you absent when they dole out honours. Some of the 'let what will be, be'—ites are much worse than you."

The first thing Rustem heard upon arriving in the capital was that Ali Haïdar Pasha had been exiled to Arabia. The news did not affect him as it would have done a month before, for in the frenzy of the Revolution he had seen so many fall, and in the last few days had witnessed such surprising changes, that he had acquired the feelings of a mere spectator of men's fate.

"My sister will be glad," was all he thought. "She will divorce him, and will marry some young scapegrace."

Going in course of time to visit her, he found her cheerfully engaged in packing a great trunk, surrounded

by a group of servants, who were all in tears. These fled at his approach.

"What means all this?" he asked. "Art moving house?"

"Hast thou not heard, beloved? We are exiled."

"Ali Haïdar Pasha has been exiled, but thou wilt not follow!"

She turned on him, erect, with flashing eyes.

"Dost think I would desert a man of his distinction, in such misfortune, and already old?"

"But thou art young. It is too much to ask!"

"He begs me to remain behind, but I say no. What should I do or think or say alone? I love my husband more than anything. What made thee think I should desire to leave him?"

"What else was I to think, when thou didst scheme to kill him!" her brother faltered in complete bewilderment.

"That was in a cause for which men's lives were given freely, for which I would have killed myself if needful. It was my sacrifice."

"Still . . . thou didst show no pleasure when informed that he might live!"

"How could I feel pleasure while as yet I knew not whether the light would shine or be extinguished. Now that the light has come I am no more divided. . . . Beloved, I was willing thou should be deceived. I do not care to show my heart when it is torn and bleeding. And I think I was then child enough to feel ashamed of ever owning that I loved so old a man. I was relieved to have thee think I hated him, and yet I hated thee for the mistake, I now confess. . . . Swift death was nothing dreadful for a man like him, so upright, so unstained. My one thought was to make it swift and easy for him. The sorrow would have been for me, and with God's help I should have borne it. I told him lately the whole story, and he did not blame me."

Her brother only bowed his head and kissed her hand.

UNOFFICIAL

AFTER dark one winter's evening two muffled figures stole forth from a town of Eastern Anatolia, through the orchards to the house leased by the Turkish governor. The leader, a tall servant, bore a lantern to show up the path. All day long it had been raining, but by then the sky was clear. Great winking stars looked down through leafless branches, which took fantastic forms like stretched-out arms and heads of human hair erect in terror. There was no sound except the sighing of the wind and an occasional dog's bark out of the distance. They met no one till they drew quite near the Pasha's residence, when a soldier sprang out of the shadows and inquired their business.

"It is very private, very urgent," said the man who walked behind.

"My master is familiar with His Excellency," said the lantern-bearer.

"Vouchsafe the name!" the orderly insisted.

The servant whispered it. It was the name of the most wealthy and respected of Armenian merchants. The soldier, deferential in a second, led them up to the selamlik—a kiosk-like building separated from the house. The place was dark. The soldier brought a lamp, and then a vessel of glowing charcoal, closed the shutters of the windows, and retired.

After a quarter of an hour of waiting, during which they risked no word above the breath, the Pasha came to them. He was a man of fifty, iron-gray and upright, with keen blue eyes and a commanding air. Before him, the Armenian merchant, who had now thrown off his wraps, looked like an aged walrus blinking at the light, his servant the same creature in the prime of life.

The governor sat down on the divan and made the merchant sit beside him.

"What is your business?" he inquired after the formal courtesies.

"Ah, Vâh! Vâh! Vâh!" (Woe! Woe! Woe!) the merchant blubbered, flinging up his arms; and "Vâh! Vâh! Vâh!" intoned the servant, squatting down beside the door. And then the merchant broke into a tale of fear, speaking as one who seeks protection and advice, the servant at each pause ejaculating: "Vâh! Vâh! Vâh!"

The Armenian revolutionary committees were once more active in the province—worse than ever! They were creatures of ill-omen. He, the merchant, could remember their iniquities of old, which drew down punishment upon the whole Armenian nation. He, Grégoire Aramïan, the most respected merchant, had been threatened by them, forced under pain of dreadful tortures to subscribe to their accursed funds. A friend of his, who had refused to do so, had been killed, but not till he had seen his daughters ravished and his sons impaled. That happened years ago. And now the menace was renewed, with greater violence! What was a man who had a wife and family, for whom he was responsible to God, to do? The whole Armenian population was completely terrorised. They knew that if they disobeyed those men's injunctions they would die a hideous death, and on the other hand they knew that the design of the committees was so to rouse the anger of the Mussulman majority as to bring about a general massacre of the Armenian Christians, which would serve as an excuse for the advance of the detested Russian armies, already gathering, he heard, beyond the frontier. It was a chain of misery without an end.

"All this I know," replied the governor, with some asperity, the note of lamentation growing tedious to his ears.

"They boast that the whole force of Russia is behind

them, that the Czar, who is become their father, will establish an Armenian empire extending from the foothills of the Caucasus to the Cilician gates. It is incredible, of course. But unwise people will believe them!" The merchant Grégoire wrung his hands and wept real tears. His servant, by the door, cried: "Vâh! Vâh! Vâh!"

"Allah is greater!" said the governor. "And you subscribed to their demands."

"What else was I to do, Effendim?"

"Ah, what else, indeed!"

"Your Excellency is aware of my devotion to the government, and that of thousands of my people—the immense majority."

"Of course; but it surprises me that the immense majority should be intimidated by so few—so very few—incendiaries."

"But they are armed."

"If only the bad characters of the Armenian nation possess firearms, then we have only to consult the list of those who hold gun-licences," remarked the Pasha drily. "I did not know the question was so simple."

"Your Excellency is pleased to jest," replied the merchant sadly. "But for the rest of us it is a serious matter. Only think, a Russian army gathered near the frontier, and the revolutionaries urging people to rebellion, at a time when all the garrisons are much depleted, and the Sultan is engaged in a disastrous war in Europe!"

"We have thought of it enough," replied the governor. "In future we intend to think no more, but act."

"But the means at Your Excellency's disposal are inadequate. The troops are few."

"Vâh! Vâh! Vâh!" the servant interjected.

"I do not count upon the troops alone, but on the loyalty of all those thousands of Armenians of whom you spoke just now, who, like yourself, profess devotion to the government," exclaimed the Pasha, rising.

"I would not count on them too much," muttered

the merchant gloomily, "for, as I told Your Excellency, they are much afraid."

"At least, I count on you," the Pasha said, with a most friendly smile.

"I am your servant," murmured the old man with some emotion, but he shook his head. The servant having then prepared the lantern, the pair took humble leave and passed into the night, exclaiming: "Vâh! Vâh! Vâh!"

The Pasha crossed the courtyard to the house. All that the Armenian told him he had known before, and yet the interview left in his mind a sense of evil tidings. Perhaps it was the spectacle, which it revealed, of a great multitude intimidated by the antics of a few banditti and driven towards a course which every one of them was loth to take. Most of the Armenian folk at heart were loyal, as that man had said; most of them hated and distrusted Russia; but they all distrusted one another, and yet held together weakly like a flock of sheep; easily controlled by any one who shouted orders in Armenian. Inquiring of a servant if the ladies of his household were at leisure, the governor was told they also were receiving visitors. The news surprised him greatly, for the women of the town were not accustomed to go out at all at night.

He turned aside into a kind of office bare of furniture save for a desk and chair, and a divan against one wall. When lights were brought, he told his orderly to hasten to the barracks in the town and call the commandant; and then sat down and did some work upon a long report to his superiors, till the clank of spurs and sounds of salutation in the vestibule informed him that the commandant had come. Even then he went on writing for a moment, being at a crucial point.

The commandant, an old man with a white moustache, strode in, saluted with a smile and, seeing that his chief was busy, took a seat on the divan and, pulling out a chaplet from his belt, began to tell the beads. The governor at length laid down his pen, and

went and sat beside him. He inquired: "What news?"

"Nothing particular to-day, Effendim, except the usual rumours of disorder and the spread of treason."

"What can be done?"

"Nothing, Effendim, while the trouble is thus scattered, for our force is much too small to be dispersed. Wait till it reaches something like a head, then I will strike with all the might available."

"No good," replied the governor decidedly, "for that would be to play into the hands of Russia. Be good enough to listen, soul of mine!" He laid his hand on his companion's arm and lectured him in a low tone. Their conversation lasted about half an hour. In the end the commandant sprang up and, standing to attention, said:—

"Effendim, let me recapitulate before I go, to ascertain that I have everything quite clear in mind. I send this telegram in cipher to Stamboul at once. I circulate an order to the troops and frontier-guards to keep strict watch for arms of all descriptions, to report their passage and, where possible, their destination, but to avoid collisions which might make a noise; also to report all movements of banditti or suspected rebels. Upon news of any wrong committed on the Muslim population, I am to make haste to the scene of crime with force sufficient to prevent attempts at vengeance by the population which might furnish an excuse for interference to a foreign Power. Say, is that all, Effendim?"

"That is all."

The commandant saluted and withdrew.

The governor resumed his writing for a while. His chief anxiety was for his wife and daughters, for the Armenian revolutionaries, if successful, were sure to massacre the Muslim population, and a Russian army was not likely to restrain them. He wished that he had never let his household leave Stamboul; but at the time of his appointment to this mountain government, the

guns of the barbarians were thundering on the Chatalja line, and he had thought, when granting their request to bear him company, that there would be less danger for them in the East.

The Ottoman Power was not at war with Russia. That ancient enemy had not come forward openly as instigator and protector of the Balkan States in their combined attack. But everybody knew how her designs had been frustrated by the independent spirit of Bulgaria; and so, desirous always of despoiling Turkey, she now was trying to provoke a cause of war in Eastern Anatolia by favouring Armenian anarchists and other malcontents. The Russian armies in the Caucasus were much superior to any force that he and all his colleagues on the frontier could at that time hope to raise; and in his case the frontier was but ten miles off. He was going to do his duty to the utmost; but the task seemed hopeless, death the best reward.

Inquiring once again about the ladies, he heard that they were now at liberty and went to join them. Their visitors, like his, he learnt, had been Armenians, who had come to warn them of the trouble brewing in the land. The girls were pleasantly excited, and the mother sad.

"They say the Russian army is advancing," cried the elder daughter. "Well, we will drive it back, we Muslim women, with our teeth and hands."

"I have a pistol," said the younger, "and have practised shooting. I will cut my hair and dress up as a man."

The governor smiled sadly at their foolishness, thinking that, if the worst came, he would kill them both.

That was on the fifteenth of March.

On March 17th, the governor received a telegram from Stamboul, from the best friend he had at court, the secretary to the Grand Vizier, assuring him that the attention of His Highness had been called to his report of troubles.

On March 18th the commandant reported the capture by some frontier-guards of fifteen hundred Russian rifles packed in bales like cotton goods and carried on the backs of mules. According to a muleteer's confession, they were destined not for the Armenians, but some disaffected Kurds.

"Aha!" exclaimed the governor within himself. "It is not enough to provoke vengeance; they must also, to make altogether sure, provide the means by which that vengeance shall be executed." He told the commandant to keep the matter secret.

On March 21st a secret agent of Armenian birth, who had been sent three months before to Tiflis to spy out the land, craved audience and informed him that the well-known Kurdish brigand, Kara Ahmed, who, for his crimes, had long been outlawed by the Turkish government, had been received with princely honours by the Russian viceroy, who at the same time was exciting the Armenian revolutionaries with hopes of independence to be gained by Russia's help.

"How can they be independent while they live as a minority among a warlike Muslim population?" mused the governor. "Their aim is to exterminate the Muslims with the help of Russian troops."

He sat with eyes cast down, telling his beads.

"What were the tidings in the villages through which you passed?" he asked aloud of the informer.

"The Armenians hear a rumour that the Muslims will rise up and slay them suddenly, and the Muslims hear the same of the Armenians. It is said in Tiflis that the Russian army only waits for some occurrence which can be made to justify invasion in the eyes of Europe."

Acting upon this and other similar reports, the governor convoked a general meeting of the Ulema. It took place three days later in a hall adjoining the great mosque. The governor explained to the Mohammedan divines the delicacy of the whole position and its danger, and begged them, in the interests of El

Islâm, to keep the Muslim population calm whatever happened. They all replied: "To hear is to obey."

On March 28th a Muslim family, inhabiting a lonely house some two hours' journey from the town was massacred. So lonely was the spot that the atrocity was not discovered until thirty-six hours after it occurred. On March 30th, in the early morning, the governor himself rode over to inspect the scene of the crime. The cottage of the murdered family stood by a lake. Beside it was an orchard, and behind, a wooded hill. It was a sunny day. The waters of the lake were brushed by a light breeze, which troubled the reflection of the great, blue, snow-capped mountains on the farther shore. The peaceful beauty of the place enhanced the tragedy.

When he had seen the mutilation of the bodies the Pasha cursed the murderers beneath his breath. The well-trained soldiers of his escort murmured vengeance. What would have been the conduct of the Muslim rabble of the town? He caused the corpses to be covered up and buried quickly, bidding the soldiers speak to no one of their mutilations. Among the troops detailed to hunt the murderers the tidings spread, however, and increased their zeal. A little company of five Armenians —who, strange to say, were men of education—was surrounded in a wood. Things taken from the cottage of the murdered Muslims were found upon them. They were brought back to the town in bonds and, one by one, interrogated by the governor. Each, when he found himself alone, in peril of his life, confessed the plot, which aimed at far more than the slaughter of a simple family. Upon the information thus obtained a raid was made upon a certain villa in the suburbs, where a whole armoury of bombs and other weapons was discovered, including two machine-guns sent from Russia.

There was no doubt whatever of the guilt of the five men in custody. By all the laws of nations they were Turkey's prisoners. The Russian consulate,

however, denied Turkish jurisdiction upon the claim that all the five were Russian subjects. This seemed to be the case with only two of them, upon inquiry; but the consulate upheld its first demand. The governor refused to give them up until he should receive instructions from Stamboul; agreeing in the meanwhile to proceed no further with the charge.

On April 3rd came news that some Armenian brigands near the frontier had burnt a Muslim village, Kizil Tepeh, and exterminated the inhabitants. The place was distant, and the governor, conscious that his presence was most needed at the centre of affairs, sent a commission with an escort to inquire into the crime. This commission was composed of two Armenian bishops, a Muslim judge and his own aide-de-camp.

Two days later he received a deputation from the Muslims in the district where the outrage had occurred, asking that soldiers should be sent for their protection, and another, representing the Armenians of the town itself, asking for a special guard against the Muslims who, they said, were going to take vengeance indiscriminately for crimes which were the work of thieves and outlaws. He did his best to reassure both parties. Soldiers he could not send, for he had none to spare. He felt exceedingly despondent till, on that same evening, he got a telegram in cipher from Stamboul. It was from no less a person than the Grand Vizier himself. It ran:—

"Highly approve of your report of policy. Have sent two regiments, as an earnest of my strong support. Till they arrive, do nothing vigorous, avoid all acts that could be construed as offence to Russia. Am dealing with the embassy about the murderers you have in hand. Send them hither under a safe escort. We give them up; but it is more politic to do so here, before the representatives of all the Powers, who thus must take some cognizance of the affair, however loth, than in your province, where our yielding would be reckoned a great Russian victory. Thanks for your

despatch, which has enabled us to question accuracy of a memorandum recently put forth by the Armenian patriarch. Another Russian move—stopped dead, by Allah's mercy. We learn that they are now on a fresh line of action. Beware the Hamidian Kurds. Watch Kara Ahmed. There are hopes of English help, if we can stave off actual war."

This message gave the governor new life. The sender was the man he most respected upon earth, a strong man capable of saving Turkey. It was true that almost all the European provinces had been wrested from the Muslim empire in the last few months, with circumstances of unheard-of cruelty. It was true that his own birthplace was to-day in hostile hands. His spirit often yearned for the green hills of Resna, the blue-eyed lake of Ochrida, his childhood's home. But the body of the empire still remained. The Muslims still possessed a splendid heritage which, by reforms and education, with the help of Allah, might yet be made a model for the world. The hope the Grand Vizier expressed of England cheered him greatly; for England, the traditional friend of the Osmanli, the founder of the great progressive movement in the Muslim realm, had not been friendly since the Revolution. The Turks, who looked to her for active help, had been perplexed and disappointed by her attitude. Doubtless the English people had been misinformed. The Russian agents and their lies were everywhere. If England were once more prepared to give them aid, there was a hope, to match their courage, for the Turks.

The Russian consul, calling on the governor soon after he had read that missive from the Grand Vizier, was much astonished by his cheerful looks and firm replies.

On April 8th a messenger arrived in town with news that the commission delegated to investigate the massacre of Kizil Tepeh had been attacked by a strong force of brigands and annihilated. Later in the same day a more trustworthy report declared that the

attacking brigands had been routed, but the governor's aide-de-camp and three soldiers of the escort had been killed, and an Armenian bishop wounded. The Pasha loved that aide-de-camp as his own son. He had, indeed, been plighted to his elder daughter. "Allah have mercy on him!" he exclaimed, with aching heart, hearing sounds of mourning from the women's portion of the house.

On the next day he learnt that three of the assailant brigands, wounded in the fight and captured, were being brought into the town for judgment. He deferred their trial till the popular excitement should to some extent subside.

On April 14th came a telegram from the Ministry of the Interior, asking for immediate information on the measures which were being taken to secure the punishment of Kurds who on the 5th of April had murdered an Armenian bishop at the altar. The Russian embassy demanded satisfaction. He replied that the usual search was being made for the Armenian brigands who on the date in question had attacked a government commission, killing a Turkish officer of distinction and three private soldiers, and wounding, among other persons, an Armenian bishop, on the open road. The said bishop, he subjoined, was far from dead, and had recovered from the trifling injuries he had received.

In reply to this despatch he got an unsigned message which, when deciphered, read :—

"Have Kara Ahmed watched."

He had already taken steps to have that done ; and as good luck would have it, while still he waited for some certain tidings of that outlawed chief, the regiment promised by the Grand Vizier arrived. At once the aspect of the town was changed as if by magic. People who had hardly ventured out of doors for months now filled the streets with talk and swaggering laughter. The peasantry poured in to market as of old. Armenian notables, who for a long while past had shunned the Turkish governor and, if they met him in the street,

had slunk by with hurried salutation, as if afraid of being seen to pay him reverence, now fawned upon him. Grégoire Aramïan, that wealthy merchant, called on him in broad daylight at the office of the government and, kissing his hand repeatedly, exclaimed: "Thê praise to Allah for those soldiers! Praise to Allah!" It was at the very height of this enthusiasm, when the troops had been assigned by companies to all the districts where disorders were most feared, that the governor got word that Kara Ahmed with two hundred of his men disguised as learned clerks and dervishes and simple peasants had come into the town. Their leader, in the garb of a Mohammedan divine, with hennaed beard, had been already to the Russian consulate, where he had spent two hours.

The watch upon the town was strengthened to a half battalion; and on the early morning of the 21st of April, Kara Ahmed and the leaders of his band—thirty-five men in all—were surrounded by the soldiers in a yard where they were holding council, and after their deliberations had been overheard by many witnesses, attacked and overcome. They put up a brave fight. Ten of them broke away, their chief among them, and fled for refuge to the Russian consulate.

The governor, elated, took the liberty to telegraph the news directly to the Grand Vizier. In course of time he had an answer: "Praise to Allah. I shall have a statement of the facts prepared and make a solemn protest to the Powers. Do thou, meanwhile, demand the head of Kara Ahmed, who is unquestionably an Osmanli subject, and was taken in rebellion."

The governor was greatly flattered by this private message. The friendly "thou" especially delighted him, as showing that His Highness was sincerely pleased. He did as he was told, calling repeatedly upon the Russian consul, who was evidently much embarrassed to invent new reasons for evading a demand so manifestly just and legal. At last, on the 20th of May he finally admitted, with expressions of profound regret,

that the miscreant in question had escaped he knew not whither. The governor was perfectly aware by then that Kara Ahmed had been safe in Russian territory for at least three weeks; but he of course pretended ignorance of such a fact, confining himself to an expression of surprise that so notorious a wretch should not have been more strictly guarded, and a regret that the respected consul had not seen his way to deliver up the miscreant at once to Turkish custody. The consul's manner at this interview was abject, and with reason, for he had been sternly reprimanded by his government. He even offered an apology to the Turkish governor for his refusals to give up the outlawed chief. He had, he said, been misinformed as to that person's character.

The fact, not known till later by the governor, was that a tremendous storm had risen from that local incident. The Grand Vizier was threatening to call the attention of the whole civilised world to an affair so typical of Russian methods in regard to Turkey. What made it look the worse for Russia was the fact that the Russian and Armenian newspapers at Tiflis had published full and horrible accounts of massacres of Christians alleged to have been committed by the Muslims in that very district and on the very day which had been fixed for Kara Ahmed's rising. These showed what would in fact have happened if everything had come to pass as Russia wished. The Grand Vizier used his advantage boldly; and infinite was the embarrassment in all the embassies.

The governor, perceiving that his enemy was silenced temporarily, had the houses of reputed revolutionaries searched, all on one day. Abundant evidence was found of Russia's guilt. On the day after these discoveries, as he was driving from the government building in the city to his private house, two shots were fired upon him from a window. One of his fingers on the left hand, which was resting on the carriage door, was shot away, and that was all. The coachman lashed the

horses to a furious gallop. The Pasha wrapped his hand up in a handkerchief, assisted by an officer who sat before him in the carriage. Both praised God for their escape.

Outside the town His Excellency noticed white pavilions in a leafy orchard by the river bank and, leaning out, inquired their meaning of the driver.

"Some English travellers, Effendim," the man answered. "Lovers of the Armenians, who desire to see them lords of everything. They do not know them, it is evident, so well as we do. The English used to be considered sensible, but these are friends of Russia. So it is said," he added, with a shrug.

"Impossible," replied the Pasha, drawing in his head.

At his own door, a servant met him with the words :—

"Two English beys await Your Excellency in the garden house."

"I go to them at once," replied the Pasha, and he strode towards the selamlik gaily. He liked Englishmen. But before he reached the door he noticed that the handkerchief on his left hand was soaked with blood. He turned back to the house to get a proper bandage, and it was quite ten minutes ere he could appear before his visitors.

He offered them a cordial welcome to the town and province. But their demeanour chilled him at a glance. One was clean-shaven, of a monkish gravity. The other wore a thin moustache and beard, red turning gray.

Dismayed by the severity of their appearance, the Pasha kept his eyes downcast while they explained the purpose of their visit. It was not, as he had thought, the simple compliment of persons of condition to the local governor. They had heard, it seemed, from some Armenian friends of theirs, of a poor lad who had been kidnapped by the Turkish soldiers and was being kept in prison for no reason ; and had come to make a protest in the name of justice. Both spoke intelligible French ; and their denunciations of the Turkish mode of government, which they judged upon the surface

only with no knowledge of the depths, distressed the governor because the speakers happened to be English, the people most beloved of the Osmanlis.

He tried to make them realise the difficulties with which the government of a wild Anatolian province had to fight, speaking his mind more earnestly and freely than he would have done to chance acquaintances of another race, being sincerely anxious to convince them that they had been misled. They listened with apparent incredulity, and, when he paused, returned to the Armenian youth who was in prison.

The Pasha asked to be excused a moment and, going out, made some inquiries of his secretary. When he came back after a few minutes, he was able to assure his visitors that the person in whose case they took an interest had not been "kidnapped," nor arrested by mistake, nor kept in prison without valid reason. The youth had been arrested in connection with a certain outrage, because two bombs were found in his possession. His trial would be public, and would take place in the coming week. If any one had any evidence to give on his behalf, they would have the opportunity to state it then. It was not possible for him, the governor, to interfere in such a case before the judgment.

And then a strange thing happened. The clean-shaven visitor, who was, if anything, the sterner of the two, suddenly flushed up to the roots of his gray hair and, with a face of righteous indignation, blurted :—

"If a reasonable sum of money will facilitate the matter, I will pay it."

The Pasha felt exceedingly disgusted, yet he had to laugh. Although he had accepted presents in his time, he had never known them offered in that manner, nor for a matter which concerned his honour as a servant of the State. Attributing the rudeness to a total ignorance of Turkish customs, he tried to change the subject of the conversation. But they would not, reverting always to the misdeeds of the Turkish government, particularly in regard to the Armenian Christians.

The governor, dismayed to hear such unfair judgments from the lips of Englishmen, spoke to them of the wildness of the people in those provinces, and of the evil influence of Russia, quoting instances. But, far from sympathising with him, they grew only more indignant.

"Russia is right to protect these unfortunate Christians," remarked the bearded one, with icy vehemence.

"The Czar's yoke, however heavy it may be, will still be preferable to the Sultan's," said the other. "You cannot blind us to the truth. We have been travelling for weeks among the people. We have heard the stories which all classes have to tell of massacre and persecution."

"Are you acquainted with their language?" asked the Pasha, curious.

"No, but we have with us a good interpreter."

"An Armenian, possibly?"

"Certainly, an Armenian."

"Well, we could tell you stories on our side," remarked the Pasha, laughing.

"No doubt," said the clean-shaven one, with nose in air.

"Well, we could tell you stories on the other side. You should go and talk to some Armenians in this town—without your dragoman. There is M. Grégoire Aramïan, our greatest merchant, to whom I can introduce you if you like."

"It would not be worth while, for we depart tomorrow."

It was at that moment of the conversation that a soldier entered with a telegram.

"Excuse me for one moment," said the Pasha, opening it. The message was in cipher. He had to leave his guests a while and go into his private room, to make it out.

"The Grand Vizier was assassinated before noon today, as the result of a plot for the extermination of the government. Praise be to God, the government holds

firm. The conspirators are known familiars of the Russian and British embassies."

The Pasha tore the paper into little bits, as he strolled back to the selamlik, where he resumed his conversation with the Englishmen. With amiable bows and smiles he placed his judgment at their service. Everything was as they wished. Now that he came to think of it, he might perhaps do something to befriend that young Armenian since he was their protégé. Of course, the Ottoman régime, though much improved, must seem infirm and antiquated to their Western eyes. Doubtless the Russian government was more efficient, and so on. He no longer offered any opposition to their point of view. He did not think it worth his while to waste his breath in seeking to dispel the prejudices of known enemies.

A MATTER OF TASTE

If Stanley Jackson wished to travel, it was more from youthful energy, the desire to move about and overcome new obstacles, than from any curiosity regarding foreign peoples and their habits. These he knew beforehand, with the firm conviction of religious faith, to be inferior. Happening to hear of a vacancy in a mercantile house at Constantinople, in the spirit of adventure he applied for and obtained the post, thinking himself lucky to escape the tame existence of a bank clerk in a little country town. On the journey which he made from Marseilles by a steamer of the Messageries Maritimes service, he gravitated naturally towards the only other Britisher on board, a taciturn and rufous Scot, to the extent of walking up and down the deck with him for hours on end, or lolling by his side in canvas chairs; not that he found this individual at all attractive, but because he held that any native of these isles, however surly, must in nature, be preferred to any foreigner.

The Scotchman evidently thought the same. They exchanged remarks about the steamer's build and speed with wholesale pity for the French as seamen; grumbled about the food occasionally, and wondered who had won the Rugger Match. At Naples, where they went on shore, it was their one desire to get an English newspaper; at Athens, to devour an English steak. And on the quay of Ghalatah one sunny morning they parted with a casual nod on either side, never to meet again. The Scotchman was employed on some new railway, at that time pushing inland from the Black Sea coast. Jackson instantly forgot him, to attach himself as conscientiously to the next compatriot with whom he happened to be thrown. This was his new

employer, an old gentleman, who had lived too long abroad to take an interest in current football, the subject on which Jackson talked with most enthusiasm. He atoned for this deficiency, however, by his general kindness, introducing the newcomer to the English colony—hospitable, homely people, if a thought behind the times—and found him lodgings in a "pension" at Cadi-keuy, kept by an Englishwoman married to a Greek. He and two older Englishmen—a Mr. Jones and a Mr. Pilling—both like himself employed in commerce, formed the aristocracy of this establishment, though they recognised the presence of some dozen foreigners and even on occasion spoke to them. From his bedroom window high up in the building, Jackson could see, between the high-pitched, old tiled roofs of Cadi-keuy, Seraglio Point, the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed and the lighthouse, steadfast amid the dance of azure sea.

He mentioned this look-out in his first letter to his people, observing that it was as pretty as a painting—an artist could make something of it, he opined. But every morning when, in company with Jones and Pilling, he went by steamer to the bridge which joins Stamboul to Ghalatah, the glorious city with its mosques, the shifting panorama of the Bosphorus, the crowd composed of all the nations of the earth, impressed him as mere background to the life of Englishmen. Among the shipping he looked out for English craft; among the crowd he noticed only English faces; and the sycophancy of the Levantines of his acquaintance confirmed him in this good opinion of his race.

Pilling was the oldest of the three—a man of forty, with amorous and social inclinations which made him tolerant of Greeks and nondescripts to a degree which struck his younger companions, who pitied the attachés at the Embassy for being forced to mix up with a lot of foreigners, as hardly decent. It was he who, when they would have sat indoors each evening, smoking their pipes and talking of the things of home, dragged them out sometimes to the social gatherings which he

frequented; and it was on one of those reluctantly endured occasions that Stanley Jackson met the girl who was his ruin.

There was resident at Moda near to Cadi-keuy a family of wealthy Levantines, the Alamatopoulos; of which the father had, by one means or another, become a British subject in his youth. The family was thus classified as English among the medley of commercial tribes and nations which live as parasites upon the noble Turk. The children were called Percy, Jack and Molly Alamatopoulo, and, if asked their nationality, made answer: "Eng-leesh." The boys, both in the twenties, were short, dark, strongly perfumed, and obsequious in manner. Molly, the girl, was a resplendent beauty of the Eastern mould. At the age of eighteen, when she first met the shocked and frightened eyes of Stanley Jackson, she was as near to perfection, both of form and features, as a girl can be. Jackson, on his side, was a personable youth enough, though very gruff and awkward in society. It was his uncouthness which at first attracted Molly Alamatopoulo. It was so English.

"Why do you stand there all alone, Mr Jackson?" asked his hostess of the evening, coming on him in a corner of the long veranda, where he stood smoking a cigarette and staring at the lights across the Bosphorus. "Come, I will introduce you to an English girl who dies to know you."

