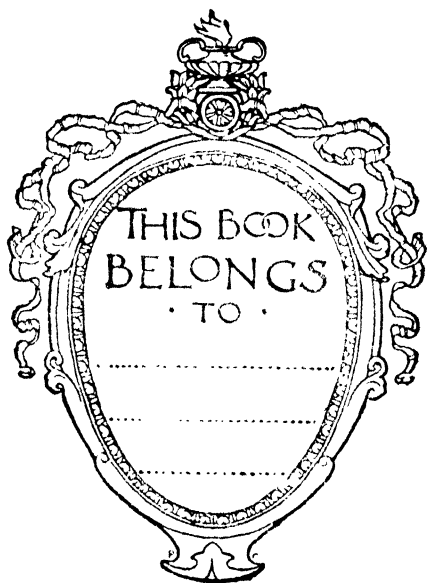
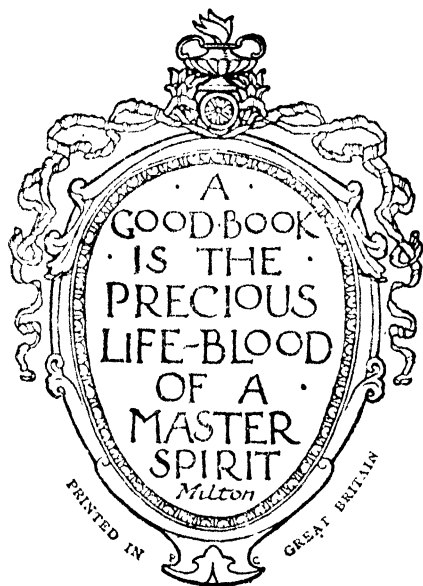


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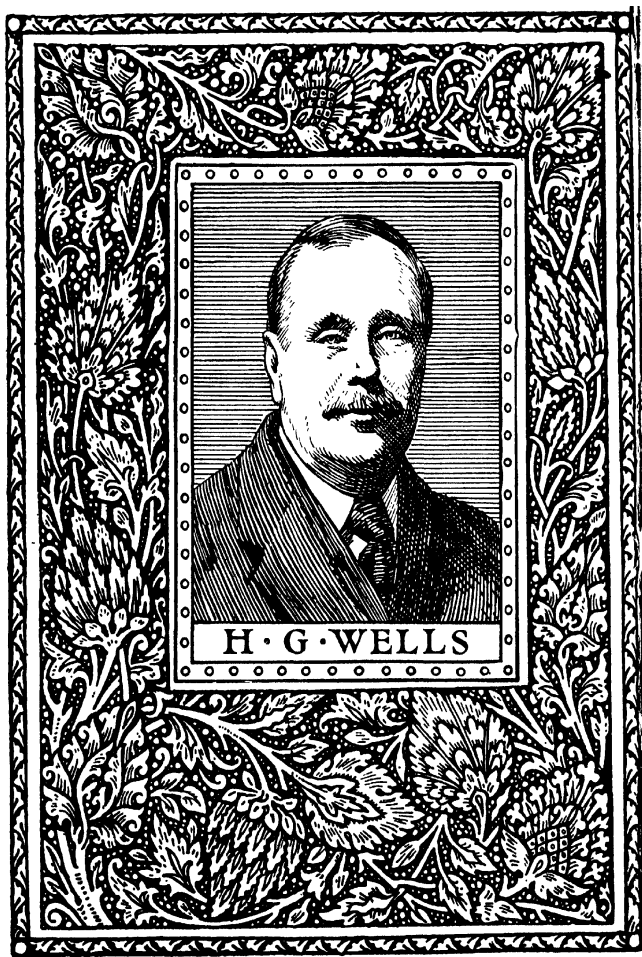




The **KINGS TREASURIES**
OF LITERATURE



GENERAL EDITOR
SIR A. T. QUILLER COUCH



NEW YORK E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY

MODERN SHORT STORIES



1701
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INTRODUCTION

It is an amazing thing, perhaps rather a dreadful thing, to think of the countless number of short stories that find their way into print. Cataracts of short stories: they come pouring out, monthly, weekly, daily, even hourly, from the English and American Press, till one is reminded of those illustrated statistics for which there was once a magazine vogue: "If all the short stories published in a year were set out in a single line, they would stretch from Fleet Street to Mars." And what of all the short stories that are written and rejected? The thought is baffling: imagination boggles at it.

One may assume that the rejected stories are for the most part rubbish. Yet of all the thousands of stories that reach the stage of publication, how few are really worth the writing and the reading—how extraordinarily few can be called great! But this is not so extraordinary as at first sight it would appear, for a *great* short story is a very difficult artistic achievement. The stories chosen for this little book are 'all very good indeed; and perhaps before you read them it will be as well for us to make up our minds as to what constitutes a really good short story.

First of all, and very obviously, it must be a story. There must be a plot of some sort, however slight—some kind of development and crisis—or

it will be a sketch, a little snapshot from life or imagination, and not a story at all. When you go to the "Pictures" you notice at once the distinction between "Pathé's Gazette" or "Scenes from Wild Life" on the one hand, and "Deadwood Dick" or "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" on the other. The former are just scenes, typical or particular; the latter a more or less artistic arrangement of scenes and situations developing to a climax. In short they are stories. It is the same in literature. You may write an account of a walking-tour, or draw word-pictures of school-life, or describe scenes in foreign lands, but unless there is artistic development—unless there is a *plot*, however slight—they will not be stories.

The next point is almost equally obvious, though it is often forgotten. The Short Story must be short. There is such a thing as a long Short Story—an anomalous sort of thing—a kind of literary dachshund. Really good Short Stories, such as those chosen for this book, should be brief and to the point. Some of the greatest stories in the world are quite astonishingly short—two or three thousand words, perhaps; while the most memorable of the Fairy Tales and Old Testament stories are condensed to a few hundred.

Some years ago a prize was offered for the world's shortest Short Story; and if I remember right, the winning story was as follows. "'I don't believe in ghosts,' said a gentleman to his fellow-traveller in the railway carriage. 'Oh, don't you?'" said the

other, and vanished." Now this of course was only intended as a joke, and is not what we mean by a Short Story. But it is clever, and I have quoted it here to show you that it is possible to condense many of the essentials of a Short Story into a couple of dozen words. The true modern Short Story varies in length, of course, but you will see if you look through this book that the average length is about twenty of these small pages. And these stories are typical.

There is a very definite reason why the story should be short, for every single part of the story must be relevant and to the point. There must be no padding out, no word-spinning. Every epithet, every phrase, every sentence should bear in some way upon the plot, character, or atmosphere, so that when we come to the end we feel sure that we could not have skipped a line without missing something essential. Take for example any story from this book—"The Paupers," by "Q"—and choose at random a single sentence: "Her luggage in a blue handkerchief lay on the table." Omit that sentence and the story has lost a step, and an essential colour-note. "Her old lips twitched nervously." Cut out the epithet "old," and the portrait has lost much of its intimate and telling character.

If the story is one of action the narrative must be rapid: and "rapidity" does not mean a breathless head-over-ears rush of adventures, but a swift and sustained sequence of events, such as we find, for instance, in the story called "The Lost God." Should

the story depend less on action and unexpected climax, than upon the unfolding of character; should the plot be less forceful and vigorous, but more subtle and psychological, still the story must go rapidly in the sense that there is no time—no space rather—for loitering about and explaining the situation. Your story must unfold itself—like the quiet and condensed history of a character in “Old Gadgett.”

Then we should expect each great Short Story to be consistent in tone. Perhaps the tone is pathos, such as in the story “The Paupers”; and then every little intimate touch, the homely talk, the simple thought—all these things lend a cumulative effect to the pathos of the story. There is humour in that story, too, as there is in “Old Gadgett”; and humour is very close indeed to pathos when delicately used with that intent. In the naval story “That Which Remained” there is the pathos of tragedy; but infinite sympathy and simple understanding make it a tragedy without bitterness or sting. Perhaps the tone is humorous without any hint of pathos—a story to make one laugh, like Ernest Bramah’s delicious mock-Chinese yarn, “The ill-regulated destiny of Kin-Yen the picture maker.” There are many kinds or shades of humour in Short Stories—there is the humour of wit, which you admire but do not laugh at; there is pathetic humour, which makes one smile with a lump in one’s throat; there is the humour of satire, and of irony—the rather cruel humour of making fun of those who deserve it;

there is the humour of the unexpected; there is that quaint and delicious humour which we call drollery; and lastly there is sheer fun. Most humorous stories are written with more than one shade of humour, but with a single predominating tone. It is interesting to analyse funny stories. To which class, do you think, does the story of Kin Yen belong?

Then there are stories of Imagination. Perhaps they are fanciful, like the beautiful little story called "Cobbler, Cobbler"; and then the writer takes us consciously into a world that lies beyond our everyday experience. Perhaps the imagination is scientific, as in "The New Accelerator," and in many other stories by the same author; and here we feel that the events, though beyond our experience, are not beyond the possibility of experience. However unlikely, they are strangely convincing, because the play of the imagination is always scientific. We who have seen slow-motion pictures on the screen recognise at once that there is nothing preposterous in this imaginative story.

Some stories carry with them a strange and haunting atmosphere—of mystery, perhaps; or a feeling of remoteness, a sense that it all happened far away and long ago. It is not so much the events of the story that make you feel you are living on another and unfamiliar plane, for often you feel the subtle atmosphere closing round you before you reach the second page. It is Style that works this magic; the personality of the author coming through. Read "The Tale," by Joseph Conrad; and at once, like

the sailors in the story, you are wrapped round by a dense and secret fog. It never lifts, and when you come to the end you are left with a sense of oppression and mystery far too profound to be accounted for by the mere facts of the story, which in themselves are slight and simple enough. In the story "Niño Diablo," it is style again that makes the far-off setting so convincing and true—a style so distinct and individual that one can tell Hudson's writing among a thousand. Notice again the detail of every Short Story; for where there is no space to be discursive the detail must be intimate and clear-cut. No landsman could have written "The Tale," or "That Which Remained," for to speak of ships and the sea and sailormen, if you do not know them, spells disaster. None but a scientific man could have written "The New Accelerator"; no one lacking insight into the minds of country folk could have written the story of Old Gadgett. It is the intimate details that tell, and never more so than when the characters themselves are speaking. Their tongue betrayeth them. Either they are the real thing, or they are the author dressed up in borrowed and unfamiliar garb, which will deceive nobody. Such stories as you will find in this book carry conviction even when they are most fanciful.

G. N. P.

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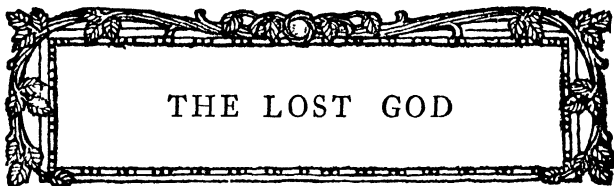
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THE LOST GOD

PROPHETS have cried out in print, no man regarding, and saints have been known to write their autobiographies, and even angels are credited now and then with revealing most curious matters in language quite plain and ungrammatical. But I have seen the diary of an authentic god who once went to and fro on the earth and in the waters underneath.

His record is the Book of Jim Albro, and he made it at Barange Bay, which is Papua, which is the end of the back of beyond and a bit farther yet: the great, dark, and smiling land that no white man has ever yet gripped as a conqueror, where anything can happen that you would care to believe and many things that you never would. He neglected to copyright it himself. The chances of his returning to claim it are apparently remote. And Jeckol says that fiction is stranger than truth anyhow, and pays better. So I shall feel quite safe in making free of that remarkable work, just as Jim Albro set it down with a leaden bullet on some strips of bark and left it for those who came after to find. . . .

In his very blackest hour Jim Albro must have known that somebody would come after him, some time. Somebody always did come after him, no matter how far and to what desperate chance his

trail might lead. He was that kind. All his days he never lacked the friend to hunt him up and to pack him home when he was helpless, to pay his bills or to bail him out at need. One of those irresistible rascals born to a soft place near the world's heart whose worst follies serve only to endear them, whose wildest errors are accepted as the manifestation of an engaging caprice, while they go on serenely drawing blank cheques against destiny!

It is odd that he should have had to settle up in the end unaided, cut off from all help, completely isolated—and yet with the savour of popular admiration still rising about him, amid the continued applause of a multitude.

"A chap like Albro can't simply drop out of sight, like you or me might," said Cap'n Bartlet, thoughtfully. "He's filled too much space and pulled through too many scrapes. He's had his way too often with men and devils—and women too."

We were strung along the rail on the afterdeck of the little *Aurora Bird* as she began to grope her passage through the barrier reef, a silent lot. Talk had been cheap enough on the long stretch up the Coral Sea, when every possible theory of Albro's fate and the fate of his three white shipmates and their native crew had been thrashed to weariness. But now suspense held us all by the throat, for we were come at last to Barange, the falling-off place.

And something else held us—I could call it a spell and not be so far wrong. The lazy airs offshore bore down to us the scent that is like nothing else

in the world, of rotting jungle and teeming soil; of poisonous, lush green, and rare, sleepy blossoms, heavy with death and ardent with a fierce vitality. This is the breath of Papua, stirring warm on her lips, that none who has known between loathing and desire can ever forget. Many men have known it—traders, pearlers, recruiters, gold hunters—and eagerly have sought to know more and have died seeking. There she lies, the last enigma, guarding her secrets still behind her savage coasts and the fringe of her untracked forests—the black sphinx of the seas, lovely, vast, and cruel.

We had been watching the widening gap of the bay off our quarter, the palm-tufted threads of beach, the sullen hills a-quiver in the heat haze and the nameless dim mountains beyond. For an hour or more the only sounds had been Bartlet's gruff orders to the Kanaka at the wheel, the gentle crush of foam overside, the musical cry of the leadsman and the tap-tap of reef points and creak of tackle as our sails slatted and filled again. Each one of us was intent for some sign of the disaster. Each one of us had a question pressing on his tongue—pretty much the same question, I judge—but nobody cared to voice it until the cap'n spoke. He had had, we knew, rather a special interest in Albro. . . . "Throw him how you like, he'd land on his feet," he said.

"Aye," confirmed Peters, the lank trader from Samarai. "Or if so be he couldn't stand, why the crowd would fair fight for the privilege of proppin' him up and buyin' him the last drink in the house."

"You think he's alive?" piped Harris then.

"I think he's alive," said Bartlet, without turning his shaggy grey head. "He weren't made to finish hugger-mugger in no such hell hole. I'm backing the luck of Jim Albro, that always had his way."

"Like as not," said Peters, and spun the cylinder of his big Webley revolver and chuckled a little; "like as not we'll find him sittin' on a stump all so lofty with the niggers squatted round in rows, addressin' of the congregation."

You will note—and a queer thing too—that this happened before we had learned the first sure detail of the affair at Barange Bay.

It was now the 20th of April. On the 2nd of November preceding, the pearling schooner *Timothy S.* had cleared from Cooktown on her lawful occasions for Joannet Harbour in the Louisiades. She had never reached Joannet. A month later she had been spoken by a Sydney steamer up among the Bismarck Group, where she had no ostensible business to be. And early in March some cannibal gossip of the west coast, friendly or only boastful, had passed word to some missionary of a British schooner cut off at Barange. That was strictly all. It remained for certain friends and backers at Cooktown, with or without lawful occasion, to link up the vaguely rumoured outrage with the actual and private destination of the *Timothy S.* and to send our search party go-look-see.

But Jeckol snorted. . . . You could hardly blame

him, at that. Among the five of us he was the only man who had never crossed Jim Albro at one point or another in the career of that eccentric luminary. And, besides, it was Jeckol's business to snort. You must have read his clever bits in the *Bulletin*—those little running paragraphs that snap and fume like a pack of Chinese crackers? He had been loafing about Bananaland on vacation just before we started, and of course he got wind and wished himself along. Trust a pressman to know the necessary people and a chance for copy.

"I've heard a deal of talk of this Albro since we weighed anchor," he said. "What's all about him? He wasn't commanding the *Timothy S.*?"

"No," drawled Peters. "No—he didn't command, Mullhall was skipper."

"Did he launch the scheme then? Was he the discoverer of this wonderful virgin shell bed they were going to strip?"

"No," returned Peters. "No—you couldn't say he had any regular standin' in the expedition. . . . He shipped as a sort of supercargo—didn't he, Cap'n Bartlet?"