The English girl was Molly Alamatopoulo. Had she been introduced as Greek he might have borne with her contemptuously. The cool assumption of the English name by that dark, lissom creature, demonstrative as no English girl could ever be, abounding in soft gestures and alluring glances, aroused in him an indignation which dispelled reserve. Her loveliness, compact of light as were the fabled sylphs, a light for ever being reborn out of darkness, offended Stanley Jackson's native prejudices.

"Come; I say now, you're not English really!" was his first remark after their introduction.

"Yes, I am English real-lee," she replied, with glance and smile so shamelessly seductive that he blushed for her. "Let us sit down somewhere where we can talk comfortablee. It is so long a time since I have talked of dear old England."

She went and found a seat and beckoned to him. What could he do but follow and sit near her?

"But I say! You aren't English, you know! You can't be, really!" he cried out in anguish.

"If you mean that I have never been myself to England; that is true, alas! My father is an Englishman of Greek descent. My mother also is an Englishwoman, though of Greek descent."

"Well, that isn't the real thing, you know. You're only naturalised. You shouldn't call yourself English, when you're really Greek."

They argued on the subject for quite half an hour; she, in the sweetest manner, trying to coax him to allow her point of view, not caring what they talked about if only they were together; he, earnest in his efforts to convince her that she had no right to call herself an English girl.

"Then you do not wish me for your compatriot?" she asked at length, pouting, and with a sidelong glance that made him hate her.

"That's not the point," he said severely. "A fact's a fact, you know. You can't get round it."

"Well, tell me about England; tell me what you do at home," said Molly, with a shrug of absolute good humour.

Of course, at the command to talk, his tongue grew heavy; but by dint of many questions, which made him laugh in pity of her ignorance, she led him on to speak of his beloved football. She hung upon his every word with breathless eagerness. When they were disturbed by the call to join in a round game, she murmured as she rose:—

"Some other time you must continue teaching me. I am so interested. You will make me reallee Engleesh, will you not?"

And when they joined the party gathered round a

table for the homely pastime of "Up, Jenkin," she was at his side. He felt her soft warm hand upon his own, and shrank away as if a snake had touched him.

"You seemed to get along all right with that Alamatopoulo youngster," said Pilling as they went back to the boarding-house. "I admire your taste, my boy. She's a real beauty."

"She had the cheek to call herself an Englishwoman," explained Stanley Jackson in accents of profound disgust. He did not like Miss Alamatopoulo at all; he did not even think her pretty; she was not his sort. Her image in his mind possessed indecency. It should have been the image of a practised siren, and not the image of a girl; which made it enigmatical and in a curious, unpleasant way attractive to his secret thoughts.

Between their first and second meetings he was half afraid of her. Their second meeting turned his fear to pity. It happened in the Grande Rue de Péra, as he was coming from the office one fine afternoon. Some people up at Bibek had asked him to play tennis, and he was clad in flannels, with a racket in his hand, threading his way among the over-dressed, unwholesome crowd of Levantines, when a woman dressed as only harlots dress in England, smiled and bowed to him. It was Molly Alamatopoulo, out shopping with her mother, a huge sallow woman in a purple gown, low-necked and trimmed with artificial pearls, white gloves, white boots and an enormous hat with feathers. The daughter wore an equally enormous hat, a pale pink gown and black gloves to above her elbow. Both carried frilly parasols. Stanley Jackson, blushing to the eyes, not for himself, but them, stopped and allowed them to shake hands with him.

"When weell you come to veeseet us?" cried Madame Alamatopoulo. "I have heard of you so much from Mollee. You must know her father, Meester Alamatopoulo, and her brothers, Jack and Percee. Varree pleased to see you. Can you come to-morrow afternoon? Without ceremonee?"

"Oh, please do!" murmured Molly, with her killing smile.

He agreed in order to be rid of them, and strode off with a flourish of his hat. Faugh! He blew a great breath to be rid of their besetting perfume, and returned to thoughts of tennis with relief. That girl had rouge on her cheeks, and something beastly on her eyelids, in broad daylight! The observation laid the phantom of desire which for five days had haunted him to his defilement.

It was without fear, and therefore without much embarrassment, that he called upon her people the next day, a Sunday. The Alamatopoulos lived in a pretty villa on the rock of Moda with a garden looking on the Sea of Marmora. He found them very hospitable and polite—much too polite, as he confided afterwards to Jones; it was his complaint of all these people, they made a fellow feel an ass by fussing round him. Old Alamatopoulo, extremely fat and brown, with a walrus moustache and gold-rimmed spectacles, kept in the background with his no less portly spouse, allowing the young people to do all the talking. Jack and Percy, black-avised and sleek, with very high shirt-collars and a taste for jewellery, were duly deferential to the real Englishman, while Molly put on pretty airs of comradeship as if she and Mr. Jackson had been quite old friends. There was no rouge on her cheeks, nor antimony round her eyes, on this occasion. The impression which the visit left upon his mind was mildly favourable, near indifference. After that he did not shrink from meeting Molly.

There was something finished and complete about her manners and appearance which had made him think her older than she really was. It was quite a shock to him when Pilling, upon some one's wondering whom Molly Alamatopoulo would choose to marry, said: "She's only just eighteen. There's loads of time."

"You don't mean that?" cried Stanley Jackson in amazement. "I thought she was at least as old as I am."

"Fruits ripen quickly in the sun," was Pilling's

answer. "As for you, you young barbarian, you'll be always green and sour, like a Scotch fig."

"I never should have dreamt it," Jackson muttered.

He had another shock in the discovery that she played tennis well, although with too much exclamation and self-consciousness. This raised her in his estimation a good deal. She remained, of course, a hopeless little "dago," attractive in a way which he thought reprehensible; but he no longer thought of her as quite impossible, nor much resented her decided liking for himself. She was just a kid.

This was the state of his affections after some six months, when Pilling said to him one evening:—

"I wouldn't go too far, if I were you. People soon start talking, and before a man knows what he's doing he's let in for something which he never contemplated. I don't believe in marrying out here."

"Marrying? Oh, Lord!" cried Jackson wildly. "What have you gone and got into your head?"

"Well, yesterday, when we were at the Alamatopoulos, and you were out with Molly in the garden picking cherries, Madame was careful to explain to me that she would not allow her daughter to pick cherries with just any one, but with an English gentleman she felt quite safe."

"Well, what of that?" said Jackson, with some heat. "The sort of men they know—these beastly Levantines—are utter blackguards. You couldn't trust a girl like Molly out of sight with them."

"A girl like Molly!—eh?"

"I mean . . . Oh, hang it all! Say, any girl."

When speaking of "a girl like Molly" he was thinking of her tendency to snuggle (so to speak), to lay her hand upon a fellow's sleeve, to touch his hand and so on; which he ascribed to the effusion of her southern nature. But it had occurred to him that it was no affair of Pilling's.

"Say, any girl!" he cried defiantly.

His mentor shrugged: "Well, have it as you like. I've warned you, and I think I know my ground."

Jackson thought the warning nonsense at the time, but when he pondered it alone, misgivings came to him. He remembered that her parents and her brothers had left him rather pointedly to Molly, seeming eager to secure him opportunities not usually allowed to simple friendship in the south. Alarmed at the suspicion of a project to inveigle him (a true-born Briton) into an unthinkable alliance, he determined (as he put it) to cool off. But he had already accepted an invitation from the Alamatopoulos to join a picnic party they were organising for the coming week. Having himself proposed some expedition of the kind, and having taken charge of some of the arrangements, he could not get out of it.

The party of some forty persons—mostly Levantines, elaborately dressed as for a garden party, the men all wearing gloves, the women their best hats—set out at six one morning from the quay of Cadi-keuy in a procession of six country carts devoid of springs, each with a canopy and flapping blinds of red or yellow, each with two horses and a Turkish driver. The coachmen cracked their whips, the horses galloped, the ladies grinned self-consciously at the attention they attracted, till they passed the suburbs, when their pace subsided to a steady trot. It was a three hours' journey over roads so execrable that at times the elegants were thrown a foot into the air, returning violently; were tumbled all together sideways and narrowly escaped an overturn. They did not seem to mind it in the least, though Stanley Jackson was at times alarmed for them. He was far from comfortable. Beside him in the cart sat Molly and, whether from the jolting or her own desire, she was continually leaning up against him. He could not actually push her off, nor was he able to withdraw his person any distance without indenting the soft mass of Madame Alamatopoulo, who sat upon his other side.

So he bore with the inevitable, sitting stiff and ill-at-ease, while the procession of rude vehicles with their fashionable occupants jogged through meadow valleys

or jolted over rocky slopes, traversed a village of gray wooden kiosks wreathed in wistaria, clustering round a white mosque, and, crawling up a long and rough ascent, approached its destination. This was a grove of noble, ancient trees, knee-deep in fern and wild flowers, high up on a mountain side. Here, in the shade, the carts stopped and disgorged their inmates. Between the outer columns of the forest loomed the sea, uprising like a wall, as blue as ink in contrast with the sun-bleached land. After an hour of screaming preparations, a place of rest was chosen, and the luncheon spread. Stanley Jackson showed a feverish zeal in these arrangements, glad of a respite from temptations which alarmed his soul.

But after luncheon, when the elders rested and the younger members of the party wandered off in groups, he once more found himself alone with Molly. She had whispered: "Come, and I will show you where those lilies grow," and he had followed weakly, lacking the presence or the strength of mind to feign fatigue. In truth, his feelings were divided in that languid moment. He saw an opportunity to "choke her off" (as he expressed it); at the same time, he doubted his own courage, his own will to do so. The day was warm, the scene delightful, and he had eaten well and drunk his fill of country wine. He vowed that, if he got through that one day without disgrace, he would throw up his position in Constantinople and go home for safety. Never had he been so tempted in his life before. His very thoughts, his very blood, were traitors.

They sat down on a rock among the lilies, when she had picked a bunch of them, and after that were silent for some time. There was a singing in his ears. Suddenly she turned and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Why are you so silent? Don't you like to be with me?"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Jackson in his inmost soul. His limbs were palsied, quaking, his mouth dry. She was looking at him with her great soft eyes which seemed of power to melt the marrow in his bones; her breath was on his face; she took his hand and pressed it.

"Will you not tell me what has made you sad? For you are sad to-day. Have you some trouble?" she inquired, with friendly earnestness.

Never had she seemed so lovely in his eyes, or so un-English. The attraction and the impossibility appeared to him together, alike threatening. He felt as helpless as if he had been actually pulled with equal force in two opposite directions.

"What is it, tell me! I am frightened for you," she went on insisting.

"It's nothing. Only I am afraid that I may have to leave this country in a week or two, and I've grown fond of it."

The lie had slipped out unawares—without his will, it seemed, against his judgment; yet it struck him as about the best thing that he could have said. Her bright face clouded instantly. Tears sprang into her eyes.

She moaned: "I am so sad. How I shall miss you!"

He got up.

"I shall be sorry, too," he said with studied coolness. "Hadn't we better go back to the others? They'll be wondering where we are."

He felt an utter brute. The youngster's smile, the joy suffusing her dark beauty like an inward light, was gone, and he had killed it. And she was but a kid, after all—the thought tugged at his heartstrings—as good, perhaps, as any English girl, only so different!

Molly was very silent on the homeward road, and so, for the matter of that, was almost everybody, for the spirits of the party were not proof against fatigue. She sat against him as before, he could feel every movement of her body, and once or twice, when it grew dark, he fancied she was crying. At length, as they drew near their journey's end, jogging along a straight paved road, the lights of Cadi-keuy rising up before them, she clasped his arm and for a moment laid her head upon his shoulder whispering: "Take me with you!" His brain swam. He all but hugged her in his arms. Saving himself in time, he touched her hand, and murmured:—

"Don't make it harder for me than it is already."

She was sobbing.

"I must get away at once," he said to Pilling at the boarding-house, after confiding to the older man as much as he thought fit of the day's story. "I must get away at once," he said to his employer, on a similar confession, the next morning. Both recognised his need to fly, but the old merchant said:—

"I should be sorry if you left us altogether. From what you say there's really no harm done. The whole thing will blow over in a month. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll transfer you to our Egyptian house for half a year. Some one reliable is badly needed there. How will that suit you? You can start next week."

"That suits me down to the ground. I'm very grateful to you, sir."

The news that Stanley Jackson was to go to Egypt travelled quickly through the British colony and its adherent circles, and also, as things secret will leak out, the fact that he had wished to leave Constantinople. He had arranged to start on a Tuesday by the Austrian Lloyd steamer. On the Sunday morning he was sitting in his own room at the boarding-house, packing his belongings in a leisurely way, when the man-of-all-work of the boarding-house, a Laz named Mukhtar, brought a card to him. It bore the printed legend: "M. Jack Alamatopoulo," and underneath, hand-written: "M. Percy Alamatopoulo." He coloured up as he made Mukhtar understand he was to show them in. He felt he was behaving shabbily towards the family, but did not see how, as an Englishman, he could have acted otherwise. They had always been so devilishly polite and hospitable, had always seemed to like him so much more than he liked them; and now they came so decently to say good-bye to him, that he felt an utter worm, as he himself expressed it. He met them with a shamefaced cordiality, exclaiming: "I was meaning to come and see you this very afternoon," before he noticed that their looks were not as usual.

They were little men, with thick black hair much greased and slightly waved—rather ridiculous little men, he had once thought them. But now they had acquired a certain dignity. Both stood bolt upright with chins held at an even higher angle than that which their shirt-collars made obligatory; both frowned like the recording angel. Jack, who was short-sighted, fixed his gold-rimmed pince-nez and observed:—

"We wish for ver*ee* serious conversation."

"Well?" asked Jackson.

"What, may I ask you, sir, are your intentions with regard to our beloved sister, Meess Mollee Alamatopoulo?"

"That is what we come to learn," emitted Percy.

"What do you mean?" asked Jackson rather crossly. "We are just good friends."

"Friends!" bellowed Percy with extreme ferocity. "You call it friends to tamper with the feelings of a girl so young and innocent? We are an honourable famil*ee*, and we do not want your friendship until we know that you are honourable like as we are. You have dragged my sister's reputation in the dirt, in the mire, with what you call your friendship. Father and mother had no fears. They thought: 'An Englishman is honourable. When he behaves to a young girl in such a way that no one after him would wish to marry her, he will not leave her there to die of shame.'

"You're talking nonsense. You know perfectly well that there was nothing of the sort between us. We were only friends."

"Nice friends! And she is now in tears with broken heart, because you go away and scorn her after too much friendship! Nice friends, when every one has seen your conduct both at our house and also at the picnic, and every one has thought you were engaged to her!"

"That's not my fault!"

"Not your fault, sir? Not your fault?" repeated Percy, with terrific mildness.

Jack cut in:—

"I put a question to you, Meester Jackson: Will you

marr*ee* my sister, Meess Moll*ee* Alamatopoulo? We stop here till we have your promise in handwriting signed and witnessed."

"Then you'll stop here till the Day of Judgment," answered Stanley Jackson.

"Then we will thrash you like the dirty leetle dog you are!" cried Percy. He struck at Jackson with his cane, but missed the stroke. Jack then attacked. They both ran in on him. But both were mad and nearly blind with rage, while Jackson at the first blow had grown cooler than he had been since they came into the room. After some three minutes of exciting struggle, he pushed them both outside the door, which Mukhtar, by good fortune, had that minute opened, coming to see what the commotion meant. The Laz took part with Jackson, and accelerated their departure down the stairs.

But the victor in this battle knew no joy. He saw the scandal which the news of such a brawl was sure to raise, and felt that it was hard on little Molly. More than ever he was anxious to be gone. He wished he could have gone that very minute. However, he must grin and bear it until Tuesday.

In the farewell visits which he had to pay he was received by the women with marked coldness, by the men with sly hilarity.

"It's all right, old fellow; it'll all blow over," Pilling told him, when his face betrayed dejection. "No Englishman of any sense will blame you. One must keep clear of dagoes, in that way. To-morrow when you're safe on board the boat, with Stamboul sinking in the sea astern, you'll thank your stars and feel a different man."

"I don't know," muttered Stanley Jackson miserably. "It's pretty beastly. I never thought of anything, that's the hard part of it."

Struggling with deep thoughts and new emotions, he was scarce articulate.

With feelings of immense relief he found himself at last upon the Austrian steamer, the centre of a little

crowd of English who had come to say good-bye. And his sensations of relief increased when the ship moved at last and, standing by the bulwarks, he kept waving to his friends on shore. He watched the glorious city gliding by—the quays, the bridge, the panorama of great mosques, the palace, Sultan Ahmed and the light-house; then turned to gaze upon the other side, at Cadi-keuy and the point of Moda where she lived; and then with a deep sigh he cleared his mind and sauntered down to the saloon to have a drink. There, at the bar, he happened on a fellow-countryman, a talkative old man upon a tour around the world, with whom he stayed in conversation for some time.

When he returned on deck, the sun was setting; Stamboul had dwindled to a streak upon the far edge of the purpled sea, a mere appendage of the hills of Asia. His shadow stretched before him on the deck as he strolled towards the stern for a last look at it. A girl already stood there watching the receding coast. Her head was hooded in a white veil such as Turkish women in the country wear, her figure wrapped in a black satin cloak. She turned as he drew near. Not thinking of her, he continued to advance, until he realised that he stood face to face with Molly Alamatopoulo.

"You here?" he murmured in amazement.

Strange to say, his first sensation was of unmixed gladness at her presence. Then, as he suspected that it was a plot, that her parents or her brothers were on board with her, that he might not escape, he added in the coldest tone at his command:—

"What are you here for?"

"Don't stand like that, or people will be staring at us. Let us walk about. Give me your arm."

She took command of him, and he submitted, although his face preserved a look of obstinate distrust.

"You ask why I am here. I wished to speak to you, and so I came."

"How many of your people are on board?" he questioned, with a savage grin.

" What do you mean ? Oh, do you think—you cannot —think ! Oh, I am ashamed ! "

For a moment he was much afraid that she was going to cry. The plain white veil ennobled her appearance, which he had generally seen degraded by some monstrous hat. After a moment's silence, she resumed :—

" It is the fault of my brothers. They have made you think such things. They went and tried to frighten you—the fools !—on Sunday morning ; and now you think that we are all alike, both they and I, and would do anything. Believe me, I knew nothing of their going to you. If I had known of their design beforehand, they should not have gone. I would have killed them sooner. And oh, I was so glad you overcame them both and drove them out. I thought : 'My Stanlee is so strong ; he knows no fear,' and I was glad ; but then I thought, 'he does not love poor Mollee, he is flying from her,' and I was so sorree. At last I thought of this which I am doing now : to come on the same ship and speak alone with you, that we may understand each other clearlee, once for all. 'Perhaps,' I said, 'He does not know how much I feel.' "

" But how did you ever get here. Have you got a berth on board ? "

" Yes, Stanlee." Her lips parted in a childlike smile.

"But a berth costs money. Then your parents know ?"

" No, Stanlee. They know nothing. I just stole the money and gave it to our Muslim gardener, who bought the ticket for me."

" But what possessed you ? What good can it do, your talking to me ? "

" This good it can do, Stanlee. It can put an end to what has so much troubled me. My talk with you is this : I ask you, will you take me with you where you're going ? Yes or No ? If you say yes, I shall be very happee. If you say no, I throw myself into the sea."

" You're not so mad ! " cried Jackson horrified. Like a person in the act of drowning, he had the vision of his whole past life, beheld his parents and his home

surroundings, his comrades, and the cool ideal of girlhood which he had always cherished in his bosom until now.

"No, Stanlee. I shall do exactly as I say."

He met her eyes, and knew that she was speaking truth.

"Well, Stanlee, is it Yes or No?"

"Oh, yes, then, since you put it that way."

She pressed his arm and leaned against it lovingly.

"Thank you so much," she sighed. "You give me life. You will not regret what you have done, I swear to God."

He, though assuredly enamoured, had grave doubts of that; but it was now too late to air them with advantage. It was agreed that they should meet on deck as mere acquaintances until the boat reached Alexandria, where Molly had an aunt and uncle who would take her in while Stanley made arrangements for their marriage. The bridegroom's heart was heavy on the voyage and in the days and nights he spent at an hotel at Ramleh. He had to write the startling news to his home people and, which was worse, to people at Constantinople, where he knew that it would raise a storm of mocking laughter. But he did his best to keep a cheerful face before the girl. It was therefore with dismay that, on the day before the wedding, he heard her say:—

"I think I know what you are feeling. You are afraid, because I am not quite an English girl. I asked you—did I not?—to marry me. That you think shocking. But it was to save my life. You do not know how girls not English suffer when they love in vain. Dear Stanlee, this I know: that you will not regret it."

"Of course I shan't!" said Jackson manfully. "The prettiest girl in Constantinople! I'm a lucky dog."

"You never thought me prettee!" she asserted boldly, putting her face close to his. "You do not think me prettee even now!"

"Oh, I do."

"You don't. But I will make you think me pretty. I will drive all that you have thought against me from your mind. I will make you love me better than an English girl, so that you shall never in your life regret that you said yes to me."

And strange though it may seem, she kept her word.

When after six months' absence the young couple came back to Constantinople, Stanley Jackson was already a changed man. Instead of coming shamefaced to the place where the wretched circumstances of his marriage were well known, he returned triumphant, proud of his young wife. He manifested not the least repugnance for the Alamatopoulos and all their tribe, seemed even to prefer them to his English friends. Molly might wear the most outrageous hats, might perfume her white skin or touch her cheeks with rouge, he never noticed anything amiss with her. And his delight in her increased as time went on.

His English friends observed the process of degeneration. He grew fatter every month, and less inclined for manly exercise. On the other hand, he was now making money with the assistance of the Alamatopoulos, who knew the ins and outs of all financial ventures, and was a great deal more polite and amiable than of yore.

"He's just a dago!" exclaimed Jones disgustedly, one evening after he and Pilling had met and talked with Jackson on the Cadi-keuy boat. "Whoever would have thought a decent Englishman could change his skin like that?"

"He's happy," answered Pilling, with a shrug. "There's only one thing English girls are bad at—that is, love. They think too much about themselves. They keep a man in a perpetual state of irritation, which produces energy. Now little Molly has made Jackson happy. He's content to be a dago—any blessed thing—with her. You mustn't blame him. It's a question of supply and demand."

"I call it a question of good taste," said Jones fastidiously.

THE MARSEILLES TRAGEDY

In the drink-shop—a kiosk upon a little pier built out into the water of the inland sea, an old man full of arak wept continuously, while those around him offered words of sympathy and plied him with the potent liquor, drinking too. Among these sad carousers was a priest, a little fierce-eyed man whose speech consisted of appeals to God, the Virgin and the saints. The sea laughed in the splendid sunlight under a light breeze, lapping the pebbles of the beach with a refreshing sound and moving a few boats about the landing-stage; while from the hill of houses interspersed with gardens came peaceful human noises and the coo of doves.

The old man, with mouth hanging open and tears running down his wrinkled cheeks, sobbed:—

"May my right hand wither if I go not now to kill her."

"Wait for the deputation," growled his son, who sat beside him. The young one had been drinking quite as freely as the old, but the result in him was grim excitement and not weakness.

"Aye—Lord of Heaven!—that is good advice," put in the priest. "They may restore the girl—the Holy Virgin grant it!—when thou and Dmitri here can kill her quietly."

"My father and my mother are to blame. They spoilt her with indulgence," said the young man, Dmitri.

At that his father's grief became convulsive. He wailed out: "Woe the day! The sun is blackened! Holy St. Michael, save me, for I burn in hell, and naught can quench the burning save my daughter's blood."

"Be patient, Dmitri," said the priest in chiding tone.

"Thy father is distraught with righteous grief.—The saints protect us!—It is a sin for thee to vex him in so dark an hour."

"Do I not know him?" sneered the young man bitterly. "He weeps and drinks and curses, that is all. I know he will resign himself to this, as to all other ignominy. As for me, I swear to kill my sister, Miriam, sooner or later, though it take me years. God knows how fondly I have always loved her!"

"The Lord give strength to thy right arm!" exclaimed the priest approvingly, and all who heard the benediction said, Amen.

From the place where Dmitri sat between his father and the priest, he could see a good way up a street of steps which cleft the village. There presently he spied a group of men, descending, under sunshades, leisurely. It was the deputation coming back from its long visit to the representative of Turkish government in Merdiven-keuy. Some women from the houses ran out, questioning, and soon the men down in the drink-shop heard distinctly their angry crying of one word: "Refused!" The old man moaned out, "Lord have mercy!" seeming at the point of death. His son shrugged up his shoulders and laughed bitterly.

"Alas, my brothers," said the headman as he, with others of the deputation, joined them, bidding the tavern-keeper bring a whole decanter full of arak with salted dainties to enhance his pleasure in the drink. "All was in vain. I spoke about our ancient privileges, and the law forbidding all attempts at our conversion. I spoke, too, of the Constitution and the promise of improved conditions lately made to us. His Honour called the culprit and his father to confront us. They swore, of course, that they had no intention to convert the girl, nor hinder her from practising the Christian faith."

"She shall not have the sacraments in Merdiven-keuy," cried the priest vindictively. "And what said the mudîr himself?"

"He talked," replied the headman, with a shrug, "a long tale about toleration and the blessings of the Constitution, and how the Muslims are henceforth our brothers."

There were loud, scornful laughs. Young Dmitri ground his teeth and cried :—

"She shall not live!"

"Now comes the most important part," pursued the headman. "Although of European education, the mudîr is still a Turk. After talking about brotherhood and progress a long while, just as we were rising to depart, he looked me in the eyes—a tiger-glance—and said: 'If any harm befalls the bride of Mahmûd Agha, I punish the whole Christian commune. So beware!' He is not such a harmless one as he at first appears. He knows our hearts. Therefore it behoves us to move cautiously."

"She shall at least be excommunicated," said the priest.

"Be careful even there," replied the headman gravely.

"Merciful Christ!" arose the general murmur of dismay.

"Thy Englishman might help; he is a sort of Christian," said a fair-haired man to Dmitri privately.

"I am going now to try him," was the answer of the angry youth, who soon departed from the drinking-shop without a word to any one.

The trouble had originated on a summer's day of the preceding year, when men had come by boat to Merdiven-keuy from the chief town of the coast, and had proceeded up the street of steps with banners; pausing before the church to make harangues in Greek and Turkish, pausing again for the same purpose underneath a mulberry-tree half up the hill, and then again in the wide open space before the mosque; announcing that the day of brotherhood, of equal rights and justice had dawned at last for all the human race. It took time for the simple folk of Merdiven-keuy to grasp the

meaning of the learned words, but when the Muslim khoja kissed the Christian priest upon both cheeks, hailing him brother, there were shouts of praise to Allah, and the town went mad. Christians were made welcome in the mosque, and Muslims in the church, at the thanksgiving services; and all that day and night the two streams in the population, which had flowed apart for centuries, mingled and ran together in a single flood.

It was towards morning that Dmitri, going homeward with a lantern through his father's orchard, espied a Christian girl in conversation with a Muslim man. He did not recognise his sister; but his soul was angered, and in the morning he informed the priest, who preached upon the subject the next Sunday. Still the goodwill continued till the day when it was known in Merdiven-keuy that Austria had annexed two Turkish provinces and Bulgaria had thrown off the last scrap of allegiance, with impunity. Then the Christians knew that they had been deceived.

The men who had harangued them on the day of liberty had said the Christian Powers were all in favour of the new ideas. They, who had long looked forward to a Christian conquest of the country, enabling them to extirpate and spoil the Muslims, had thought their hope of domination at an end. They now beheld the talk of equal justice as a mere device to rob them of those ancient privileges by means of which they could embarrass and obstruct the government; a plot to level them with Muslims and submerge them quite. They thus became suspicious of the new arrangements; resisted a proposed improvement of the education in their school, quarrelled with the apportionment of votes for the new parliament and regarded military service for the Christians as a cruel outrage, finding in every new proposal food for hate. And now, as the result of the new-fangled nonsense, a Christian maid was taken by a Muslim man!

That Miriam had left her parents of her own accord,

and after persecution, made no difference. No Christian girl must look with favour on a Muslim. The punishment for such a crime in decent families was always death, the task of killing being on the next of kin. If she remained unpunished, all her race would be ashamed, and Muslims would be always after Christian girls.

The sunny day was dark in Dmitri's eyes as he passed up the staircase street into the Muslim quarter with its latticed windows and walled gardens imparting to each house a look of proud reserve, past the white mosque with minarets like candlesticks, to open country where, beneath a pear-tree, the Englishman had pitched his little camp.

This person, though apparently a man of wealth, had the peculiar madness of wandering about the world with guns in chase of birds; and, still more strange to say, his wife accompanied him. Dmitri was their guide on more than one excursion and, when a servant of their camp fell ill, he had replaced him. They had been at Merdiven-keuy now for several weeks and, as they knew some Greek but little Turkish, he had contrived to interest them in the Christians of the place. The priest, the headman and the schoolmaster had been to visit them, and had told them many things about the Mussulmans.

The pair, though odd, were Christians of a sort, and so would shudder when they heard of the choice of Miriam. But Dmitri had sufficient doubt about their Christianity to recognise the need of caution in approaching them with such a tale. Their talk was sometimes almost indistinguishable from the talk of Muslim rationalists. Once or twice it had inspired him with an inkling that they might be freemasons—a kind of persons whom he classed with Muslims in imagination—people who deny the efficacy of the priesthood and the sacraments and all the magic proofs of Christianity. He was therefore full of thought as he approached the tent.

"What is it, Dmitri?" asked the Englishman.

"I came to beg your help, sir," he exclaimed dramatically, wringing his hands. "My best beloved sister has been taken by the Muslims and put in a harem. The Christians all are grieved and very angry."

"You don't mean that they took her from your father's house?"

"No, but they tempted her—a girl so young, and knowing nothing of the kind of people that they are, nor yet the kind of place to which they take her."

The Englishman went to the tent mouth, calling "Grace!" on which his wife appeared from the adjoining tent and, having heard the tidings in her turn, expressed deep horror. She was a champion of her sex and, in her calls at Christian houses, gave strange counsel to the women, who pronounced her mad.

"All that we wish," said Dmitri, sobbing, "is that they give her back to us, that she have time to think. She does not know the wicked thing that she is doing. They will make her curse our Lord!"