"Cabin boy, more likely," said Bartlet in his slow way. "Or bos'n's mate—or even midshipmite."

Jeckol eyed us all around, but nobody smiled.

"You're getting at me," he said. "Never mind. Only I'm going to write the yarn, you know. You'd much better help me pick the right hero. What's your famous Albro like?"

"The takingest chap that ever stood in shoe

leather," cried young Harris with a rush. "Absolutely. I never saw him only twice, but I remember just how he looked and what he said. The first time he was drunk—but—but that was all right. He sang *Mad Bess of Bedlam* to make your hair curl. And one night in Brisbane when he took on the Castle-reagh Slasher for two rounds——"

"Six foot of mad Irishman," said Peters, "and about three inches of dreamy Spaniard atop of that—to put a head on the mixture, you might say. Blue-black, wavy beard and an eye like a blue glass marble——"

"With the sunlight shining through!" Harris shot in.

"James O'Shaughnessy Albro." Peters lingered upon the name. "As to his luck, Cap'n Bartlet may be right, but I wouldn't call it so. He was born too late. He should ha' been a conquistador—d'y' call em?—and gone swaggerin' up and down in the old time holdin' pepper rajahs to ransom and carvin' out kingdoms. Whereas he was only Jim and anything you like between a navvy and a millionaire.

"Nobody knows what he'd done back home—prob'ly he got to bulgin' over too many boundaries and needed room. He blew into the Endeavour River one season with a tradin' schooner of his own—curly maple saloon, satin divans, silver-mounted gun racks—by Joe, you'd ha' thought he was goin' to trade with cherryubims for golden harps in the isles of paradise. And so he very nearly did, too, what with the dare-devil chances he took, till he

lost craft and all on a race back from Thursday Island."

"Wrecked?" asked Jeckol.

"Just gambled. Old man Tyler could lay his *Hawfinch* half a point nearer the wind than a chap has a right to expect from an archbishop. Jimmie paid over at the dock head and went weavin' his way up Charlotte Street a beggar, turned into a political barney they were havin' there, and made them a roarin' speech on somethin'—temperance prob'ly. And, by Joe, if they didn't elect him a divisional councillor the next day!"

"I've heard of that," proffered Harris with a grin. "Wasn't it the same winter he did a quick dash to the tin mines for his health? It seemed there was a beauteous and wealthy widow. He couldn't have loved her half so well had he not loved her pretty under-housemaid more. So he started for Mount Romeo. . . . My word, he'd turn the worst scrape into a romance, that fellow! They say he made a big winning at Romeo—just to console himself."

"He made a dozen winnings. And I've helped him to a job as warehouse clerk at Samarai when he wore no shirt under his coat, and gunny bags for trousers. That's what the cap'n here means by his luck, I fancy, because you couldn't keep him down. Capitalist, miner, politician, stevedore—it was all one to Jimmie. Look how he brought up the *Creswick* that nobody else would touch when she went ashore on Turn-again Island, cleared four thou' off her by the nerviest kind of work and dropped it all

on the next Melbourne Cup. Little he cared. He was havin' his own way with life—as you say, Cap'n Bartlet."

But Jeckol frowned and pursed his thin lips.

"He never saw the game that was too big for him," said Harris, "nor held back his smile nor his fist."

"Darlinghurst jail is full of the same sort," observed Jeckol dryly.

"You ask what he was like?" Cap'n Bartlet swung around beside the wheel. "I'll tell you. I'm married to a girl that was pretty chief with Jim Albro once. There's no living man dare stand and say a word agen my wife—the finest in Queensland, sir—but I knew all the talk when I married her. And yet you see me here."

"Ah! With an entirely friendly purpose?" queried Jeckol, peering at him. "Or to make sure he won't come back? . . ."

I saw the colour flood to Bartlet's rugged cheek and ebb again.

"In friendship," he answered simply.

Jeckol made a gesture like a salute, with a hint of mockery perhaps, but he said no more. And we others said rather less. Bartlet brought the schooner smartly about on her heel and laid her square through the gap and we turned again to that sinister bay, opening before us like the painted depth of a stage set, whereon we were now to discover and reconstruct our obscure tragedy.

We drew a quick curtain on it. Scarcely had we come abreast the near headland when one of the

brown, breech-clouted sailors leaped up forward with a yell, and each startled eye swept past his darting finger to the wreck of the *Timothy S.* There could be no manner of doubt—a green hull with a black water line, bedded low and on her side, hatches awash, just behind a shallow jag of the shore well away to leeward. We needed no glasses to pick her name or to see that nothing remained of life or value about the battered shell. She lay in her last berth, in the final stage of naval decay, stripped to the shreds of rigging, her masts broken short and bare as bleached bones; and from her whitened rail rose up a flight of boobies that cried like shrill, mournful ghosts and vanished. . . .

“Aye—that’s the end of their pearlin’ cruise,” said Peters grimly. “That’s Mullhall’s craft, sure enough. The south-west gales would drive her there. She must ha’ been anchored just about where we’re passin’ now, and I shouldn’t wonder.”

“On the shell bank?” sniffed Jeckol, leaning to squint down into the sparkling blue.

“Fair under our keel, I’d say.”

At a signal the leadsman had flown his pigeon again, though we were well past all reefs.

“Lord! Ten fathom!” Harris echoed the cry. “That’s diving! I heard it was a deep-water bed. D’you suppose they were at it when the niggers jumped ’em?”

“I figger they were,” said Peters. “See that scrubby bit of island?—the point’s not a hundred yards away. A dozen canoes could mass up there and never be noticed. By Joe, it’s plain as paint.

The ship snuggled down for business—the diver below, like as not—pumps and tackle goin’—all hands busy on board and the watch calculatin’ profits to three decimals behind the windlass. Aye, there’s your treasure hunter, every time! Then perhaps a slant of wind settin’ around that point to give the raid a runnin’ start—and——”

“Him finish,” concluded Harris briefly. “All over in ten minutes. They’d hardly know what hit ’em. A black cloud—that’s all. A black cloud.”

And Peters was right—it was all too plain. None of us but had heard tales enough, and stark history enough, of these blood-stained barriers that hedge the true unknown continent. To our waiting minds his few phrases threw a sharp picture of the careless ship, the stalking death, and the swift horror that must have followed. There lay the wreck and there the empty bay. The rest we could fill in for ourselves, or just about.

“Then what are you doing here?” asked Jeckol at last.

Peters was already dealing out rifles and ammunition by the deck house, and Bartlet, looking drawn and old, did not seem to hear, but Harris jerked an answer over his shoulder with the flippancy of emotion. “Oh, you can’t tell—we might find some smoked heads to bring away. . . .”

A few minutes later the cap’n was giving his last instructions while we of the shore dropped to our places in the big whaleboat.

“You’re not to follow us in whatever happens—

mind that. If you sight more'n three canoes at a time, knock out the shackles and run for open sea. I'm leaving you Obadiah—he's a goodish shot—and four of the best boys."

The young mate nodded. He hated not coming with us, but Bartlet knew. This was Papua, where wise men take no chance and fools seldom live long enough to take a second.

We took none ourselves as we rowed slowly shoreward and sheered off out of spear-throw, watching the wall of jungle. There is no beach inside Barange, only the mangrove roots that writhe down to the water's edge like tangled pythons through the oozy bank of salt marsh. It was very still and very clear in the afternoon sunlight, though the heat pouring out over us seemed the exhalation of a great steam bath, choked with stewing vegetation. Now and then our crew of clean-limbed Tonga boys rested on their oars, with timid, limpid gaze turned askance. We heard their quick breathing and the drip from the oar-blades—nothing else. At such times we floated in a mirage where each leaf and frond and looped liana with its mirrored image had an unnatural brilliance and precision, like a laboured canvas or a view seen through a stereoscope.

And there stole upon us again the oppressive solicitation of the land, subtle and perilous. Behind the beauty and wonder of it, beyond those bright shores and the first low foothills of the range—what? Nobody knows, that is the charm and the lure.

Peoples, religions, empires untouched since the birth of time—fabulous wealth, mountains of gold, cliffs of ruby, “cataracts of adamant,” any marvel that fantasy still dares to dream in a prosaic century. They may be; no man has ever drawn the map to deny them. They must be: why else should the sphinx smile? . . .

“I suppose a hundred woolly-heads are spying on us now,” whispered Jeckol suddenly. “Why don’t they do something?” He fiddled nervously with his rifle and sniffed. “What a place! This air is deadly—rotten with fever. Faugh! It’s animal. It’s like—it’s like a tiger’s throat!”

I blinked at the little chap and with the same glance was aware of Peters standing up in the bow. The trader was just lighting a short-fused stick of dynamite from his cigar. Before I could cry murder he had lobbed it in and shot the bush.

It struck with the smash of all calamity in that utter quiet. The trees sprang toward us and the roar rolled back from angry rocks. Like a multi-coloured dust of the explosion burst a myriad of screaming birds, lories, parakeets, kingfishers, flashing motes of green and blue and scarlet in the sunshine. But they dwindled and passed. The echoes died. The smoke drifted away and the green wall closed up without a scar; the silence engulfed us once more, floating there, futile invaders who assaulted its immense riddle with a squib.

“They don’t seem to care much,” giggled Jeckol.

But Bartlet raised a finger. Far away in the wood something stirred. It drew nearer, with long pauses,

pressing on and at last charging recklessly through the undergrowth. We had the spot covered from half a dozen rifles as there broke out at the verge a creature that leaped and clung among the creepers.

"Mahrster!" it cried, imploring. "Mahrster!"

A man—though more like a naked, starving ape with his knobby joints and the bones in a rack under his black skin—and shaken now by the ecstasy of terror! Not at us. He faced the guns without wincing. His beady eyes kept coasting behind him the way he had come as if he looked to see a dreadful hand reach from the thicket and pluck him back. The jungle, the land, was what he feared.

"Mahrster," he gasped, "you take'm me that fella boat along you! One fella ship-boy me—good fella too much!"

"What name?" challenged Peters. "What fella ship?"

From the chattered reply we caught a startling word.

"By Joe—he's one of their boys! Give way, cap'n. . . ."

We edged in until Peters could yank the quaking bundle aboard and pulled again to safety from the mangrove shadow, while the fugitive stammered his story in broken *bêche de mer*.

It was true, we had found a survivor from the lost *Timothy S.*: Kakwe, he called himself, and he had come to Barange "long time before altogether." Two months, at least, we judged. In the attack on the schooner he had escaped by swimming. Himself a Papuan, of a different tribe and region, he had

taken to the tree-tops after the fashion of his own people, the painted monkey folk of Princess Marianne Straits—a facility to which he owed his life, it appeared, for he had since lived on fruits and nuts among the cockatoos, undiscovered.

This much we gathered from his gabble before Peters caught him up.

“But the others—them white fella?”

“All finish,” said Kakwe bluntly.

“How?” cried Peters.

“No savee, me. Too much fright—walk along salt water—get to hell along beach, along tree. Me fright like hell!”

His account tallied with our own theory of the massacre, but he had seen no bodies brought ashore, could not identify the murderers, could not say where the native village lay or how to reach it, would not guide anyone into that bush on any consideration. For the rest—this was a “good fella place” to get away from quickly.

“Ah!” said Jeckol, sympathising. “And that’s a true word.”

So indeed it seemed, and it is odd to think how close we were to giving up then. Aye, we were that close. We drifted out toward the anchorage and looked helplessly around us. The place was so huge, so baffling. Hopeless to search farther among empty swamps and forests, to grope at large in this hushed wilderness, to coerce a jungle. The cruisers that have bombarded these same coasts on many a

punitive expedition have learned how hopeless—against Papua, who keeps her secrets.

We must have been half-way back to the *Aurora Bird* when Bartlet, sitting thoughtful in the stern, made the sign that brought us all up sharp.

"He's lying," he said quietly.

Jeckol's nerves jumped in protest.

"Eh—what? The black? He's only scared half to death. You wouldn't blame him for wanting to get out of this trap, would you? I do myself."

"He couldn't have lived overhead the whole nest o' them all this time without learning something," declared Bartlet.

"Why should he lie?"

But Peters had risen to snatch around that weazened face, blank as a mummy's—his own was alight. "By Joe, and a timely reminder. When you've got to ask why a Papuan nigger should lie you've gone pretty wide! As for scare—what d'y' suppose he must ha' seen to scare him so?"

Here he bent our monkey man over a thwart and introduced him affectionately to the Webley. . . .

"You fella Kakwe," he said, "my survivin' jewel—I forgot your breed. I should ha' begun by bang'm black head b'long you. Now don't stop to gammon. Whatever you're holdin' back you *show*—savee? S'pose you no show'm straight, me finish 'long you close up altogether!"

And Kakwe showed. Dominated by superior wickedness, with all the black man's docility under the instant threat, he collapsed quite simply at the

touch of steel, and he showed—the nook where a tiny, hidden creek flowed down among the mangroves, the winding course that led by the swamp's edge through dank and darksome channels to a trodden mud bank and Barange village itself, tucked away there like a huddle of giant hives in a back lot. This time we paused for no manœuvring. Even Jeckol grabbed a boat-hook and we pushed through, eager to strike on a definite lead at last.

Though we might have saved our energy, for the wild had its surprise in waiting. The village was silent, deserted, tenantless.

We landed at the square, to call it so, a rude clearing on which the few houses faced, those sprawling, spacious communal dwellings—palaces among huts—that sometimes amaze the explorer along the west coast. None opposed us. Nothing moved, not so much as a curl of smoke. An insect hummed in the sun like a bullet, and I take no shame to say I ducked. But that was all. And when the grovelling Kakwe led us to a wide platform that ran breast high across the front of the largest house, we stood with rifles propped and quickened pulses, staring stupidly at the thing we had come this far to find. . . .

Only a box, lying on the middle of the platform, under the shadow of the lofty thatch—a small, brass-bound chest such as sailormen love and ships carry everywhere! “Loot!” snorted Jeckol. “Well——?”

But Cap'n Bartlet had laid hold of another trove, a coil of ringed rubber tubing, neatly disposed about the chest. “What's there?”

"A diver's air pipe," stated the cap'n.

"What about it?"

"It's been cut—top and bottom."

We crowded for a look, and I saw his tanned fist tremble ever so slightly.

"A diver's pipe," he repeated. "A diver, d'you see? They had a diver, and—according to your notion, Peters——" He drew a slow breath. "What—what if that there diver *did* happen to be overboard at the minute the rush came?"

And then came the voice of Peters, cool and drawling: "Someone's left a message on the box."

As we spun around he turned it over a-tilt, so that all might see the bold letters, scarred in lead, of that laconic legend—all but Bartlet, who fumbled for his spectacles. "Writ with a Snider bullet, I take it," continued the trader. "One of them soft-nosed kind as supplied to heathen parts for a blessin' of civilisation."

"Read it, can't you?" begged the cap'n.

And this was the notice Jeckol read:

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The Crew of the Schooner *Timothy S.* of Cooktown that tried a cast with fortune and turned a deuce.

Barange Bay, Jan. 22, 19—

J. MULLHALL, *master*

BAMBA, KOHO

B. SMYTHE, *mate*

KAKWE, JACK-JACK

HENRY NEW

MENOMI, FRANK

Hic finis fandi

+

Cap'n Bartlet removed his hat and wiped away a steam of sweat with deliberate care and a red-barred kerchief. "Sounds natural," he observed, clearing his throat. "Though I never did make much of that 'hic' language."

"It means 'here ended the talk,' or something of the kind," explained Jeckol. "But still," he added, quite seriously, "the list isn't complete, you know. Where's your friend Albro?"

Peters rolled the white of an eye on him. "Is it your fancy," he inquired, "that the niggers run much to writin' epitaphs? Or books——?"

He held up to our gaze the object he had found on lifting the lid of the box—a packet of thin bark strips covered with coarse markings and bound with a twist of fibre which next he unknotted, to run the leaves over in his hand. "I knew he was alive," said Cap'n Bartlet simply. . . .

And that was the way we won to the story of James O'Shaughnessy Albro. Even now I can recall each tone and gesture of its telling, each detail of the group we made there in empty Barange village: the trader's drawl and check as he read a line or turned to Kakwe with a question or flung in some vivid comment of his own; the strained attention on Bartlet's earnest face; the incredulous sniff and squint of little Jeckol, still unsubdued, fidgeting about; the statued bronze figures of our Tonga boys as they stood leaning patiently on their rifles, awaiting the master's next whim; the massed ring of the jungle; the odd, high-peaked houses with their cavernous fronts like

gaping and grinning listeners; the lances of sunlight that began to splinter and fall out among lengthening shadows across the open; and through all and over all the heat and the smell and the brooding, ominous, inscrutable mystery of Papua!

Seeking wealth I found glory. I went below as an amateur diver and I came up a professional god. But I wish I could find which son of a nighthawk it was that cut my pipe. I'd excommunicate him on the altar.

This is a page from the Book of Jim Albro, and it shows him as he lived. Later entries are not so clear, not by any means so sprightly, and some are pitiful enough in all truth. It must have been set down in the early hours of his reign, while he was still in the flush of his stupendous adventure, before he had begun to understand what lay ahead. But here was the man "with an eye like a blue glass marble," that "never held his fist or his smile." No other could have written it after the events he had survived.

Just as Peters inferred to have been the case, the attack on the *Timothy S.* caught the whole crew of pearl hunters unready. They had seen no natives at Barangé, they kept no lookout, and when Albro stepped off the ladder that morning of 22 January he left his shipmates contentedly employed on deck. He never saw any of them again, or—what might have been a different matter—any part of them. He went down to the shell bed, and while he was there the black raiders made their sweep of the schooner.

It is likely the savages took the diving lines for an extra mooring—it is certain they knew nothing whatever about the apparatus—and Albro's first warning was the cutting of that air pipe, when he found his pressure gone and water trickling through the inlet valve. Fortunately, he was just preparing to ascend and had tightened his outlet to inflate the suit. Fortunately, too, his helmet was furnished with an adjustable inlet and he was able hastily to close both valves.

He tugged at his life-line, but it drew loose in his hand. He turned over on his side to look upward, but he could see nothing—only the vague blue twilight through which the slack coils of his severed air pipe came sagging. Then he knew that he had been cut off, and the hideous fear that lies in wait for every diver, amid the perils and loneliness of the sea bottom, seized upon him. He might have popped to the surface by throwing off his forty-pound weights, but he was aware that no chance accident could have served him so, and his impulse was to get away, from schooner and all, to shore. Under water he had some few minutes to live, perhaps four or five, as long as the enclosed air should last him. Frantically he began to struggle toward the beach, yielding to a moment's panic that was to cost him dear. . . . While trying blindly to slash free the useless pipe he lost his diver's knife.

The rotten coral burst and sank under footing. Clogging weeds enwreathed and held him back with evil embrace. A tridacna spread its jaws before his

steps so that he nearly plunged into that deadly spring trap of the deep. But he kept on up the slope; his keen spirit rallied and bore him through, and he came surging from the waves at last on a point of rocks outside the bay where he could cling and open the emergency cock in the helmet. The suit deflated and he breathed new life. But here he suffered his second immediate mishap, for as he scrambled to his feet a dizziness took him and he slipped and pitched forward heavily, and with a great clang of armour the god fell fainting at the very threshold of his world.

Broke left arm getting ashore. Walking the beach when I met the niggers. They dropped on their faces, and I saw I was elected.

These are the words with which Jim Albro chooses to make his note of a scene that can scarcely have had its parallel in human experience. With two dozen words, no more. You figure him there, I hope, that muffled colossus with his huge copper helm flashing red and his monstrous cyclopean eye agleam, striding along the strip of white beach against the hostile green hills of Papua. You see him break, an incredible apparition of power and majesty, upon the view of the dusky cannibal folk and stand towering over their stricken ranks, triumphant—a glimpse as through the flick of a shutter that passes and leaves the beholder dazzled and unsatisfied! But the whole record is only a series of such glimpses, some focused with startling lucidity, some clouded and confused, and all too brief.

One other bit remains to fix the picture—an inimitable splash of colour, flung at the end of a perplexing page. . . .

I picked out the chief devil-devil doctor, and raised him to honour. Old Gum-eye. Friend of mine.

Mark the spirit of the man. Whole chapters could supply no clearer tribute to his resilience and entire adequacy. Unerringly he took the right course to enforce the rôle thus amazingly thrust upon him and to establish his godhead. Already he had caught up the situation, had put its shock behind him. The inscription on the box remains his only reference to the loss of the schooner and her crew. And while this might seem to argue a certain lack of sensibility, I cannot feel it was so with Albro. His was a nature essentially episodic, prompt to the play of circumstance. The thing was done and past crying over; the blacks had acted by their lights, and he had very swiftly to act by his. They had given him his cue. How well he filled the part we can guess. By evening he had been installed in some kind of temple or devil house as an accredited deity to the Barange tribes. . . .

Here ends the first part of the book, so far as its unnumbered and fugitive entries can be arranged—the first part and the only part quite comprehensible, before the haze of distress and anxiety has dimmed our image of that strange god, whose mortality was all too real. He began its composition that same night, picking up the Snider cartridge and the bark

strips while still he had some measure of liberty. Perhaps he foresaw that he would want to leave the record. Perhaps he merely sought distraction, and he had need of it.

Squatting above his own altar, he prepared his own epistle. Around his sanctuary slept a guard of devil doctors, priests, sorcerers—he uses all three terms. No sleep for Albrow. But while he wrestled there alone through long hours he found the pluck to jot those early notes by the flare of a guttering torch, beguiling the pain of his broken arm and the new terror that was now rapidly closing upon him.

Like a glint of lightning from a cloud comes the following spurted item, written the next day:

Forty hours of this. Am growing weaker. My arm —[word scratched out]. Had to give up trying to start the glass in my helmet. Can't budge it. . . .

Soon afterwards occurs another passage in the same startling altered key:

Tried to get away this [morning], but the priests too suspicious. I wanted to try smashing the glass on a rock. Likely would have burst my ear drums anyway—

And further:

If I could get hold of a knife for three minutes. Bamboo stick [part illegible here]—can't tear vulcan canvas. No use. . . .

When Peters read those lines aloud and looked up he confronted a sickly ring of auditors.

"Good God!" breathed Bartlet. "*He couldn't get out!*"

The knowledge of Albro's actual plight crashed upon us all in just that phrase, and I leave you to gauge its impact. We had had no hint of it. Here was the diary before us. We were only waiting to learn the present address of the diarist. Indeed our whole attitude toward the singular discovery we were making had been quite cheerful, even exultant, like that of children who follow the tribulations of some favourite hero, secure of the happy solution.

"Couldn't get *out*?" squeaked Jeckol. "How do you mean—he couldn't?"

"He was locked up in that blasted diving dress!"

"Locked up? . . ."

"Sewed up—sacked up," said Peters heavily. "Did you ever see the damn' stuff? He calls it canvas, which it ain't, but tanned twill—two-ply—with rubber between. He can't tear his way out with a stick, he says. And small wonder. Talk about strait-jackets!"

"But—but why doesn't he take off the helmet?"

Peters stared unseeing at the packet in his hand, and his face was saturnine.

"By Joe, what a mess!" he murmured. "What a beau-ti-ful mess! Look here—d'y' know a diver's outfit? First he wears a solid breastplate—see?—that sets about his shoulders. Then the helmet fits on that with segmental neck rings and screws hard down with a quarter turn to a catch. Aye, there's a catch to snap it home. . . . And where is that catch? Why, at the *back*! No diver was ever intended to take off his own helmet!"

We could only blink at him dumbly.

"Albro couldn't reach it. Of course if he should manage to rip away the cloth from the eyelets he'd be all right—he'd simply shift the whole upper works. But them eyelets, now, they lock down all around through a vulcanised collar. He couldn't reach more'n two of them either."

"There's the glass——"

Peters offered the diary.

"What does he say himself? There's only one removable glass to a helmet and that's in front—an inch thick and screws tight in a gun-metal socket. It's guarded with a gridiron of bars—same as the two side glasses. He wants to break it, but he can't. He wants to unscrew it, but he can't. He wants to cut himself loose, but he has no knife. Do you see him—by Joe!—do you see him twistin' and writhin' and fightin' for his life in there—*with one good arm?*"

"Why," cried Jeckol, in sudden appalled perception, "he couldn't even eat. He's starving inside that suit!"

"Starving?" echoed Bartlet, from colourless lips. "God—if that was all! He's dying of thirst by inches! . . ."

I do not know how it struck Jeckol, but it seemed to me as if a blackness came in upon the sun.

"Go on," urged Bartlet. "Go on!"

But it was not so easy to go on. Peters found whole pages of the Book impossible to decipher. At places it lapsed to a mere jumble of sprawling characters. Again the soft lead was hopelessly blurred

over, where the pages had been often thumbed, or perhaps crumbled and thrown aside. He shuffled them hastily and we hung upon his search.

. . . uneasy god. They got me tied up now to keep me safe [words missing] joke, to pass out here like a rat under a bell jar. Not me. I don't mean to. . . .

Curious. When Peters resumed the thread, when he read that eloquent line, those of us who had known Jim Albro nodded solemnly, one to another, as if sharing a profound and secret thrill. For this was the man's real triumph—and we felt it then, regardless of the outcome—that alone, beyond any conceivable aid for the first time in his life, speechless, helpless, at the end of all those amiable arts which had given him his way so often with men and devils, and women, too, Jim Albro was still the Jim Albro “that you couldn't keep down.”

His body was consuming and shrivelling with its own heat. He had to scheme for each scant breath he drew, spreading the dress and collapsing it at short intervals to renew the foul air. He had to view the tempting tribute laid out before the altar: juicy mangoes and figs and sugar-cane, wild berries and young drinking coco-nuts freshly opened, with the new, cool milk frothing up at the brim. He had to receive the homage of a people, and to count by the wheeling sun how many hours of torment were left him. Worse than all, he had to withstand the pitiless irony of it, the derisive grin of fate that drives men mad. He did these things, and he would

not yield. He did not mean to. And lest you should think the phrase a mere flourish—observe the testimony of the Book. . . .

The tribes flocked in that second day to do him honour. There was a great gathering in the square. Some vivid pantomime was displayed before the high seat. Some unusual rites were enacted before the temple, when the bamboo pipes and drums were going and the doctors wore their vermilion mop wigs and masks of ceremony, and chains of naked dancers were stamping and circling to the chant. Jim Albro watched and noted it all behind his solid inch of plate glass; not passively, not indifferently, but with close attention and the very liveliest interest. Aye, this god took an interest in the welfare of his people!

Heaven knows what he saw in the Papuans of Barange. By all accounts they are a plum-black race of rather superior ferocity—six feet is their medium stature, and their favourite dish a human ear, nicely broiled. So the old traders report, and never an explorer has improved the description. It required someone who could sit down among them without losing his head—quite literally—to learn more. Albro filled the bill. He had nothing to do but to sit. And while he sat he busied himself with the thoughts that have made the strangest, and blindest, reading in the diary.

A prime lot of raw material. Why [do?] people always lie about niggers? Unspoiled [part illegible]

the makings. Their orators told me in dumb show [words missing] behind the hills [lines missing]. . . . Wonderful!

Wonderful, he says. Wonderful what? Chances perhaps. Opportunities. Possibilities. Certainly nobody else ever had such as lay before Jim Albro if he could have won free to take them, as a conqueror, as a god. Was he dreaming even then of empire? Had he had a glimpse into the meaning of Papua that struck fire to his roving and restless soul? Had he fallen enamoured of the sphinx, and had she drawn the veil for him? It may be. The fact stands that, fevered and tortured as he was, burning with thirst and pain, he discovered something capable of rousing that cry from him. We hear the cry, and that is all we hear—nearly.

. . . suppose I should take a hand at this dumb show myself. I could do it. I know I could. Am going to trust old Gum-eye. And afterwards . . .

Peters looked up from the last page.

"Well?" said Jeckol impatiently.

"That's the end," announced Peters.

I cannot say what the breathless group of us had been expecting. Possibly the first-hand memoir of a miracle would have satisfied us, or the harrowing confessions and last wishes of the moribund. But so natural and unfanciful a thing as a full stop to the tension left us stupefied. We felt aggrieved, too, as if the author should have postponed his business long enough to let us know whether he was dead or not.

"It can't be!" cried Jeckol, all abroad. "How could it end there? What happened to him? Where is he?"

Peters swung his gaze around the vacant clearing and the impenetrable palisade of the forest.

"This was written three months ago, remember," he said.

"But he had a plan," insisted Jeckol. "He surely had a plan. He says he was going to do something. He'd found a friend he could trust. What next?"

"The friend must ha' failed him."

Cap'n Bartlet shook himself like one awaking. "No friend would have failed him," he said deliberately. "And—you're forgetting that ship-boy again."

Once more, with a rattled oath, Peters pounced on the unfortunate Kakwe, quailing beside him. Once more he brought to bear the persuasion he best knew how to use; and once more the black boy submitted, wholly, and showed. He had nothing to tell. He could throw no light on events. But he had seen from the trees where the "white fella mahrster him diver" forgathered with all the fiends of the pit, whereat he was "too much fright," and he showed us this time up the platform of the identical wide-thatched house by which we had been standing. We crept in through the low entrance and across a floor of sagging bamboo mats and found ourselves before a curtain of pandanus that hung midway. We were long past astonishment, but Jeckol, arresting a gesture, dropped his hand.

"I daren't," he whimpered.

It was Bartlet who put the curtain aside. And there, in the twilight of the place, we saw the god as he had appeared in his recent earthly phase. His great copper head gleamed at the back of a shallow niche, made fast against the wall. The muffled, stiff clumsiness of his diving dress revealed an heroic figure, still disposed in the attitude of a sitting Buddha, with the leaden-soled diving shoes thrust out by either knee. His single huge eye glared down at us balefully from over the altar as we stood, overwhelmed in the presence.

"And so he did—pass out," said Jeckol.

Something had caught the quick eye of Peters. Horrified, we saw him step forward and lay a vigorous and sacrilegious hold on that high divinity, saw the shape start and tremble as with life, saw it shake and flutter like a bundle of rags in the wind, and flap—emptily. . . .

"Yes," said Peters. "He's passed out, right enough. Leastways from here. Passed out, and on. And quite easy too. Look at these slits—would you?"

The diving suit had been laid open like a stripped pelt with long cuts of a keen blade, one down the middle of the back, one across the shoulders, and others connected along the inside of each limb to the wrists and ankles.

"Gone!"

"Gone," confirmed Peters. "Whether the niggers

dug him from it piece by piece like the kernel from a nut or whether that friend of his helped him to shed complete—you can take your choice. In either case he's gone—and gone this time to stay."

"There's no—no blood!" gasped Jeckol. "Anyhow!"

Cap'n Bartlet had removed his hat to polish his shiny forehead with the colourful kerchief, and he was looking out of the door over the tops of the trees to the far blue and nameless mountains of Papua, with an eye at peace.

"You could always bank on the luck of James O'Shaughnessy Albro," he said simply. "I knew he was alive."

But Jeckol was still reeling.

"I shan't write this yarn," he assured us earnestly. "It's too—it's too—and besides, there's no end to it. . . ."

"*Hic finis fandi*," suggested Peters.

JOHN RUSSELL.



OLD GADGETT

THE landlord, the landlord's wife and the landlord's son were sitting in the bar of the "George" at Bullockdean. It wanted about twenty minutes to opening time, and the potboy was polishing the glasses in readiness for six o'clock. The landlord was reading his newspaper—if he couldn't finish it now he'd get no opportunity later, and he liked to be able to talk a bit of politics with the farmers who drank in his bar; his wife was busy with her knitting and counting her stitches out loud, to the suppressed annoyance of his son, who was reading *The Blood on the Wall: a New Adventure of Detective Jim*.

There was a shuffling, scurrying sound outside, followed by a rap on the door.

"Go and see who that is, Dan," said the landlord's wife. "We aren't open yet."

The boy rose regretfully and unlocked the door, revealing an ancient shepherd in charge of some dusty sheep.

"Hallo, Mr. Gadgett! What brings you around at this time?"

"'Tis agone six o'clock, Maas' Sheather."

"Not for half an hour," called the landlord's wife. Mr. Gadgett consulted an elderly turnip.

"My watch says three o'clock, which means ten minnut past six," he affirmed.

"And my clock says half-past five, which means half-past five," said Mrs. Sheather.