"I don't suppose that they'll do that," replied the burly Englishman; "but I think it likely she will suffer for her foolishness."

"It is horrible enough in any case," exclaimed his lady. "The Muslims take so low a view of woman."

"There is another thing which hurts us," put in Dmitri eagerly. "No Muslim girl is free to wed a Christian—no more since the Revolution than before. When one poor Muslim girl did do it, in Constantinople, all the Muslims rose and killed her and the man together very cruelly."

"The savages!" exclaimed the English lady, with clenched teeth.

She and her husband strove to comfort the young man. They spoke of going straight to the mudîr and threatening, in the case of a refusal to restore the girl, to bring the matter to the knowledge of the British Embassy. Dmitri was then dismissed, a little reassured, with orders to return at night and hear the news.

But when he did return, he found them changed.

The lady, it appeared, had seen his sister, who declared herself quite happy with her Muslim lord. She had been astonished by the courtliness of her reception and by the fact that Miriam's husband had no other wives. Too late, Dmitri realised that he had been unwise to rouse false expectations with his talk of harems; for the mudîr, who spoke good French, had told the Englishman with hearty laughter that no such luxury existed at the present day. When he spoke against the law forbidding Muslim girls to marry Christians, the Englishman had been informed that Christians thought it necessary to convert their spouses, whereas Islâm allowed full liberty of conscience. And when he argued on this point, maintaining that the Christians were more tolerant, the mudîr answered :—

"That may be the case in England; it is not so here. Here they do not think at all of Christos and his teaching, which we also venerate, but only of the priests' inventions and their magic tricks. Do you know why they wish to have this girl restored to them? It is because they wish to kill her, they are so fanatical."

The Englishman reported this to Dmitri with a laugh, observing :—

"So you see, they think of you as wrongly as you think of them. However, I am glad my wife has seen your sister. You will now be able to assure your parents she is not unhappy."

"Ah, sir, you do not know the half!" Dmitri wailed, and fled from consolations which increased his grief. As he strode back through the village in the dark, he swore that he would taste no joy till he had knifed his sister.

This oath he kept repeating in the days which followed, even after his mother had paid Miriam a visit, and his father tamely had accepted bounty from the Muslim bridegroom. His vow of sacrifice became the common talk; till one day he was called by the mudîr, who thus addressed him :—

"Thou art the person named Dmitri, son of Iurzi?"

"Yes, Effendim."

"Thou hast threatened murder to the wife of Mahmûd Agha?"

"No, by the Holy Name," gasped Dmitri, but the mudîr went on, unheeding the denial:—

"If harm befalls her anywhere within these realms by any hand, thou wilt be held responsible."

Dmitri's mouth and throat had suddenly become so dry that he could make no sound in answer to this solemn warning, so with a rough salute, he slunk away. He went straight to the priest and told his story. The priest at once absolved him of his vow, exclaiming:—

"It is now too dangerous. It might bring penalties upon the whole community. That brute beast has spoken also to the headman and to me. I have agreed against my will to let her come to church. Do thou, for thy part, lay aside the thought of vengeance."

Dmitri bowed his head as if assenting, though in his heart desire to kill his sister burned as strong as ever. It was a holy and a sweet resolve, for he still loved her more than any other creature, and by that sacrifice alone, it seemed, could she be his once more, her soul reclaimed from everlasting torments, her name redeemed from a dishonour which was poison to his brain.

A few days later it was known that Mahmûd Agha and his Christian wife were going to remove their dwelling to some other place.

"Thanks be to God!" exclaimed the Christian villagers. "A stinking corpse is taken off our doorsteps."

But Dmitri, the devoted brother, was oppressed with grief. When Miriam was gone he knew no peace of mind. So long as she remained in Merdiven-keuy she had not seemed altogether lost to him; he had been able to observe her from a distance sometimes, and refresh his spirit with the thought that he could kill her when he liked. Except for his attendance on the English travellers there was nothing left to interest him in his native place; and when, as happened in the natural course of things, those travellers departed, he

resolved to follow Miriam to her new dwelling-place. The threat of the mudîr had taught him that he could not hope to gratify his longing with impunity in a country ruled by Muslims. In dreams—and he was always dreaming when alone—he saw a Christian country, with vast herds of swine feeding upon a plain, and church spires in the distance; and a great crucifix, at the foot of which lay Miriam dying, while he himself knelt by her weeping passionately. Around them was a crowd of Christian people, who applauded his devotion while they wept for him.

All Christians, of whatever country, hate the Muslim, he considered, and would rage to think of any Christian girl in his profane embrace.

At the end of a week's journey, made on foot, he stood before his sister in her new abode. Her joy at seeing him relieved his mind, as showing that she had not grown forgetful in her new surroundings. At the same time he began to wonder if the Englishman had not been right when he declared on one occasion that his (Dmitri's) horror of this Muslim marriage was in part imaginary.

She spoke with deep affection of her husband, but betrayed some disappointment at their way of living. It was dull. The Muslim women round about were shy of her because she still remained a Christian; though her husband told her that in cities they had no such prejudice. She would have liked to live in Brusa or Constantinople! But to do so in a pleasant way required much money; and so Mahmûd, who tried to give her all she wanted, talked of going to America to try his luck. She could not quite make up her mind to let him go, though sometimes, through desire for money, she was sorely tempted; and he said that after he had found employment, she might go and join him. It would please her well to see that rich, new country. And, even if he had to be away a year or two, she would not feel so very lonely if her brother was at hand. She hoped that he had come to stay with her.

Her husband, when he came in, was as cordial in his hope that Dmitri would not think of going back to Merdiven-keuy. In private he informed him :—

" I have not yet told her that I start next week. A friend of mine, who knows America, is then returning, and I should be a fool to miss the chance he offers. I never thought of money till I married Miriam, but she, like all you Christians "—here he chuckled—" worships it. By choosing me she has estranged her old friends without gaining new ones, a state of things which wealth alone can remedy. And so, to save her from a life all disappointment, I am going out to seek my fortune in the world, with Allah's help. If thou art here, my mind will be at peace concerning her. Remain then, I beseech thee, for her sake."

Dmitri agreed. He journeyed back to Merdiven-keuy to tell his father of his purpose and to say farewell. When he returned to Miriam, she was alone, and saddened from parting with her husband. He found a small employment in the place, and cultivated certain fields belonging to Mahmûd, on behalf of Miriam. So happy and so tranquil was their life together that for months his mind was free from the desire to kill her ; till one day she informed him that she was with child, mourning anew the absence of her lord. He nearly swooned with horror at the tidings, which reminded him of the dishonour of his race acutely. The child his sister bore would be a Muslim ! The horror preyed upon his mind continually. He renewed his vow. The fierce desire of sacrifice once more consumed him, and he cast about for some safe way to gratify it. At length one day, returning from the market-town, he told her :—

" I have made inquiries and I find that we can journey to America for much less than the money which we have in hand."

She clapped her hands for joy at this assurance. Mahmûd had written to her of success, suggesting that he might invite her to rejoin him before very long ; and ever since the coming of that letter she had been

building palaces upon the hope it held for her. A month passed busily in preparations and farewells. Before they started Dmitri went to Merdiven-keuy on purpose to be shriven by the black-browed priest who knew his story.

From the place upon the lower deck of a great steamer where he and Miriam sat upon their heap of bedding, amid the crowd of steerage passengers, most of them with eyes screwed up against the glare of sea and sky, Dmitri saw more lucky people, clad in European clothes, moving upon the first-class deck above. Occasionally some of these would lean upon the railing and gaze upon the humble crowd a moment with disdainful eyes. Once a man and woman from that upper world came down to walk among them, out of curiosity. Dmitri, who was at his dinner of dry bread and olives, took no notice of the couple till they came abreast of him, when he recognised the English who had camped so long at Merdiven-keuy.

They recognised him too, and stopped before him, when Dmitri introduced his sister and explained that he was taking her to join her husband in America.

"What a pathetic face!" exclaimed the lady, who straightway entered into talk with Miriam; while the gentleman, apart with Dmitri, asked facetiously:—

"Is that your sister who was in a harem? I am glad to see that you are reconciled to her."

After that the English couple came down every day from their superior deck to talk with Miriam and Dmitri.

"Marsilia, sir? That is a Christian country?" Dmitri asked the Englishman on one occasion.

"Yes, I suppose so," was the dubious answer. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I shall be glad to reach a country where the Christians rule," said Dmitri, smiling.

From the talk of other steerage passengers he gained the notion that Marseilles was truly Christian. These spoke with smacking lips of shops quite full of pork,

and how the pious people of the country lived on pork and arak. By contrast with a Muslim country it was Paradise.

The English gentleman and lady stood by the rail and waved farewell when Dmitri and his sister with the crowd of emigrants were taken off in boats to the quarantine island. They were pleased to notice the young Greek's attentions to his sister, the way he lifted her into the boat, and then arranged their baggage as a throne for her, taking no thought whatever for himself. As the last boat-load of poor Orientals left its side, the ship steamed on into the harbour of Marseilles.

The crowd of emigrants from Turkey, mostly Maronites from the Lebanon, remained three days upon the island, sleeping in long huts, and guarded by French soldiers. Miriam consorted with the other women, and Dmitri thus had time for lonely thought. He found a spot whence he could see the outline of Marseilles, and even hear the murmur of the seaport when the wind was right. The streams of many coloured smoke arising constantly, the sheaves of masts, the high suspension bridge of which he could not guess the purpose, filled him with vague alarm, which was at once allayed when his gaze came to rest upon the church of Notre Dame de la Garde, alone upon its height, its tower surmounted by a golden statue of the Holy Virgin.

"A Christian country," he would then assure his soul.

One early morning, when the waves were sparkling under pearly haze, the emigrants, after having been examined for the last time by the doctor, were driven from the huts on to a little steamer black with coal-dust, which conveyed them quickly to the town. The noise and bustle of arrival stupefied them. Dmitri, in despair, set down his baggage on the quay, and sat upon it with his sister, opposing every one who wished to seize it. The sunlight shimmered upon everything, a strong wind blew; from time to time the notes of bugles rang out above the other noises of the port.

Dmitri, seeing that his sister's face was sad—he had till then been too distraught to take much note of her—inquired the cause.

She said: "I had a dream last night. I saw Mahmûd, and he was weeping bitterly. Then I knew that I was dead and should not see him more, until we meet again in Paradise."

"Mahmûd is not for Paradise," said Dmitri sternly. "He is a Muslim, food of fire hereafter."

"That I will not believe!" exclaimed his sister. "Much that we learnt in childhood must be false, or how can God be just or merciful?"

"Her mind is tainted with Islâm," Dmitri thought with horror, "which gives salvation to all kinds of men regardless of Redemption by the Sacred Blood." But his answer to his sister was: "God knows the truth."

From where they sat upon the quay, resisting the attention of a crowd of harpies, he could not see the Virgin's church upon the hill. But when a man who spoke their language found them and they went along with him, he saw it once again with great relief. It was a Christian land!

In a squalid back street of Marseilles there is a row of houses kept as a caravanserai for Eastern emigrants, numbers of whom are always passing through the town on their way to the United States or South America. There, for a trifling sum of money, they may occupy the bare floor of a room, and have the food they choose to buy prepared for them, upon condition that they pay respect to the proprietor, a heartless Maronite, who orders them about like dogs and even whips them. There Dmitri and his sister sought a lodging by their guide's advice and, having money in their hands, were well received. They hired a small room for themselves alone, which gave them standing, and the Syrian landlord, who had made a fortune by this traffic with the very poor, called them his children.

Dmitri, leaving Miriam and their baggage in the room, went out to a church and prayed, then to a pork

shop, where he purchased pies and sausages, then to a café where he bought two bottles of strong drink, laden with which he went back to his sister. It was a festival day, he told her; since it was the first that either of them had ever spent upon the soil of Christendom; and they were going to have a feast of Christian food. He crossed himself devoutly and then set to work upon the victuals, bidding his sister do the same, for it was pork, which Christians of the East regard as sacred meat, because the Muslims and the Jews abhor it. She did at length obey, but with reluctance. Her Muslim husband had corrupted her, he thought with rage and anguish, watching her with the corner of an eye. He ate till he could eat no more with any pleasure, and then he fell to drinking, still observing her by stealth, and every now and then exclaiming in a kind of ecstasy: "Thanks be to God that we have reached a Christian land!"

"Why talk of Christians and of Muslims?" sighed his sister. "This country is less peaceful than our native land. I feel that no one could be happy here."

Then Dmitri told her of the glories of the land of Fransa, its wealth, its commerce, the conveniences of railways, tram-cars, banks and telephones. And all the Christian countries of the world had these advantages. Could any Muslim country boast the like? He argued with her fiercely, making it appear that she maintained the Muslim to be better than the Christian countries; deliberately working himself up to frenzy, and gulping down raw spirit in the pauses of his talk. His sister answered gently for some time; but when he grew abusive in his speech and cursed all Muslims, she became angry in her turn and cried:—

"Would God that I could see a Muslim in thy place, thou evil-speaker! Mahmûd is not a drunkard; he is kind to all. I think that he will go to Heaven before thee, defiled one!"

"Thou speakest blasphemy!" cried Dmitri, springing up and glaring at her with wild, drunken eyes. It is

not thou that speakest, but the Muslim babe within thee."

He drew out of his girdle a long knife.

"Sit down!" she urged. "Be not so mad, so foolish!"

But he had seized her by the head-veil and the tail of hair beneath. "O Lord, accept the sacrifice and save her soul from hell," he mumbled piously; while she, struck dumb by terror, stared into his face. With his left hand upon her hair he dragged her backwards while with his right he struck down with the knife, then dragged it upwards. She gave one piercing shriek, so like an infant's that he believed it was the death-cry of the Muslim babe, and then pitched sidelong on the floor, which soon was reddened.

He stood and watched her with regret and satisfaction queerly mingled, till all at once the room was full of hostile shapes, and he was struggling with a man who seemed intent to kill him. It was the Syrian owner of the hostelry, who with the help of others flung the murderer upon the ground, and beat and kicked him, calling him evil names in Greek and Arabic. Then soldiers came and asked him strange questions, which the master of the house translated for him in insulting tones. He answered dully:—

"Is it not a Christian country? I am a Christian. I can clear myself."

Then suddenly it struck him that he had no witnesses to prove that Miriam had really been disgraced by marriage with a Muslim man. There was but one in Europe who had knowledge of the facts—the Englishman who once had camped at Merdiven-kuey. So when the landlord, speaking for the soldiers, asked him:—

"Is there any one who knows thee in this land?" he answered dully: "Mûsiû Clark, the Englishman who travelled with us on the steamship *Niger*."

Then he was handcuffed and led out through gibbering crowds to an automobile, which wafted him and his tormentors as by magic to a building like a fortress

kept by many soldiers. There he was shut up in a white-washed room without a window. Still he assured himself: "It is a Christian country. When they know that she was married to a Muslim and with child by him, they will respect me."

And when the warder came into his cell with food and water he asked again for "Mûsiû Clark, the Englishman."

As luck would have it, Mr. Clark had not yet left Marseilles and, as the best hotels are few in number, a gendarme detailed for the purpose found him easily. That very evening he was ushered into Dmitri's cell, together with a brisk, frock-coated French official who had long been waiting for him in the corridor. The prisoner fell down upon the floor and tried to kiss his feet. The French official said:—

"It is an Arab, is it not, monsieur?"

"No," replied the Englishman, "it is a Greek from Turkey."

The Frenchman shrugged as if to say it made no difference, and then resumed:—

"A tragic case! The man has murdered his own sister; she was enceinte, as you doubtless know. The man was drunk, and in so far as we can gather from the master of the lodging-house, who speaks his tongue, he fancied that the babe she carried would become his enemy. He has declared repeatedly, we understand, that you, monsieur, can show that he was justified in what he did; or at least that he is justified according to the law of his own country. Does any law of any country sanction such a crime? I ask myself! I am most curious to know the facts."

But the Englishman was once again in Merdivenkeuy—the little climbing town of gardens by the inland sea. He saw once more the face of the mudîr who had annoyed him by maintaining that the Christians wished to kill the girl now lying dead; while Dmitri, clinging to his feet; implored him to assure the Frenchman that the victim had in truth disgraced the Christian name.

"She had submitted to a Muslim. A Muslim babe was in her; so she had to die. . . . It is a Christian country. There is a great church with a golden Virgin on it, on a hill. These men are Christians; they eat pork, drink wine. I also am a Christian. They will let me go. I slew her to avenge the honour of the people of the Cross."

"They will not let thee go alive," replied the Englishman.

Then Dmitri uttered shriek on shriek of rage and horror, calling his captors freemasons and atheists, to take the side of unbelievers against Christian men.

"This is no Christian land. God's curse be on it!" he shouted in a final paroxysm ere, foaming at the mouth, he swooned away.

THE HAILSTORM

SIDE by side upon the southern edge of the Rhone valley, just where it widens to embrace Lake Leman, at a distance of about four kilometres from each other, stand the villages of Verthex and Véronnaz. Each boasts of a small " place " or square of well-built houses, mostly cafés, on the road which runs along the foot of the great mountain wall, with a long tail of wooden châlets running up from the said road into a gorge, down which a torrent turning millwheels rushes merrily to join the Rhone. Each has a fine stone church among the vineyards, upon a terrace overlooking all its houses, and a great wooden crucifix beside the churchyard gate ; and each possesses a vast tract of forest, and alpine pastures with their hamlets, on the heights above. As is usual in the case of such near neighbours, there is jealousy.

In old days when each commune in the Valais formed, for purposes of every day, a separate State, the men of Verthex and Véronnaz often battled over some small scrap of territory, the corner of a vineyard or a slope of pine trees ; and even now, if any one would know the utmost scorn to be expressed by physiognomy, let him only praise Véronnaz in the hearing of a man from Verthex, or Verthex to a native of Véronnaz. The ancient rivalry is now expressed in communal activities. When Verthex, with a surplus, had installed electric light, Véronnaz, with a deficit, must do the same ; and when Véronnaz was presented by a wealthy foreigner with a new organ for the church, Verthex must cripple her resources in order to procure a finer instrument. There is besides a difference in politics, Véronnaz being clerical—that is, conservative—while Verthex is compact

of anti-clericals, the radicals of Canton Valais, although their views would brand them as extreme reactionaries in any of the Protestant cantons. Both populations are devout and even superstitious Catholics, but Véronnaz theoretically admits the Church to be above the State in temporal affairs, while Verthex holds the opposite opinion. In Verthex, there are stories of Véronnaz wisdom; as, for instance, how they cleaned out their church bell. Grass growing in the bell had stopped its ringing. A steeple-jack discovered what the trouble was and, coming to the ground again, informed the council, which then debated what was to be done. A neuvaine was proclaimed, then all the village went on pilgrimage; but still for all their prayers and penances the bell was dumb. At last with infinite expense they raised a monstrous scaffolding, fitted with mighty pulleys and strong ropes, and so hauled up a bull which ate the grass. And when the bell rang true and clear once more, they went and sang Te Deum in the church. Upon the other hand, the people of Véronnaz have stories of the great humility of "those of Verthex"; for example, how a man from Verthex, having strayed to Rome, rebuked the Pope at High Mass in St. Peter's because the order of the service was not quite "according to the use of Verthex." Even so late as in the nineteenth century such jibes as these caused bloody fights between the villages. And even now the cantonal authorities are careful that the gendarmes, who look after those two communes, come always from another district and possess no local ties.

In the year 1896 occurred the last and strangest outbreak of this ancient feud.

The vineyards of both villages are famous in the neighbourhood, and all the population has an interest in them. Vines are tender things, requiring care to save them through the winter and protect them from disease in spring. And even after everything possible has been done to ensure a sturdy growth, there still remains a danger in the sudden showers of hail which scourge the

valley in the summer time. It is indeed a bitter trial for the husbandman to look upon his vineyard after such a shower has passed, to see the half-formed grapes upon the ground, the crop destroyed; and as such storms are purely local, and capricious in their course, the victim's sorrow is embittered often by the sight of neighbouring vines untouched by the calamity. On the 20th of June, 1896, a storm of hail and thunder came near Verthex and Véronnaz. Happily it emptied all its wrath upon the forest, only its gloom lay on the villages, and not a vine was touched. But everybody felt its terror, and that evening, after work, a deputation of the Verthex elders, headed by the president, waited on the curé at the presbytery—a white house with green shutters—up beside the church.

The door was opened to them by a girl of twenty-one, the curé's sister, on whose looks the graybeards commented with rustic freedom, expressing their belief that she would get a husband soon. She blushed at the suggestion, and the only young man of the deputation, the president's son, Maximin, blushed likewise, furiously, though no one of the others saw him, for he came in last.

"Is Monsieur le curé disengaged, Mademoiselle Sidonie?" inquired the president when he had doffed his hat and crossed the threshold.

"Yes, Monsieur Riboulet," the girl replied. "I have just cleared the table. Take the trouble to come in."

She turned the handle of an inner door, admitting them into a room whose window framed the small walled garden of the presbytery full of evening light, the curé's flowers and fruit-trees, and two bee-hives on a bench against the southern wall.

The president and his three friends tramped forward with the solemn awkwardness which belongs to all deputations of the people. Having grasped the curé's hand with cruel strength and wished him a good-evening, each in turn, they looked behind them, and the president exclaimed:—

"But—sacred thunder!—where is Maximin?"

The young man suddenly appeared with rosy cheeks, while Sidonie with marked composure shut the door behind him.

"Monsieur le curé," began the president rhetorically. "We come to make a petition on behalf of all the vine-growers of this commune, who . . . desire . . . desire . . ."

Feeling unequal to the strain of further eloquence, he suddenly relapsed to common speech, exclaiming:—

"Monsieur le curé, it is those devils of Véronnaz—saving your presence! They are at their tricks again to get the better of us. Thou, Maximin, who hast more education, explain the matter fully to his reverence."

Maximin then turned almost as red as if his thoughts of Mademoiselle Sidonie had been the matter in debate and, staring at the hat which he held fast with both his hands, intoned:—

"Monsieur le curé, the case is this: It is now the season of the summer hailstorms which destroy the grapes. They of Véronnaz, when they see a storm approaching, rush to the church—men, women and children, helter-skelter, in a mass. The curé is already there before them, living close at hand. He makes a prayer to the good Lord, and the storm passes."

"Storms always do," observed the curé drily. The deputation smiled, but with embarrassment.

The Church of Rome is not devoid of worldly cunning. Knowing that the men of Verthex were all anti-clericals, she had given them a curé of the most enlightened, learned type, a graduate of many universities, while to Véronnaz she assigned a half-inspired fanatic. The men of Verthex sometimes wished the two priests could have been transposed, for what was the use of being anti-clerical in a parish where the curé was less superstitious than they were themselves.

"Aye, but they pass without the slightest damage to the vineyards of Véronnaz. It makes one think," remarked the president, as half ashamed.

" Were any of the vines of Verthex ruined by a storm last year ? "

" Thanks to God, no, Monsieur le curé, but the vines of Aligny, which marches with Véronnaz on the other side, were devastated. Those of Véronnaz openly make boast that by their service in the church they turned the storm off on to Aligny."

" There are always fools and liars in the world, may God forgive them," said the priest dispassionately.

The members of the deputation looked at one another sheepishly, and then at Maximin, as if imploring him to help them out. He blurted :—

" We have the honour to request, Monsieur le curé, on behalf of all the viticultors of this commune, that you will hold a service in the church on the approach of summer storms."

There was a moment of dead silence, which the deputation spent in staring, some at the garden in the sunset light and others at the pattern of the strip of carpet in the room. And then the curé got upon his feet and, after pacing up and down a minute, took his stand beside the great stone stove and eyed them coldly.

He was a man of fifty only, but of withered mien. With hands locked tight behind his back and feet apart, he spoke his mind to them in level tones. When first appointed to the curé of Verthex, he declared, he had been told that his parishioners possessed advanced ideas, and he had felt attracted, since all his life he had found pleasure in the conversation of intelligent, enlightened people. But now, what could he think, in face of this absurd petition ? Had they no notion of the Majesty of God Almighty that they could fancy that man's prayers could alter and control His providence—as if, he said, one were to pull a handle and to ring a bell ? No, and again No. He would never countenance such blasphemy—for that, though his petitioners were innocent of bad intent, it really was.

" The curé of Veronnaz is then impious," growled Monsieur Riboulet, a trifle nettled.

"He is a clerical among the clergy, that is all!" replied the priest with sudden smile, abashing them. "I am surprised to find that he has partisans in Verthex, where it seems that I, the curé, stand alone for reason and enlightenment."

The deputation stumbled out with ears as red as if the curé's bees had had to do with them.

"He doubts the use of prayer," whispered one member greatly shocked. "My faith, he is a freemason, and nothing else!"

Maximin, the last to leave the house, essayed to whisper in the ear of Sidonie. She pushed him out and closed the door with rage, then joined her brother in the sitting-room, taking her sewing as her custom was. The curé was still pacing to and fro.

"This, after fifteen years' endeavour!" he ejaculated. "It is time I was transferred to some new sphere of work, for it is clear that my instructions are not suited to the understanding of these peasants. Maximin Riboulet—a lad whom I have taught since he was ten years old! He and no other was the spokesman. It is desolating!"

"He was made the mouthpiece of his father, much against his will. He told me so as he went out. He seemed ashamed," said Sidonie over her work.

"He ought to have refused in such a case," replied the priest indignantly. He added in a thoughtful tone: "For thee too, my cherished one, it would be better if I were transferred. I would not have thee all thy life keep house for me. But there is no one suitable for thee to marry in a place like this."

Sidonie gave a careless little laugh, and then bent low to bite a thread in two.

The curé kept reverting to the deputation. The absurdity of their petition made him doubt the ground of it. He questioned every word that they had said about Véronnaz. Was there on earth a churchman who would countenance such fetichistic folly nowadays? The curé of Véronnaz was well known to both of them—

a great ecstatic certainly, a great enthusiast, but not benighted. When Sidonie confirmed his doubts by acquiescence he declared that he would call upon his brother in the Lord, with God's permission, on the following day and, in the course of friendly conversation, learn the truth.

Accordingly upon the morrow, having breakfasted on his return from Mass, he sauntered to Véronnaz by a path through chestnut woods, a pleasant walk upon a summer morning. Five minutes after he had gone, Maximin Riboulet came up to the presbytery, bringing a bouquet of pinks from the president's garden. He was in his working blouse—in fact, was working in a vineyard near at hand, where the "oeillets" had been with him pending opportunity, reposing in a mug of water in the shade. Sidonie implored him to be gone immediately, and yet he stayed, with shoulder leaning on the doorpost, to inquire :—

"What says he ?"

"Oh, do not ask me ! All is lost !" She wrung her hands. "He is disgusted with thee. He would never hear were I to ask him now."

"Wretched luck !" sighed Maximin. "It is the affair of yesterday evening ?"

"What else ? It is sufficient. He is disappointed in thee."

These two young people were in terror of the curé who, as both knew well, had grand ideas for Sidonie, which Maximin was far from likely to fulfil. It had been arranged that Sidonie should seize the first occasion which arose to ascertain her brother's views on this momentous subject ; but she had not yet summoned up the strength to do so. It was now too late. With stricken heart expressed in gusty sighs, Maximin went back to his labour in the vineyard.

The priest returned before the noonday angelus.

"I thought those worthy people were exaggerating," he informed his sister with a scornful laugh. "Now I have heard the story. It is this : Five years ago, the

produce of the vines of Véronnaz was totally destroyed by a great hailstorm. It was a calamity. In memory of that affliction, a number of the people, of their own accord, go to the church and pray on the approach of thunderstorms. It is no worse than making the sign of the cross, which everybody in this country does at sound of thunder, a reminder of the chances of this mortal life."

"Then, my brother, you will grant the petition of poor Monsieur Riboulet?" put in his sister.

"I? . . . Never!" cried the priest, and then stopped short, restrained by his devotion to the priesthood from expressing to her his whole thought, which was that, what was tolerable in a mere ecstatic like the curé of Véronnaz, would have been a crime in any person of complete intelligence. He did not know the history of the deputation which he had received.

Monsieur Riboulet the elder had one day encountered the president of Véronnaz in the market-town of St. Maurice. Feeling friendly, they had gone into a café and consumed three décilitres, then three décilitres, and then again three décilitres, together till their tongues were loosed, and they spoke heart to heart as brother-presidents and brother vine-growers. The hail-storm season was at hand, and he of Véronnaz had whispered in an awestruck tone that prayers in church on the approach of thunderclouds had guaranteed his commune against damage for the last five years.

"A good idea! We ought to do the same," said he of Verthex, who, returning home, had laid the scheme before the village council, which accepted it without debate. Only his own son, Maximin, when pressed into the service of the deputation, had opposed the notion, saying that the priest was certain to refuse with scorn.

"Thou hast the new ideas, as people call them; but be assured that not a priest in all the world will share them," said the anti-clerical amid applause from all the elders.

After the amazing failure of the deputation, the president of Verthex once more met the president of Véronnaz in the market-town. They drank together as before, having acquired the habit, and Véronnaz inquired whether the men of Verthex had adopted his specific against hailstorms. Verthex answered with a sigh :—

"Our curé will have none of it. He grew extremely angry, although God knows it was a good idea, and nothing impious."

"What kind of a priest can he be," exclaimed Véronnaz scandalised, "who would deny the good God's mercy in response to prayer!"

"An estimable man enough, and very learned, but averse to superstition," answered Verthex drily. Therewith the conversation fell into the pit of clerical and anti-clerical. There were high words between the two old men before they parted. Véronnaz told the tale when he reached home, and his whole commune felt a thrill of triumph in their pious curé, over Verthex which was hampered with an unbelieving priest. Men, women, even children, when they happened on a man from Verthex condoled with him upon his pastor's lack of faith. It would grieve them to remember, while they prayed in church, that damage would be happening to the Verthex vineyards. "The remedy for that is easy," answered those of Verthex. "Apply it if your sorrow is sincere. Stop ringing your church bell and praying when the storms approach. Be honest men, and bear the common fate. By your own showing, it is cheating, what you do!"

But Véronnaz was not prepared to go so far as that.

The Verthex people put up with this banter, and even turned the joke against Véronnaz, saying: "Hast heard the latest of those imbeciles? They verily believe that the angelic hosts obey their orders!" till a certain day, unusually sultry from the dawn, when Mademoiselle Sidonie, the curé's sister, had to go to Véronnaz to interview the nun who kept the girls'

school there. She started about one o'clcok, as soon as she had washed up after dinner, tripping along the path through chestnut woods, a basket on her arm ; and though the distance was not great to come and go, she had not yet returned when the great storm approached at six o'clock.