The old man heaved a deep sigh.

"I come all the way from Brakey Bottom, and there's a wunnerful lot of dust on the roads. Leastways, it was wunst on the roads—reckon it's all in my throat now."

"Poor old chap," said the landlord. "I can't see any harm in serving him. It's nearly opening time."

"Oh no, it isn't," said the wife, "and even if it was only two minutes to six, you'd be breaking the law just the same. The law's a fine thing, ain't it, Mr. Gadgett?"

The shepherd looked confused and weary.

"Wot wud six o'clock and two o'clock and ten o'clock, I'm wunnerful muddled."

Dan felt sorry for him.

"Maybe we could let you have a cup of tea, since it's too early for beer," he suggested.

"Well, you go into the kitchen and make it," said his mother, "since you're the only one who's doing nothing."

Dan accepted the statement good-humouredly, though his heart yearned for Detective Jim.

"I'm a fine handy one with the tea, ain't I, mum? You come around to the kitchen door, Mr. Gadgett, and I'll give you something to lay the dust."

Life had taught Daniel Sheather to be handy at most things; he had none of the usual awkwardness and shame of a man making tea. He blew up the dying kitchen fire into a fine roar, filled the kettle

with fresh water, fetched tea from the caddy and a cup from the shelf just as efficiently, and a good deal more graciously than his mother would have done. Old Gadgett watched him from the chair where he sat stiffly, as one unused to rest.

"You're a wunnerful kind young chap, Maas' Sheather, and some day if you'll come around to my house I'll show you wot I ain't shown nobody yet."

"And what may that be?" asked Daniel.

The old man dropped his voice to a husky whisper.

"My teeth."

"Your teeth!"

"Yes, you come around to my house and I'll show you my teeth."

"But I didn't know as you had any," said Dan, with a rather tactless stare at the thin, receding old mouth.

"No, there ain't many as knows. I don't go wearing them about the place. But I've a wunnerful fine set of teeth."

"Got 'em at the hospital?" asked Dan, as he set the tea on the table.

Mr. Gadgett, with deliberate, shaking hands, emptied his cup into his saucer, and supped a few mouthfuls before answering impressively:

"No—not I. I made 'em myself."

"Reckon that was smart of you. How did you do it?"

"It's taken me nigh on ten year. They're sheep's teeth, wot I've picked up on the hill, and rubbed 'em and filed 'em till they're a proper size. And I've

strung 'em on two wires, and I hitn 'em around two old stumps I've got . . . you never saw the like."

Dan was properly impressed.

"Reckon you're a hem clever man, Mr. Gadgett, and I bet you find 'em useful at supper time."

Mr. Gadgett looked superior.

"Oh, I'd never use 'em for eating. They ain't that kind of teeth—and I don't say as I can rightly speak wud 'em, I wear 'em for the looks of things. Some day I mean to have my likeness took wud them in. But if you come around to my house I'll show 'em to you."

"I'll be proud."

"Reckon it ain't everyone I'd show 'em to. But you've done me a kindness to-day, Maas' Sheather, and it ain't the fust. I often wish as my poor Ellen cud see my teeth, for many's the times she's said: 'if we cud only get you fitted for a set of teeth, maaster.' . . . May be it's that wot put the notion into my head, and I'm larmentable sorry she didn't live to see wot I done. Howsumdever, they may have told her where she's gone. . . . There's my dog barking—reckon the sheep's uneasy; I mun be off, or I'll never be over the hill by sundown. Thank you kindly for the tea, Maas' Sheather."

He went out, comfortable and slaked. It was now nearly six—a few more minutes would have seen him in legal enjoyment of a glass of beer—but, reflected Daniel, a cup of tea was better for these old chaps.

It was some weeks before he redeemed his promise

to "call around," and there may have been some excuse in the fact that calling around involved a four-mile tramp across the downs to Alciston. But one evening he met the district nurse, who told him that old Gadgett had taken to his bed with rheumatism, and was not likely ever to leave it again.

"Poor old chap—it ud be a kindness if you'd call and see him, Mr. Sheather. He's been asking for you more than once. I don't think he'll ever be out with his sheep again, though I tell him he will, just to keep him quiet—he's terribly worried as to how they can manage without him at Place Farm."

"I can't come to-night, but I'll come to-morrow. Will that do?"

"Oh, fine. He'll be delighted, poor old soul."

So the next evening Dan set off for Alciston and Place Farm, across Heighton Down, the playground of sea winds and battleground of forgotten armies, and then through a webbing of obscure, chalky lanes, to a small osier-thatched cottage, huddled against the outlying ricks of Place.

The district nurse had just taken her leave, after having made the old man comfortable for the night. He was sitting up in his bed, propped against pillows, in the dusky, sag-roofed bedroom, which was so full of furniture that Dan had difficulty in threading his way through to the bedside.

"Hallo, Mr. Gadgett!"

The shepherd did not return his greeting, and when he sat down within the dim circle of the candlelight, he knew the reason. Mr. Gadgett was wearing his teeth.

For a moment Daniel, too, was speechless.

The sight before him was truly an astounding one. The old man had set out not only to supply Nature's deficiency, but to improve on her perfect work. Instead of thirty-two teeth, he had fifty, twenty-five in each row. The result was a grin of terrible magnitude. . . . Daniel gaped—fortunately he did not feel inclined to laugh. When he considered that the wonder had been given its proper due of amazement the shepherd's jaws worked convulsively as he freed them to express his satisfaction.

"Wunnerful, ain't it?"

"Surelye, Mr. Gadgett."

"You never thought to see such a set of teeth. A dentist couldn't do it more fine."

"That he couldn't."

"It's took me nigh on ten year, getting 'em all together and fixing 'em proper. And now I mun be thinking of having my likeness took, but I'm that stiff in my bones as maybe it'll be some days before I'm up on the hill—let alone I get into the town."

"How are you feeling to-night?"

"I feel valiant, save as there's aches in all my bones, and the power is agone from my legs. I asked God how am I to follow the sheep on the hill if He takes the power out of my legs like this?"

"Reckon you'll be better for a good long rest."

"I'm not so set on that. I'd sooner be out wud the sheep on the hill. But it ain't reasonable to expect it of me, and I've always understood as the Lord is properly reasonable."

Dan said nothing, feeling uncertain of the matter.

"There's that nurse is an unreasonable woman," continued the old man—"to think of me come down to having a nurse, and I done for myself this last twenty year. She's all for putting things where they don't belong, and the trouble I've had wud her notions you'd never believe: 'I'm biling the kettle fur your hot water, Mr. Gadgett, to give you a bit of a wash.' A bit of a wash! And she washes my chest and my back, which no mortal Christian ud wash between October and May—and she calls that a bit of a wash. . . . I'm like to take my death of cold wud her bits and tricks. . . . She's an unreasonable woman, wot shall never see my teeth. And she's agone and opened the winder, wot's never bin opened since my poor Ellen died and we let her spirit go out on to the hill."

Daniel was beginning to feel drowsy in the little room, full of the shadows of its crowded furniture. Outside a faint wind had risen and droned under the eaves.

"If I cud only get out to my sheep. There's that fool Botolph's got 'em now. . . . Reckon he'll have 'em all straggled—and the lambing not so far. . . . I mun be up fur the lambing."

"You'll be up, sure enough, Mr. Gadgett."

"I mun be up, surelye; or . . . this is a tarble thing to have happened to a poor old man past seventy year. I'm fretted after my sheep, and there's my likeness I want taken. Maas' Sheather, I mun have my likeness taken before I go. So as

everyone ull know wot I looked like, wearing my teeth. . . .”

The old voice quavered—evidently Mr. Gadgett felt strongly on the subject.

“Not an illness had I as boy or man,” he continued, “and now in my old age it comes upon me. Howsumdever, I’ll always say as the Lord ain’t unreasonable, and I’d have naught against Him if I cud get out to my sheep on the hill . . . before that fool Botolph spiles their fleeces. And if you’re going, lad, you mun shut that winder, and I’ll tell the nurse as it shut of issself.”

Daniel Sheather was courting, or he would not have allowed another long interval to elapse before he went to see Mr. Gadgett again. However, when everything was settled between him and Marion Stace, he reproached himself for his neglect.

“Let’s call around and see him to-night,” he said to his girl; “he’d be rare pleased to see you, and it’ll be a fine, friendly walk for us over the hill.”

So they went out in the last sunshine of the June day, in the slow raking yellow light which strokes the Downs before sunset. Their shadows, long and clear of line, went before them to Alciston, though they lost them in the Bostal Way, where the dusk was already lying between the banks. They found them again in the big ploughed fields of Place, moving over the bright, fierce green of the young oats. . . . Sometimes they were separate, sometimes they were one mingled darkness in which Daniel and Marion stood, as it were married by the sun.

"I'd like us to live in a little house like that," said Marion, when she saw old Gadgett's cottage.

"Hol!" said Dan—"I'll give you a better. Brick and slate and a couple of bow windows. . . ."

"But this is what I like best, surelye."

"Lath and plaster and osier-thatch! I'll give you better. . . ."

They went in and found the old man propped up waiting for them. But he had changed a good deal since Daniel's last visit. The tan was fading from his hands and cheeks, leaving him the queer ghost of himself, who had always been brown as a russet pear. He was also a little inclined to wander in his mind. Daniel was unable to make him quite understand who Marion was. Sometimes she ceased to be Maas' Sheather's young woman, and became a daughter, Mary, or even once the girl Ellen Bourne, who afterward had been Ellen Gadgett for thirty-five years.

But he willingly showed her his teeth, which he kept under his pillow wrapped in a clean cotton handkerchief.

"They're to be buried with me," he said, showing his acceptance of that final unreasonableness which allowed not only sickness but death to claim him after seventy-five years.

"Don't talk of burying, Mr. Gadgett," said Daniel, working at the old illusion, "you'll be out again yet."

"No—never again. I mun know it. I'll die in this bed where I lie. Passon he's been to see me, and he reads me solemn out of the Book. Reckon the

time's come when I mun go to my own Shepherd. I'd say naun if it wurn't fur the lambing, and that I was unaccountable set on going into the town and having my likeness taken. I asked Passon and Doctor both for a lift into town in their traps, but they both said it cudn't be done. It's a sad thing, surelye—for all the time I was a-making 'em I thought of how fine it ud be to have my likeness took wud a full set of teeth—me as they've soaked the bread fur a dunna-many year. . . . My crusts in hot water, you remember, my dear—so as they shudn't be wasted. You was a wunnerful girl fur waste. . . .”

They left him a few minutes after that, and on the door-step found the parson, come for an evening call. When he had congratulated Daniel and Marion, they talked of the old man within.

“He won't last much longer now,” said the vicar, “and one mustn't hope for it. His wife, daughters, everyone—all gone before him. He says he'll be glad to follow. But he's got a queer uncontrollable fancy to have his photograph taken. He's asked both the doctor and me if he couldn't somehow be got into Lewes for it. I don't know who he wants to give it to—he hasn't a soul left.”

“He was talking to us about that, sir,” said Daniel.

“It's probably an effect of his illness—his mind wanders a bit. I offered to take a snapshot of him on a sunny day, but evidently he doesn't trust the amateur.”

He went into the cottage, and the young couple started on their lingering walk over the Down.

They had so much in each other to absorb them that it was not till they were walking through the village that Marion said, "Daniel, why shouldn't you and me pay for a photographer to go out and take a likeness of old Mr. Gadgett?"

"Would he ever do such a thing?"

"Of course—if he's paid. Why, photographers went out to Beddingham Court the day Miss Alice was married, and took a likeness of her and her bridegroom—and they've been to Place for the foxhounds—and I dunno where else besides, for house parties and such."

"But that's only the big houses. They'd never go to old Gadgett."

"They'd go if we paid their price, and I don't see why we shouldn't. It'll be a dying comfort to the poor old man. Let you and me call in to Robins when we go to Lewes on Saturday, and if it costs a terrible lot of money, we can take it off the cake. . . ."

This might have been the reason why the Sheather-Stace wedding-cake was only two tiers high. Still, everyone said it was a very good cake, and Daniel and Marion, standing flushed and stiff and happy in their respective bridal black and white had no regrets for that topmost crown with its sugar vase and silver hearts. They held secretly themselves the crowning sweetness and silver heart of life, so could dispense with sugar and paper images for their neighbours' delectation.

Besides, as Marion said and Daniel agreed, they

had done the proper thing by Mr. Gadgett, poor old soul. He had had his likeness taken, as his heart desired, and they would never forget his delight, though pleasure expressed in a smile of fifty teeth is not the most beautiful thing to remember.

He was almost in his last stupor then, slipping back more and more deeply into the past—into the days of Ellen Gadgett and Mary Gadgett, and deeper still into the days of Ellen Bourne, and then right down at last to the bottom of the house of his mind, where lived another Mary Gadgett, who used to give him his breakfast of flour dumpling and hot water before sending him out with his wooden rattle to scare the birds from the orchards of Heronsdale, over by Waldron where he was born.

But he revived when he saw them come in, Daniel and Marion, and Mr. Robins of Lewes High Street with his camera. They told him what was to happen, and with fumbling old hands he groped under his pillow for his cherished teeth. There they were, wrapped up and clean, and soon his pleasure was silent as (helped by Daniel this time) he fixed them ready for action.

Mr. Robins maintained his professional aloofness while the curtains were pulled to and fro over the tiny hermetically shut window, and the light adjusted—a difficult matter in that low room of gleams and shadows.

“Now, quite still, please—while I count thirty. . .”
And the marvel was accomplished.

The old man's work had been given its immor-

tality: "Now everyone ul know I had a set of teeth as fine as anybody's."

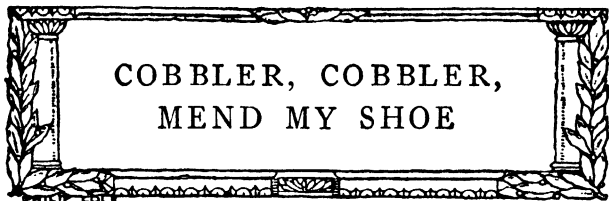
It was the memory of those words which made Daniel and Marion put his photograph with its terrifying smile in a conspicuous place in their new parlour. Otherwise, it would have been excusable of them to have buried it in an album, or at least have hidden it behind the wedding-group on the chiffonier. . . .

"But he wanted himself to be seen," said Daniel.

So the neighbours saw what old Gadgett himself had never seen, for by the time the proofs were ready he had sunk back so far into the past that it had closed over his head, and neither the present nor the future, with its promise of survival for the work of his hands, could reach him where he drowsed in the old days—strange old days when the railways had not come to Sussex and the stage coach still rolled and lurched in the ruts of the Lewes road . . . bad old days when farm labourers were paid eight shillings a week, and Mary Gadgett had tearfully sent her children out at dusk into the fields to steal turnips. . . .

The Sheathers made their selection from the proofs, doing their best to choose what they thought the old man would have wished. They still hoped he might come back to them for a little before the end, but by the time the prints arrived he was dead. He had followed his Ellen and his two Marys; and the little window of the stuffy room at last stood open, for old Gadgett had gone out on to the hill, to meet his own Shepherd.

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH.



COBBLER, COBBLER, MEND MY SHOE

THERE are a great many strange characters wandering about the streets of that strange little town they call Chelsea. There are street singers by the score, and street musicians who play on barrel-organs and hurdy-gurdies and cornets and flutes and fiddles and harps. There are men who shout "Fine Log—O!" and men who want to grind your scissors, and men who want to cane your chairs, and women who cry "Wonchu buy my sweet bloomin' lavender, sixteen fine branches for one penny"—which sounds very poetic but is actually a lie, because prices have risen since the day when the cry was first invented. There are also several religious maniacs, old men with grey beards and young men with golden ones, who walk about bareheaded and talk of God. Finally, there are a few artists in broad, floppy felt hats and black cloaks, and a great many female cranks who think that they can bring about the renaissance of Art by wearing laboriously hand-woven clothes of pastel colouring and quite intolerable cut. In fact, there are so many curiosities of one kind and another that after a while you don't bother to turn round and stare at them, as you did when you first came to live there.

Nobody stared, therefore, at the old man who

walked up the King's Road one afternoon in late October, when the chilly autumn sunset was just beginning to send people home to hot buttered toast and the passionate rapture of first fires. He was a very old man indeed, and a very odd old man. From the long loose cloak that he wore he might have been one of the artists, but from the raggedness of it you would have classed him with the hurdy-gurdists. The white beard and a touch of far-away ecstasy in the eyes seemed to label him "religious"; while his sandalled feet were faintly suggestive of the cranky and hand-woven women.

Not sandalled feet—sandalled foot; for his left foot was bare and very dirty, and his left sandal he was carrying in his gnarled old hand, because one of the straps of it was broken. And as he walked along, limping a little from a cut on his foot, he muttered:

"Who is going to mend my sandal?"

Presently he came to a shop whose windows were decked with innumerable shoes, as the firmament is decked with stars. There were men's shoes marked "Highly Serviceable," and women's shoes marked "Very Chic," and felt bedroom slippers marked "Unrivalled Bargain." The old man stopped and gazed into the window.

"Hideous—most hideous," he murmured, and mused upon the decadence of the times. Then he caught sight of some children's sandals in a corner, and the sternness of his face relaxed.

"But the children still wear sandals," he said softly; and reassured by this he went into the shop.

Inside there was a bright and ugly green carpet, and his bare foot left a trail of mud and blood upon it as he walked. A young salesman appeared from the depths of the shop, rubbing his hands and saying mechanically:

"Good afternoon, sir. What can I do for you?" But when he had looked more closely at the old man in the failing light his tone changed.

"Excuse me, sir—the carpet. Something's wrong with your foot."

"I know," said the old man patiently; "I have damaged it on some broken vessel. That is why I came in here. I want you to mend my sandal so that I may wear it again." He held out the tattered footgear to the young man, who peered at it distastefully with his hands behind his back.

"I'm afraid you'll have to go somewhere else," he said, dropping the "sir." "We don't do repairs of that kind."

"Will you sell me another pair, then?"

"We don't stock anything like that, I'm afraid."

"But those ones in the window——?"

"Oh, for children, yes. No demand for large sizes."

"As ever," murmured the old man, "the children are the wise ones. Can you not make me some, then?"

"Sorry," said the salesman, shortly, "but we're not manufacturers, we're only agents. Good afternoon." Very firmly he held the door open, and very sadly the old man passed out, muttering to himself, "You cannot make, neither can you mend: are there no craftsmen left?"

There were several more shops of the same kind, and at all of them he met with the same treatment. In one of them the salesman called the manager, and the manager requested him to leave. In another a pert young woman told him with a giggle that they hadn't got any hare-skins or rabbit-skins to-day, thank you. In a third he felt so tired that he sat down, uninvited, on one of the red plush chairs; but the manager fixed him with a glassy eye and began to talk about the police, so he rose wearily to his feet again and shuffled away down the street.

"In all this great city," he asked himself, "will nobody mend my shoe?"

But suddenly there were quick running footsteps behind him, and a girl in a black frock touched his arm. She was a little button-nosed creature, a very unimportant assistant in the last shop he had entered, and she had felt sorry for the old man.

"Look here," she panted, "my uncle's a cobbler in Emily Street. You try '*im*.'" And she scuttled back to the shop, blushing at her own impulsiveness. The old man turned and threw a blessing after her as she ran. (And it is a certain fact that the very next day the manager told her she was getting on much better now, and her friend Mabel gave her an almost new blue hat because she herself had gone into mourning, and she picked up a shilling in the gutter going home, and the boy she was walking out with asked her to marry him. So you may say what you like about blessings.)

The old man limped along to Emily Street, which

is a little alley leading off the King's Road. And there, sure enough, was a real old-fashioned cobbler's shop, with a battered wooden counter that was also a work-bench, and bundles of bootlaces hanging like seaweed on the walls, and little irregular three-cornered scraps of hide littering the floor, and a glorious all-pervading smell of leather. And there at the bench, bent double over his work under a flaming, fan-shaped gas-jet, was Mr. Mullins, the cobbler. He looked up with a cheerful grin as the old man entered. He liked queer-looking customers.

"I wonder," said the old man diffidently, "whether you can mend my shoe?"

"Mend your shoe, sir? If it's anything made of leather, I can mend it. That's my trade, that is."

"At last," cried the old man, handing him the sandal, "I have found a craftsman!"

"That's a curious shoe," said Mullins, looking at it with interest. "If you'll excuse my saying so, I bet that's carried you a good long way in its time?"

"Sixteen hundred years," the old man murmured.

"Potty," thought Mullins to himself, "but a decent old chap." Aloud he said, "I'll do this 'ere job for you now if you like, seeing you won't want to walk 'ome as you are. If you'd care to take a seat——" He pushed forward a high wooden stool. "Live far from 'ere?"

"A good long way," answered the old man, and he leaned forward, watching with keen interest in his face while the other worked.

"If you don't mind my saying so, sir, this is the finest bit of leather ever I see, even if it *is* old."

"Yes. Leather was leather in those days."

"I don't know *when* I've seen such a beautiful bit of leather," Mullins repeated. "If you'll excuse me, sir, may I ask where you got this pair of sandals?"

"I made them myself. You see, I was in your trade once."

"*Was* you now? Well, I never. Well, well. All I can say is, you knew your job. Give it up now, ave you?"

"Yes. A long time ago."

"Ar. Sold the goodwill, I suppose?"

"Goodwill? Ah, that's neither bought nor sold," said the old man.

"'Tis in London," Mullins assured him. "But per'aps other places they've got other ways of doing business. Now where was it you was working exactly?"

"In Soissons," said the old man.

"Soisson? Not Soisson on the Aisne?"

"You know the place?" asked the old man eagerly.

"I should think I ought to. I was there two years—there and thereabouts—before I was knocked out."

"A beautiful place," the old man mused, "but a hotbed of evil-doing and evil-thinking. A veritable hotbed."

"A blinkin' 'otbed," agreed Mullins tersely. "'ottest corner *I* ever was in, anyway."

"I did my best, you know, I did my best. . . . Living among them, and working among them, and trying to reach their immortal souls through the soles of their shoes. They were hard to convert, but perhaps . . ."

His voice trailed away, and for a few minutes the two men lost themselves among the memories of old fights; but for one of them it was the fighting of armies, and for the other it was the fighting of God against the gods. And one of them had travelled back scarcely a decade, while the other was dwelling on things that had happened sixteen hundred years ago.

"There now," said Mr. Mullins, putting the finishing touches to the sandal. "I think you'll find that all right. Don't you move, sir. I'll just slip it on for you."

He knelt down among the scraps of leather and fastened the sandal on to the bare and travel-stained foot. And then the extraordinary old man laid his wrinkled hand on Mullins' head and began to bless him.

Mullins thought, "Lumme, this is a go. The old cove must be one of the religious ones, after all, who come and ask you whether you're saved." He was glad that there was nobody there to see him being made a fool of. And then suddenly he came all over queer, and felt happier than he ever had before, and rather light-headed. He couldn't see properly, his head swam. . . .

It was only for a moment, but when he came to

himself again the old man had gone away, and on the counter lay a gold coin. It wasn't a sovereign—it was a foreign coin, and it looked very old and worn. He slipped it into his pocket hastily because his small son Tommy had burst into the shop, swinging his school satchel.

"Oh, Dad! Do you know what we done 'safternoon? A play! At least, a bit of a play. Shakespeare. And we read it out in turns. And, Dad—I was the King, I was!"

"Whatever are you talking about?" asked Mullins, patiently. "What King? What play?"

"*Henry the Fiff*. You look here." He pushed a paper-covered Shakespeare under his father's nose.

"Oh—poetry!" Mullins sniffed.

"Go on, Dad. It's luvly. Just read the end bit of what the King says——"

. . . And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

"You see, to-day is S'n Crispin's Day—twenty-fiff of October. That's why teacher made us do it to-day."

"Oh," said Mullins, unimpressed. "All this play-acting stuff. Why can't they teach you something useful? And 'oo is Saint Crispin, any'ow, when 'e's at 'ome?"

"'E was a shoemaker—just like you are," cried Tommy triumphantly. "An' teacher said 'e wos

the pattern—patt—patron saint of shoemakers—so there!”

“*Wos* 'e now?” said Mullins slowly, scratching his head. Then, after a long pause—

“Oh, 'e *wos*, *wos* 'e?” said Mullins thoughtfully, fingering the gold coin in his pocket.

JAN STRUTHER.

THE
ILL-REGULATED DESTINY
OF KIN YEN, THE PICTURE-
MAKER

PHILIP COLE

AS RECORDED BY HIMSELF BEFORE HIS SUDDEN
DEPARTURE FROM PEKIN, OWING TO CIRCUM-
STANCES WHICH ARE MADE PLAIN IN THE FOLLOW-
ING NARRATIVE

THERE are moments in the life of a person when the saying of the wise Ni-Hyu that "Misfortune comes to all men and to most women" is endowed with double force. At such times the faithful child of the Sun is a prey to the whitest and most funereal thoughts, and even the inspired wisdom of his illustrious ancestors seems more than doubtful, while the continued inactivity of the Sacred Dragon appears for the time to give colour to the scoffs of the Western barbarian. A little while ago these misgivings would have found no resting-place in the bosom of the writer. Now, however—but the matter must be made clear from the beginning.

The name of the despicable person who here sets forth his immature story is Kin Yen, and he is a native of Kia-Lu in the Province of Che-Kiang. Having purchased from a very aged man the position of Hereditary Instructor in the Art of Drawing Birds and Flowers, he gave lessons in these accomplishments until he had saved sufficient money to

journey to Peking. Here it was his presumptuous intention to learn the art of drawing figures in order that he might illustrate printed leaves of a more distinguished class than those which would accept what true politeness compels him to call his exceedingly unsymmetrical pictures of birds and flowers. Accordingly, when the time arrived, he disposed of his Hereditary Instructorship, having first ascertained in the interests of his pupils that his successor was a person of refined morals and great filial piety.

Alas! it is well written, "The road to eminence lies through the cheap and exceedingly uninviting eating-houses." In spite of this person's great economy, and of his having begged his way from Kia-Lu to Peking in the guise of a pilgrim, journeying to burn incense in the sacred Temple of Truth near that city, when once within the latter place his taels melted away like the smile of a person of low class when he discovers that the mandarin's stern words were not intended as a jest. Moreover, he found that the story-makers of Peking, receiving higher rewards than those at Kia-Lu, considered themselves bound to introduce living characters into all their tales, and in consequence the very ornamental drawings of birds and flowers which he had entwined into a legend, entitled "The Last Fight of the Heaven-sent Tcheng"—a story which had been entrusted to him for illustration as a test of his skill—were returned to him with a communication in which the writer conveyed his real meaning by stating contrary facts. It therefore became necessary that he should become competent

in the art of drawing figures without delay, and with this object he called at the picture-room of Tieng Lin, a person whose experience was so great that he could, without discomfort to himself, draw men and women of all classes, both good and bad. When the person who is setting forth this narrative revealed to Tieng Lin the utmost amount of money he could afford to give for instruction in the art of drawing living figures, Tieng Lin's face became as overcast as the sky immediately before the Great Rains, for in his ignorance of this incapable person's poverty he had treated him with equality and courtesy, nor had he kept him waiting in the mean room on the plea that he was at that moment closeted with the Sacred Emperor. However, upon receiving an assurance that a rumour would be spread in which the number of taels should be multiplied by ten, and that the sum itself should be brought in advance, Tieng Lin promised to instruct this person in the art of drawing five characters, which, he said, would be sufficient to illustrate all stories except those by the most expensive and highly-rewarded story-tellers—men who have become so proficient that they not infrequently introduce a score or more of living persons into their tales without confusion.

After considerable deliberation, this unassuming person selected the following characters, judging them to be the most useful, and the most readily applicable to all phases and situations of life:

- I. A bad person, wearing a long dark pigtail and

smoking an opium pipe. His arms to be folded, and his clothes new and very expensive.

2. A woman of low class. One who removes dust and useless things from the rooms of the over-fastidious and of those who have long nails; she to be carrying her trade-signs.

3. A person from Pe-ling, endowed with qualities which cause the beholder to be amused. This character to be especially designed to go with the short sayings which remove gravity.

4. One who, having incurred the displeasure of the sublime Emperor, has been decapitated in consequence.

5. An ordinary person of no striking or distinguished appearance. One who can be safely introduced in all places and circumstances without great fear of detection.

After many months spent in constant practice and in taking measurements, this unenviable person attained a very high degree of proficiency, and could draw any of the five characters without hesitation. With renewed hope, therefore, he again approached those who sit in easy-chairs, and concealing his identity (for they are stiff at bending, and when once a picture-maker is classed as "of no good" he remains so to the end, in spite of change), he succeeded in getting entrusted with a story by the elegant and refined Kyen Tal. This writer, as he remembered with distrust, confines his distinguished efforts entirely to the doings of sailors and of those con-

nected with the sea, and this tale, indeed, he found upon reading to be the narrative of how a Hang-Chow junk and its crew, consisting mostly of aged persons, were beguiled out of their course by an exceedingly ill-disposed dragon, and wrecked upon an island of naked barbarians. It was, therefore, with a somewhat heavy stomach that this person set himself to the task of arranging his five characters so as to illustrate the words of the story.

The sayings of the ancient philosopher Tai Loo are indeed very subtle, and the truth of his remark, "After being disturbed in one's dignity by a mandarin's foot it is no unusual occurrence to fall on the face in crossing a muddy street," was now apparent. Great as was the disadvantage owing to the nature of the five characters, this became as nothing when it presently appeared that the avaricious and clay-souled Tieng Lin, taking advantage of the blindness of this person's enthusiasm, had taught him the figures so that they all gazed in the same direction. In consequence of this it would have been impossible that two should be placed as in the act of conversing together had not the noble Kyen Tal been inspired to write that "his companions turned from him in horror." This incident the ingenious person who is recording these facts made the subject of three separate drawings, and having in one or two other places effected skilful changes in the writing, so similar in style to the strokes of the illustrious Kyen Tal as to be undetectable, he found little difficulty in making use of all his characters. The risks of the

future, however, were too great to be run with impunity; therefore it was arranged, by means of money—for this person was fast becoming acquainted with the ways of Peking—that an emissary from one who sat in an easy-chair should call upon him for a conference, the narrative of which appeared in this form in the *Peking Printed Leaves of Thrice-distilled Truth*:

The brilliant and amiable young picture-maker Kin Yen, in spite of the immediate and universal success of his accomplished efforts, is still quite rotund in intellect, nor is he, if we may use a form of speaking affected by our friends across the Hoang Hai, "suffering from swollen feet." A person with no recognised position, but one who occasionally does inferior work of this nature for us, recently surprised Kin Yen without warning, and found him in his sumptuously appointed picture-room, busy with compasses and tracing-paper. About the place were scattered in elegant confusion several of his recent masterpieces. From the subsequent conversation we are in a position to make it known that in future this refined and versatile person will confine himself entirely to illustrations of processions, funerals, armies on the march, persons pursued by others, and kindred subjects which appeal strongly to his imagination. Kin Yen has severe emotions on the subject of individuality in art, and does not hesitate to express himself forcibly with reference to those who are content to degrade the names of their ancestors by turning out what he wittily describes as "so much of varied mediocrity."

The prominence obtained by this pleasantly-composed notice—for it was copied by others who were

unaware of the circumstance of its origin—had the desired effect. In future, when one of those who sit in easy-chairs wished for a picture after the kind mentioned, he would say to his lesser one: "Oh, send to the graceful and versatile Kin Yen; he becomes inspired on the subject of funerals," or persons escaping from prison, or families walking to the temple, or whatever it might be. In that way this narrow-minded and illiterate person was soon both looked at and rich, so that it was his daily practice to be carried, in silk garments, past the houses of those who had known him in poverty, and on these occasions he would puff out his cheeks and pull his moustaches, looking fiercely from side to side.

True are the words written in the elegant and distinguished Book of Verses: "Beware lest when being kissed by the all-seeing Emperor, you step upon the elusive banana-peel." It was at the height of eminence in this altogether degraded person's career that he encountered the being who led him on to his present altogether too lamentable condition.

Tien Nung is the earthly name by which is known she who combines all the most illustrious attributes which have been possessed of women since the days of the divine Fou-Hy. Her father is a person of very gross habits, and lives by selling inferior merchandise covered with some of good quality. Upon past occasions, when under the direct influence of Tien, and in the hope of gaining some money benefit, this person may have spoken of him in terms of praise,

and may even have recommended friends to entrust articles of value to him, or to procure goods on his advice. Now, however, he records it as his unalterable decision that the father of Tien Nung is by profession a person who obtains goods by stratagem, and that, moreover, it is impossible to gain an advantage over him on matters of exchange.