Never was such a hailstorm known in all the valley. The sky began to veil at half-past five with a thin mist which steadily became more dense, until by six o'clock it was as black as night. Everybody was engaged in driving cattle, poultry, children, all creatures irresponsible and yet of value, into shelter; and Monsieur Riboulet's loud shouts for Maximin, whose help he needed, re-echoed by the mountain-cliffs, were heard in all the village, when sudden lightning flashed and danced across the landscape, followed by a crash of thunder louder than was ever heard. The lightning lasted clear a minute, and then came the hail. It fell in great white sheets. The pellets, large as sparrows' eggs, bounced on the cobbled road before the presbytery and on the dry earth of the vineyards underneath. They hurt the face and hands of Monsieur le curé, who had come out watching for his sister, driving him indoors. When he looked out of the window he could see no farther than the beaten rose-bush which grew close against the panes. Everything beyond was curtained by the pelting hail.

The downpour lasted for ten minutes only, but when light returned, the vines of Verthex had been stripped of fruit and leaves. The people came and looked and shook their heads, too sad to wail.

" If only Monsieur le curé had not his ideas," said Monsieur Riboulet, with rueful looks to those around him, " we might have saved our grapes like those of Véronnaz. I heard their church bell going when the darkness fell. May the malediction of heaven rest upon them ! "

A minute later, when the priest himself came down among the mourners, preaching resignation to the will

of God, the president reproached him, saying gruffly: "Ah, Monsieur le curé, all this might have been prevented if you had been willing. It is the worst storm we have known for fifty years. People will say it is a judgment on us for impiety, though God knows that we viticultors did our utmost to persuade you. The vines of Véronnaz are safe, of course. I think the tempest would have spared us also if we had held a service in the church and rung the bell as they did."

"The vines of Véronnaz have suffered also, be assured!" replied the curé gently. But at that moment came a cry of "Holà, men of Verthex!" and some young men of Véronnaz were seen coming from the chestnut woods, springing down the terraces to join the group. They raised their hands at sight of the destruction, and then shook their heads with sad, but satisfied grimaces.

"You should have done as we did!" one of them exclaimed compassionately. "Our vines are safe down to the smallest grape. Do but go, and you will see the devastation stopped by our communal boundary as if by an unseen wall. You heard our church bell ringing, doubtless, just before the storm. That is the cause of our complete immunity."

The speaker uttered the last word with reverence and lifted his soft hat. A grin appeared upon the faces of the men from Véronnaz, a murmur as of angry hornets came from those of Verthex.

"May I beg of Monsieur le curé to withdraw himself?" said Monsieur Riboulet with most unusual suavity. "This is no fitting company for him."

"No, Monsieur le president, I will not go," replied the curé stoutly. "I know that your intention is to fight, but I will not permit it."

He placed himself between the would-be combatants and, facing the young men from Véronnaz sternly, said:—

"You lie when you declare the hailstorm ended at the boundary of your commune."

The young men raised their hats. Their spokesman answered :—

" Truly, Monsieur le curé, things are as I said. If you retain a doubt upon the subject, go and look."

As night was drawing near, this last suggestion savoured of derision. The curé still declared their statement to be false. But Verthex thought it true, and could conceive of no more suitable rejoinder to it than to beat them dead. Once more did Monsieur Riboulet beseech the curé to withdraw, declaring :—

" It would be unseemly if a fight should happen in your presence, yet a fight there will be ; and all the village would be altogether desolated if, through injudicious interference, you should happen to be hurt."

The wizened little scholar would not budge. In a loud voice he denounced his people's folly and credulity, still vowing that the men from Véronnaz were telling lies.

" Remove yourself from there, Monsieur le curé ! " cried a man of Verthex. " You have your notions, as we know too well. The vines of Véronnaz are safe, while ours are ruined ; which means that we are not the fools you thought us. There are such things as miracles, for all your doubting. There are such things as magic and sheer devilry. Eh bien, we know our enemies and can repay them. Do you get out, and leave us to the work."

The fight was going to begin, much to the curé's horror, for in the present temper of the men of Verthex he knew that nothing less than slaughter would content them, when a voice cried loudly :—

" Ah the vineyards of Véronnaz are destroyed. I come from thence and I have seen the thing with my own eyes."

The speaker was the missing Maximin Riboulet, who all unnoticed had appeared upon the scene. At the same moment Sidonie, appearing likewise, came to her brother's side and took his arm.

" Thanks be to God," shouted the folk of Verthex.

"It is a lie," replied the young men from Véronnaz hotly. "Our vines are safe to the last grape, the fact is known." They seemed both shaken and alarmed, however.

"It is evident you have not seen them since the storm has passed upon them," said Maximin in tones of grave commiseration. "Heaven! Never have I seen such perfect devastation. It is even worse than what I now behold, if that be possible."

"It is quite true, what he says; I too have seen it," cried Sidonie in accents of emotion. "The storm came on me as I crossed those very vineyards."

"How comes it that thou art not wet, my jewel?" asked the curé, feeling her sleeve which lay within his arm.

"Maximin overtook me," was the whispered answer. "He protected me."

"Maximin is a good boy. He shall sup with us this evening," said her brother tenderly.

The young men from Verronaz had surrounded Maximin, asking him questions. They were still incredulous, but their incredulity was slowly yielding to his confident replies. It now transpired that they had left Véronnaz at the first threat of the storm, simply to gloat on the disaster of the men of Verthex. The storm had come while they were in the chestnut woods above the latter village, where they had waited till its rage was spent. Now, realising that Véronnaz had been smitten too, they hurried back with exclamations of despair, pursued with execrations and loud jeers by those of Verthex, who for the moment had forgotten their own loss.

"All those of Véronnaz are wiseacres," chuckled the president. "Say then, Monsieur le curé, have you heard the story, how they cleaned their bell?"

"A thousand times," replied the curé drily. "Let that rest, I pray you. Come hither, Maximin, and tell your father and all these people once again the state in which thou hast beheld the vines of Véronnaz.

It is for thee to put an end to their unhappy error. Maximin has seen with his own eyes the havoc wrought, my children; and so too has my little Sidonie, whom he protected from the hail. By great good luck they were together, so we have two witnesses."

And he went on to preach a sermon to his flock, quite unaware that there were any smiles among his audience, or yet that Maximin and Sidonie were much observed.

Maximin supped that evening at the presbytery, in such favour that Sidonie, when he had gone, took heart of grace and let her brother see her feelings with regard to him. There was a hint of disappointment in his tone of voice as he remarked:—

"Well, after all, he is an honest lad, and a good Catholic."

Maximin himself appeared next day, in Sunday clothes and rubicund with shyness, supported by his father, for the formal interview; but Sidonie did not appear on that occasion. The priest himself admitted them, and showed them out.

Maximin's lot as an affianced bridegroom was less blissful than he had anticipated. Mademoiselle Sidonie kept him at a more respectful distance than she had considered necessary in the time of dangling, and read him many lessons on propriety. He saw his loved one generally in the curé's presence, which made him long the more for marriage, when she would be his alone. Cold from a sense of duty with the son, Sidonie now lavished tenderness upon the father. Old Monsieur Riboulet was very often at the presbytery; and in the warmth of new relationship, his former awe of Monsieur le curé as a deeply learned man was changed to warm and loud-voiced admiration. For the priest, in intimacy, had his genial side, could tell a story well, and loved a joke. The president came round completely to the curé's point of view. He now thought of the hail-storm, which had wrecked his vines, with satisfaction as a judgment on the men of Véronnaz. And this belated view found favour with the anti-clericals, who shouted

to Véronnaz: "God has punished you for the impiety and ignorance of which you boasted. Repent, and use your reason! Be advised!"

But Véronnaz, embittered by the loss of all the grapes, were in no mood for self-abasement. They replied with dreadful oaths:—

"We have done right. Our praying in the church was efficacious many times, and if this once it failed, that is because of some shortcoming on our part."

Verthex retorted, laughing: "Pack of imbeciles! When our church bell is dumb, we will consult you. Go home, eat grass, and kiss your curé's petticoats! Your vines were spoilt."

Véronnaz looked on Verthex as a nest of infidels, while Verthex scorned Véronnaz as a den of apes.

Things reached a climax on the occasion of the wedding of Maximin Riboulet with Mademoiselle Sidonie. The curé of Véronnaz helped perform the ceremony, and several personages from that village were among the guests. The president of Verthex, father of the bride-groom, being in facetious mood and held back by respect from jokes befitting the occasion, amused himself with an attempt to set the clergy by the ears. During the banquet he spoke guardedly of hailstorms and of prayers in church, rousing sly mirth among the Verthex folk. Their curé scorned the bait; but he of Véronnaz—poor lean-jawed, earnest man!—rose to it instantly. All talk was hushed while the good priest enlarged upon the mystic beauty and religious value of a practice which every one in Verthex now regarded with contempt. "And yet the vines were spoilt!" said Monsieur Riboulet, with roguish grin.

The curé of Véronnaz said that that was owing to some defect in the worshippers, probably lack of faith. The curé of Verthex, in a tone to close the subject, questioned: "Might it not be owing to a lack of Christian love, since some of them had sought to get the better of their neighbours and had even boasted

that their prayers had that effect? Prayer for purely selfish ends is sinful, I believe."

The curé of Véronnaz quite agreed with him, and was quite horrified to learn that any of his flock had nursed such evil thoughts. The topic was submerged in toasting of the bride and bridegroom, both as red as peonies, who smiled inanely and avoided one another's eyes; but it came up again when all the guests streamed forth, the men repairing to the various cafés of the place, well filled already with the rougher sort. Their curé's word of blame upon Véronnaz was new light to the men of Verthex, who had not until then esteemed it criminal for men to try and save their crops by any means. But now they cried shame freely on the people of Véronnaz, accusing them of lack of Christian love.

Véronnaz had arrived in force to see the wedding. The baser sort soon came to blows. They fought like dogs. At one time Véronnaz, led by a giant known as Big Jean Golat, held half the village street of Verthex. The tide of battle even reached the châlet of the president and there were frenzied cries for Maximin. The young man that day married left his bride and rushed into the street. The gendarme, after shouting himself hoarse to no effect, was no more seen. Maximin was the Verthex champion, and his coming, hardly hoped for in the circumstances, saved the day. Foot by foot the men of Véronnaz were forced back down the street, across the "place," and out into the open fields. And when at last they broke and fled, a shout went after them:—

"Shame on you, for your lack of Christian love."

HIS MAJESTY

A HIGH beach of shingle stretching away into the wintry haze on either hand, facing a vast expanse of greenish, foam-flecked sea, under a sky more veiled than clouded, shining with a watery beam : that must have been the prospect which the shipwrecked man beheld, when he opened his eyes after lying for a long while prone upon the pebbles, exhausted from his struggle with the waters. The waves kept breaking with an angry roar, followed by the backdraft of the shingle like a long-drawn sigh. That and the wail of seabirds was the only sound. After blinking at the scene until his wits returned to him, one can imagine that he climbed the beach to view the land, shivering as he caught the full strength of the wind. First there was a thin, stiff growth of yellow bents, and brown, dead stems of ragwort, then a great expanse of level marshland intersected by a lot of ditches choked with dying reeds, and in the distance rising ground with purple woods, a tower and threads of silver smoke uprising from among the trees, denoting human habitation. Towards that smoke he bent his steps when strength returned.

For any man to cross those marshes in anything approaching a straight line is a considerable feat. The shipwrecked man performed it somehow, but it must have been the work of many hours, and one may take it that he started in the early morning, since his first appearance in the village was at tea-time of a winter's night.

Joe Watling and his wife and all their little ones were sitting at tea, when loud knocks and a strange wailing at the cottage door surprised them. Mrs. Watling went and opened ; but at sight of a black face, great goggling

eyes, a fearsome mouth wide open, and long waving arms, set on a human body which to all appearance ended in a fish's tail (for the man was cased in weed and slime from the waist downward), she started back. The children shrieked and scrambled up the cupboard stairs. The mistress of the house cried: "Lord, deliver us!" and Joe himself was frozen to his chair. The creature made a hideous noise, resembling human speech, but unintelligible. It pointed to its mouth and to the food upon the table. When Mrs. Watling, jealous of her children's bread, said: "No, you don't!" it gave a blood-curdling cry and pounced upon a quartern loaf.

Joe, starting from his chair with an indignant exclamation, attacked the brute and tried to hold it, but it curled round like a snake, as he said afterwards, and bit his hand till he let go. It knocked down Mrs. Watling, who opposed its exit, and with the loaf escaped into the night.

Joe Watling seemed to bear no grudge against the apparition when he spoke about it to the gentleman for whom he worked—a Mr. Solesby—on the following day. On the contrary, he spoke about it with a certain reverence.

"That come to dew us naught but good, I dew believe," he stated, straightening his back from digging while he rested on his spade. "We took and thwarted 'un, and then that bit me."

He solemnly unwound the rag which bound his injured hand. "They can't abide for folks to take and thwart 'em, I ha' ollus heerd. But my poor missus were fair took aback, and ta' children was afeerd to go to school this mornun'."

"Any idea what it was?" asked Mr. Solesby.

"Couldn't say, I'm sure, sir. Some reckon as that were a sperrit. But 'tis my belief that meant us naught but good, not till I took and riled 'un."

For a week there was no other apparition. Then some children coming home from school beheld the

monster. It approached them with terrific outcry, freezing their young blood. But some men at work on a potato-clamp hard by, hearing the children scream, ran out with pitchforks, and the monster fled.

"I fare more comferable-like now some one else ha' seen that," Joe Watling told his master in triumphant tones. "There's several thought as me and my poor missus, and ta' children tew, was drunk or dramin'. But now there's others seen that and can testify as how that bain't no arthly, human thing."

"Which way did it run?" asked Mr. Solesby, beginning to be moved by curiosity.

"Right up on to the walks by Marler's Grove."

Mr. Solesby walked by Marler's Grove—a coppice of old beeches interspersed with modern firs upon the outskirts of a great expanse of heathland—that very afternoon, but he put up nothing more surprising than a fat cock-pheasant. But that was no proof that Joe's "sperrit" was not there, for those sheep-walks clothed in a tall growth of whins could have concealed an army. Only two years before, as Mr. Solesby (an observer of all local wonders) knew, a skeleton had been discovered quite by chance among the whins and identified by rags of clothing as belonging to a man who had disappeared one winter's night, and had been missing for ten years. A broken ankle and hard frost had sealed his fate. That showed the value of the furze-clad wilderness as a retreat.

No doubt the stranger, having met with hostile treatment, was shy of drawing near the haunts of men. But the weather was so bleak just then that Mr. Solesby felt much pity for any foreign creature out in it. It was his belief, from the descriptions of it, that Joe Watling's "sperrit" was a good-sized ape, escaped from some menagerie, which, under stress of cold and hunger, might do anything.

In sight of Marler's Grove, two miles away across the heath, there was a keeper's cottage. The people there were startled by a knocking at the door at eight o'clock

one night. The keeper opened and beheld a crouching figure with a frightful face. He slammed the door and fastened it, then got his gun. Going upstairs, he set the casement open and leaned out.

"If thou art a human thing, speak!" he solemnly adjured; and when the moaning still continued, "let 'un have it," as he said.

"That s'ruck out good tidily," he told Mr. Solesby when the latter called to make inquiries on the morrow, "and departed from us slow and threatening-like, a-s'riekin' like old Nick. That show as how that b'aint no human thing, dew that'd ha' up and answered my plain question."

Mr. Solesby spent a long while searching for the wounded creature, but could find no trace of it. And then he grew aware that a more imperious and potent curiosity had been roused concerning it. Sir Rupert Carraway, the great man of the district, called on him one afternoon. He said:—

"Rouse tells me that you think the creature is a monkey. So do I. Keep a look-out for it, will you?—and let me know at once if you can find its lair. And do impress upon the people that they must not kill it. I'll give pounds if it is brought to me alive. Let that be known. What do you think it is? An ourang-outang? Or a gorilla? From what Rouse tells me it is bigger than a man. You know my passion for wild animals. Don't let them harm it. My fear is that it may be dead and dying at this minute all through the terror of that damned fool, Rouse."

Mr. Solesby made Sir Rupert's wishes known throughout the village with all the greater zeal because they were his own. But the village people, though they touched their foreheads to Sir Rupert's edict, were recalcitrant. Besides the natural instinct of the poacher to set traps for any wild thing which the squire preserves, there was the feeling that by thus protecting something evil and malignant, Sir Rupert was transgressing higher laws than those of man. The people were resolved to

hurt the monster and to kill it if they could, before it injured them. The monkey theory they flouted after much discussion; while the notion that it was some kind of spirit had lost ground. The idea most favoured now was that it was a Russian—a term in common use among the country-folk to designate a creature rushing suddenly and darkly to no righteous end.

It is to the stranger's gift for sudden disappearances, that Mr. Solesby, no mean judge of dialect, ascribed the name; but the rector of the parish then maintained, and still maintains against all argument, that it was derived from the well-known habit of the Russian peasant of devouring fowls uncooked, which he discovered in a learned work and chanced to mention to old Mrs. Barlow when condoling with her on the depredations in her hen-roost.

For the stranger's source of food-supply became apparent, when many fowls—a score at least—were missed within a fortnight from a farmyard less than half a mile from Marler's Grove. The one policeman who perambulated twenty square miles of sparsely-populated country was informed of the affair, and paid a lengthy call on Mrs. Barlow. He told Joe Watling, on his way back through the village, that in his opinion those fowls had not been taken by a fox or bird of prey. He was a cautious man, and said no more; but his grand air of mystery suggested to Joe's mind the Russian; and the idea that the creature, in addition to its other crimes, was no better than a common thief, was well established in the village mind before the proofs were found. This happened on a night when two men, going to the brick-kilns, which are situated in a pit upon the border of the heath, beheld the dreadful creature sleeping by the furnace-mouth. They fled in terror with loud cries of "Lord preserve us!" When they returned with reinforcements from the nearest cottages, armed with reap-hooks, choppers, forks and even, in one woman's case, a poker, the monster was no longer there; and the two workmen, who had given

the alarm, were looking foolish when some one noticed the pink bones and bloodstained feathers of a fowl upon the ground. That was conclusive evidence. The Russian was a gipsy thief, as well as murderous.

Some washing had been spread to dry upon the whins behind a cottage on a sunny morning. A sheet, a counterpane, a flannel shirt and an old pair of woollen drawers vanished while the housewife was indoors. They had been stolen by the Russian, all agreed.

Then some bold spirits recollected that there was a little hut—a rough affair of posts and some dry whins—in Marler's Grove, and went up in a body to explore it. They were frightened near to dissolution by an awful figure clad in flowing white, which came forth from the entrance of the hut and stretched its arms towards them. Headlong they ran along the road to Barlow's farm, where they at length plucked up the courage to return. The thing had vanished, as its custom was. Approaching with the greatest care, they peeped into the hut, and saw the bones and feathers of a lot of fowls, besides a heap of sheep's wool, rags, dead leaves and so forth, on which the Russian slept, as could be plainly seen. This they were going to disperse vindictively, when one bethought him of a better plan. Instead, they went and fetched two scythe-blades from the farm, and hid them in the heap, the sharp edge upwards. It was by that time dusk, and they retreated in a hurry. When they revisited the hut next day, they were delighted to discover stains of blood.

This cruel exploit reached the ears of Mr. Solesby, who brought it to the knowledge of Sir Rupert Carraway, who himself rode round the village in a towering rage, upbraiding every relative of the young men concerned whom he could come across. According to the evidence of the delinquents, the creature was much taller than a man ; his arms and hands were something like a man's, but " black as sut, and much more scraggy-like." Sir Rupert, quite convinced that it was some transcendent ape, was ten times more incensed by this

description. He called the young men evil names, and gave command for a grand beating of the heath. He could not bear to think of such a glorious specimen bleeding, perhaps to death, undoctored, starving. The whole of a dull winter's day, from eight o'clock in the morning until dusk, the squire with all his men and Mr. Solesby searched the tract of whins between the cottage of the keeper Rouse and Marler's Grove, without result. Sir Rupert, in despair, expressed a fear that those young blackguards had driven the creature from the district by their cruelty. He rated them again with great severity, and immediately thereafter offered twenty pounds and permanent employment to whichever one of them should bring to him the beast alive. The young men set their tongues out when he rode away.

Sir Rupert did not give up hope in disappointment, having set his heart on the possession of that ape. Mr. Solesby was invited to the Hall one afternoon, and shown a small, new, red-brick building, with the mortar not yet dry, prepared for the reception of the foreign guest. Part of the façade was open save for iron bars. Apart from that, it bore no likeness to a cage. Lady Carraway, who went with them to look at it, called it with some disdain the squire's new toy ; and, when Sir Rupert dwelt upon its beauties at great length, pointing out the means by which it could be warmed in winter to a certain temperature, she frankly yawned.

Mr. Solesby was as interested in the preparations as Sir Rupert, being an ingenious little man who loved to keep small beasts and birds alive in cages, or stuffed in glass-faced cases which he made with his own hands. Properly impressed by the magnificence of the abode, he spoke of its prospective inmate as " His Majesty," which pleased Sir Rupert greatly ; and His Majesty became the creature's name between them.

The village people had no sympathy for these enthusiasts. For them the monster was a wicked Russian, not an ape at all, nor in the least majestic.

Not one of them now dared to cross the heathland after dark unless it were in company and with a gun. The children who lived out in that direction were escorted home from school by male relations who got release from work for that specific purpose.

Every one imagined that the Russian was still somewhere in the parish, though it was ascertained that he had quite forsaken Marler's Grove; till, late one evening Farmer Mayhew, coming from Saxmundham market in his gig, stopped at the Oyster Inn and told how, at a place quite five miles distant, he had seen the thing. It had sprung out on him from a group of fir-trees on a heathy knoll by the roadside, waving its hands about and grinning horribly. It knelt down in the road. The ghastly apparition in the gloaming caused the mare to shy and nearly over-set the cart. The farmer, scared, had laid his whip across the Russian's face.

"I made 'un s'riek, I tell 'ee, man or divil!" he declared with glee.

"A good thing tew!" replied his audience with one breath.

Every one was glad to know the gruesome thing had left the parish.

Upon the following afternoon Sir Rupert Carraway drove a high dog-cart up to Mr. Solesby's garden gate, and there alighted, handing to his groom the reins.

"You've heard the news," he asked, "about His Majesty? Pack up a toothbrush and your sleeping things and come along. I've got my suit-case in the cart, we're going to Saxmundham, to the Bell, to-night. I've telegraphed for rooms and also to my agent, to have the latest news of our friend's whereabouts ready for us by to-morrow morning. We'll have him this time if it takes a week."

Mr. Solesby was soon ready, and they drove away, both in high spirits, which were not decreased by the good cheer they found awaiting them at the Bell Inn. There one of Sir Rupert's myrmidons brought them the news that the creature was out somewhere on the

walks behind a lonely farm-house in the occupation of a man named Read, whose fowls kept disappearing. This Read had been intent upon destroying it until he heard it was protected by Sir Rupert Carraway. Then he desisted; but as for going near the creature, or bidding anybody else go near it, without leave to shoot or strike in self-defence, he refused to entertain the thought. To this man Read the two friends hastened. The distance was a short three miles. The day was fine. Sir Rupert rubbed his hands as they walked up the pathway to the farm-house door. The place lay in a shallow valley, a kind of inlet of the cultivated country to the heath. To all Sir Rupert's exhortations the man Read replied:—

"You can dew what yow like, gentlemen."

He would not join the hunt himself, nor lend a man. They were still endeavouring to rouse his valour or cupidity, when a man arrived in frantic haste upon a bicycle, and jumped down at the gate. He came with tidings that the "Rooshian," as the people called it, had been seen again, at a place not more than two miles off as the crow flies, but a good five by road, in the direction of Iken. It had attacked a girl, the daughter of a labouring man named William Grice.

The hunters clambered back into the dog-cart. By dint of asking everybody whom they met upon the road and stopping at each cottage gate to make inquiry after William Grice, they ultimately found the very man at work uprooting beet in a large field.

"I'm goin' to settle that ef I can ketch ut, and I means to try my best," he answered grimly, when Sir Rupert asked about the monkey. "Monkey or what, that mobbed my Sukey suffen crool, I'll pay that ef I ketch ut, sarten sure."

For further information he referred the gentry to the sufferer herself, his daughter, whom they would find at home and ailing in a dreadful way. He pointed to a thread of smoke which rose against the dark line of the heath, remarking:—

"That's the place. Follow the drift arter yow passed the waterin' and you can't mess ut."

Observing these directions they soon found the cottage. The girl, though shaken from her terrible adventure, was sensible and told them all she knew. At twilight on the previous evening she had been returning from the village shop, where she had stayed to gossip, carrying a basket full of purchases, when the monster stood before her in the lane which crossed the heath. He knelt down in the road.

"And ye could tell he worn't no Christian, for he crossed hisself like what the ancient Romans used to do," she told them.

With one hand he kept pointing to his mouth, which was much larger than the mouth in human kind. He was something like a blackamoor, she thought, but even more unnatural. Then he rubbed his hands and fell a-jibbering; and when she shrieked and tried to run away, he sprang on her and stopped her mouth and pushed her down upon the grass by the roadside.

"And then I s'pose he must ha' thought as he heard some one comin' for he cut and run, snatchin' the shawl what I was wearin' and my basket full o' grocery."

"Now, which way did he run, can you remember?" inquired Sir Rupert, in the manner of a kindly magistrate.

"Straight for that wood of fir-trees, you can see the tops from here." She showed them through the little cottage window. "And then I got home somehow. I can't tell no more, bein' as I were well-nigh dead wi' fright," the girl concluded.

Sir Rupert thanked her for the information, presented her with a gold coin, which she accepted, blushing, wished her good-morning, and went out with Mr. Solesby.

"We want a great big net, and some good men," he said when they were once more in the dog-cart. He drove back to Saxmundham to despatch a telegram to his head-keeper, bidding him come at once with all the men whom he could muster at short notice. Then after searching in the shops of the small town without

success, the friends drove on to Aldeburgh where, after much trouble, they at last succeeded in purchasing a net which wholly satisfied Sir Rupert. It was then too late to start the hunt upon that day; but the baronet decided that they ought to speak to William Grice again in order to ensure that he did nothing rash. They reached the cottage on their second visit after nightfall, leaving the dog-cart in the lane, and stumbling up the rutted driftway in the dark. They found the cottage crowded to the door with yokels. Pitchforks, scythes, a gun and other weapons leaned against the outer wall.

"We see that, sir, but we ha'n't cotched un, not this go," cried William Grice at sight of the first gentleman. "Please God, we'll finish that to-morrer, howsomdever."

He told how he had raised the hue and cry, bidding all those who set store by their girls to come and help him. "And these trew friends was not found wantin'," he exclaimed emotionally, looking around him at the faces with a tearful eye.

The wood to which the Russian had repaired in Sukey's tale, being a fir wood, had no cover for a fugitive. The monster naturally, therefore, was not there. The hue and cry emerged upon the walks beyond. By then it was already dusk; and it was solely owing to that accident that the "ghashly brewt"—as one of the pursuers called it—escaped a painful death on this occasion. They had come upon it suddenly among the whins. So strange and horrible was its appearance that for a moment they were paralysed with fear; and so the monster got away with no more than a prod in the loins from some one's pitchfork. They had lost it in a perfect wilderness of "hulver-bushes," whins and brambles which just there broke the level of the heath; and after searching till all daylight failed, they had returned.

Sir Rupert was enraged by a report of their proceedings. He cursed their impudence for interfering in the business, their lack of sportsmanship, their cruelty.

"Hew be you a-talkin' tew, I'd like to know," cried

William Grice. "That ha'n't assoiled your daughter, dew yow'd change your tune!"

Sir Rupert loftily commanded all the yokels to leave the ape alone. They told him in plain language he could go to hell.

He was exceedingly upset by this rebellion. It was with difficulty that his friend persuaded him to come away.

"I had so hoped that we could keep the matter private, he said miserably as they stumbled back together, arm in arm, along the driftway to the lane. "But now I see that we must call in the police, to cow those scoundrels."

Accordingly, on their arrival at the inn, Mr. Solesby went at once to the police-station, while Sir Rupert gave directions to his keeper, whom he found awaiting him. Eight decent men from the estate had been collected and were then carousing in a pothouse of the town. Sir Rupert's orders were that they should go at once on to the heath near William Grice's cottage and keep watch all night in order to frustrate the efforts of that man and his adherents, by main force, if need be. The keeper went off straightway to collect his men. Then Mr. Solesby came back with a sergeant of the police, who with a constable, had been placed at the disposal of Sir Rupert Carraway. Sir Rupert told the sergeant the whole story of the monkey and of the superstitious folly of the country-people, bidding him be ready for a start at daybreak on the morrow.

That daybreak when it came was chill and rainy. As they drove out through the misty country in their cart, the two policemen following on bicycles, the hunters shivered and felt unaccountably depressed. Nor was the news which they received upon arrival at the scene of action reassuring, for the keeper stood there waiting for them, with his men behind him, all of them with the dejected look of persons who have had the worst of it.

"We done our best to stop their game, Sir Rupert,"

said the leader, " but that weren't no use. They was a sight tew many for us," was his sad report. "And they're out huntin' for the creature now, this minute. Somewheres over yonder. Yow can hear 'em hollerin' ! "

Sir Rupert leapt down from the dog-cart ; so did Mr. Solesby. The two policemen laid their bicycles upon the grass. All four set off as fast as they could go in the direction indicated ; while the keeper and his men, thus reinforced, recovered spirit and went after them. Suddenly the baronet remembered the great net, and sent a man to fetch it from the dog-cart. He and the others waited till it came and had been given to the sergeant of police, with full instructions how to use it most effectively.

Then once again they hurried forward. But the sturdy growth of whins, the lack of any path, made going difficult and often painful. The rain, which at the dawn had been a drizzle, now came down in sheets. They had got near enough to see the labourers at search among the furze-bushes when a shout informed them that the louts had found. Sir Rupert yelled to them for God's sake not to hurt the creature, promising twenty pounds among them as reward for their obedience. " That net ! " he cried. The sergeant of police, bearing the net above his head in order to escape entanglement, dashed forward through the whins.