The events that have happened prove the deep wisdom of Li Pen when he exclaimed, "The whitest of pigeons, no matter how excellent in the silk-hung chamber, is not to be followed on the field of battle." Tien herself was all that the most exacting of persons could demand, but her opinions on the subject of picture-making were not formed by heavy thought, and it would have been well if this had been borne in mind by this person. One morning he chanced to meet her while carrying open in his hands four sets of printed leaves containing his pictures.

"I have observed," said Tien, after the usual personal inquiries had been exchanged, "that the renowned Kin Yen, who is the object of the keenest envy among his brother picture-makers, so little regards the sacredness of his accomplished art that never by any chance does he depict persons of the very highest excellence. Let not the words of an impetuous maiden disarrange his digestive organs if they should seem too bold to the high-souled Kin Yen, but this matter has, since she has known him, troubled the eyelids of Tien. Here," she continued, taking from this person's hands one of the printed leaves which he was carrying, "in this illustration of

persons returning from extinguishing a fire, is there one who appears to possess those qualities which appeal to all that is intellectual and competitive within one? Can it be that the immaculate Kin Yen is unacquainted with the subtle distinctions between the really select and the vastly ordinary? Ah, indiscriminating Kin Yen! are not the eyelashes of the person who is addressing you as threads of fine gold to junks' cables when compared with those of the extremely commonplace female who is here pictured in the art of carrying a bucket? Can the most refined lack of vanity hide from you the fact that your own person is infinitely rounder than this of the evilly-intentioned-looking individual with the opium pipe? O blind Kin Yen!"

Here she fled in honourable confusion, leaving this person standing in the street astounded, and a prey to the most distinguished emotions of a complicated nature.

"Oh, Tien," he cried at length, "inspired by those bright eyes, narrower than the most select of the three thousand and one possessed by the sublime Buddha, the almost fallen Kin Yen will yet prove himself worthy of your esteemed consideration. He will, without delay, learn to draw two new living persons, and will incorporate in them the likenesses which you have suggested."

Returning swiftly to his abode, he therefore inscribed and dispatched this letter, in proof of his resolve:

To the Heaven-sent human chrysanthemum, in whose

body reside the Celestial Principles and the imprisoned colours of the rainbow.

From the very offensive and self-opinionated picture-maker.

Henceforth this person will take no rest, nor eat any but the commonest food, until he shall have carried out the wishes of his one Jade Star, she whose teeth he is not worthy to blacken.

When Kin Yen has been entrusted with a story which contains a being in some degree reflecting the character of Tien, he will embellish it with her irreproachable profile and come to hear her words. Till then he bids her farewell.

From that moment most of this person's time was necessarily spent in learning to draw the two new characters, and in consequence of this he lost much work, and, indeed, the greater part of the connection which he had been at such pains to form gradually slipped away from him. Many months passed before he was competent to reproduce persons resembling Tien and himself, for in this he was unassisted by Tieng Lin, and his progress was slow.

At length, being satisfied, he called upon the least fierce of those who sit in easy-chairs, and requested that he might be entrusted with a story for picture-making.

"We should have been covered with honourable joy to set in operation the brush of the inspired Kin Yen," replied the other with agreeable condescension; "only at the moment it does not chance that we have before us any stories in which funerals, or beggars being driven from the city, form the chief incidents. Perhaps if the polished Kin Yen should happen to

be passing this ill-constructed office in about six months' time——"

"The brush of Kin Yen will never again depict funerals, or labourers arranging themselves to receive pay or similar subjects," exclaimed this person impetuously; "for, as it is well said, 'The lightning discovers objects which the paper-lantern fails to reveal.' In future none but tales dealing with the most distinguished persons shall have his attention."

"If this be the true word of the dignified Kin Yen, it is possible that we may be able to animate his inspired faculties," was the response. "But in that case, as a new style must be in the nature of an experiment, and as our public has come to regard Kin Yen as the great exponent of Art Facing in One Direction, we cannot continue the exceedingly liberal payment with which we have been accustomed to reward his elegant exertions."

"Provided the story be suitable, that is a matter of less importance," replied this person.

"The story," said the one in the easy-chair, "is by the refined Tong-king, and it treats of the high-minded and conscientious doubts of one who would become a priest of Fo. When preparing for this distinguished office he discovers within himself leanings towards the religion of Lao-Tse. His illustrious scruples are enhanced by his affection for Wu Ping, who now appears in the story."

"And the ending?" inquired this person, for it was desirable that the two should marry happily.

"The inimitable stories of Tong-king never have any real ending, and this one, being in his most elevated style, has even less end than most of them. But the whole narrative is permeated with the odour of joss-sticks and honourable high-mindedness, and the two characters are both of noble birth."

As it might be some time before another story so suitable should be offered, or one which would afford so good an opportunity of wafting incense to Tien, and of displaying her incomparable outline in dignified and magnanimous attitudes, this was eagerly accepted, and for the next week this obscure person spent all his days and nights in picturing the lovely Tien and his debased self in the characters of the nobly-born young priest of Fo and Wu Ping. The pictures finished, he caused them to be carefully conveyed to the office, and then, sitting down, spent many hours in composing the following letter, to be sent to Tien, accompanying a copy of the printed leaves wherein the story and his drawings should appear:

When the light has for a period been hidden from a person, it is no uncommon thing for him to be struck blind on gazing at the sun; therefore, if the sublime Tien values the eyes of Kin Yen, let her hide herself behind a gauze screen on his approach.

The trembling words of Tien have sunk deep into the inside of Kin Yen and become part of his being. Never again can he depict persons of the quality and in the position he was wont to do.

With this he sends his latest efforts. In each case he conceives his drawings to be the pictures to the written words; in the noble Tien's case it is undoubtedly

so, in his own he aspires to it. Doubtless the unobtrusive Tien would make no claim to the character and manner of behaving of the one in the story, yet Kin Yen confidently asserts that she is to the other as the glove is to the hand, and he is filled with the most intelligent delight at being able to exhibit her in her true robes, by which she will be known to all who see her, in spite of her dignified protests. Kin Yen hopes; he will come this evening after sunset.

The week which passed between the finishing of the pictures and the appearance of the eminent printed leaves containing them was the longest in this near-sighted person's ill-spent life. But at length the day arrived, and going with exceedingly mean haste to the place of sale, he purchased a copy and sent it, together with the letter of his honourable intention, on which he had bestowed so much care, to Tien.

Not till then did it occur to this inconsiderable one that the impetuosity of his action was ill-judged; for might it not be that the pictures were evilly printed, or that the delicate and fragrant words painting the character of the one who now bore the features of Tien had undergone some change?

To satisfy himself, scarce as taels had become with him, he purchased another copy.

There are many exalted sayings of the wise and venerable Confucius constructed so as to be of service and consolation in moments of strong mental distress. These for the greater part recommend tranquillity of mind, a complete abnegation of the human passions and the like behaviour. The person who is here

endeavouring to bring this badly-constructed account of his dishonourable career to a close pondered these for some moments after twice glancing through the matter in the printed leaves, and then, finding the faculties of speech and movement restored to him, procured a two-edged knife of distinguished brilliance and went forth to call upon the one who sits in an easy-chair.

"Behold," said the lesser one, insidiously stepping in between this person and the inner door, "my intellectual and all-knowing chief is not here to-day. May his entirely insufficient substitute offer words of congratulation to the inspired Kin Yen on his effective and striking pictures in this week's issue?"

"His altogether insufficient substitute," answered this person, with difficulty mastering his great rage, "may and shall offer words of explanation to the inspired Kin Yen, setting forth the reason of his pictures being used, not with the high-minded story of the elegant Tong-king for which they were executed, but accompanying exceeding base, foolish, and ungrammatical words written by Klan-hi, the Peking remover of gravity—words which will evermore brand the dew-like Tien as a person of light speech and no refinement"; and in his agony this person struck the lacquered table several times with his elegant knife.

"O Kin Yen," exclaimed the lesser one, "this matter rests not here. It is a thing beyond the sphere of the individual who is addressing you. All he can tell is that the graceful Tong-king withdrew

his exceedingly tedious story for some reason at the final moment, and as your eminent drawings had been paid for, my chief of the inner office decided to use them with this story of Klan-hi. But surely it cannot be that there is aught in the story to displease your illustrious personality?"

"Judge for yourself," this person said, "first, understanding that the two immaculate characters figuring as the personages of the narrative are exact copies of this dishonoured person himself and of the willowy Tien, daughter of the vastly rich Pe-li-Chen, whom he was hopeful of marrying."

Selecting one of the least offensive of the passages in the work, this unhappy person read the following immature and inelegant words:

This well-satisfied writer of printed leaves had a highly-distinguished time last night. After Chow had departed to see about food, and the junk had been fastened up at the lock of Kilung, on the Yang-tse-Kiang, he and the round-bodied Shang were journeying along the narrow path by the riverside when the right leg of the graceful and popular person who is narrating these events disappeared into the river. Suffering no apprehension in the dark but that the vanishing limb was the left leg of Shang, this intelligent writer allowed his impassiveness to melt away to an exaggerated degree; but at that moment the circumstance became plain to the round-bodied Shang, who was in consequence very grossly amused at the mishap and misapprehension of your good lord, the writer, at the same time pointing out the matter as it really was. Then it chanced that there came by one of the maidens who

carry tea and jest for small sums of money to the sitters at the little tables with round white tops, at which this remarkable person, the confidant of many mandarins, ever desirous of displaying his priceless power of removing gravity, said to her:

"How much of gladness, Ning-Ning? By the Sacred Serpent this is plainly your night out."

Perceiving the true facts of the predicament of this commendable writer, she replied:

"Suffer not your illustrious pigtail to be removed, venerable Wang; for in this maiden's estimation it is indeed your night in."

There are times when this valued person wonders whether his method of removing gravity be in reality very antique or quite new. On such occasions the world, with all its schools, and those who interfere in the concerns of others, continues to revolve around him. The wondrous sky-lanterns come out silently two by two like to the crystallised music of stringed woods. Then, in the mystery of no-noise, his head becomes greatly enlarged with celestial and highly-profound thoughts; his groping hand seems to touch matter which may be written out in his impressive style and sold to those who print leaves, and he goes home to write out such.

When this person looked up after reading, with tears of shame in his eyes, he perceived that the lesser one had cautiously disappeared. Therefore, being unable to gain admittance to the inner office, he returned to his home.

Here the remark of the omniscient Tai Loo again fixes itself upon the attention. No sooner had this incapable person reached his house than he became

aware that a parcel had arrived for him from the still adorable Tien. Retiring to a distance from it, he opened the accompanying letter and read:

When a virtuous maiden has been made the victim of a heartless jest or a piece of coarse stupidity at a person's hands, it is no uncommon thing for him to be struck blind on meeting her father. Therefore, if the degraded and evil-minded Kin Yen values his eyes, ears, nose, pigtail, even his dishonourable breath, let him hide himself behind a fortified wall at Pe-li-Chen's approach.

With this Tien returns everything she has ever accepted from Kin Yen. She even includes the brace of puppies which she received anonymously about a month ago, and which she did not eat, but kept for reasons of her own—reasons entirely unconnected with the vapid and exceedingly conceited Kin Yen.

As though this letter, and the puppies of which this person now heard for the first time, making him aware of the existence of a rival lover, were not enough, there almost immediately arrived a letter from Tien's father:

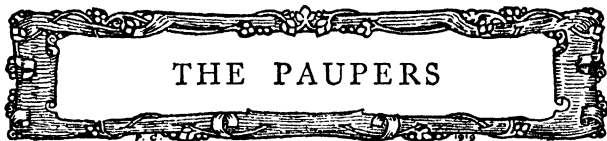
This person has taken the advice of those skilled in extorting money by means of law forms, and he finds that Kin Yen has been guilty of a grave and highly expensive act. This is increased by the fact that Tien had conveyed his seemingly distinguished intentions to all her friends, before whom she now stands in an exceedingly ungraceful attitude. The machinery for depriving Kin Yen of all the necessities of existence shall be put into operation at once.

At this point, the person who is now concluding his obscure and commonplace history, having spent his

last piece of money on joss-sticks and incense-paper, and being convinced of the presence of the spirits of his ancestors, is inspired to make the following prophecies: That Tieng Lin, who imposed upon him in the matter of picture-teaching, shall come to a sudden end, accompanied by great internal pains, after suffering extreme poverty; that the one who sits in an easy-chair, together with his lesser one and all who make stories for them, shall, while sailing to a rice feast during the Festival of Flowers, be precipitated into the water and slowly devoured by sea monsters, Klan-hi in particular being tortured in the process; that Pe-li-Chen, the father of Tien, shall be seized with the dancing sickness when in the presence of the august Emperor, and being in consequence suspected of treachery, shall, to prove the truth of his denials, be submitted to the tests of boiling tar, red-hot swords, and of being dropped from a great height on to the Sacred Stone of Goodness and Badness, in each of which he shall fail to convince his judges or to establish his innocence, to the amusement of all beholders.

These are the true words of Kin Yen, the picture-maker, who, having unweighted his mind and exposed the avaricious villainy of certain persons, is now retiring by night to a very select and hidden spot in the Khingan Mountains.

ERNEST BRAMAH.



οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρείσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχουσιν
ἀνὴρ ἡδὲ γυνή.

I

ROUND the skirts of the plantation, and half-way down the hill, there runs a thick fringe of wild cherry-trees. Their white blossom makes, for three weeks in the year, a pretty contrast with the larches and Scotch firs that serrate the long ridge above; and close under their branches runs the line of oak rails that marks off the plantation from the meadow.

A labouring man came deliberately round the slope, as if following this line of rails. As a matter of fact, he was treading the little-used footpath that here runs close alongside the fence for fifty yards before diverging downhill towards the village. So narrow is this path that the man's boots were powdered to a rich gold by the buttercups they had brushed aside.

By and by he came to a standstill, looked over the fence, and listened. Up among the larches a faint chopping sound could just be heard, irregular but persistent. The man put a hand to his mouth, and hailed:

"Hi-i-i! Knock off! Stable clock's gone noo-oon!"

Came back no answer. But the chopping ceased

at once; and this apparently satisfied the man, who leaned against the rail and waited, chewing a spear of brome-grass, and staring steadily, but incuriously, at his boots. Two minutes passed without stir or sound in this corner of the land. The human figure was motionless. The birds in the plantation were taking their noonday siesta. A brown butterfly rested, with spread wings, on the rail—so quietly, he might have been pinned there.

A cracked voice was suddenly lifted a dozen yards off, and within the plantation:

"Such a man as I be to work! Never heard a note o' that blessed clock, if you'll believe me. Ab-sorbed, I s'pose."

A thin withered man in a smock-frock emerged from among the cherry-trees with a bill-hook in his hand, and stooped to pass under the rail.

"Ewgh! The pains I suffer in that old back of mine you'll never believe, my son, not till the appointed time when you come to suffer 'em yoursel'. Well-a-well! Says I just now, up among the larches, 'Heigh, my sonny-boys, I can crow over you, anyways; for I was a man grown when Squire planted ye; and here I be, a lusty gaffer, markin' ye down for destruction.' But hallo! where's the dinner?"

"There bain't none."

"Hey?"

"There bain't none."

"How's that? Damme! William Henry, dinner's dinner, an' don't you joke about it. Once you begin to make fun o' sacred things like meals and vittles——"

"And don't you flare up like that, at your time o' life. We're fashionists to-day: dining-out. 'Quarter after nine this morning I was passing by the Green wi' the straw-cart, when old Jan Trueman calls after me, 'Have 'ee heard the news?' 'What news?' says I. 'Why,' says he, 'me an' my missus be going into the House this afternoon—can't manage to pull along by ourselves no more,' he says; 'an' we wants you an' your father to drop in soon after noon an' take a bite wi' us, for old sake's sake. 'Tis our last taste o' free life, and we'm going to do the thing fittywise,' he says."

The old man bent a meditative look on the village roofs below.

"We'll pleasure 'en, of course," he said slowly. "So 'tis come round to Jan's turn? But a' was born in the year of Waterloo victory, ten year afore me, so I s'pose he've kept his doom off longer than most."