Two labourers had come upon the Russian unexpectedly, where he was lying huddled in a grassy nest.

They raised a shout of triumph and struck down at him with all their might. The outraged father, William Grice, came striding up and kicked the monster on the head, exclaiming :—

" That there'll larn yow to assoil my Sukey, bo' ! "

And he was going to transfix the Russian with the fork he carried, when the sergeant of police opposed him with Sir Rupert's net, for lack of better weapon, and ordered all the others to desist at once.

" A pretty mess ! " exclaimed the representative of law disgustedly. " What are ye ? Savages or what,

I'd like to know! . . . This ain't no monkey, sir," he told Sir Rupert, who was drawing near. "It's just a blackamoor, and well-nigh dead already of exposure, I should say, without their meddlin'. Here's your net, sir. That's no use, as you can see." He looked round on the group of labourers with bitter scorn, adding: "I guess you'll have to answer for this here, together, all of ye. And let me tell you, that'll be a hangin' matter, by the looks of it."

The rustics gaped and goggled at this information, dazed by the light it shed upon their late pursuit. They showed compunction, one among them wailing:—

"Gawd knows I niver thought that were a human thing!"

But William Grice contended: "We be right to kill ut. That assoiled my Sukey."

As a matter of fact, it may be here remarked, the persecuted, wounded negro did not die till some weeks later, in the workhouse infirmary, and not of the wounds he had received, but of consumption. In the interval he was able to converse with one who understood his jargon, and so the story of his shipwreck became known. But everybody who was present on the heath that morning supposed him to be either dead or dying.

They took the body up and bore it carefully, under instructions from the constable, down through the whins to William Grice's cottage.

"I thought you knew for sure it was a monkey, sir," observed the sergeant of police in guarded tones, as he with Mr. Solesby and Sir Rupert followed the procession.

"People assured me that it was a monkey," said Sir Rupert angrily. "Confound them! Making everybody look a fool! As if I hunted black men. You—you told me, Solesby, that it was a monkey. Hunting a wretched nigger—— It's disgusting! And," he concluded plaintively, holding up the shapeless mass that he was carrying, wet and heavy with the rain, as if it symbolised his disappointment, "what the—— am I to do with this d——d net?"

THE DERELICT

It was a day of soft autumnal glow. White cumuli of cloud arose like snow-capped mountains on the far horizon of the Sussex landscape with its woody dells, and villages along the heights, its nestling homesteads and every here and there among the trees an oast-house with its trim, white cowls. An old man leaning on a staff, which had evidently been uprooted from some hedge and roughly trimmed, drew near a decent cottage on a hill. The little garden by the roadside was ablaze with dahlias and chrysanthemums. Birds were chirping in the orchard. A vague delight was in the gaffer's face as he approached the gate, as if he had found something precious to him in a dream.

He went up to the door and opened it without knocking, then stood upon the threshold, stupefied. The room inside was strange to him. He rapped upon the door. A busy woman came round from the back and, catching sight of him, exclaimed :—

" We don't want nothing, thank you, not to-day."

" My name's John May," replied the old man dully. " I've come a long way, and I'm glad to rest."

" You get along ! " the woman cried more sharply. " We don't want any of your sort round here."

" There's something wrong," the old man muttered, looking puzzled. " Haven't I told you as my name's John May ? This is my place. It's took me months to find it."

"Ah, you're the Mr. May what used to live here ? " exclaimed the woman in a less forbidding tone. " We've been here two years now come Michaelmas. You'd like to look around, perhaps, for old times' sake ? "

" I had an accident. My head ain't clear like what

it was," faltered John May. "It took me days and days to find the place. I reckon I'll step in and rest my limbs."

"I'm sure you're welcome," said the woman, with a doubtful glance, for Mr. May's appearance was not over-clean.

Already he had taken leave for granted and sat down upon a chair, placing his bundle on the floor-cloth and his staff against the wall. The woman shouted: "Jenny!" and a girl of ten came slowly from the orchard, where she had been playing. Her mother ran and seized her by the arm. "Run to the police-station," she commanded in a whisper, "and my compliments to Mr. Bate, and ask him to be good enough to step up here. There's some one come as I don't like the look of."

The child departed at a run. The woman waited where, unseen of the old man, she could have heard directly if he moved about. She heard him coughing and then talking to himself, and then she heard him snoring. He had gone to sleep. She looked in to make sure that he was really sleeping and, having watched him with disfavour for a while, was thinking of returning to her work in the back premises, when the constable arrived. He knew John May—"a looney," he proclaimed him—and went and shook him by the shoulder, crying pleasantly:—

"Why, Mr. May, this ain't your house no longer! And the other cottage what you took is let again. They sold you up to pay the rent and what you owed about the place, supposin' you was dead and gone. But there's a bit of money over, so I hear, if you apply to Mr. Jones at Woodfield."

"I had an accident. My wits ain't what they were," murmured the old man in complete bewilderment, allowing the constable to lead him out into the sunlight.

"I'm sorry for the old chap," Mr. Bate declared at parting from the woman of the house. "He was a respectable and thriving man six years ago, when his wife died. She used to tend him like a child, and when she died he seemed to lose his spirit. I know for

certain that he's got a daughter well-to-do, but no one in the place knows where she's living now, and he—he can't remember nothing, poor old soul."

"That comes of pamperin' a man," replied the woman.

The policeman took the old man to his cottage and sat him down to tea, having first seen him wash his face and hands at the pump in the yard.

"What do you think of doing, Mr. May?" he asked benevolently.

"I ain't fit for much these days. I had an accident. The most as I could do, without no capital, 'd be a back-door trade. There's lots folks throw away as other folks 'd pay as much as sixpence for."

"And that's a fact," said the policeman heartily.

"I couldn't go back to a labourer. My missus wouldn't hear of that. She had her pride——" He broke off suddenly, bemoaning: "My head ain't what it was, you know. I had an accident."

"I tell you what, Mr. May. You come along with me to Woodfield. There's a fine house there where they'll put you up quite comfortable and keep you just as nice as your good lady used to do. Then, when the spring comes, you can go to Mr. Jones in High Street, and get that bit of money what I told you of, and start your peddling round the country."

"What d'you mean?"

"Ever heard of the Union? Not a bad place really, though some folks miscall it. . . . Why, what's the matter with you, Mr. May? I couldn't take you there without you wished it. Don't be afraid!"

But John May's eyes were full of sudden terror. "The workhouse . . . my poor missus!" he kept muttering. "I ain't a pauper. I don't owe no money, and I done no harm to nobody."

"That's all right, Mr. May. Don't be afraid," cried the policeman and his wife together. But all the old man's faith in them was gone; he knew no peace of mind till he was on the road again, with three good miles between him and their dwelling.

Weary to death, he sat down by the wayside in the shade of trees. A horseman bringing home his team from water passed him, whistling "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

"Is there a farm near by?" inquired John May.

"Just through that gate," was the reply. "That's where I work."

"Is there an empty grange where I could sleep?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. You ask the governor."

John May rose up and limped along behind the spanking cart-horses. After passing up a drive across a field, he came into a prosperous farmyard surrounded on three sides by forest trees.

"I had an accident," he mumbled, when confronted by the farmer. "My head ain't what it was. I lost my wife. Is there a grange where I could sleep about the place?"

"Well, who are you, and where do you come from?" asked the farmer irritably.

"I'm John May. I belong to Fairlands, Woodfield way."

"Well, I'm jiggered! What has happened to you, man? I've seen you often down at Woodfield market years ago."

"I had an accident. My head's turned queer. And there's folks what wish to put me in the workhouse, though there's money coming to me. I've done no harm, and God won't let 'em do it."

The farmer called his wife out from the house. Whispering together, they surveyed the old man's figure from a little distance, in doubt, as Christian people, whether they ought not immediately to bid him welcome to the house itself. In the end they shook their heads. The woman went indoors. The farmer led John May across the rickyard to a little wooden structure in the field beyond.

"You turn in there. It's empty. As long as you like. No one'll disturb you," he informed him gruffly; and later he sent out a meal of bread and cheese and a great jug of tea to the old man, who, sitting at the door of

his new home, gazing upon the quiet meadow in the starlight, with great trees beyond, praised God that he had come to rest at last. When the farmer came to see him in the morning, John May said :—

"I'd like to stop here. It's like Heaven, and it makes my head seem clearer."

"As long as you like," was the reply. "My missus 'll set you up with a few odds and ends—an old kettle, and a cup and saucer, and a plate, and I'll throw in a truss o' straw for bedding, so as you can make things snug."

"The Lord reward you both!" said John, with tears of gratitude. "I'll pay my rent. I'll go this morning into Woodfield, where there's money waiting for me."

"You keep your money. That's all right," answered the farmer.

His wife, who knew the Fairlands neighbourhood, had told him the old man's pathetic story: how he had squandered nearly all his savings on a marble cross for his wife's grave and, being lost without her guidance and by nature feckless, had sunk within two years to the position of a cottager, happy to do odd jobs for any one who needed help. But he was then past sixty, and a little deaf. One day, when he was working for the local wheelwright, shifting wood, he failed to hear a warning shout, with the result that a great piece of timber struck him on the head. He had been taken in a carriage to the county hospital, where he remained so long a while that all the neighbours had forgotten him. And he had not been seen at Fairlands for two years.

"I'm sorry for the poor old soul," the farmer's wife declared. "I wouldn't grudge him any help that we can rightly spare. But he's got himself into such a state, I couldn't have him in my kitchen."

The farmer acquiesced in her decision with a sense of shame, which John May's fervent blessings rendered active. He was better than his word about providing comforts.

When the old man came back from his tramp into Woodfield, he had two pounds seventeen shillings and

eightpence in his pocket knotted in a piece of rag, and carried on his shoulder an old sack containing tea and sugar, some potatoes and a saucepan. He called at the back door for half a pint of milk, insisting upon paying for it. Then, having carried these provisions to his grange, he gathered sticks and lit a fire beside the hedge, feeling as happy as a king in independence. His wife had always wished him to be independent and to pay his way. She would be pleased to know he had a small place of his own, and cash in hand.

On the next day he set out early with his sack and called at various farms and cottages, collecting bottles, bones, and rabbit-skins where these were to be had. At noon he found a sheltered spot by the roadside, and there sat down and made a fire of twigs and cooked his dinner, which consisted of sweet tea and baked potatoes. Then he resumed his rounds. And when the sack grew heavy, he took it to a man in Woodfield who bought rubbish, selling its contents at a trifling profit. This was his occupation, no matter what the weather, for two years ; till people grew familiar with his story and no longer pitied him, though the wretchedness of his appearance grew no less. His rounds occasionally led him past the Fairlands churchyard, where he would spend an hour in tending his wife's grave. The farmer and his wife no longer heeded him ; and no one willingly went near his little grange. In those two years he neither washed nor changed his clothes. The rain would often wet him to the skin, and his wading into streams and ponds in search of watercress, for which he knew good customers, would often case him to the waist in liquid slime. He took no care. In the severest winter weather he still went his round, and cooked his dinner out of doors with some rough screen. Good-natured housewives told him that he ought to go into the workhouse till the spring returned. When any one had shouted this into his ear, for he was deaf, he would reply :—

" Not likely ! When I've got my living, independent.

I've been a man well off and well respected, till I had an accident. My daughter's a rich woman. What'd she or my poor missus think of father in the workus? My daughter, when she comes to hear of my misfortunes, 'll reward all them as have been kind to me."

It was his dream on his bad days, that his rich married daughter would one day reappear in such majestic fashion as to shame all those who had been arrogant to him, her father. It rankled in his mind that folks did not believe him when he told them he had once been in a good position. The neighbourhood had changed in all those years, and very seldom did he see a face which he remembered hazily; while, what with dirt and unkempt hair and ragged clothing, he himself was quite unrecognisable for anybody who had known him in old days.

"You ought to have a tub, John," said his landlord with disgust. "I'll make you a present of a copperful o' boiling water and a bar o' soap, if you'll agree to use it."

"No, thank ye!" was his answer. "I should take my death. I know the filthy state I've got into. I know I couldn't go into a house like this. But washing rough with soap 'd about kill me, unless I was to go into a house to live. Wait till my daughter comes along. Then I'll clean up."

He grew so deaf that only with the greatest difficulty could he be made to grasp the meaning of a word correctly. But no one seriously interfered with him; and he was happy in his dreams about his wife in heaven and his wealthy daughter, till a gentleman new come into the neighbourhood was moved with pity by the sight of such an object cooking his dinner by the roadside on a winter's day. Though John May could not hear the words the stranger uttered, he saw the kind expression of his face, and found relief in telling him the story of his former greatness, the death of his dear wife, his accident and all his troubles, and how he had a daughter somewhere, well-to-do. The stranger, as a charitable man, was shocked to see a human being thus

degraded. He went to see the parson of the parish, who sent him to the squire, who was a magistrate. The squire was sympathetic, promising to make inquiries. These took the form of a sharp question to the village constable who, thinking himself blamed for letting old May be at large, replied :—

"Yes, sir; I know the man. The children call out after him. But he carries on a sort o' trade; he doesn't steal, nor beg, and there's no law—more's the pity—to compel him to the Union, though there's no doubt but that's where he should be, by rights."

"Well, keep an eye on him, and see what can be done. If I can help in any way, just let me know. It's a shame, in a Christian country, for a man to live so like a beast."

The policeman understood that he was ordered to pursue John May relentlessly with a view to making things too hot for him in Hansted parish. The poor old outcast had lit his fire by the wayside; the constable came upon him and, exclaiming: "Come, clear out o' that!" proceeded to kick the sticks apart and trample out the embers. The old man took his sack upon his back and tramped off with tears and prayers to God, sped by the scornful admonition :—

"Get to the workus, that's the place for you!"

He went up to a cottage door, a cottage where he was accustomed in his rounds to call for rabbit-skins. But the woman who looked out upon him was a stranger. He told the latest story of his persecution in resentful tones:—

"He trod on two potaters, as was nearly done. Ain't folks afraid of God, to go and trample on good food?"

The woman listened with compassion, then, looking at him hard, exclaimed: "Why, never! Mr. May?"

He did not hear her. She repeated, shouting, "Mr. May."

"Aye, that's my name. I had an accident."

"You remember, surely, Mrs. Hill at Fairlands? She moved to Lewes several years ago. I'm her daughter Amy. You remember? I and my husband have just come to live here."

"I've got a daughter married independent. She'll come somewhen to help me, if she hears of my misfortune."

" Where is your daughter living ? " shouted Amy.

" In the drapery."

"She writes to mother sometimes ; I know that much."

" I had an accident, you know. My head went queer."

" Well, of all the unfortunate things ! "

Amy, who was exceedingly good-natured, dismayed at the sad state of one whom as a child she had respected, wrote that same evening to her mother, demanding the address of Mr. May's relations. In course of time she got the information.

Mr. May's daughter was a Mrs. Jerniman, living at 21 Mersey Street, Birkenhead.

After a few days' reflection and talking of the matter over with her husband, Amy wrote to Mrs. Jerniman, informing her of the condition of her worthy father. She got an answer by return of post. Mrs. Jerniman would come to Hansted on the following Tuesday, and had much pleasure in accepting Amy's invitation for the night. The day on which this letter came was Wednesday.

" Your daughter's coming," she told Mr. May, by dint of shouting, on Friday morning when he came up to her door. " Coming one day soon to stay a night with me."

She did not think it wise to name the day, lest by too sudden an appearance he should scare his daughter.

Tuesday came, and about three o'clock in the afternoon the station fly drew up before the cottage gate, and out of it there stepped a stout and comfortable lady, richly beaded. She stepped into the cottage for a moment, but would not sit down.

" You understand, my dear," she said benignantly, " I can't have father with us up at Birkenhead. It wouldn't do. But I'm sure I should desire to help him all I can, and hire a room for him and pay a woman to look after him, or make him an allowance, or whatever seems the best. But first I want so much to go and look at mother's grave. I've never seen it, but I hear it's beautiful. You'll come too, won't you, dear ? I kept the fly on purpose."

Together they were driven at the shuffle of the old white fly-horse up to Fairlands church. There they alighted from the carriage, and passed through the lych-gate. As they turned the corner of the church, Amy caught sight of what at first appeared to be a heap of rags lying at the foot of the marble cross which marked the resting-place of Mrs. May. Mrs. Jerniman already had brought out her handkerchief.

"Please wait a minute," whispered Amy. "It's your father."

They waited in a stricken silence, watching the old man, who was weeding a small bed of roses on the grave; till at last, as if suddenly aware that he was overlooked, he rose up hastily and hobbled off. Then the two women ventured to draw near the marble cross, and stood a long while gazing at it. Mrs. Jerniman breathed hard behind her pocket-handerchief.

"A lovely headstone, isn't it, my dear?" she snuffled when at length they turned away. "Genteel is quite the word, and so well cared for."

"Your father cares for it, they say. That's almost all he seems to recollect of days before his accident."

The visitor from Birkenhead made no reply. They went back to the carriage, where for a little while they sat in silence, gazing at the hedgerows as they drifted slowly by, till all at once the elder lady burst out weeping and exclaimed:—

"I can't. It's no use trying. I can't face him. The Lord knows I have always lived a Christian woman, and I meant to do my Christian duty by him when I came to-day. I never thought he'd sunk so low as that. My dear, don't think too hard of me, but I can't meet him. Cyril and all his folks are quite genteel, and I have always let them understand that we're the same. I can't have anything to do with father as he is. Don't let him know I've ever been here, poor old dear! I feel it's wicked, but I can't do nothing personally. You wouldn't take him in and do for him yourself—now would you?—even if I paid you something handsome?"

"No, that I wouldn't—not for any money! I know how it is. But sometimes I do feel so sorry for the poor old gentleman. It's pitiful."

"If you think a bit of money will do any good, I'll give that gladly. But I won't appear. I daren't, my dear, and that's the truth of it."

"A half a crown a week might come in handy to him. But he's not in want. And I do believe he's happier like that than any way that one could think of for him being used to it. If I could stop the children plaguing of him sometimes, and the policeman harrying of him like a vagabond——"

"Don't! Don't, my dear! I can't endure to hear it. I'll leave five pounds with you to give as you see need. I'm going back as far as town to-night. Don't think too hard of me!"

When John May came again to Amy's cottage door she told him that his daughter could not come to see him yet awhile. She was not sure the old man understood what she was shouting. He was delighted with the gift of half a crown, asked God to bless her, and went upon his way with smiling face. The policeman had grown weary of his persecution, which had been undertaken from a sense of duty without animosity, and for some weeks the vagrant led a quiet life, except for the assaults of children, which he now regarded as a plague in nature on a par with thorns and stinging-nettles, and the bite of insects. He was feeling settled and contented once again when, going home one evening to his little grange, he found the farmer, his kind landlord, and his wife standing by the stackyard fence surveying it with great disfavour.

"You've made a fine mess, John," the farmer shouted in the tenant's ear. "If it was anybody else, I'd thank you to clear out that filth, and wash the shed and disinfect it, if you could!"

John altogether failed to get the meaning of so long a speech.

"No one could clean it!" said the farmer's wife.

"But let him stop there till the other people come. They may not mind him pigging there; he does no harm. And if they do, they can burn the shed, the state he's brought it to. Nothing could ever make it sweet again. Does he know we're leaving?"

"I've told the old chap often enough. But he's got pretty near stone-deaf."

John May hardly ever crossed the farmyard in those days, but approached his dwelling by a path through a coppice and a gap in a hedge, both of his own making. He bought the few provisions which he needed on his daily rounds. He thus saw nothing of the pageant of the farmer's moving; and was utterly amazed one evening when a man and two rude boys came up while he was supping in the doorway of his little grange, and told him to be gone. He could not hear the words, but saw the gestures and the threatening faces. With indignation he informed them that the place was his, bidding them go and ask the farmer if they doubted; and, when they found they could not make him understand, they went away. After an hour, when it was dark, they came again, and with them the policeman, his old enemy. He could not understand things in the least. What right had they to come on private land? Where was the farmer? Where was law and order?

They drove him out, and threw his kettle and his saucepan after him. He stuffed the two utensils in his sack, which he had clutched from force of habit, and utterly bewildered went off into the woods.

It seemed to him that Satan was unloosed on earth, that Christian charity was bound and scourged and all men had forgotten God Most High. It was late autumn. He floundered in and out of ditches filled with sop of rotting leaves; lay down to rest and then got up again, chilled to the bone and stiff in every limb. Wet branches splashed his face and clothing when he moved, and when he stopped dripped moisture on him steadily. Yet he preferred the dank, inhospitable woodland to the haunts of men, whom he imagined changed to devils for the nonce.

But in the end sheer weariness and pain made him forget the cause of his terror, and endeavour to return.

Then he perceived that he had somehow lost his sack. While trying to retrace his steps among the trees, he stepped into a pond, and sank up to his middle in dead leaves and mud. It took him time to flounder out, and when he had at last succeeded he made straight for home, of which he now knew the direction through his accident. There was but that one piece of water in the wood. The matter of his sack was left till morning.

He was awakened by noises at the entrance to his shed, which was but little bigger than a good-sized kennel.

"He's in there—the old stinking badger! Bring the dogs! Let's 'ave a bit o' sport with him, to pay for all our trouble," cried his enemies.

John May, of course, heard only a vague roaring, but he feared mankind, and so, when they withdrew a little from the opening, he crept out.

They set two dogs on him for fun. He tried to run, but fell down on his face while the dogs worried him. At length they called them off. He rose with difficulty and staggered down the meadow to the wood. All through that day he tried to find his sack, but failed to do so. The loss of it preyed on his mind, above his other troubles, of which it seemed the token and the mystic cause. That night he slept in a small gully in the wood, and in the morning tried to find another dwelling, but in vain. Even those who were the kindest to him shook their heads decidedly when asked to let him sleep upon their premises. One man, however, when he mourned his sack, produced another from an outhouse and bestowed it on him. Made happy for the moment by this benefaction, John May set off upon his round as usual. He slept that night beneath a hedge, but was so stiff when he arose next morning that he recognised the need of shelter with the winter coming on. But though he offered to pay a shilling a week for the mere right to creep into a corner of a cartshed, no one of those he asked would give him leave.

At last, when night came on again, and he was weary, he thought that he might venture back to his old lair. Such evil influences could not last for ever. His enemies would have departed, he imagined, and his friends returned.

Creeping through the wood and up the meadow with precaution, he reached the shed unnoticed and there spent the night. He was awakened in the morning by a curious heat. They had set fire to the wooden building while he slept. Somebody seized his feet and dragged him out, only a little singed, but nearly dead with fright. He had reached the road before he noticed that his sack, the one which had been given to him, had been left behind. He went back, meaning to claim it, till he saw the group of men and boys around the burning grange, and then he turned and ran, bereft of all his wits, half-blind and with a singing in his ears. Along the road he fled till he could go no more, but lay down by the hedge to die.

There the policeman, warned by passers-by, found him a little later, quite insensible. A group of persons from the nearest cottages had gathered round.

"No, he ain't dead," the constable replied to questions, "but not far off it by the look of him. The workhouse infirmary, that's the place for him. But how I'm going to get him there's what puzzles me."

While he was still debating, a carter with a steaming tumbril of manure came up the road, and hearing what the matter was, advised: "Heave him up here. He'll lay warm and soft in the muck and about as clean as he's been used to layin', I'll be bound!"

So old John May was thrown up on to the muck-cart. The carter, walking at the horse's head, with pitchfork held up like some kind of ensign, whistled "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and the policeman, vexed that he would have to miss his dinner, followed at a careless distance, chewing a stalk of grass which he had plucked from the hedgefoot.

REHOBOTH

HALF an hour after noon of a fine October day the double doors beneath the shadow of the pillared portico of Salham Hall opened to let out three persons ; two of them yokels in their Sunday best, the third a small cock-sparrow of a man with prominent brown eyes of piercing glance and a thick black moustache. In any garb one would have known this last individual for a Radical and an orator of an aggressive type ; clad as he was, in black, and with a soft black hat, he was evidently a dissenting preacher and presumably a Welshman. A condescending voice behind them said : " Good-day to you. Take care : there are four steps ; " the warning being needed since the two embarrassed countrymen were walking backwards. It caused them to take heed where they were going for a moment, so that it was not until their heavy boots scrunched gravel that they made their answer : " Good-day to you, Sir John ; and no offence, I hoop, as none intended."

By then the door was shut.

The yokels stood stock-still and gazed about them, as if the sight of lawns and trees and cattle grazing in the sunlight had been unforeseen. The man in black strode off determinedly in the direction of the lodge on Salham High Street. As if afraid of being left alone, they set off at the double and rejoined him.

" Offence, indeed ! " he snorted, with contempt. " Can there be any question of offence from us to him ? He is the vessel of offence—he and the Jesuit who eggs him on to persecute us. But the Lord is on our side. Though we wander in the wilderness, yet He will not forsake us. Nay ! He will bring us back once more into the holy place."

He added in a mundane tone: "I did not like your cringing manner to the man."

"I don't wonder as yow fare on-sensed, Mr. Evans," replied Job Smith, a large man with a bushy auburn beard and a most lamentable, bleating tone of voice. "That dew seems hard as that there little place where we ha' met in prayer and praise for such a sight o' years should be took from us sudden, like this here."

"Hard? It is iniquitous, an act of tyranny. What would the Jesuit in disguise say, think you, if any one should close his church in such a manner?"

The Jesuit in disguise was Salham's rector.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Evans, but that bain't the same. The church is different, that's an old foundation. But our Rehoboth wasn't never freehold; that was let on ninety-nine years' lease, and we've paid a peppercorn rent for that every year to the Hall. And now the lease is nearly run, Sir John be in his rights not to renew. A bargain's a bargain, that's how I see it."

The speaker this time was Nathaniel Drew, the carpenter.

"It may be as you say, in law," replied the pastor coldly, "but his treatment of us is iniquitous. If the baronet had sought a higher rent, we might have paid it, but to turn the house of prayer into a parish-room where dancing and such sinful pastimes are allowed—that, I say, is sacrilege, is wickedness. He deems us quite defenceless, but we have a weapon—prayer. Let us devote ourselves to prayer from this day forth."

"Maybe the Lord'll know that was a bargain and'll hold us tew ut," muttered Drew.

"You ought to be ashamed to talk so," snapped the pastor. "You know the Scripture: 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you. Ask and ye shall have.'"

"I guess that's right," bleated Job Smith ecstatically. "The Lord maybe'll save Rehoboth if we take and wrastle wi' un like what Jacob done."

"That is our faith," replied the preacher firmly.

By then they were in Salham High Street, walking

sometimes on the pavement, sometimes in the road, according as the path before the shops was clear or crowded. A butcher, standing in a cavern full of meat, called out :—

" Well, what luck, deppytation ? " in a scoffing tone, and many were the mocking smiles which they encountered.

No further conversation passed between them till they reached Rehoboth, at whose gate some members of the chapel, chiefly women, waited to learn the outcome of the deputation. Conspicuous in point of splendour of attire, in plush and bugles, stood forth Mrs. Bellingham, the only person of the congregation who had private means. She was a liberal subscriber to the chapel teas, and paid the best part of the pastor's stipend. He hastened to her now, and told his story ; the while he tapped two fingers playfully upon the cheek of her fair daughter, Doris, who was there beside her—a girl of eighteen, fresh from an expensive boarding-school—and then they all moved on into the chapel for the business meeting to discuss the news.

" It's the most disgraceful thing I ever heard," said Mrs. Bellingham. " Isn't it, Doris ? "

" Dreadful ! " agreed her daughter, with a little narrowing of the eyes—a little wince—which made their colour seem of deepest violet. Her mouth was so felicitously shaped that every time she opened it she seemed to smile.

" The Lord will not allow it, I feel sure."

" We must throw ourselves upon His mercy," groaned the minister. " We must devote our hearts and souls to earnest prayer and intercession. Has anybody something to propose ? "

Job Smith stood up and in his wailing voice began :—

" Dear brethren, as we was comin' here, Pastor Evans he said suffen what struck me all of a heap, with Gospel light a-shinin' round, like when I were convarted. He mentioned, solemn-like, these blessed words : ' Knock and it shall be oopened unto yow : ask and ve shall hev'.'

and he said as that was his belief as how, was we to take and wrestle wi' ta Loord, like Jacob done, until the mornun', we could save Rehoboth. Now, Pastor Evans and brethren, I propose as how we take and hold a reg-lar campaign o' prayer this comin' week—a watch-night meetin' every evenun'."

There was loud applause.

"An excellent idea!" said Mr. Evans, with suppressed excitement.

"Beautiful, I call it!" murmured Mrs. Bellingham, whose social light was in the chapel services.

"Beautiful!" echoed Doris, with a lovely blush.

"What is it, Mr. Drew?" inquired the minister of his companion, who had risen, and was standing hat in hand.

"I must be goin' now," was the reply. "I've got my work. But I'll stand in wi' what the meetin' here decides."

With that, and nods all round, Drew clattered out.

"Prayer-meetin's every night," he muttered in his beard. "Well, I suppose that can't dew nobody no harm."

Out in the road he stood a moment and surveyed Rehoboth. In shape like a child's Noah's ark, upon a patch of greensward with a straight path leading up from gate to door; of dull red brick with roof of slate, and wealth of gutter-piping for its sole adornment, the chapel stood upon a by-road leading out of Salham, on the edge of marshland; on either hand a row of dingy cottages, and opposite, allotment gardens sloping to a swamp. It was a building as unlovely as can be imagined; yet to Drew and others its unloveliness was dearer than the beauty of the fine old parish church, admired of artists. From his childhood it had been the centre of his inward life, the only place on earth where he was somebody. Everywhere else he was of no account, a mere subordinate. Within those walls he felt himself of the elect, was free to lift his voice in prayer and testimony, to try his wings in thought, his wits in argument, without the fear of a rebuke or sneer.

"A mortal pity!" his soul groaned. "Maybe she'll build another." He referred to Mrs. Bellingham. "But that 'ont never be the same. More like she'll take and leave us afore long. That gel o' hars, 'ont rest content wi' such as us. And children drag their parents, I ha' seen that, times. A mortal pity we're to lose the little place."

With that he turned from contemplation of Rehoboth and strode away in the direction of his work.

Now it happened that the rector of Salham had witnessed the return of the deputation down the High Street as he came out of the post-office at a quarter to one. He went back to the rectory to luncheon, a prey to curiosity which could only be satisfied by conversation with Sir John himself. Accordingly, at three o'clock that afternoon, he walked up to the Hall and saw the aged baronet, whom he found reclining in a long deck-chair in a veranda on the sunny side of the house, resting, for his health had latterly begun to fail.

"I am very glad that you were firm with them," he said, when he had heard the story of the deputation. "That chapel is no use at all in Salham. It seats two hundred, and the congregation can't be forty. The boys and girls go there to flirt on Sunday evenings when it rains. They call it, as I hear, the courting-shop. I have always held that in this part of England one could extirpate dissent by closing chapels. It is all in the buildings. Our people go to any building where there's singing."

"I had as good as offered 'em another site to build on, and a shed in which to hold their services meanwhile," Sir John informed him; "but since that preacher-fellow was so rude to me, the offer's off."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the rector in a manner of reproof.

"Sir John is sadly changed," he told his wife on his return. "I want to get this matter of Rehoboth settled quickly."

Next day he visited the squire again, and told him.

"They're going to hold a week of prayer at Rehoboth to try and turn your heart! They're having handbills printed: 'A Campaign of Prayer.' That woman Bellingham, no doubt, is paying for it. Her daughter, by the way, has grown a very pretty girl. I suspect that she accounts for many in the Sunday evening congregations. From what Reade the barber tells me, they are quite in earnest. Really the superstition of these people is extraordinary. They are centuries behind the times."

"You mean to say they think they're going to keep the chapel through their howling?" asked Sir John, becoming purple in the face.

"Yes; Reade assures me they expect a miracle."

"And they've got handbills out?"

"They'll be on every gate and barn-end by to-morrow evening."

"Well, it's blasphemy, that's all it is, and the police should stop it," cried the baronet. The rector, less impulsive, set it down to idiotcy.

Returning through the town, he met a faithful member of his flock, the grocer, to whom he spoke at length upon the subject of Rehoboth, expressing satisfaction that the courting-shop would soon be closed. Liking to let his parishioners perceive occasionally that he knew their talk and could appreciate its humours, he spoke of it as "ta coortin' shawp" with a sly grin. "We'll stop their little game on Sunday evenings. They must come to church."

The grocer laughed, obsequiously, raised his hat and went his way, repeating the divine's remarks to everybody. They were received by the wealthy with respect, but by the poor with scorn and indignation. "What so he want to mell for?" was the feeling of the rougher sort. "Bain't poor folks not to be allowed no liberty? And bain't them chapel folks as good as him, the dommed old badger?"

Nor were there wanting champions of religious toleration, neither church nor chapel nor anything but

public-house, who, at news of a design upon the part of some lewd spirits of the church to "rag" the coming meetings at Rehoboth, swore by God and by the devil to defend the place; who stood guard truculently over pasted handbills which the church faction wanted to tear down, and generally took Rehoboth under their protection. And so it chanced that when the great campaign of prayer began on Sunday evening, the chapel by the marshes was for once quite full, while the approach to it was guarded by a group of stalwarts who sat smoking at the hedge-foot or on garden walls.

The eyes of Pastor Evans, on the rostrum, ranged with excitement over all the unfamiliar faces; he prayed and preached with more than his accustomed eloquence. The roughs from the back lanes of Salham had never listened to such words before. Some of them blubbered, some applauded wildly; one man, a red nose in the midst of tangled hair above a dirty orange neckerchief, got up and openly confessed his sins. The pastor spoke with feeling of the persecution suffered by that congregation, of the design to close Rehoboth, the only place in Salham where the Word was preached in all its purity. The church was dead, and had a deadening influence on all who entered on its broad and flowery way. Rehoboth was a living fountain of the spirit. Why then did the ungodly wish to close Rehoboth? Because it shamed them; because the congregation of Rehoboth was composed of men as poor as were the twelve Apostles, and the rich and powerful do not like the poor to shame them. "They seek to crush us out," the preacher cried. "But will they be allowed to do so?"

"Naw, naw!" roared the crowd. "We 'ont let 'em dew ut." A man cried: "Damn 'em. It's the same wi' pubs, they're ollus hard upon the pore."

There were shocked calls for order.

Evans prayed once more; encouraged by Amens and shouts of "Glory!" and then there was an interval for

silent prayer, when individual sobs and moans could be distinctly heard.

Drew kept an anxious watch for rowdyism, and Mrs. Bellingham, with other women members, was a little scared. Doris sat up in the gallery, where it was almost dark; that was her place as member of the choir. Never had she known such rapture as she felt this evening, for her hand was being held and fondled by the man she loved—a man whom she had never spoken to, but often seen, one who fulfilled her dream of all a youth should be, being good-looking, reckless and a gentleman. He was in truth the graceless son of Salham's rector, who called himself an artist, read French novels, and bred sporting dogs. He had made soft eyes at her since her return from school, secretly, for fear of Mrs. Bellingham, who took a lofty and affronted tone with all the gentry; and had slipped into the chapel gallery to-night, as twice before, muffled unrecognisably, so as to be near her. There were too many people in the gloom around them to permit of even whispered conversation; but a note was passed, her hand was held and fondled intermittently for several hours, and thus an understanding was at last established. As the congregation streamed forth after midnight he did contrive to whisper; "Every night this week!" and that was all that she had ever heard from him.

The concourse was much less upon the following evening, but the proceedings were more fervent and exciting. Again and again did Mr. Evans exhort the meeting to devotion in such terms as these:—

"Pray, I beseech you. Pray with might and main. Aye, wrestle with the Lord in prayer. Pray with all your hearts and souls until the veins stand out upon your temples and your heart is like to burst with stress of anguish, that this great tribulation may pass over us."

Some of the ruffians who had "got religion" on the previous night obeyed him literally; for, not knowing what prayer was, they held their breath and thus attained

the state he recommended. One of these "led in prayer" by invitation of the pastor in a grumbling tone, beginning:—

"'Tis a crool thing, O Lord—ta croolest thing I ever see in all my days. This here little place, where I and others ha' received a blessin', to be took away and turned into a pairish room. Don't let 'em dew ut, Lord. Larn them as wants to dew ut, for Thy Mercy's sake!"

A hymn was sung with fury, and then Mrs. Bellingham stood up and prayed in a meek, tearful voice:—

"O Lord, if it be Thy will. . . . I am only a weak woman, but Thou knowest I have done my best to save Thy tabernacle. If a higher rent was laid upon us, I had offered to defray it at my own expense (groans of applause). Alas, there was no choice. The wicked had resolved on our destruction. . . . O Lord, have mercy on Thy faithful people, on this congregation, on every one of us assembled here in prayer to-night. O Lord, save Rehoboth for us. Turn not Thy face away. . . ."

The benefactress of the chapel here broke down completely. There were cries of "Hallelujah!" "Glory!" and "Amen!"

The gallery that night was empty save for Doris Bellingham and her aspirant.

"Do you know, I love Rehoboth," he was whispering. "The primitive Christian atmosphere appeals to me. I like to hear the prayers in dialect."

"Oh, *do* you?" whispered Doris, with fastidious emphasis; adding, after a moment's hesitation: "I—I hate it. They are all so common. I do so long to get away, clean out of it, to people who can understand."

"Of course," he said, "Perdita is a princess, and knows herself an exile till she goes to court. But as a spectacle I find it interesting and quite touching. I had never been inside a chapel in my life before."

The storm of prayer and indignation raged below, increasing as it drew near midnight, until several of the congregation were offering petitions at the same time, loudly. There were sobs and moans. A hymn was

sung, and then they all poured out into the rainy night.

"Oh, what a blessed meetin'!" said a labourer's wife to Mrs. Bellingham, dropping a curtsey as she came beside her in the porch. "You spoke lovely, mum!"

"God bless you, Mrs. Rugg," replied the benefactress. "Have you seen Miss Doris?"

"Here I am, mother!"

Doris stood there, serenely smiling, with the words, "To-morrow, darling!" ringing in her ears.

It was on the following morning (Tuesday) that all Salham was excited by the news, first published by a servant from the Hall, that Sir John Fanting had been taken seriously ill. Groups of the townsmen gathered to discuss the tidings in the various inns; and great was the indignation of all reputable church-people when they heard it suggested that this illness was God's judgment on the squire for his ill-treatment of Rehoboth.

"You ought to be ashamed to say such things," Johnson the butcher shouted at Job Smith, who dared to proffer this opinion in his shop. But it was the remark of one of the new converts of Rehoboth, heretofore a godless poacher, of the name of Minter, which scandalised and angered half the town. This man had the audacity to cry out in the hearing of a group of decent tradesmen: "Sarve ta ole badger right! That's ta Loord's dewun, that is—all in answer to our prayers. We'll pray ta ole badger dead, we will—ta parson tew, afore we've done."

"You'd better mind what you're a-sayin', my fine feller, or you'll find yourself in quad," he was informed severely.

"I've got religion, I have," was his solemn answer.

"Some one ought to put a stop to their Campaign of Prayer—a disgrace to the town I call it," cried the butcher, a strong churchman, when he heard of Minter's outburst. "Rank blasphemy, that's all it is. I'll go up, dinner-time, and see the rector. He's a magistrate."

The rector strongly counselled inactivity, but the

more ardent spirits of his flock were bent on vengeance. An attack was made upon Rehoboth that same night, but the chapel was well guarded; the assailants were repulsed with bloodshed. The sounds of strife were audible within the building. Evans turned very pale, while he exhorted the congregation to keep calm. He waxed more fierce than ever in denunciations of the tyrants. Job Smith put up a prayer for their forgiveness which was hailed with loud Amens. Up in the gallery Doris shrank into her lover's arms for safety. A hymn was sung to drown the shouts of battle, and when the last notes died away, the fight was over.

Next morning (Wednesday) as Nathaniel Drew was walking down the High Street under drizzling rain, he saw a figure which he knew emerge from the post-office and stride towards a dog-cart waiting farther up the street. In the upright form, the golf-cap, leggings and gray burberry, there was no mistaking Captain Fanting, Sir John's son and heir. Drew hurried up to him.

"Hallo, Drew! What is it?" was his greeting.

"If you please, sir, I should like a word wi' you."

"I can't stop long. My father's ill, you know. They telegraphed for me yesterday. To-day he seems a good deal better, I am glad to say."

Drew told the story of Rehoboth in few words, concluding with: "A bargain is a bargain, that we know. But, ye see, sir, that fare raythe hard on us."

"I think so too, by Jove!" said Captain Fanting. "This is the very first I've heard of it. I'll see what I can do to help you when my father's a bit better. It couldn't hurt us to renew the lease."

"I thank ye kindly, sir. My dooty to Sir John and to her leddyship."

Drew stood and watched the captain drive away, and then went to the house of Pastor Evans.

"I reckon I ha' done a stroke o' business for Rehoboth," he remarked, with self-congratulation, as he told his story. "More than all the meetin's would ha' done without me."

"The Lord chooses whom He will—aye, even dumb, unthinking beasts—to answer prayer," replied the preacher.

"Hew be yow a-callin' stinkin' beasts, I'd like to know."

"You mistake me, Mr. Drew. I was thinking of the ravens which were sent to feed Elijah, and the lion which was raised up to devour the prophet in the way."

"Oh, ah. I beg yer pardon. That's all right. Well, I reckon I ha' done a stroke o' work this mornun'."

"Please God, it may be so!" said Pastor Evans; who referred to Captain Fanting that same night in chapel as "a mighty helper, who has been raised up in answer to our faithful prayers. I hear that it is so. We are no longer friendless in the earthly sense. Let us then renew our humble crying and petitions that the fulness of God's mercy may be showered on us."

Up in the darkness of the gallery, Doris and her lover talked in close embrace.

"My mother will oppose it. She so hates your people."

"They'll oppose it, too. But, thank the Lord and my old aunt, I'm independent. There's nothing for it; we must run away."

"You'll take me right away from stupid Salham?"

"We'll go and live in Italy, or where you like."

"I couldn't go so far away from mother. It would break her heart."

"Why? She could come and stay with us, you know."

"I would rather, if it could be done, some other way—less violent. Couldn't you make your people call on mother, and have it all respectable?"

"They think me mad. They will oppose the match with all their might. And if I asked your mother for you, she would kick me out."

"I don't know that she would if—" Doris nestled to him—"if she was quite sure that your people very strongly disapproved. She hates them very much indeed."

"I couldn't do it on those terms. No, we must run away. They'll all be angry just at first, but they'll get over it. We'll write and ask forgiveness of your mother, and then come and see her."

"I never want to come to Salham, once I've left it. She could come to us."

The prayers, the cries and sobs below went on until the singing of the final hymn.

On the next night (Thursday) there were fewer worshippers; but still the chapel was well filled, and great enthusiasm reigned till nearly midnight; when all at once a hideous din outside brought terror-stricken silence on the congregation. There was the noise of fighting mingled with the crash of what is called "rough music"—a beating on tin kettles and on home-made drums, a blast of penny whistles, mouth-organs and Jews harps.

"Let us sing to the praise and glory of God," Mr. Evans had begun, as soon as he recovered from his first amazement, when angry men began to push in at the chapel door, and a stentorian voice, the voice of butcher Johnson, bellowed: "Stop it, do you hear? Sir John is dead."

"Er—indeed!" said Mr. Evans; "we will then conclude our service by singing, as I said——"

"Stop it, I say, and hook it!" bellowed Johnson.

The hymn was given out, however, and begun; but by misfortune it was one of praise to God—a jaunty tune. It savoured of thanksgiving. "Blasphemy!" was shouted from the doorway. "Give it 'em:" and in a moment angry men were all about the chapel, cudgelling the male part of the congregation; hustling them towards the door, smashing the pews and all the furniture. The shrieks of women rose above the tumult. Lamp after lamp was smashed down and extinguished. Resistance soon died out. The congregation, one by one, escaped as best they could. The mob of church-people was in possession of the building.

"Oh, let us go!" said Doris, weeping. "I am frightened."

"Stay where you are! They'll never come up here. It's dark, and they can't see us," whispered her adored.

"My mother may come up to look for me."

"She'll feel sure that you've run back home."

They sat there close together in the darkness till the last disturbers had retired, and then slipped down the stairs. The chapel door was off its hinges. There was wreckage on the path—black objects casting shadows in the pallid moonlight.

"We'll go the long way round," observed the youth.

"Oh, let me run straight home," the maiden whispered.

"Not if I know it. Roughs are still about. We'll go round by the fields."

They took the path across the marshes, watched by ranks of pollard willows, like scared human heads.

Suddenly he stopped and clasped her in his arms.

"I tell you what," he cried, "you shan't go home at all. We'll run away to-night and get it over. We'll walk to Ellersford and catch the early train."

"No, no! I can't! Don't ask it!"

"Why?"

"I've got no things."

"We'll fit you up in town. It'll be just as hard for you a fortnight hence. We've made our minds up. Better get it over!"

She still continued to resist in words long after she had set her feet upon the road to Ellersford.

On the day following Sir John Fanting's funeral, Nathaniel Drew happened to meet the new baronet walking in the town, and ventured to remind him of his promise in connection with Rehoboth. His speech, though meek, produced a formidable frown.

"Don't speak of that," was the abrupt reply. "I was quite willing to renew the lease. But since you people have been boasting that you prayed Sir John

to death, I'm hanged if I'll have any more to do with you."

"Don't heed what people say. That's nonsense, sir!"

"It strikes me as exceedingly offensive nonsense. I won't have such a nest of evil superstition on my property. Not another word, please, Drew. My mind's made up."

Rehoboth ceased to be a chapel, and became a parish-room, where smoking concerts, even dances, are now held. The former pastor, Evans, had a call to Wales. Mrs. Bellingham left Salham in great tribulation to seek and, with God's help, reclaim her fallen child. And there were other changes, all disastrous to the congregation, which shortly ceased to have a corporate existence. But still, among its scattered members, and in the alleys and low public-houses of the town, Rehoboth is regarded as triumphant.

"We prayed Sir John to dead, and that's the fact we did," Minter, relapsed to his old habits, tells his fellow-rogues. "And if we'd kep' that up the week, as farst intended, there bain't no doubt but what we should ha' prayed ta chapel freehold and ta rector blind. But they kind o' funked that, when they heerd Sir John was dead, and when them blackguards come along and smash ta farniture, and so they give up o' the Thursday night."

The story is too well authenticated to admit of doubt. And it gives a sort of comfort to those social outcasts to reflect that persons poor and unregarded like themselves, having no power save faith, there in their own town, prayed a great man dead. For what has once been done may be repeated.

CHILDREN OF NATURE

SUDDENLY a noise of singing mingled with the howling of the wind, which had been blowing hard all day. Miss Brett, who had been sitting reading in an easy-chair, went to the window of her cottage living-room, and looked in the direction whence the noise proceeded. She represented Providence in Easterwick much as the policeman represented law and order, and the noise was of a nature to arouse her vigilance. The sky was thickly clouded, rain was falling. The cottages, tarred or red or whitewashed, round the village green, all looked like persons buttoned up against the weather. A child in cloak and hood, bearing a jug with care to shield its precious contents from the rain, came hurrying from the direction of the Old Ship Inn, opened a cottage door and disappeared. There remained no human being out of doors; yet, still above the caterwauling of the wind, there was that sound of singing at the pitch of raucous voices, the sound lugubrious, yet somehow rollicking, which had disturbed Miss Brett.

"We've mide up our moi—oi—oinds to *sile* er—wy. *Sile* er—wy! *Sile* er—wy!"

The door of the smallest cottage within sight was opened. A tall young woman in a very clean white overall appeared expectant in the aperture. And then, at the corner where the road from the seaport of Searmouth debouched upon the village green, appeared a group of which the aspect, reckless in itself, was rendered more so by the accidents of wind and rain. A sturdy seaman still in his first youth supported three old women and one young one, all five persons being closely linked together, the young sailor in the midst. The women were in Sunday clothes. They seemed to find it difficult

to place their feet, once raised, upon a spot of ground, and so advanced unevenly and in a waving line; and all the while, with heads thrown back and crimson faces, they sang of their irrevocable mind to sail away. They were all drunk, though one of the women, the sailor's grandmother, was nearly eighty, with death and judgment in her eyes. Miss Brett forsook the window, and hastened to put on her hat and cloak.

When she emerged upon the green, the group of roisterers were drawing near the cottage where the tall white-clad young woman held the doorway. She was in fact the sailor's lawful wife. He shouted: "Come on, Jenny. Put your mack on and come round to mother's. We ha' had a day in Searmouth, and now we're goin' to make a night of it in Easterwick."

"Not I!" said Jenny from the height of scorn. "Come yow in home, Jack Skellett. I never knew as yow was back, not till Jim Ostler told me. That ain't the way to treat a wife, and so I'll have ye know. Be quick indoors, all on yer, there's some one comin'!"

But Jack and his adherents, far from hastening as she adjured them, swung round to gaze at the approaching some one. And before they were aware of anything, Miss Brett was on them—a short, stout woman, unimposing and ill-dressed, yet unmistakably of gentle birth.

"What is all this? Jack Skellett, I'm ashamed of you—disgracing yourself and disappointing your pretty young wife when she's been so much looking forward to your coming home. As for you, Mrs. Skellett senior, I'm still more ashamed of you, and your old mother too, and Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Rumbelow. One expects such bestiality from men! . . . Mrs. Cox, how dare you take your daughter with you on a drunken bout?"

The faces of the revellers assumed a hang-dog look. They let go one another's arms and rolled about *in situ*, unable to stand still or to retreat without support. Jack, with a great lurch forward, touched his seaman's cap and, with an irresponsible chuckle, murmured

something about giving his mother, grandmother, two aunts and cousin there present a good time.

"And so yow hev', old dear," his mother answered with a hiccup. "Don't yow heed nobody. Who's she, sh'd like to know. Interferin' ole blowbroth!"

Dorothy Cox, aged seventeen, laughed rudely and began to sing again, taking the arm of Jack. Quick as a flash, Miss Brett laid hands on her, and dragged her off, commanding:—

"Jenny, take your man indoors and dust his jacket for him. I'll drive off these geese."

Young Mrs. Skellett did as she was told, her husband in his fuddled state proving amenable; while Miss Brett read a stinging lecture to his female relatives. The lookers-on from neighbouring doorways took her part. Utterly worsted, the old women took to flight, though the girl Dorothy kept up a Parthian fire of strong invective. Miss Brett returned to her own place, and, sinking down once more into her easy-chair, laughed till the tears ran down her rugged cheeks.

She lived among the poor and knew their lives. Jack Skellett had that day returned from sea. His mother's cottage was upon his homeward road. He had gone in and, finding a warm welcome, had forgotten all about his wife expecting him. With his usual good-nature, now increased by family affection and the sentiment of home-coming, he had asked his mother and his grandmother, his two aunts and his cousin Dorothy to have a drink; and as the charms of Easterwick were limited to a small public-house, he had led his family-party into Searmouth, which could boast of eight and thirty licensed houses, to make what he called a day of it. His mother and his granny and his aunts! Could anything more innocent, more purely dutiful, be well imagined? But Miss Brett frowned when she remembered the girl Dorothy, who had probably been made drunk for the first time.

She had come through harsh experience to the belief that all the older people were quite hopeless. Though

she reasoned with them from a sense of duty, in her heart she viewed their failings with a cold indulgence. All her warmth was for the young. Her hopes were always on the children, decreasing gradually from a passionate delight in babies to a sad solicitude for girls and boys of twenty-one. For all, both old and young, she had a kindness. No curate ever worked among the poor as she did; no relieving-officer was ever half so thorough in investigating claims of need.

Miss Brett put on the kettle for her tea. She liked events, and had acquired a curious sympathy for all the sins and follies which it was her business to denounce and punish when she could. Coming from the sick-bed of a poor old man, the soul of piety, that afternoon, she had been much depressed until Jack Skellett's escapade came to revive her spirits. It was a good thing Vera Plowman had not seen the group of roisterers, or she would have deluged them with tracts and prayers for months to come, doing no good. Vera Plowman was the rector's daughter, a "girl" past thirty, of whose goodness there was no dispute, though some might doubt her knowledge of realities. Miss Brett had a sincere regard for Vera Plowman, which made her anxious to ward off from her the shock which certain facts give to religious optimism. As for the rector, dear old man, he was past interference, though nothing in the natural world had power to shock him. He was a folklorist and wealthy, and his one idea of helping people appeared to be to dole out money recklessly. Loving them both, Miss Brett stood forth between the rector and the people's greed, just as she stood between the rector's daughter's goodness and the people's sins; defending thus the one oasis in her struggling life, for only at the rectory could she find those fair illusions which she needed on occasion for her mental comfort.

She was dining at the rectory that very evening. Clad in a gray silk dress quite out of fashion, high-necked and with a collar of old lace, protected by a waterproof,

an umbrella and goloshes, she tramped a mile through muddy lanes and up the rectory drive.

Miss Plowman, in full evening dress, was sitting writing with her back towards her when, divested of her dripping outer shell, she came into the large, bright drawing-room. The white-haired rector rose to greet her, bidding her draw near the fire, which she was glad to see, though it was summer technically.

"What tidings from Bœotia?" he inquired; Bœotia being his pet name for his parishioners.

Miss Brett began the story of Jack Skellett's outbreak, while Mr. Plowman sat and rubbed his hands before the blaze. The narrative was interrupted by the call to dinner, but was continued at the rector's own request as soon as they were free from the attendance of the maidservant. The old man was both interested and amused. He said:—

"You know, of course, that our folk here are a peculiar people. There is a stronger mixture of Norse blood in Easterwick and Searmouth than can be traced among the villagers inland. In fact, one is led to suspect a regular colony of rovers. I once began a monograph upon the subject, but had to give it up for lack of real material. They do not intermarry with the inland folk. . . . Now, this behaviour of young Skellett in celebrating his return from sea by wassail with his most respected relatives suggests the feast which the home-coming viking gave his family. There is something dear to the imagination, and certainly extenuating, in his choice of boon companions."

"Father, how can you!" cried Miss Plowman wildly.

"Jenny had a rod in pickle for him, I could see," Miss Brett continued. "She's a capable young woman. She comes of a horrid family, those Woollings, but her cottage is a miracle of cleanness. I have a liking for Jenny, and I hope she'll give it him."

"I should think she'd drive him from the house till he repented," said Miss Plowman.

"I expect she'll keep him in the house for days," replied Miss Brett.

Her expectation was belied, however, for that very night when she regained her cottage, having been escorted thither by the rectory gardener with a lantern and a stick, she had but had the time to get a light and doff her outdoor clothes when a knock came at the door, and Jenny's weeping voice implored :—

"May I come in, miss? I'm in trouble."

"It's Jack," the tall girl sobbed, when she was in the room. "He've gone and left me, 'cause I told 'un what I thought about sich going's-on."

"He'll come back, never fear!" replied Miss Brett consolingly. "When once he's sober, he will see what a big fool he's been to waste his hard-earned money on drink."

"That ain't the money," blubbered Jenny, "what I'm vexed for. 'Tis that crafty little slink, Dot Cox, his cousin what he took along wi' 'un. I taxed 'un with it, and he railed at me like one on-sensed, and swore as it was har he'd have, and not a stingy bitch like me. And out he go and slam the door. And—oo!—oo!—now I'm sure he've gone to har—ta dutty hussy, what've tried to catch 'un. . . ."

After hearing the outpourings of her woe till she grew calmer, Miss Brett led Jenny back to her own cottage, and there remained till long past midnight, trying to soothe the weeping girl with the assurance that Jack was not so wicked nor so foolish as she thought him. When his brain cleared he would be penitent, and ready to return at the first word of kindness.

"I 'ont go runnin' arter 'un, mind yow! I ha' my pride," said Jenny fiercely.

"I'll go myself and talk to him to-morrow."

"Ah, if yow would!"

Miss Brett believed that the girl's fears were moonshine, and left her without serious anxiety on her account. When she recrossed the green at last to her own dwelling, the rain had stopped and stars shone calmly down upon

the sleeping village which the wind still buffeted. She took the change as a good omen. But in the morning, when she went to Mrs. Cox's house to seek the truant, she was told that Jack had gone, and so had Dorothy. Good Mrs. Cox denounced her nephew and her entertainer of the day before as "Nawthun' better nor a willan—may ta Loord reward 'un!" while Mrs. Skellett, Jack's mamma, emerging from next door, kept saying: "Ta Loord's will be done."

Miss Brett had no opinion of those women, and did not stay in parley with them longer than the time required to ascertain beyond a doubt that Jack and Dot had gone together. Then she went back to Jenny, who, to her immense relief, when once she knew that Jack had really left her for that "dirt," assumed a resolute and calm demeanour.

"You can force him to support you by the law," Miss Brett informed her.

"I'd ha' to catch 'un farst," was Jenny's answer. "No, miss, I guess as I'll let well alone. I'd like to keep on this here little place, bein' as I've made it nice. I won't go back to mother's if ye paid me. Sich a pigstye! If I could get some washin' and maybe a job o' charin' now and then I could dew nicely, better'n I ever done along o' Jack."

"I'll do my best to help you," said Miss Brett.

She liked the spirit of the girl in taking Jack's desertion of her as an insult, not a woe; that seeming to her mind the only way for women to regard the wrongs which they receive from men and keep their dignity, which has to be maintained unless the race is to go down. Moreover, Jenny, though past twenty, was within the age which Miss Brett counted hopeful and still lovable. She helped her, therefore, to the utmost of her power, and recommended her sad case to Vera Plowman.

Miss Plowman's goodness proved at once responsive. Regarding marriage as a sacred mystery, the rector's daughter saw Jack Skellett's crime almost as sacrilege.

Her spirit yearned towards the victim of so foul a wrong. She went next day to call on Mrs. Skellett junior; and Miss Brett, from her own window, could observe their interview, which took place at the cottage door. Jenny was no fool. Playing up to Vera's tone of deep religious sympathy, she gave a most pathetic smile and dropped a touching little curtsey, every line of her tall figure advertising martyred innocence. As usual she was beautifully clean and neat.

Miss Plowman fell in love with her at once, and after that came almost every day to see her. Occasional work was found for Jenny at the rectory, and all the servants' washing was entrusted to her. Miss Brett was secretly amused at the infatuation, knowing that Jenny Skellett was no saint. She was a little shocked when, one day at the rectory, the rector's daughter showed her the Madonna of a Spanish master, inquiring, "Who does that remind you of?" and when she could not think, suggesting: "Jenny Skellett. She is so good and patient, and I call her lovely," said Miss Plowman fervently. And then the resignation and the dignity of her maimed life. I feel that one can never truly realise."

Miss Brett could not but smile a little at her friend's delusion, but did not think it proper to impugn it so long as it befriended one who was in real need. But that delusion long outlasted Jenny's want. Months after Jack's elopement she was still the same pure martyr in Miss Plowman's eyes, although Miss Brett knew that she had consoled herself a hundredfold, earning the reputation of a village Messalina, while working hard and having none of the untidiness which girls of such a character are wont to show. Miss Brett, who spoke her mind to all offenders, taxed young Jenny Skellett with her naughtiness, and got the flat denial she expected; qualified, however, by "And if I had! What then, I'd like to know. That's my affair. I'm independent. I don't ask no one for advice, nor yet for money."

Jenny's diction had improved through intercourse with Vera Plowman.

Without a doubt she was a person of decided character; the pity was that her decisions were all wrong.

When Vera called upon Miss Brett one day and told her, as a sacred and pathetic fact, that Jenny Skellett was with child, Miss Brett had difficulty in suppressing the remarks which nature prompted her to make on the occasion. But a girl—they called her that though she was thirty-three—who could ascribe to sailor Jack's paternity a child which was not likely to be born till twelve months after he had left the place—was not of age to hear the sinful truth. So Miss Brett held her tongue before Miss Plowman, speaking out to Jenny at their next encounter, when she adjured her to make a full confession to her benefactress, and repent.

"Why, that'd kill her," was the scornful answer, "she's that innocent. She'd have a fit or suffen, and I'm fond of her, and then I should feel fit to kill myself. I'm not a-goin' to kill my babe afore it's born, for you, miss, nor for nobody. The way I'm in, sich strife'd be the death o' me."