The two set off down the footpath. There is a stile at the foot of the meadow, and as he climbed it painfully, the old man spoke again.

"And his doorway, I reckon, 'll be locked for a little while, an' then opened by strangers; an' his nimble youth be forgot like a flower o' the field; an' fare thee well, Jan Trueman! Maria, too—I can mind her well as a nursing mother—a comely woman in her day. I'd no notion they'd got this in their mind."

"Far as I can gather, they've been minded that way ever since their daughter Jane died, last fall."

From the stile where they stood they could look

down into the village street. And old Jan Trueman was plain to see, in clean linen and his Sunday suit, standing in the doorway and welcoming his guests.

"Come ye in—come ye in, good friends," he called, as they approached. "There's cold bekkon, an' cold sheep's liver, an' Dutch cheese, besides bread, an' a thimbleful o' gin-an'-water for every soul among ye, to make it a day of note in the parish."

He looked back over his shoulder into the kitchen. A dozen men and women, all elderly, were already gathered there. They had brought their own chairs. Jan's wife wore her bonnet and shawl, ready to start at a moment's notice. Her luggage in a blue handkerchief lay on the table. As she moved about and supplied her guests, her old lips twitched nervously; but when she spoke it was with no unusual tremor of the voice.

"I wish, friends, I could ha' cooked ye a little something hot; but there'd be no time for the washing-up, an' I've ordained to leave the place tidy."

One of the old women answered:

"There's naught to be pardoned, I'm sure. Never do I mind such a gay set-off for the journey. For the gin-an'-water is a little addition beyond experience. The vittles, no doubt, you begged up at the Vicarage, sayin' you'd been a peck o' trouble to the family, but this was going to be the last time."

"I did, I did," assented Mr. Trueman.

"But the gin-an'-water—how on airth you contrived it is a riddle!"

The old man rubbed his hands together and looked around with genuine pride.

"There was old Miss Scantlebury," said another guest, a smock-frocked gaffer of seventy, with a grizzled shock of hair. "You remember Miss Scantlebury?"

"O' course, o' course."

"Well, she did it better'n anybody I've heard tell of. When she fell into redooiced circumstances she sold the eight-day clock that was the only thing o' value she had left. Brown o' Tregarrick made it, with a very curious brass dial, whereon he carved a full-rigged ship that rocked like a cradle, an' went down stern foremost when the hour struck. 'Twas worth walking a mile to see. Brown's grandson bought it off Miss Scantlebury for two guineas, he being proud of his grandfather's skill; an' the old lady drove into Tregarrick Work'us behind a pair o' greys wi' the proceeds. Over and above the carriage hire, she'd enough left to adorn the horse wi' white favours an' give the rider a crown, large as my lord. Aye, an' at the Work'us door she said to the fellow, said she, 'All my life I've longed to ride in a bridal chariot; an' though my only lover died of a decline when I was scarce twenty-two, I've done it at last,' said she; 'an' now heaven an' airth can't undo it!'"

A heavy silence followed this anecdote, and then one or two of the women vented small disapproving coughs. The reason was the speaker's loud mention of the Workhouse. A week, a day, a few hours

before, its name might have been spoken in Mr. and Mrs. Trueman's presence. But now they had entered its shadow; they were "going"—whether to the dim vale of Avilion, or with chariot and horses of fire to heaven, let nobody too curiously ask. If Mr. and Mrs. Trueman chose to speak definitely, it was another matter.

Old Jan bore no malice, however, but answered, "That beats me, I own. Yet we shall drive, though it be upon two wheels an' behind a single horse. For Farmer Lear's driving into Tregarrick in an hour's time, an' he've a-promised us a lift."

"But about that gin-an'-water? For real gin-an'-water it is, to sight an' taste."

"Well, friends, I'll tell ye: for the trick may serve one of ye in the days when you come to follow me, tho' the new relieving officer may have learnt wisdom before then. You must know we've been considering of this step for some while; but hearing that old Jacobs was going to retire soon, I says to Maria, 'We'll bide till the new officer comes, and if he's a green hand, we'll diddle 'en.' Day before yesterday, as you know, was his first round at the work; so I goes up an' draws out my ha'af-crown same as usual, an' walks straight off for the "Four Lords" for a ha'af-crown's worth o' gin. Then back I goes, an' demands an admission order for me an' the missus. 'Why, where's your ha'at-crown?' says he. 'Gone in drink,' says I. 'Old man,' says he, 'you'm a scandal, an' the sooner you're put out o' the way o' drink, the better for you an' your poor wife.' 'Right you are,'

I says; an' I got my order. But there, I'm wasting time; for to be sure you've most of ye got kith or kin in the place where we'm going, and'll be wanting to send 'em a word by us."

It was less than an hour before Farmer Lear pulled up to the door in his red-wheeled spring-cart.

"Now, friends," said Mrs. Trueman, as her ears caught the rattle of the wheels, "I must trouble ye to step outside while I tidy up the floor."

The women offered their help, but she declined it. Alone she put the small kitchen to rights, while they waited outside around the door. Then she stepped out with her bundle, locked the door after her, and slipped the key under an old flower-pot on the window-ledge. Her eyes were dry.

"Come'st along, Jan."

There was a brief hand-shaking, and the paupers climbed up beside Farmer Lear.

"I've made a sort o' little plan in my head," said old Jan at parting, "of the order in which I shall see ye again, one by one. 'Twill be a great amusement to me, friends, to see how the fact fits in wi' my little plan."

The guests raised three feeble cheers as the cart drove away, and hung about for several minutes after it had passed out of sight, gazing along the road as wistfully as more prosperous men look in through churchyard gates at the acres where their kinsfolk lie buried.

II

The first building passed by the westerly road as it descends into Tregarrick is a sombre pile of some eminence, having a gateway and lodge before it, and a high encircling wall. The sun lay warm on its long roof, and the slates flashed gaily there, as Farmer Lear came over the knap of the hill and looked down on it. He withdrew his eyes nervously to glance at the old couple beside him. At the same moment he reined up his dun-coloured mare.

"I reckoned," he said timidly, "I reckoned you'd be for stopping hereabouts an' getting down. You'd think it more seemly—that's what I reckoned: an' 'tis all down-hill now."

For ten seconds and more neither the man nor the woman gave a sign of having heard him. The spring-cart's oscillatory motion seemed to have entered into their spinal joints; and now that they were come to a halt, their heads continued to wag forward and back as they contemplated the haze of smoke spread, like a blue scarf, over the town, and the one long slate roof that rose from it as if to meet them. At length the old woman spoke, and with some viciousness, though her face remained as blank as the Work-house door.

"The next time I go back up this hill, if ever I do, I'll be carried up feet first."

"Maria," said her husband, feebly reproachful, "you tempt the Lord, that you do."

"Thank 'ee, Farmer Lear," she went on, paying

no heed; "you shall help us down, if you've a mind to, an' drive on. We'll make shift to trickly 'way down so far as the gate; for I'd be main vexed if anybody that had known me in life should see us creep in. Come'st along, Jan."

Farmer Lear alighted, and helped them out carefully. He was a clumsy man, but did his best to handle them gently. When they were set on their feet, side by side on the high road, he climbed back, and fell to arranging the reins, while he cast about for something to say.

"Well, folks, I s'pose I must be wishing 'ee good-bye." He meant to speak cheerfully, but over-acted, and was hilarious instead. Recognising this, he blushed.

"We'll meet in heaven, I dare say," the woman answered. "I put the door-key, as you saw, under the empty geranium-pot 'pon the window-ledge; an' whoever the new tenant's wife may be, she can eat off the floor if she's minded. Now drive along, that's a good soul, and leave us to fend for ourselves."

They watched him out of sight before either stirred. The last decisive step, the step across the Workhouse threshold, must be taken with none to witness. If they could not pass out of their small world by the more reputable mode of dying, they would at least depart with this amount of mystery. They had left the village in Farmer Lear's cart, and Farmer Lear had left them in the high road; and after that, nothing should be known.

"Shall we be moving on?" Jan asked at length.

There was a gate beside the road just there, with a small triangle of green before it, and a granite roller half-buried in dock leaves. Without making any answer, the woman seated herself on this, and pulling a handful of the leaves, dusted her shoes and skirt.

"Maria, you'll take a chill that'll carry you off, sitting 'pon that cold stone."

"I don't care. 'Twon't carry me off afore I get inside; an' I'm going in decent, or not at all. Come here, an' let me tittivate you."

He sat down on the stone beside her, and submitted to be dusted.

"You'd as lief lower me as not in their eyes, I verily believe."

"I always was one to gather dust."

"An' a fresh spot o' bacon-fat 'pon your weskit, that I've kept the moths from since goodness knows when!"

Old Jan looked down over his waistcoat. It was of good West-of-England broadcloth, and he had worn it on the day when he married the woman at his side.

"I'm thinking——" he began, nervously.

"Hey?"

"I'm thinking I'll find it hard to make friends in—in there. 'Tis such a pity, to my thinking, that by reggilations we'll be parted as soon as we get inside. You've a-got so used to my little ways an' cornders, an' we've a-got so many little secrets together an' old-fash'ned odds an' ends o' knowledge, that you can take my meaning almost afore I start to speak.

An' that's a great comfort to a man o' my age. It'll be terrible hard, when I wants to talk, to begin at the beginning every time. There's that old yarn o' mine about Hambly's cow an' the lawn-mowing machine—I doubt that anybody'll enjoy it so much as you always do; an' I've so got out o' the way o' telling the beginning—which bain't extra funny,, though needful to a stranger's understanding the whole joke—that I 'most forgets how it goes."

"We'll see one another now an' then, they tell me. The sexes meet for Chris'mas-trees an' such-like."

"I'm jealous that 'twon't be the same. You can't hold your triflin' confabs with a great Chris'mas-tree blazin' away in your face as important as a town afire."

"Well, I'm going to start along," the old woman decided, getting on her feet; "or else someone'll be driving by and seeing us."

Jan, too, stood up.

"We may so well make our congees here," she went on, "as under the porter's nose."

An awkward silence fell between them for a minute, and these two old creatures, who for more than fifty years had felt no constraint in each other's presence, now looked into each other's eyes with a fearful diffidence. Jan cleared his throat, much as if he had to make a public speech.

"Maria," he began in an unnatural voice, "we're bound for to part, and I can trewly swear, on leavin' ye, that——"

"——that for two-score year and twelve it's never entered your head to consider whether I've made

'ee a good wife or a bad. Kiss me, my old man; for I tell 'ee I wouldn' ha' wished it other. An' thank 'ee for trying to make that speech. What did it feel like?"

"Why, 't reminded me o' the time when I offered ee marriage."

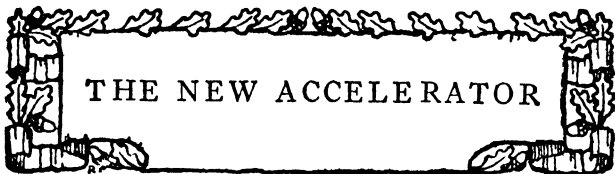
"It reminded me o' that, too," the woman answered. "Come'st along."

They tottered down the hill towards the Workhouse gate. When they were but ten yards from it, however, they heard the sound of wheels on the road behind them, and walked bravely past, pretending to have no business at that portal. They had descended a good thirty yards beyond (such haste was put into them by dread of having their purpose guessed) before the vehicle overtook them—a four-wheeled dog-cart carrying a commercial traveller, who pulled up and offered them a lift into the town.

They declined.

Then, as soon as he passed out of sight, they turned, and began painfully to climb back towards the gate. Of the two, the woman had shown the less emotion. But all the way her lips were at work, and as she went she was praying a prayer. It was the only one she used night and morning, and she had never changed a word since she learned it as a chit of a child. Down to her seventieth year she had never found it absurd to beseech God to make her "a good girl"; nor did she find it so as the Workhouse gate opened, and she began a new life.

QUILLER-COUCH.



THE NEW ACCELERATOR

CERTAINLY, if ever a man found a guinea when he was looking for a pin it is my good friend Professor Gibberne. I have heard before of investigators overshooting the mark, but never quite to the extent that he has done. He has really, this time at any rate, without any touch of exaggeration in the phrase, found something to revolutionise human life. And that when he was simply seeking an all-round nervous stimulant to bring languid people up to the stresses of these pushful days. I have tasted the stuff now several times, and I cannot do better than describe the effect the thing had on me. That there are astonishing experiences in store for all in search of new sensations will become apparent enough.

Professor Gibberne, as many people know, is my neighbour in Folkestone. Unless my memory plays me a trick, his portrait at various ages has already appeared in *The Strand Magazine*—I think late in 1899; but I am unable to look it up because I have lent that volume to someone who has never sent it back. The reader may, perhaps, recall the high forehead and the singularly long black eyebrows that give such a Mephistophelian touch to his face. He occupies one of those pleasant detached houses in the mixed style that make the western end of the

Upper Sandgate Road so interesting. His is the one with the Flemish gables and the Moorish portico, and it is in the room with the mullioned bay window that he works when he is down here, and in which of an evening we have so often smoked and talked together. He is a mighty jester, but, besides, he likes to talk to me about his work; he is one of those men who find a help and stimulus in talking, and so I have been able to follow the conception of the New Accelerator right up from a very early stage. Of course, the greater portion of his experimental work is not done in Folkestone, but in Gower Street, in the fine new laboratory next to the hospital that he has been the first to use.

As everyone knows, or at least as all intelligent people know, the special department in which Gibberne has gained so great and deserved a reputation among physiologists is the action of drugs upon the nervous system. Upon soporifics, sedatives, and anæsthetics he is, I am told, unequalled. He is also a chemist of considerable eminence, and I suppose in the subtle and complex jungle of riddles that centres about the ganglion cell and the axis fibre there are little cleared places of his making, glades of illumination, that, until he sees fit to publish his results, are inaccessible to every other living man. And in the last few years he has been particularly assiduous upon this question of nervous stimulants, and already, before the discovery of the New Accelerator, very successful with them. Medical science has to thank him for at least three distinct and absolutely safe

invigorators of unrivalled value to practising men. In cases of exhaustion the preparation known as Gibberne's B Syrup has, I suppose, saved more lives already than any lifeboat round the coast.

"But none of these things begin to satisfy me yet," he told me nearly a year ago. "Either they increase the central energy without affecting the nerves or they simply increase the available energy by lowering the nervous conductivity; and all of them are unequal and local in their operation. One wakes up the heart and viscera and leaves the brain stupefied, one gets at the brain champagne fashion and does nothing good for the solar plexus, and what I want—and what, if it's an earthly possibility, I mean to have—is a stimulant that stimulates all round, that wakes you up for a time from the crown of your head to the tip of your great toe, and makes you go two—or even three to everybody else's one. Eh? That's the thing I'm after."

"It would tire a man," I said.

"Not a doubt of it. And you'd eat double or treble—and all that. But just think what the thing would mean. Imagine yourself with a little phial like this"—he held up a bottle of green glass and marked his points with it—"and in this precious phial is the power to think twice as fast, move twice as quickly, do twice as much work in a given time as you could otherwise do."

"But is such a thing possible?"

"I believe so. If it isn't, I've wasted my time for a year. These various preparations of the hypophos-

phites, for example, seem to show that something of the sort—— Even if it was only one and a half times as fast it would do.”

“It *would* do,” I said.

“If you were a statesman in a corner, for example, time rushing up against you, something urgent to be done, eh?”

“He could dose his private secretary,” I said.

“And gain—double time. And think if *you*, for example, wanted to finish a book.”

“Usually,” I said, “I wish I’d never begun ’em.”

“Or a doctor, driven to death, wants to sit down and think out a case. Or a barrister—or a man cramming for an examination.”

“Worth a guinea a drop,” said I, “and more—to men like that.”

“And in a duel again,” said Gibberne, “where it all depends on your quickness in pulling the trigger.”

“Or in fencing,” I echoed.

“You see,” said Gibberne, “if I get it as an all-round thing it will really do you no harm at all—except perhaps to an infinitesimal degree it brings you nearer old age. You will just have lived twice to other people’s once——”

“I suppose,” I meditated, “in a duel—it would be fair?”

“That’s a question for the seconds,” said Gibberne.

I harked back farther. “And you really think such a thing *is* possible?” I said.