Miss Brett was driven in her secret conscience to admit the presence of a sort of natural right on Jenny's side. Besides, the girl had passed beyond the stage which Miss Brett viewed as possible salvation to that which she regarded with the vast indulgence of despair. So, after that attempt to move her to confess her sin to Vera privately, she gave up the adventure, not without relief. The village, as she knew, was grinning at Miss Plowman's innocence, but everybody felt, as she did, loth to smirch it: for there was something exquisite about poor Vera's chaste excitement, her preparations for the birth, her holy rapture with the infant when it came and when, as godmother, she rocked it in her arms beside the font.

"She would drop the poor little wretch on the pavement if I told her it is what they call a child of shame," Miss Brett reflected as she watched her at the ceremony;

with some degree of scorn, for she herself was of opinion that the human race began afresh with every new-born child, so great was her delight in infants of whatever parentage. " It is best to leave her in a fool's delusion, where she does no harm."

The months went by and Jenny Skellett was once more expecting an addition to her family. At the time when her new hope of increase became apparent to the casual observer, Vera Plowman, as it happened, was away upon a visit to some cousins in " the Shires," as the whole of England outside Anglia is called in Easterwick. There was much discussion in the village as to whether it were better that she should be told the news on her arrival, or be left to find out for herself.

" She can't never think as this one be Jack Skellett's, for simple as she be," said Mrs. Rumbelow to Kate, a housemaid of the rectory, when the latter stood to gossip at the former's gate on her afternoon out, " yow marn spake freely this time."

The housemaid quite agreed on the necessity, but doubted, when it came to action, whether she would ever dare to speak such tidings to Miss Plowman's face, without she gave her some kind of a lead or opening.

Miss Plowman came and, on the very afternoon of her arrival, she happened to ask Kate for news of Jenny Skellett.

" She don't go out to work just now, and for good reason," said the housemaid, blushing. Everybody blushed before Miss Plowman's goodness.

" What do you mean, Kate ? " said the mistress sharply.

" Well, miss," replied the damsel, blushing furiously and with a manner of defiance, " since you ask me, there's another baby on the way."

" Goodness me ! Has Jack been home then ? " asked Miss Plowman, wondering.

" No, miss, and that's the fact," was the succinct reply.

It took some seconds for Miss Plowman's mind to

grasp the new and horrible ideas which this reply presented to it. When she did catch their import, she was mightily indignant, exclaiming :—

" Kate, how can you say such things. I fear you are a very wicked girl. I don't believe a word of your most slanderous suggestion."

" It's only what all Easterwick is saying," murmured Kate in contrite tones.

" Jenny Skellett ! It's impossible. I can't and won't believe it. I shall go and ask her. It is a cruel shame to say such things behind her back."

" Folks say 'em to her face, miss," said the housemaid stoutly.

" Well, I won't believe it."

Half an hour later, Miss Plowman, very upright, very pale, traversed the village green, with the appearance of one dead but for the sense of duty. Miss Brett caught sight of her and, noting the direction of her march, put on her hat and dashed out in pursuit. It was to save poor Vera's life she thus pursued her, saying to herself : "Jenny at bay will kill her. She will die."

Miss Plowman knocked one rap at Mrs. Skellett's door, which opened instantly, revealing Jenny, brazen.

" Is it true what I have heard about you, Jenny ? " the rector's daughter asked in solemn and reproachful tones—" her church voice," Mrs. Skellett said when she described it afterwards.

" I'm sure I don't know what you've heard, miss ! " was the saucy answer as Jenny stood with crimson face and arms akimbo, the tell-tale figure much in evidence.

" Why, Jenny, that you are—you are——" Miss Plowman gulped convulsively with flaming cheeks and downcast eyes—" that you are going to have another baby ? "

" That's quite right. miss."

" Well, all I can say is, I call it simply *disgusting* ! "

Then Jenny's tongue was loosed. The word disgusting seemed to her offensive language deserving a retort, lady or no lady. She poured out words such as

poor Vera Plowman had never heard addressed to any one before, concluding, with a high-pitched laugh and in a mincing tone intended to take off the lady's speech :—

" Oh, no, indeed, miss. That ain't disgustin', not at all. That's only nater ! "

Miss Brett, while hurrying to the rescue, overheard this passage, which took less time in fact than in narration. She was in time to seize poor Vera's arm, just as she turned away from the cottage door which, for a final insult, had been slammed in her face ; and to conduct the injured creature back across the green, supporting her with strength and sympathy. It relieved her greatly to discover, which she did not do until they reached the rectory gate, that the tremors which kept agitating Vera's frame were due to anger. If the views the rector's daughter then expressed concerning Jenny had been heard by Jenny in the flesh they would have cowed her utterly.

" I'm going straight to father," Vera said, when they had reached the house. " She must not stay in Easterwick. I'll never rest again till I have punished her for her deceit and her disgraceful, brazen rudeness. Such a creature ! "

Miss Brett escorted her into the rector's presence, but, at sight of her father, Miss Plowman suddenly and unaccountably gave way to sorrow and could only say, " You tell him ! " sobbing helplessly.

" A very rude, ill-mannered person," said the rector, when he heard Miss Brett's account of the affair. " We have undoubtedly been much deceived in her. It is always disconcerting to detect hypocrisy in any one whom one has loved and tried to benefit."

" But, father, I must see her punished ; she must leave the place ! " cried Vera, stamping. " Miss Brett has not repeated half she said to me, the words she used. No woman could repeat them. They are too defiling."

" I don't see how I am to punish her," replied the rector. " I am not her landlord. And when a woman

is about to have a child is not the moment to be hard on her, no matter what her crimes. That is acknowledged, I believe, in every law."

"Ah, how much better if she died before the child was born!"

"It might be!" said her father seriously; "but one cannot tell. Heaven only knows what fate may hold in store. And so, since our knowledge of what is to be is merely speculative or conjectural, we let people live even though we may think ill of them, and suffer children to be born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward. What you have told me of this woman's character, Miss Brett, is very interesting—her cleanliness, her industry, her perfect independence of the various fathers of her children. It bears upon the subject of an article which I have long been writing upon—matriarchy—which seems, as far as we know, to have been the earliest form of family life for humankind. It is strange that this young woman should revert to it, no doubt from some obscure, primeval instinct. I should like to call on her and ask her a few questions, but I suppose it would not do in my position."

"Hardly!" exclaimed Miss Brett.

"Father, how can you, upon such a subject?" wailed his daughter, once more bursting into tears.

For some time Vera could not bear the sight of Jenny Skellett, who, for her part, had no wish to meet Miss Plowman face to face, feeling ashamed of her indecent outburst in that lady's presence, which all the neighbours blamed as wanton cruelty. Miss Brett suspected that they each still nursed a secret fondness for the other; in other words, that their consuming present hatred was but a variation of their former love. For such mutual attractions she considered are not all delusion on the one hand and hypocrisy upon the other, but must partake of natural inclination if they last a month. She knew that Jenny was forever in Miss Plowman's mind, and Miss Plowman in Jenny's. The sight of each, though in the distance, put to flight the other.

One afternoon Miss Brett received a visit from the rector, a most unusual honour, for nowadays he seldom went beyond his sheltered garden. He had come down in the wagonette to visit a sick woman who had been a servant at the rectory in former days; and before driving home came to his friend for gossip and a cup of tea. Miss Brett was much delighted, for she loved the scholarly old man, with all his limitations and defections as a parish priest.

"The most extraordinary thing," he said, as he sat down in her small living-room and looked around him with a gratified expression. "I fully meant to take my Bible down to read to poor dear Anne; but by mistake I took a very learned book on necromancy—I will show it to you presently—which happened to be also on my study table. When I was in Anne's room I noticed my mistake and told her of it; but she, poor soul, had set her heart upon my reading to her, and begged me so to read 'a bit,' no matter what, that I read her part of a most interesting chapter about evil spirits and the charms by which they were invoked; and after I had finished she declared that it had done her good. Now that is really curious, seeming to indicate that it is the modulation of the human voice, and not the meaning of the words, which soothes sick persons."

Miss Brett was more amused than shocked. She asked to see the book. He gave it to her with the words: "A valuable work." And then he asked her kindly to point out to him the dwelling-place of Jenny Skellett—"the matriarch," he called her—from the window. She did so, and he stood in contemplation of it.

"The cottage and the garden look uncommonly well cared for," he remarked at length. "I should much like to have in mind the likeness of the matriarch herself. She used, I know, to work up at the rectory; but I never noticed her, being quite unaware at the time that she was anything out of the common. Now there are one or two points in her case which need elucidating. Does she make the men—her husbands, we will say, in terms

of matriarchy—work for her? . . . You say she does? —in their off-time? So I supposed. Now comes the question: do they work for her together in some kind of order or rotation like the members of a guild, or separately and unknown to one another? If there were proof of their collaboration—even in the case of only two of them—it would constitute a very interesting modern instance, and would support a theory I am propounding in my little work. I should be glad, too, if you could discover for me other local cases of women living a hard-working life under the same or similar conditions."

"My dear Mr. Plowman!" cried Miss Brett in comic horror. "You talk as if your one desire was to have women live in such a way—as if you would create such cases if you could, to suit your theory."

"No," said the rector gravely. "I should not do that. For cases fostered or promoted I could not admit as genuine."

It was at this point of their conversation, as they stood together at the window, that Miss Brett gave a start and cried:—

"Why, gracious me!"

"What is it?" asked the rector, always interested.

"Why, there's Jack Skellett crossing the grass by Kersey's woodshed—the missing husband of your matriarch!"

"Never! You don't say so! How extremely interesting! I wonder now if he will join the guild of husbands, or stalk apart in patriarchal pride—not monogamic, strictly, as I understand."

"I wonder how he dare come back," exclaimed Miss Brett. "I am afraid there will be trouble in the parish."

"You think he will make war upon the guild. Then he had better go away again. I do not like the look of the young man at all. Please, dear Miss Brett, keep me informed of all that happens, either personally or through Vera, who, although a true reporter, is rather narrowly ecclesiastical in her opinions, don't you think? Her

conversation sometimes savours of white sheets and guttering tapers and the Inquisition—darker ages than our own!"

On the next day, having made inquiries of Mrs. Rumbelow and Mrs. Cox, Jack Skellett's aunts, Miss Brett was in the act of setting out to bear the news which she had thus collected to the rectory, when Vera Plowman came up to her cottage door, saying with bated breath:—

"Jack Skellett's home again, I hear from father. Is it true?"

"Quite true," replied Miss Brett.

"I am so glad!" cried Vera, her eyes shining with a supernatural light. "For Jenny's sake."

Miss Brett was quite unable to perceive a cause for joy; she could only guess that Vera, with her strong ideas on marriage, expected Jack to punish Jenny in some signal way. It was with a sense of cruelty that she replied:—

"Dorothy Cox is with him, figuring as Mrs. Jack. By some means or other he's got money; and they think of taking a small farm."

"Oh, but that must not be, when Jenny is his wife. She can and must reclaim him and his money, and give that other creature the disgrace she has so richly earned."

"She can hardly do that, after all that's happened on her side."

"Oh, but she must try!" said Vera earnestly. "It may be the saving of both of them. They ought to let bygones be bygones, and forgive each other."

"What will become of Dot and her child in that case?" asked Miss Brett, amused but much bewildered by these swift decisions.

"I don't know what would become of her and I don't care, but I suppose that she could look after herself as did the lawful wife whom she has wronged so cruelly. It is a little difficult, I know. But married people ought

to be united. And it is our clear duty to unite them if we can."

Miss Brett could hardly trust her ears, when Vera said, after a minute, spent in rosy-red reflection, "I have more than half a mind to call on Jenny," nor her eyes, five minutes later, when they told her, looking through the window, that Vera, who had just that minute said good-bye to her, was making straight across the green for Jenny Skellett's door. Possessed by natural curiosity as well as by a generous impulse to protect poor Vera, whom she regarded as a child at play with fire, she quickly donned a coat and hat and followed.

"Of course he's still your husband," Vera was remarking sweetly, when Miss Brett arrived. Her godchild clung about her knee; the other baby, nearly a year old, was sprawling in a corner on the floor and Jenny was expecting yet another, or Miss Brett's eyes had deceived her more than once of late.

"I hadn't thought about him that way, miss, and that's the fact," smiled Jenny.

"Oh, but you must, dear! It is the time to let bygones be bygones."

"That's just what I was thinkin', miss, and so I've been to see her."

"Her? . . . You mean that dreadful woman? . . . Oh, how could you?"

"It was about the washin', miss. I called about their custom, and I'm glad to say I got it, though there was several besides me a-cravin' for it. You see, Jack Skellett and his present wife, they're well-to-do. . . ."

"You mustn't call that wicked girl his wife. I'm sure it's criminal, and there are laws against it. . . . Whatever did she say?"

"Just what you did, miss, about our lettin' bygones be bygones."

"But Jack Skellett is your husband and not hers at all. You were joined to him by law and by the church. And now that you have both sinned equally. . . ."

"That may be so with gentry, but we take more

freedom," Jenny interrupted, not without respect. "I reckon all that down among the bygones."

"But you must claim your legal rights. If you will not assert them, I shall do so for you."

"You'd better let things be, Miss Vera, though I thank you kindly. Why should I mob him? I've lived free myself."

"You should not take a pride in all that, Jenny."

Flushed with a high and laudable resolve, Vera departed. Once more she carried a petition to her father, and Miss Brett escorted her into the rector's presence, wishing to hear that father's views upon this strange crusade.

They found the old man seated at his study table writing, surrounded by high shelves of learned books. He listened to his daughter's story, poured out in a torrent, with concern.

"It is a muddle in the parish, I agree," he murmured. "But there is really nothing we can do effectually. In dealing with primitive races the first rule laid down by every one who ever had to do with them is this: respect their marriage customs."

"But, father, this is not some foreign country; this is England. The marriage customs here are governed by the Church's law."

The rector smiled a smile of triumph and uprose. Going to a certain bookshelf he took down four bulky volumes and placed them on the table, saying:—

"My love, if you will wait a minute I will prove to you on good authority that the Church in every age has made concessions tacitly to local custom, and particularly in this matter of sexual relations."

"Father, how dare you," cried Miss Plowman wildly, and she fled the room.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

THIS is the story of one Rogers, who was curate-in-charge of the parish of Millingham in Suffolk at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as I heard it from the lips of the present rector of Millingham, when we sat together by his study fire one winter's evening, with a strong wind howling in the fir-trees round the house.

From the year 1725 to the year 1850 Millingham knew little of its rectors, all of them pluralists, who lived elsewhere, occasionally at the other end of England. Each visited the parish only once, to be inducted, and except for an occasional subscription to some local charity, gave no further heed to it except to draw the income of the living and to pay a curate, who inhabited the modest parsonage, performed the services, visited the poor, and reared a family as best he could upon a stipend varying at different times between the sums of forty-five and eighty pounds a year. The curate's lot in life was far from gay. His education and the relative refinement of his wife, where these existed, raised him above the lesser farmers, with whom alone his means allowed him to associate on equal terms. The greater farmers patronised, the gentry more or less ignored him ; the labourers respected when they could, and occasionally, if tradition may be trusted, loved the man. Mr. Rogers was the last but one of these curates-in-charge at Millingham, and he is still remembered in the parish as a " character." He hired a large part of the glebe and farmed it so successfully that a neighbour, going round the fields with him, and thinking favourably to impress the cleric by a pious thought, remarked that he had great cause to be thankful to Almighty God.

" The Almighty ha'n't got nawn to dew wi' that, bo' ! "

grunted Parson Rogers. "I gie thanks to that old muck-cart over yonder."

He spoke the broadest dialect when in the fields, and legend has it that he did so in the pulpit too. Yet that he had some scholarship is proved by the document in his handwriting lately discovered in the parish chest; wherein, embedded in Johnsonian English, lie classical quotations, both correct and apposite. And that he was a man of rigid principles is shown by his behaviour to his daughter Margery.

This Margery was beautiful and wilful in her youth. She flouted all the well-to-do young farmers who paid court to her, till gossip murmured that she had ideas above her station, and would come to grief. She was a tomboy and extremely fond of riding. One of her suitors offered her a hunter. Her father would not hear of her accepting such a present.

"If you accept the horse, you must accept the man," her father told her.

There ensued a furious scene, and in the end, as they relate, "he took and give her a good hidin'"—a privilege of fathers in those good old days. Margery, after that, declared rebellion. She vowed that she would run away with the first man who offered. The parson locked her in her bedroom underneath the eaves, while he and his three sons with friendly labourers kept watch around the house by day and night. One or two of her admirers, who attempted rescue, received broken heads. Yet, after but a week's imprisonment, she got away unrescued—through the human weakness of the man on guard beneath her casement, it is said. However that may be, she walked five miles in rain, bare-headed and without a cloak, to Malby Hall, where young Squire Malby and some boon companions sat up late over their wine. Malby had never been among her open suitors, but rumour says the pair were deep in love.

Loud was the welcome she received from the gay gentlemen, who wrapped her in Malby's cloak and set her on the table while they toasted her: and before

daybreak the next morning she and Andrew Malby were riding side by side upon the London road. Parson Rogers called the neighbours to his house and publicly and solemnly erased her name and surname from the sacred list which had been kept for generations on the fly-leaf of a Bible. He thus disowned her as his daughter, and he swore that, were she never so repentant, came she to never such a depth of misery, she should not pass the threshold of his door again.

But Margery, against the general expectation, was not ruined. Malby was young and deep in love, and she was masterful. The pair were duly married up in London ; and thus the daughter of rough Parson Rogers, the crony of small farmers and the ploughman's oracle, became a lady of condition in the neighbourhood. Malby, they say, sought reconciliation with his father-in-law, since Margery herself was anxious to be reconciled. But Parson Rogers kept his vow and his displeasure.

"I ha' nawthun' agen yow, Squire," he told his daughter's husband. "You acted arter your kind and in the pride o' life. But she's an ondutiful child : she disobeyed her lawful father ; I ha' done wi' har."

He devoted himself more than ever to his farm-work. When called once to a deathbed from the harvest-field, he is reported to have said, as he slipped on his coat with anxious glances at the sky, "If there come rain to-morrer old Betty Mutt's soul'll ha' to answer for this barley ! That impatient ! " And his farming prospered so that, from being merely a poor curate like his predecessors, he became a personage consulted by the farmers round, and thus, as he was always Parson Rogers, the Church took honour from the agriculturist. Little by little he increased his holdings until he farmed a matter of two hundred acres, and in those times must have made an income of about four hundred pounds a year. Yet still he craved more land, not, they declare, through avarice, but from desire to make experiments upon a larger scale.

There is an eighty-acre farm—" a four-hoss farm," in local parlance—distant about a mile from Millingham

across the marshes, called at the present day the Neutral Farm, because of an uncertainty about the ownership. At that time it was common knowledge that the place was Millingham Church property, though for several years it had been occupied by a tenant of the Earl of Bannockburn, the chief landlord in the district, and the absentee rectors of Millingham may or may not have had the rent from it. Mr. Rogers never doubted but they had received it. The agent of Lord Bannockburn, a Mr. Smith, performed some acts of ownership upon this farm ; which coming to the ears of Mr. Rogers, he was mightily incensed, the more so that he long had coveted those eighty acres. One morning he bestrode his chestnut cob, and rode away into " the Shires," as Suffolk people say, to see his rector, who resided in a stately mansion near to Ely. The interview was satisfactory, it may be presumed, for immediately on his return he called on Mr. Smith, the agent aforesaid, and peremptorily forbade him so much as to cut a stick upon the farm in question ; and on the following Sunday, in the pulpit, he spoke vehemently from the well-known text, " Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark." His lordship's agent happened to be of the congregation. There was a quarrel after service in the churchyard. Smith vowed that he would have the parson pilloried ; the parson vowed to visit Smith in prison. They parted in great wrath on either side. The curate, as the rector's representative, claimed owner's rights on the disputed land, gave notice to the tenant that the rent in future should be paid to him, prevented Lord Bannockburn's representative from intruding on the property, and even spoke of instituting legal proceedings to recover the worth of the fall of timber in the past ten years. The agent of Lord Bannockburn breathed vengeance. He sent letter after letter to the earl in London, informing him of what was going on. At length after some three months of correspondence the earl himself appeared upon the scene.

He was the second Earl of Bannockburn, to whom old

people in that part of Suffolk still allude in conversation as the wicked earl, not, perhaps, without a certain relish for his wickedness. He was popular, one learns, among his tenants, chiefly because he put the agent in his place. They say that Lady Bannockburn—long-suffering woman—never in her life set eyes on Brandish Hall, the Suffolk mansion whither her despotic lord came every autumn for the shooting, with his harem.

Yet though he had that reputation with regard to women, he was not in any sense besotted or a slave to them; preserved a head for business and affairs of state; and had a perfect passion for the land, by no means rare among the men of fashion of that day. When down at Brandish, he would take an interest in the estate, walking about like any common man. He had consulted Mr. Rogers upon more than one occasion, putting his questions with a shrewd intelligence which, together with his condescension in thus questioning a homespun man, had made a strong impression in his favour on the parson's mind. To any mention of his lordship's wickedness Mr. Rogers would reply: "I daresay you and me would be no better in his place, bo' t'." In short, he had felt flattered by his lordship's notice; and he was no doubt still more flattered by a visit from the earl one winter's morning, when his lordship deigned to sit beside his kitchen fire and quaff two bumpers of his home-brewed ale. A portrait in the gallery at Brandish, painted about that time, presents Lord Bannockburn as a square, upright man, of middle age, his face clean shaven, high-nosed, with a haughty look about the eyes, thin-lipped and square of chin—an uninviting face, but one which had some considerable charm in animation, so tradition says.

"What is all this I hear from Mr. Smith?" inquired the visitor. "I gather that he has behaved towards you with unpardonable rudeness, in his zeal for what he deems my interests. I understand from him that you claim the Valley Farm on behalf of the rector of Millingham. Is that so? Well, on what now do you base the claim?"

"On title-deeds and other documents in our possession, and on common knowledge," was the parson's answer.

"That sounds conclusive," said the earl, reflecting. "I personally have no knowledge of the matter. I spent last evening in the muniments room at Brandish, trying to find some document relating to it. There is none. Therefore, it may be, as you say, that the farm is not my property. But I must confess that I have always understood that it formed part of the estate. My father used to boast that he had brought this Suffolk property into a ring fence, and that farm runs a wedge into the heart of it. Moreover, Smith informs me that we have received the rent unquestioned since he has been agent here. I take it you are sure that what you say is true?"

"I hold the proof, my lord."

"Then I am truly sorry for a misapprehension which must have worn the look of robbery. I beg that you will pardon Smith for his mistaken zeal on my behalf. He knew no more than I did that the case was so. We must refund the money we have taken wrongfully."

"That's right, I reckon," replied Mr. Rogers. "But, seeing as it's a mistake, I don't suppose the rector'll be that hard upon your lordship."

"We must come to some arrangement." The earl rose to go. He said as if upon an afterthought:—

"Perhaps you would be good enough to let me see the documents which you have mentioned at some future time?"

"If you'll step up with me to the church this minute I'll show them to your lordship now, and welcome!"

"I have no time this morning, I regret to say. Well, let me see. How best can we arrange it? I'm only down at Brandish for a day or two, and I am quite alone. Will you come up to-morrow afternoon and dine with me? A lonely meal is indigestion, I find. We will have Smith in after dinner to discuss this business, and you will kindly bring the documents with you."

The parson answered: "Without fail, my lord."

In the narrative which he has left of these events,

Mr. Rogers has described with bitter humour his immense elation at this mark of favour from the great man of the neighbourhood: how he rode about the parish on his cob, informing people casually in the way of small talk that he was to dine with the earl alone at Brandish on the morrow; how he carefully forgot to state the business purpose of the visit because it might take something from the honour in the estimation of his neighbours; and how, upon the following morning, he unlocked the church, opened the parish chest and found the documents relating to the Valley Farm. These he put together in a "skin portfolio" of his, which he carried with him when he rode to Brandish in the afternoon, "arrayed," as he is pleased to tell us, "in my decent coat of black, short cassock, my black breeches, silken hose and shoes with silver buckles, my three-cornered hat." He describes, too, how upon the road one after another of his flock accosted him, beseeching him to pray the Lord (meaning, of course, the earl) on their behalf. One had lost a cow and was in straits for money; another was behindhand with his rent. He readily agreed to be their intercessor, and heart-felt blessings followed him along the lanes.

His account of his arrival at the hall is florid and minute. It is considered as the grandest moment of his earthly life. "The palace," he declares, "though half shut up, revealed to me the utmost dignity of human life. A janitor, resplendent as the peacock in his pride, conducted me through lofty halls and sounding galleries, furnished with rare works of art and foreign treasures, into a chamber where I deemed that I had lost my sense of hearing, so sudden did my feet fall noiseless on thick carpets."

Here he was met by the earl, when, as he says, "surrounding splendours vanished and were seen no more." He had eyes for nothing but "that noble presence, that most gracious smile."

"I am glad to see that you have brought those papers," was his host's remark. "We will go through them at our leisure after dinner."

The guest could only bow and shuffle with his feet.

The dinner was "an epic feast"; the wine was "nectar"; the conversation of the earl "a mirror of high life." His lordship condescended to refer to Mrs. Malby kindly, blaming the parson's obstinacy in refusing to receive her. Malby, he frankly said, had been a fool to marry her; but, as things proved, he might have done much worse. "He married against my advice and that of all his friends. But he did marry her. I don't see what you have to grumble at," the host declared.

"It is her rebellion against my authority, my lord. Filial obedience is a sacred duty."

"But when filial disobedience has endowed you with a wealthy son-in-law, I call you a curmudgeon not to sing *Te Deum*," the earl cried.

At this point Parson Rogers interrupts his narrative in order to applaud his lordship's freedom; implying that had the earl expressed his mind less plainly to one so vastly his inferior, being who he was, he might have been suspected of duplicity and all those hollow arts by which the great cajole the small. His manner was devoid of affectation. "He spoke to me as one whom he had known from childhood; he even swore at me; leading me to admire his magnanimity and candour no less than the effulgence of his worldly state. At his lordship's pressing invitation I drank freely of the various wines, the best I ever swallowed or am like to taste—too freely, though I thought not at the time."

After sitting at the dinner-table for two hours, Lord Bannockburn arose and led his guest into another room, where a great fire was burning underneath a carven mantelpiece. On entering this room the parson's head swam and he stumbled. "His lordship in the kindest manner helped me to a chair."

"Smith is certain to be late," remarked the earl as he sat down. "We might glance through those papers before he arrives."

Mr. Rogers had carried the portfolio with him dutifully to the dinner-table and on into the room where he

now sat—a room which, to the best of his remembrance at the time of writing, was furnished entirely in black, but this impression, he confesses, "may be due to the event which there befell." He took up the portfolio and began to fumble with the strings.

"Wait!" cried his lordship, who then rose and rang a bell beside the chimney-place. "Bring the Madeira and two glasses," he commanded the domestic who came, as silent as a ghost, in answer to the summons.

"We may as well be comfortable while we do our business," said the earl, and Mr. Rogers, as he owns, felt deeply grateful, knowing well that never more, in all his earthly pilgrimage, would he taste such a Madeira.

He tells how slumber came upon him heavily, seeming an emanation of that baleful room. He had the sense of being plunged into the heart of some great, awful building such as a prison or a madhouse, far from human kind. This sensation he experienced repeatedly, and every time would start awake to see the glowing fire, and the earl engaged in a perusal of the documents concerning Valley Farm by the light of three tall candles set in silver candlesticks upon a desk or table at his back. The glimmer of the candle-flames enhanced the gloom around. The room was vast and lofty, illumined only by those candles and the glowing fire. He must, he thinks, have been to sleep in earnest for a moment when he was startled by the earl exclaiming:—

"Mr. Rogers!"

"Yes, my lord!" he faltered, sitting up in some confusion, asking pardon for his somnolence. The earl was on his feet.

"Mr. Rogers, I desire that you should witness what I am about to do. This document in my hand is the title-deeds you have been good enough to show me. Do you see and recognise it?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Thank you!"

His lordship went up to the fire, and placed the parchment in the centre of the glow, holding it with the tongs, till it was quite consumed.

"I was like paralysed, powerless to move. I sat and stared incredulously at the crime. I gasped: 'My lord! My lord! But Mr. Smith . . .'"

"Smith will not come," replied his lordship gravely. He bade me take another glass of wine and I obeyed mechanically, feeling in truth in great need of a cordial."

"These papers are the various leases and agreements which you brought to show me," said the earl. "Kindly witness this transaction as you did the other. . . . Don't look so scared, man. We are burning parchments. Gentlemen of your profession used to burn live human flesh not long ago."

The parson, paralysed as he described himself, "held down in my seat as by some unseen hand," saw all the documents consumed in the same manner.

"There is nothing else, I fancy," said the earl when this was done. "You have my leave to tell what you have seen to everybody, *if you dare.*"

This permission was accompanied by a terrific glance, "not menacing nor wholly scornful, but of power." And then the parson lost all consciousness. "I must have had a fit or something," he remarks, for once colloquial.

He was sent home honourably in the earl's own carriage, the coachman carrying a note to his son John announcing that his worthy father had been taken ill at Brandish Hall, and that Lord Bannockburn desired to be informed of the due progress towards recovery of one whose friendship he so highly valued. These circumstances, known to all in Millingham, increased the consequence of Mr. Rogers in the neighbourhood. Even now old country-folks will tell you how the earl esteemed plain Parson Rogers more than all the great folks.

The victim of deception was in bed two days. It was a week ere he felt strong enough to undertake the ride to Cambridgeshire in order to inform his rector of the crime he had been forced to witness. He was on the point of doing this, as he expressly tells us, when a letter reached him from his "noble patron," as he sometimes calls him—for Bannockburn presented him to a small

living of some fifty pounds a year, carrying with it the status of a vicar though without a residence—saying that the rector of Millingham had been informed already of his curate's recent illness and delusions, and was glad to hear of his complete recovery.

From that he understood that, if he rode to Ely, he would be treated as a madman, and his tale discounted. But as a man of conscience, and, moreover, vexed at being so completely duped by anybody, he was bent on doing something to defeat the earl. Accordingly he rode off, not to Ely, but to Malby Hall, and became in a manner reconciled to Margery, though still adhering strictly to the letter of his vow. He never let her come into his house, nor is there any reason to suppose she ever wished to do so. Andrew Malby, as the parson knew, cherished a grudge against Lord Bannockburn, for having once in London laid a vulgar bet concerning Margery. Having heard the story of the title-deeds, he readily agreed to claim the Valley Farm, which did in fact adjoin his property; and pressed the claim through lawyers with so much effect, that Bannockburn, aware of Mr. Rogers in the background, was glad to compromise the matter. The farm was declared neutral, to be held by each estate in turn for three-year periods, an arrangement which has lasted till the present day.

"My noble patron bore no malice for this plot of mine to rob him of some part of his ill-gotten gains," the parson writes. "Rather he seemed to value me the more for not submitting tamely to so great a wrong. It is thanks in a great measure to his lordship's influence, benevolently exercised in their behalf, that my three sons have reached the good positions which they now enjoy." One had a doctor's shop in Ipswich, another was employed upon Lord Bannockburn's estate, and the third, after rising to the rank of sergeant in a marching regiment, had a commission purchased for him by the same good angel.

The rapprochement with the Malbys did not last for long. The parson, living all alone—his sons had gone

into the world—fell soon into a drunken way of life, frequenting taverns and carousing with the neighbouring farmers, with the daughter of one of whom he contracted a second marriage in his sixty-seventh year. The bride was thirty-seven years his junior, but she seems to have been honestly attached to him. She took her wifely duties seriously, and for two years he was again respectable. It was in this interval, as he himself relates, that, troubled in his conscience by the crime of which he was in some sort an accomplice—and which he regards as "robbery of the poor"—though how the diversion of a certain sum of yearly rent from the pocket of the always absent rector of Millingham to that of the occasionally present Earl of Bannockburn can be said in any manner to affect the poor, it is not easy to perceive—troubled by the crime, I say, yet not caring to reveal the matter to a living soul after the benefits he had accepted from his noble patron, he determined, since he could not make amends, to leave at least a full confession of his guilt in writing. He looks back on his time of drunkenness as on a period of aberration. "A man," he says, "must face the truth, or he will lose his soul." But his young wife died in childbed, and in his grief on that occasion he drank hard once more. It is a matter of common knowledge that he fell off a plank into a ditch, and was drowned in about a foot and a half of mud and water, one night when staggering home from a carouse at that same Valley Farm concerning which his conscience had been so much exercised. The labourers from far and near flocked to his funeral, to which the Malbys sent their carriage and the earl a wreath.

"Now is not that a curious story?" said the present rector of Millingham, leaning forward in his chair to poke the fire and looking round at me. "Only a hundred years ago, and yet the life of which it tells is almost as remote from ours to-day as that of Timbuctoo."

I remarked that I was truly glad that times had changed.

"I don't know," mused the antiquary, gazing hard into the fire, "I don't know. At least at that time everybody in the country had his place and knew it. There was sycophancy, an exaggerated reverence for persons highly placed, but very little snobbishness, as we now understand the word. Now when I first unearthed that manuscript, I was full of it. I thought that every one in any way connected with the parson's narrative would be as pleased as I was at my great discovery. I went to the present Lord Bannockburn, and what do you suppose he said? He took an angry tone, and told me that if I thought to base a claim upon those papers, I should lose my money; that the alleged confession of a drunken parson, unauthenticated and unwitnessed, was no evidence. I laughed at him, protesting I had no designs, but only thought the story interesting in a human sense; which he at length agreed that it might be, to some people.

"I told the present Malbys all about it when dining at their house one evening. Mrs. Malby at the time professed to be profoundly interested, so did they all. When I told them that I wanted to include the contents of the manuscript in a little volume of parochial antiquities, every one in the drawing-room expressed delight at the idea. But the next day Colonel Malby came to see me here in private, and then I heard his real opinion of my project. It was impossible—atrocious. If I did such a thing I should be deservedly "cut" by every decent person in the neighbourhood. And what do you imagine was the ground of his objection? Simply this: that some of Parson Rogers's descendants are small farmers in the neighbourhood, and the Malbys do not wish to be connected with them in the public mind. 'One doesn't like to be reminded of a blot on one's escutcheon,' he observed heraldically.

"Of course I gave up all idea of publication, but really I don't know—I do not know that I should call the present state of our society greatly superior to that which Parson Rogers has described."

THE RISING TIDE

SOME people of the name of Briggs had taken Greenlands —the modern house whose lodge and iron gates, breaking a long extent of new oak fence, may be observed outside the village on the Chelmsford road—and, as usual in the country, there was curiosity. The local gentry, led by Lady Parasang (the dowager), decided after brief inspection that the new arrivals were "nice people," worthy of admission to their social circle. Mr. Briggs was a retired civil servant, an unobtrusive, perfectly well-mannered man, clean shaven, wearing pince-nez, a great reader. There were two girls at home, and a young boy at Rugby—a good school—and three quite little children in the nursery. But Mrs. Briggs it was who made the chief impression, for she did all the talking and she did it well; offending none of the polite traditions which govern the first call in quiet neighbourhoods still uninvaded by the class of householder who goes to London every day.

The villagers, however, who knew nothing of such shibboleths, reserved their judgment till the Briggses came their way; thinking it likely that, like many of the gentry, the new arrivals would prove sheer nonentities so far as local trade or gossip was concerned. But Mrs. Briggs had certain strong proclivities; and it was upon the villagers—"the poor" she called them—that she focussed her attention when once she had assured the social status of her house.

She was the daughter of a clergyman long since deceased, and as a girl had helped her father in his parish; thus acquiring in her youth the instinct of trained sheep-dogs for rounding up a flock wherever seen. And, idolising as she did her father's memory,

she was inclined to view the shepherds of to-day as hirelings only. At Holly Grove the vicar was an amiable man, but old and much averse to visiting. He did his duty in the church and school, and nothing more. An earnest worker was thus needed in the parish.

"I always think we have a duty to the poor," she told her daughter Ruby; "we ought to do our best to brighten and improve their lives."

And so the poor of Holly Grove, who had been left in peace for years, were presently astonished by the apparition of a comely dame, dressed out in serviceable tweeds and stick in hand, who knocked peremptorily at cottage doors and entered, smiling, followed by a nervous girl.

"How are you, Mrs. Sawnor?"—She had taken care to get the name quite right beforehand; "they think so much of that," she told her daughters—"I'm Mrs. Briggs from Greenlands. I hope you do not mind my dropping in like this; but I like to get acquainted with my neighbours. I always think we ought to hold together in a little place."

And she would go on to inquire the size and contents of the cottage, the names and ages of the children and the husband's earnings, with a resolute, unflinching kindness which compelled an answer even from a ruffled wife who thought her visit impudence, and the tightness of her coat and skirt indecent for so full a figure.

"Well, she have got a face!" said Mrs. Sawnor on a Saturday evening when she stood to make her weekly purchases in Dawson's shop. "She marches into my house as cool as cucumbers at tea-time, and asks the price of everything we had to eat. And yet you can't help answerin' and feelin' kind o' pleased until she've gone, she's that contagious!"

"Ah, you may say so, drat her," said another customer. "That make ye want to bob only to catch her eye. And I ain't bobbed to no one since I were a gel so high!"

Mrs. Dawson, capable and silent woman, safe

depository of the village secrets, tying up their parcels at the counter, said :—

" That's just her way, I reckon. She've been trained like that." She did not think it fitting to inform the gossips that she herself had suffered from the lady's inroad. She held herself above the cottage folk, so added simply : " You see, you han't been used to nothing of the kind. Some places get it regular. We've been more fortunate."

Indeed the peasant folk of Holly Grove had been so long a law unto themselves that they had come to call their simple lives their own, and looked to no one but themselves for comfort, guidance or amusement. That seemed a shocking state of things to Mrs. Briggs. The village was dismayed to hear that earnest lady inveigh against the vicar for neglect of duty, and announce her own intention to repair his errors by starting bible-classes, sewing-parties, clothing clubs. She was, as Mrs. Sawnor put it, " that contagious " that even while the women scoffed at the idea of such activities, they found themselves entangled in them, and even taking Mrs. Briggs's view that they were somehow good. The lady bountiful was charmed with the response to her reviving call.

" We must give them something nice for a reward," she told her daughters after the sewing-party and the bible-class had run a month. " They have nothing to amuse them in the winter evenings. We must get up something. You remember the old penny readings in dear Hedgeburgh ? "

Her daughter Jean, who had a joyous nature and, being seventeen, no social flair, begged earnestly for dancing in the village schoolroom. But Mrs. Briggs repelled the notion as unsuitable for people in that class of life. " Your grandfather," she told her daughter " disapproved of it. The morals of the poor were his incessant care—so much so that he would not let us go among them in low evening dress. I always think how wise he was in that. They have a different life to lead,

and different customs, which are best for them. And some things, he would often say, they cannot understand."

It was at length decided that the youthful Briggses—Ruby and Jean and Jack, who would be home from Rugby—should give an entertainment in the village schoolroom after Christmas, with what assistance they could get from other gentry of the neighbourhood.

"Poor things! It will be quite a treat for them," said Mrs. Briggs with pathos. "They have had nothing done for them at all for years. We can charge a shilling for the better seats—with just a few at eighteenpence for our own friends—and all the back ones can be sixpence. They always like to pay for things like that. Your grandfather said often that they have their pride, which it is our duty to respect and to preserve. We must not pauperise them."

Her daughters were delighted, not on grounds of public kindness, but because they both were fond of dressing up. Their mother promised to invite some London cousins, and Lady Parasang, approached, said she would have her house full at the time, and doubted not but she could furnish them with some performers. The scheme was to be kept a secret from the village. And so it was until the time drew near enough to make it necessary to provide for the arrangement of the schoolroom and erection of a stage. Then Lady Parasang, again approached, told Mrs. Briggs to seek advice of Mrs. Dawson at the village shop, a notionable woman who knew everything about the place.

"Get the right side of her," said Lady Parasang, "and you need give yourself no further worry. Tell her what you want, and she'll find men to do it. I have faith in her." Her ladyship went on to tell how once, when driving in her carriage, she had bowed to one of Dawson's daughters by mistake for an acquaintance—"She was so nicely dressed, my dear; it might have been any one, I do assure you"—a story which seemed

bad to Mrs. Briggs, and did not prepossess her in the Dawsons' favour.

By that time two short farces, a violin concerto and some songs were in the wind, and there were merry evenings twice a week at Greenlands, when some thirty bright young people—of whom ten were the performers—met together for the purpose of rehearsal.

Mrs. Briggs did go and call on Mrs. Dawson, who wore a doubtful air when she first heard the news. Opposed to such a cool demeanour, Mrs. Briggs's tone and manner became the more enthusiastic to describe the treat in store for Holly Grove.

"My young folks are preparing it as a surprise," she said. "But I felt that I really must tell *you*. It seemed to us so pitiful that nothing has been done for all the people here. They have nothing to amuse them in the winter evenings."

"Well, what do you want me to do, ma'am?" questioned Mrs. Dawson, in a manner which sorely disconcerted Mrs. Briggs, who had not yet so much as hinted that she came with a request.

"I did think," she faltered, with a pleading smile, "that perhaps you would be good enough to help us with advice about arranging the school and putting up the platform, and all that. It's such a business!"

"John Sawnor generally sees to that. I'll tell him, if you like, to call and see you. And I daresay I could find you other help."

"That is so good of you. I think I'll leave it all to you if you don't mind. We must make you a member of the committee. You must come to Greenlands to our rehearsal on Saturday."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, ma'am. Saturday's my busy day. But I'll tell John Sawnor what to do, about the schoolroom."

"Thank you so very much. I am so truly grateful to you. Lady Parasang herself assured me that I should find you everything that's kind and good."

Having watched her visitor depart, Mrs. Dawson left

the parlour and went into another much more homelike room, where all her family were set at tea. She sat down in her place without a word.

"What did she want, mum?" asked her youngest daughter, May.

"What don't she want?" was the concise rejoinder, which was all that could be got from her till she had had some tea. Then she explained. "There's nothing done for us, and folks like us ain't able to amuse ourselves. And so some kind young gentlemen and ladies are goin' to give a concert for us at the school. And we're allowed to pay to see 'em. And I'm to do all the arrangin'. That's all she wanted, since you ask me straight."

Derisive laughter greeted this conclusion.

"When's it to be?" asked Ned, the eldest son.

"The Thursday after Christmas, eight o'clock, she said."

"Well, we aren't going, that's a sure thing. Why, that's the evenin' of the dance at Hailes's barn."

"Some of us'll have to go," said Mr. Dawson, rising, having had his tea, and filling a large briar pipe from a stone jar upon the chimney-piece.

"Well, you and mum go. We can't really," answered Kate and May and Alice in a breath. "What, miss the Hailes's dance? Not likely!"

"Well, mother, you and I must go, I reckon," said their father philosophically. "The Greenlands folk are customers. Must humour 'em!"

"What must be must," said Mrs. Dawson with a sigh. "We won't cause sorrow to a fellow-creature. After all, she's that!"

The entertainment proved a scandal from the village point of view. The eighteenpenny seats reserved for gentry stretched half-way down the room, and those beyond them had to get upon their feet if they wished to see the faces of performers on the little stage. People who had paid for shilling seats arrived to find those seats filled up, and had to be content with forms or standing

room. The gentry in the front rows talked, and laughed among themselves so loudly as sometimes to prevent the humbler sort from hearing anything. And several ladies came so slightly clad that Mrs. Dawson said in doleful accents to the blacksmith's wife :—

"I'm glad my boys ain't here to see what we do."

Then the performance was undoubtedly the very worst that any one in Holly Grove remembered to have seen ; and the village did not lack experience, for it had organised a number of such entertainments on its own account, though these were quite beneath the notice of the upper crust. It opened with a farce in which the two Misses Briggs and their brother, the Honble John Miles (a son of Lady Parasang) and the latter's most ungainly, girlish wife performed. The scene was in a seaside lodging-house. The dialogue was clever, and the playlet would have been successful, every one agreed, if the actors had remembered all their words, and if the Honble. John had not been audible hee-hawing to Miss Ruby in the wings when both were "off." The second farce, played in a drawing-room, was rather silly, and after that the show was quite contemptible.

Every one of the least experience in entertainments knows that, when there are two little plays to be enacted, one should come at the beginning of the programme and the other at the end, the time between being filled out with sundries. In this case the two plays were the first items. After them came a song entitled—"Memories"—by Ruby Briggs, who had a pretty, natural voice, but now sang sharp through nervousness, which was increased by the vagaries of the school piano, of which the most important notes were always dumb. Then came a violin solo —"Home, Sweet Home" with variations—by poor Miss Jean, who managed to get through it somehow ; then a facetious song in French by Mrs. Miles, applauded wildly by the gentry, and then the famous violin concerto, which was like the noises of a farm. This was followed by another little song—a

single verse—in French, by Mrs. Miles, which was completely drowned by calls for silence; for a number of young men in evening dress had gone into the class-room and were joking with the company in tones distinctly heard. Miss Jones, from Burnham rectory, next came on and gave a patriotic recitation. "Wake up, England!" which at times became inaudible, at others deafening. There was an awkward pause and then the Honble. John appeared, announcing his intention to recite all that he could remember of a comic piece called "Bill Adams at the Battle of Waterloo." He could remember very little of it as it proved, but his grimaces and his hesitations pleased some children, and he won applause.

There was another awkward pause, and Mrs. Briggs came in a flutter from the class-room. Observant of her father's rule, she wore a high-necked dress, and was a little scandalised to see so many of her friends without compassion for the natural feelings of the poor. She could be heard exclaiming in a loud stage-whisper: "Can't any one do something?" while her eyes ranged over the front rows appealingly. The villagers stood up to try and see what was the matter. The boys behind began to stamp and roar. The face of Mrs. Briggs grew red and redder, as she went from one to other of her friends, beseeching:—

"Do! I'm sure you can. We are not critical."

At length a black-avised young clergyman was moved by her appeals. He got upon the stage, while a tall, emaciated lady who had sat beside him in the audience—presumably his wife—went up to the piano rolling back her long black gloves. The parson bellowed "Nancy Lee" and then "The Powder-Monkey," the villagers applauding his good nature heartily. Implored by Mrs. Briggs, he went on to recite a Kipling ballad and to sing "John Peel." But even his endurance was at last exhausted; and then the Honble. John came forward into the middle of the stage, while all the company lined up behind him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he fairly roared, "I have to announce with deep regret the end of a delightful programme. We ask you all to join us in 'God save the King'."

"I hope you've all enjoyed yourselves as much as we have," added Mrs. Briggs, with beaming smile towards the humbler audience.

"God save the King" was sung with wild abandon, and the folks trooped out. It was then half-past nine, and the performance had begun at eight. Holly Grove had been accustomed to a programme of at least two hours.

"Chronic, that's what it was!" "What do she take us for?" "O Lord o' Mercy, save us!" were among the comments in the road.

Mrs. Briggs caught Mrs. Dawson in the act of going, and detained her, crying:—

"Wasn't it a great success? We've taken over five pounds; and I want so much to talk to you about an object for the money. I'm giving a party to the bible-class to-morrow afternoon at Greenlands. Won't you come—with all your girls? Then we can talk things out."

"I fancy I can manage that," said Mrs. Dawson glumly.

"That's pleasure for the likes of us," she told her husband as they sauntered homeward side by side.

"I never looked for nothing else," said he. "But still there's one good thing. There's time for me to get a drink before the White Hart closes."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, you mean," replied his wife. "Well, get along with you. I wouldn't have missed seein' it, and that's the truth."

A motor passed them full of laughing people, and then two other motors, brimming over. The entertainers and their friends were off to Greenlands to crown success with supper and a dance.

Their revels lasted late enough to make the two Misses Briggs a little out of humour on the following day, when

they were called upon to entertain the members of the bible-class. Mrs. Briggs had sown her invitations broadcast in the parish and, the story of the entertainment having gone abroad, many people changed their minds and went at the last moment, hoping to see another grand fiasco.

When doing hostess to the poor she had a ritual derived from the remembered practice of a rectory. For tea she gave them plenty—of a special kind, by no means what she would have set before her friends. The bread and butter and the sandwiches were of a certain thickness, the buns and cakes of a peculiar sort, called homely, which was never seen upon her board at other times. And she put on peculiar heartiness of manner which she would never have employed in speech to gentlefolks—a resolute and breezy optimism which, she felt, encouraged them. There was almost—never quite—a touch of dialect in her remarks, an inclination to say "Thankee," when conversing with the poor, which could not fail to put them at their ease.

Their ease was not self-evident on this occasion as they sat at tea in the long dining-room at Greenlands replying to her cheerful talk with monosyllables. Her daughters helped her with the duties of the table, but did nothing to support the conversation; in which her sole assistants were the Dawson girls, who ventured a remark occasionally, and Jack, her schoolboy son, who struggled hard for jollity and, when the company was led off to the schoolroom after tea to play Dumb Crambo, did, by his jokes, succeed in rousing laughter. Hearing that laughter, Mrs. Briggs concluded all was well. She sank down in a chair by Mrs. Dawson's side, exclaiming:—

"At last I have a chance to talk to you. About that money which we took last night. It ought to go to something that the village is interested in. Now I was thinking of the missionaries."

"Is the village interested in them?" questioned Mrs Dawson.

"It will be soon," replied the lady firmly. "Our sewing-class, you know, is for the missionaries. And in the summer we are going to hold a sale of work. I am writing to ask them to let all our contributions go to a particular place; and by-and-by we'll get a little black boy given to us to bring up entirely. That will be so much nicer, don't you think? And such an interest. My dear father, who was a most energetic clergyman, always used to say that there is nothing like an interest in foreign missions for keeping a parish together. He was rector of a place called Hockingham in Norfolk. And the little black boy whom we kept at some wild place in Africa was christened Hockingham after the parish, so that he would always know. Wasn't it a nice idea?"

"I don't know as we're that fond o' blacks in Holly Grove," said Mrs. Dawson thoughtfully.

"Ah, but you will be when you get to know about them," answered Mrs. Briggs; and she was going to say much more upon the subject when she was prevented by her son exclaiming:—

"I say, mother, they can't go yet, can they? Some of them are saying that it's time to go."

"Oh, no, we don't break up till seven," answered Mrs. Briggs. "I have my watch, and I will call out when it's time to go."

"I'm afraid we must be going all the same, ma'am. We've got to be at home by six o'clock," replied Kate Dawson, blushing; while May bent to her mother's ear and whispered: "Come along!" Her mother dutifully rose.

"Oh, but must you really? Then please wait one minute! You haven't seen the children yet. They shall come down directly."

The hostess pressed a bell and gave the necessary order, while the crowd of village maidens and their mothers stood there waiting awkwardly. And presently the children, three in number—two little girls and a small boy of four years old—appeared in clean, white

frocks and coloured sashes, and with hair well brushed, holding each other's hand and looking terrified. Their mother led them through the room, making them say "How d'ye do?" to everybody, delighted with the compliments she heard on every side. It was a ceremony that she would not have foregone for worlds at such a gathering, since it gave her little ones an inkling of their social station and at the same time gave such pleasure to the poor.

"You need not all go, surely?" she exclaimed, when it was ended; but every guest declared that she must go at once.

"Thank you very much, I'm sure, ma'am, and Mr. Jack and the young ladies," called out Kate Dawson as she led the rout. And after they were gone the master of the house rejoined his wife and children, emerging from the study into which he had been shut.

"Jack's the only one that talks to you as if you were a human being," said May Dawson, as she dragged her mother homeward.

"How dare you call him Jack, Miss Impudence," laughed Alice. "Mr. Jack, I'll thank you kindly. Know your place!"

"Ruby and Jean were yawnin' at us all the time."

"They're tired, of course, after the doings yesterday. They danced till three o'clock this morning, so the housemaid told me," answered Kate.

"I'm not so disagreeable when I've danced till morning."

"Well, somebody did ought to teach them different. I'd give a lot to tell 'em straight for once."

"You can't teach gentry," said their mother wisely, "no more than you can teach a steam-engine. You must just look on as you would at a play, say 'Sir' and 'Ma'am,' and mind you don't get hurt. For my part I've enjoyed myself this afternoon. What we did want in Holly Grove was characters."

"But can't we give 'em just a hint, mum?" cried out May despairingly.

"No," was the firm rejoinder, "that you can't."

And yet a hint was given, and a strong one—a serious blow, it seemed to Mrs Briggs, inspiring her with new opinions of her poorer neighbours, tinged with the dread which people feel for hostile powers.

Mr. and Mrs. Briggs and the young ladies had gone up to London, leaving Mr. Jack in solitary state at Greenlands for one night, which happened to be that of Dawsons' party. In the afternoon before that night there was a football match, Holly Grove against Barnham Second, and Jack strolled up to watch it, as a lover of the game. He grew excited, running to and fro with the Grove forwards, and cheered like mad when they secured the winning goal. He went up and congratulated Edward Dawson on his prowess afterwards, when, as it happened, May was standing at her brother's side. She whispered: "Ask him to our show to-night," and Ned obeyed her, proffering the invitation with becoming diffidence, as something quite unworthy of the notice of so fine a gentleman, but which might perhaps amuse him for an hour.

Jack Briggs was taken by surprise. He had his doubts about parental views; but a defying glance from May's blue eyes dispersed them.

"What shall I wear?" he said.

"Oh, any old thing!" cried May, with a malicious grin. "It's only us, you know."

"We do a bit o' dressing in our way, sir," Ned explained, twisting his sister's ear for punishment.

Jack, when the time came, put on evening dress. He felt extremely shy at entering a lighted barn, cleaned out and decked to serve the purpose of a ballroom; but once inside he thoroughly enjoyed himself. As he said afterwards, there was no nonsense, everybody talked to everybody; a decent orchestra was going and some tophole grub. There must have been a hundred people present, and at least a score of couples always dancing. The Dawson girls took charge of him, and either danced with him or found him partners. He

talked footer with the boys and hunting with old Dawson, and stayed entranced till half-past two o'clock, when he walked home gaily chatting with the Greenlands lodge-keeper, his wife and daughter. He had not dreamt that village life was such good fun. And he was full of his discovery upon the morrow, when his family returned.

"It was ripping, I can tell you," he assured his gasping relatives. "I never enjoyed anything so much in all my life. The girls looked awfully pretty—not in what we call evening dress, but jolly frocks and sashes. They are real good sorts. May taught me two new dances."

"I hardly think you should have gone without your father's leave, dear boy," said Mrs, Briggs reproachfully. She said no more just then, in presence of his father and of Jean and Ruby. But when she got her son alone, she reprimanded him, deploring his transgression of an unseen boundary, even shedding tears. She pointed out how gravely he had derogated from the high position of a luminary and example which, as a gentleman, it was his duty to preserve through life.

"How can they respect you if you mix with them?" she asked him plainly. "And what an impropriety to speak of 'May' and 'Kate' and 'Alice'—before your sisters too, as if those girls had been their equals!"

"But, mother, I assure you they were perfectly polite and nice—a good deal more particular than we are, I should say. And, by Jove, they do things well—much better than the people we know. Old Dawson must be pretty rich, I think."

"However rich he is, or may become, his children cannot be the equals of my boy," replied his mother solemnly. "That is really all I ask you to remember. We must keep our distance, or all our cultivated social life will be submerged in commonness. I did not know such things went on in Holly Grove. Dancing till three o'clock cannot be good for boys and girls in that position, who have got to work next day. But I suppose

it happens only once a year, like the old harvest-homes."

"No, mother; Alice Dawson told me she and her sisters have been to ten parties since Christmas, all within a five-mile radius of their house. And it's now only the sixteenth of January."

That was really more than Mrs. Briggs could bear to hear. Ruby and Jean had only been out once since Christmas.

"What is their mother thinking of?" she cried distractedly. "And how do they afford to hire the fly so often?"

"They don't go in a fly. They go on bicycles."

"They must be truly energetic," said his mother, with a sneer, "and pretty objects, I should think, when they arrive. I never thought my boy would show a taste for such low company."

"They aren't that, really, mother. They're just natural," Jack protested.

"You've seen them only at their best, dear! I have long experience, and I assure you that such people, though no doubt quite estimable, are not the sort that I should wish my children to associate with. Their manners and their conversation are not ours. They take advantage. Would you be pleased to know they called you 'Jack,' *tout court*, as you said 'May' when telling me about their party in the hall just now?"

Jack appeared greatly struck by this comparison. He was not destitute of proper pride. How could he be when she had brought him up with so much care to value his position as a gentleman? Seeing him waver, she attacked more strongly, appealing to his holiest sentiments, his better self, his love for home, his duty to his parents and his God; painting his father's grief, his sisters' shame; drenching him with the social poison in so sweet a form that he esteemed it sacred teaching, gospel truth. Accustomed to accept his parents' views on everything as just and generous, he

was brought near to weeping by this earnest talk. His happy evening now seemed criminal.

Still he protested: "They were jolly decent! I shouldn't like to cut them all at once."

"Certainly not. I do not ask it," said his mother. Then, with infinite indulgence, having gained her point, "Be civil in a gracious way, but not familiar, as I fear you were through thoughtlessness last night. And remember for the future that it is undignified to accept the hospitality of people whom we cannot entertain."

"You entertain them, mother—Oh, I say, by the way, you really must do things a little better when they come again. They live like fighting-cocks at home and have no end of fun. I've been worrying to know what must they think of the dull grub and stupid games we gave them here. And then that entertainment in the schoolroom. It was utter rot!"

Poor Mrs. Briggs could only gasp for half a minute, staring with eyes half glazed as at some sight of fear. Then she broke down.

"Oh, Jack, my own dear boy!" she sobbed convulsively, clutching him to her breast. "Can you not see the difference? And how imperative it is that we should keep aloof? It would be too shocking for us to compete with them as you suggest. . . . I do not put things well. Talk to your father! Think of your sisters and the children and compare! . . . My boy, I know it is a trial for you. You have a friendly nature, but I know I'm right. I pray you may be saved from all unworthiness."

And then, when Jack had taken her into his arms and dried her tears, promising all she wished, she sighed, exclaiming:—

"Whatever would your grandfather have said?"

GLASGOW: W. COLLINS SONS AND CO. LTD.

Messrs. COLLINS' Latest Novels

Messrs. COLLINS will always be glad to send their book lists regularly to readers who will send name and address.

PIRACY

Michael Arlen

This is the story of Ivor Pelham Marlay between the ages of 18 and 32, and the period is London, 1910-1922. It is the history of England, two loves, and an ideal. Mr. Arlen deals with all the types of London Society, and he likes to bring out the queer and unexpected sides of his characters. No one who read Mr. Arlen's first book, *A London Venture*, or his delightful short stories, *A Romantic Lady*, needs to be told that he writes wittily and well.

TYLER OF BARNET

Bernard Gilbert

Author of *Old England*

This long, powerful novel shows the dilemma of a middle-aged man with an invalid wife and grown-up children, who falls passionately in love for the first time. As he is a man of iron self-control he represses his passion till it bursts all bounds, with a tragic result. No one now writing knows so well or describes so vividly life in the English countryside as does Bernard Gilbert.

THE PIT-PROP SYNDICATE

Freeman Wills Crofts

Another brilliantly ingenious detective story by the author of *The Ponson Case.* The mystery of the real business of the syndicate utterly baffled the clever young "amateurs" who tried to solve it, and it took all the experience and perseverance of the "professionals" to break up the dangerous and murderous gang.

THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED

F. Scott Fitzgerald

This book has caused an even greater sensation in America than *This Side of Paradise.* It is a long, searching, and absolutely convincing study of degeneration, that degeneration which ruins so many of the rich, young, idle people. The "smart set" of New York is hurled into the limelight and mercilessly revealed. A witty, pungent, and entirely orginal book.

DANDELION DAYS

Henry Williamson

This is the tale of a boy's last terms at a public school, a very sensitive, unusual boy, and it is in a sense a sequel to *The Beautiful Years.* It is the work of a very clever young writer whose nature essays have attracted the widest attention here and in America, and is utterly unlike the usual "school story." It is a subtle and beautifully written study of character.

BEANSTALK

Mrs. Henry Dudeney

A charmingly told novel of Sussex. The theme is Motherhood, and all the emotional subtleties of the desire for children.

PENDER AMONG THE RESIDENTS

Forrest Reid

This is an episode in the life of Rex Pender, who inherited and came to live at Ballycastle. It is the story of the curious spiritual experience which came to him there. It is in a sense a "ghost story," but it is told by an artist and a stylist. "The Residents," moreover, are admirably contrasted, and in some cases deliciously humorously drawn. A charming, enigmatic, "different" book.