“As possible,” said Gibberne, and glanced at some-

thing that went throbbing by the window, "as a motor-bus. As a matter of fact——"

He paused and smiled at me deeply, and tapped slowly on the edge of his desk with the green phial. "I think I know the stuff. . . . Already I've got something coming." The nervous smile upon his face betrayed the gravity of his revelation. He rarely talked of his actual experimental work unless things were very near the end. "And it may be, it may be—I shouldn't be surprised—it may even do the thing at a greater rate than twice."

"It will be rather a big thing," I hazarded.

"It will be, I think, rather a big thing."

But I don't think he quite knew what a big thing it was to be, for all that.

I remember we had several subsequent talks about the stuff. "The New Accelerator" he called it, and his tone about it grew more confident on each occasion. Sometimes he talked nervously of unexpected physiological results its use might have, and then he would get a bit unhappy; at others he was frankly mercenary, and we debated long and anxiously how the preparation might be turned to commercial account. "It's a good thing," said Gibberne, "a tremendous thing. I know I'm giving the world something, and I think it only reasonable we should expect the world to pay. The dignity of science is all very well, but I think somehow I must have the monopoly of the stuff for, say, ten years. I don't see why *all* the fun in life should go to the dealers in ham."

My own interest in the coming drug certainly did not wane in the time. I have always had a queer twist towards metaphysics in my mind. I have always been given to paradoxes about space and time, and it seemed to me that Gibberne was really preparing no less than the absolute acceleration of life. Suppose a man repeatedly dosed with such a preparation: he would live an active and record life indeed, but he would be an adult at eleven, middle-aged at twenty-five, and by thirty well on the road to senile decay. It seemed to me that so far Gibberne was only going to do for anyone who took his drug exactly what Nature has done for the Jews and Orientals, who are men in their teens and aged by fifty, and quicker in thought and act than we are all the time. The marvel of drugs has always been great to my mind; you can madden a man, calm a man, make him incredibly strong and alert or a helpless log, quicken this passion and allay that, all by means of drugs, and here was a new miracle to be added to this strange armoury of phials the doctors use! But Gibberne was far too eager upon his technical points to enter very keenly into my aspect of the question.

It was the 7th or 8th of August when he told me the distillation that would decide his failure or success for a time was going forward as we talked, and it was on the 10th that he told me the thing was done and the New Accelerator a tangible reality in the world. I met him as I was going up the Sandgate Hill towards Folkestone—I think I was going to get

my hair cut; and he came hurrying down to meet me—I suppose he was coming to my house to tell me at once of his success. I remember that his eyes were unusually bright and his face flushed, and I noted even then the swift alacrity of his step.

“It’s done,” he cried, and gripped my hand, speaking very fast; “it’s more than done. Come up to my house and see.”

“Really?”

“Really!” he shouted. “Incredibly! Come up and see.”

“And it does—twice?”

“It does more, much more. It scares me. Come up and see the stuff. Taste it! Try it! It’s the most amazing stuff on earth.” He gripped my arm and, walking at such a pace that he forced me into a trot, went shouting with me up the hill. A whole charabancful of people turned and stared at us in unison after the manner of people in charabancs. It was one of those hot, clear days that Folkestone sees so much of, every colour incredibly bright and every outline hard. There was a breeze, of course, but not so much breeze as sufficed under these conditions to keep me cool and dry. I panted for mercy.

“I’m not walking fast, am I?” cried Gibberne, and slackened his pace to a quick march.

“You’ve been taking some of this stuff,” I puffed.

“No,” he said. “At the utmost a drop of water that stood in a beaker from which I had washed out the last traces of the stuff. I took some last night, you know. But that is ancient history, now.”

"And it goes twice?" I said, nearing his doorway in a grateful perspiration.

"It goes a thousand times, many thousand times!" cried Gibberne, with a dramatic gesture, flinging open his Early English carved oak gate.

"Phew!" said I, and followed him to the door.

"I don't know how many times it goes," he said, with his latchkey in his hand.

"And you——"

"It throws all sorts of light on nervous physiology, it kicks the theory of vision into a perfectly new shape! . . . Heaven knows how many thousand times. We'll try all that after—— The thing is to try the stuff now."

"Try the stuff?" I said, as we went along the passage.

"Rather," said Gibberne, turning on me in his study. "There it is in that little green phial there! Unless you happen to be afraid?"

I am a careful man by nature, and only theoretically adventurous. I *was* afraid. But on the other hand there is pride.

"Well," I haggled. "You say you've tried it?"

"I've tried it," he said, "and I don't look hurt by it, do I? I don't even look livery and I *feel*——"

I sat down. "Give me the potion," I said. "If the worst comes to the worst it will save having my hair cut, and that I think is one of the most hateful duties of a civilised man. How do you take the mixture?"

"With water," said Gibberne, whacking down a carafe.

He stood up in front of his desk and regarded me in his easy-chair; his manner was suddenly affected by a touch of the Harley Street specialist. "It's rum stuff, you know," he said.

I made a gesture with my hand.

"I must warn you in the first place as soon as you've got it down to shut your eyes, and open them very cautiously in a minute or so's time. One still sees. The sense of vision is a question of length of vibration, and not of multitude of impacts; but there's a kind of shock to the retina, a nasty giddy confusion just at the time if the eyes are open. Keep 'em shut."

"Shut," I said. "Good!"

"And the next thing is, keep still. Don't begin to whack about. You may fetch something a nasty rap if you do. Remember you will be going several thousand times faster than you ever did before, heart, lungs, muscles, brain—everything—and you will hit hard without knowing it. You won't know it, you know. You'll feel just as you do now. Only everything in the world will seem to be going ever so many thousand times slower than it ever went before. That's what makes it so deuced queer."

"Lor'," I said. "And you mean——"

"You'll see," said he, and took up a measure. He glanced at the material on his desk. "Glasses," he said, "water. All here. Mustn't take too much for the first attempt."

The little phial glucked out its precious contents. "Don't forget what I told you," he said, turning the contents of the measure into a glass in the manner

of an Italian waiter measuring whisky. "Sit with the eyes tightly shut and in absolute stillness for two minutes," he said. "Then you will hear me speak."

He added an inch or so of water to the dose in each glass.

"By the by," he said, "don't put your glass down. Keep it in your hand and rest your hand on your knee. Yes—so. And now——"

He raised his glass.

"The New Accelerator," I said.

"The New Accelerator," he answered, and we touched glasses and drank, and instantly I closed my eyes.

You know that blank non-existence into which one drops when one has taken "gas." For an indefinite interval it was like that. Then I heard Gibberne telling me to wake up, and I stirred and opened my eyes. There he stood as he had been standing, glass still in hand. It was empty, that was all the difference.

"Well?" said I.

"Nothing out of the way?"

"Nothing. A slight feeling of exhilaration, perhaps. Nothing more."

"Sounds?"

"Things are still," I said. "By Jove! yes! They *are* still. Except the sort of faint pat, patter, like rain falling on different things. What is it?"

"Analysed sounds," I think he said, but I am not sure. He glanced at the window. "Have you ever seen a curtain before a window fixed in that way before?"

I followed his eyes, and there was the end of the curtain, frozen, as it were, corner high, in the act of flapping briskly in the breeze.

"No," said I; "that's odd."

"And here," he said, and opened the hand that held the glass. Naturally I winced, expecting the glass to smash. But so far from smashing it did not even seem to stir; it hung in mid-air—motionless. "Roughly speaking," said Gibberne, "an object in these latitudes falls sixteen feet in the first second. This glass is falling sixteen feet in a second now. Only, you see, it hasn't been falling yet for the hundredth part of a second. That gives you some idea of the pace of my Accelerator." And he waved his hand round and round, over and under the slowly sinking glass. Finally he took it by the bottom, pulled it down and placed it very carefully on the table. "Eh?" he said to me, and laughed.

"That seems all right," I said, and began very gingerly to raise myself from my chair. I felt perfectly well, very light and comfortable, and quite confident in my mind. I was going fast all over. My heart, for example, was beating a thousand times a second, but that caused me no discomfort at all. I looked out of the window. An immovable cyclist, head down and with a frozen puff of dust behind his driving-wheel, scorched to overtake a galloping charabanc that did not stir. I gaped in amazement at this incredible spectacle. "Gibberne," I cried, "how long will this confounded stuff last?"

"Heaven knows!" he answered. "Last time I

took it I went to bed and slept it off. I tell you, I was frightened. It must have lasted some minutes, I think—it seemed like hours. But after a bit it slows down rather suddenly, I believe.”

I was proud to observe that I did not feel frightened—I suppose because there were two of us. “Why shouldn’t we go out?” I asked.

“Why not?”

“They’ll see us.”

“Not they. Goodness, no! Why, we shall be going a thousand times faster than the quickest conjuring trick that was ever done. Come along! Which way shall we go? Window, or door?”

And out by the window we went.

Assuredly of all the strange experiences that I have ever had, or imagined, or read of other people having or imagining, that little raid I made with Gibberne on the Folkestone Leas, under the influence of the New Accelerator, was the strangest and maddest of all. We went out by his gate into the road, and there we made a minute examination of the statuesque passing traffic. The tops of the wheels and some of the legs of the horses of this charabanc, the end of the whip-lash and the lower jaw of the conductor—who was just beginning to yawn—were perceptibly in motion, but all the rest of the lumbering conveyance seemed still. And quite noiseless except for a faint rattling that came from one man’s throat! And as parts of this frozen edifice there were a driver, you know, and a conductor, and eleven people! The effect as we walked about the thing began by being

madly queer and ended by being—disagreeable. There they were, people like ourselves and yet not like ourselves, frozen in careless attitudes, caught in mid-gesture. A girl and a man smiled at one another, a leering smile that threatened to last for evermore; a woman in a floppy capelline rested her arm on the rail and stared at Gibberne's house with the unwinking stare of eternity; a man stroked his moustache like a figure of wax, and another stretched a tiresome stiff hand with extended fingers towards his loosened hat. We stared at them, we laughed at them, we made faces at them, and then a sort of disgust of them came upon us, and we turned away and walked round in front of the cyclist towards the Leas.

"Goodness!" cried Gibberne, suddenly; "look there!"

He pointed, and there at the tip of his finger and sliding down the air with wings flapping slowly and at the speed of an exceptionally languid snail—was a bee.

And so we came out upon the Leas. There the thing seemed madder than ever. The band was playing in the upper stand, though all the sound it made for us was a low-pitched, wheezy rattle, a sort of prolonged last sigh that passed at times into a sound like the slow, muffled ticking of some monstrous clock. Frozen people stood erect; strange, silent, self-conscious-looking dummies hung unstably in mid-stride, promenading upon the grass. I passed close to a poodle dog suspended in the act of leaping, and watched the slow movement of his

legs as he sank to earth. "Lord, look *here!*" cried Gibberne, and we halted for a moment before a magnificent person in white faint-striped flannels, white shoes, and a Panama hat, who turned back to wink at two gaily dressed ladies he had passed. A wink, studied with such leisurely deliberation as we could afford, is an unattractive thing. It loses any quality of alert gaiety, and one remarks that the winking eye does not completely close, that under its drooping lid appears the lower edge of an eyeball and a line of white. "Heaven give me memory," said I, "and I will never wink again."

"Or smile," said Gibberne, with his eye on the lady's answering teeth.

"It's infernally hot, somehow," said I. "Let's go slower."

"Oh, come along!" said Gibberne.

We picked our way among the bath-chairs in the path. Many of the people sitting in the chairs seemed almost natural in their passive poses, but the contorted scarlet of the bandsmen was not a restful thing to see. A purple-faced gentleman was frozen in the midst of a violent struggle to refold his newspaper against the wind; there were many evidences that all these people in their sluggish way were exposed to a considerable breeze, a breeze that had no existence so far as our sensations went. We came out and walked a little way from the crowd, and turned and regarded it. To see all that multitude changed to a picture, smitten rigid, as it were, into the semblance of realistic wax, was impossibly wonderful. It was

absurd, of course; but it filled me with an irrational, an exultant sense of superior advantage. Consider the wonder of it! All that I had said and thought and done since the stuff had begun to work in my veins had happened, so far as those people, so far as the world in general went, in the twinkling of an eye. "The New Accelerator——" I began, but Gibberne interrupted me.

"There's that infernal old woman!" he said.

"What old woman?"

"Lives next door to me," said Gibberne. "Has a lapdog that yaps. Gods! The temptation is strong!"

There is something very boyish and impulsive about Gibberne at times. Before I could expostulate with him he had dashed forward, snatched the unfortunate animal out of visible existence, and was running violently with it towards the cliff of the Leas. It was most extraordinary. The little brute, you know, didn't bark or wriggle or make the slightest sign of vitality. It kept quite stiffly in an attitude of somnolent repose, and Gibberne held it by the neck. It was like running about with a dog of wood. "Gibberne," I cried, "put it down!" Then I said something else. "If you run like that, Gibberne," I cried, "you'll set your clothes on fire. Your linen trousers are going brown as it is!"

He clapped his hand on his thigh and stood hesitating on the verge. "Gibberne," I cried, coming up, "put it down. This heat is too much! It's our running so! Two or three miles a second! Friction of the air!"

"What?" he said, glancing at the dog.

"Friction of the air," I shouted. "Friction of the air. Going too fast. Like meteorites and things. Too hot. And, Gibberne! Gibberne! I'm all over pricking and a sort of perspiration. You can see people stirring slightly. I believe the stuff's working off! Put that dog down."

"Eh?" he said.

"It's working off," I repeated. "We're too hot and the stuff's working off! I'm wet through."

He stared at me. Then at the band, the wheezy rattle of whose performance was certainly going faster. Then with a tremendous sweep of the arm he hurled the dog away from him and it went spinning upward, still inanimate, and hung at last over the grouped parasols of a knot of chattering people. Gibberne was gripping my elbow. "By Jove!" he cried. "I believe it is! A sort of hot pricking and—yes. That man's moving his pocket-handkerchief! Perceptibly. We must get out of this sharp."

But we could not get out of it sharply enough. Luckily perhaps! For we might have run, and if we had run we should, I believe, have burst into flames. Almost certainly we should have burst into flames! You know we had neither of us thought of that. . . . But before we could even begin to run the action of the drug had ceased. It was the business of a minute fraction of a second. The effect of the New Accelerator passed like the drawing of a curtain, vanished in the movement of a hand. I heard Gibberne's voice in infinite alarm. "Sit down," he

said, and flop, down upon the turf at the edge of the Leas I sat—scorching as I sat. There is a patch of burnt-grass there still where I sat down. The whole stagnation seemed to wake up as I did so, the disarticulated vibration of the band rushed together into a blast of music, the promenaders put their feet down and walked their ways, the papers and flags began flapping, smiles passed into words, the winker finished his wink and went on his way complacently, and all the seated people moved and spoke.

The whole world had come alive again, was going as fast as we were, or rather we were going no faster than the rest of the world. It was like slowing down as one comes into a railway station. Everything seemed to spin round for a second or two, I had the most transient feeling of nausea, and that was all. And the little dog which had seemed to hang for a moment when the force of Gibberne's arm was expended fell with a swift acceleration clean through a lady's parasol!

That was the saving of us. Unless it was for one corpulent old gentleman in a bath-chair, who certainly did start at the sight of us and afterwards regarded us at intervals with a darkly suspicious eye, and finally, I believe, said something to his nurse about us, I doubt if a solitary person remarked our sudden appearance among them. Plop! We must have appeared abruptly. We ceased to smoulder almost at once, though the turf beneath me was uncomfortably hot. The attention of everyone—including even the Amusements' Association band, which on

this occasion, for the only time in its history, got out of tune—was arrested by the amazing fact, and the still more amazing yapping and uproar caused by the fact, that a respectable, over-fed lapdog sleeping quietly to the east of the bandstand should suddenly fall through the parasol of a lady on the west—in a slightly singed condition due to the extreme velocity of its movements through the air. In these absurd days, too, when we are all trying to be as psychic and silly and superstitious as possible! People got up and trod on other people, chairs were overturned, the Leas policeman ran. How the matter settled itself I do not know—we were much too anxious to disentangle ourselves from the affair and get out of range of the eye of the old gentleman in the bath-chair to make minute inquiries. As soon as we were sufficiently cool and sufficiently recovered from our giddiness and nausea and confusion of mind to do so we stood up and, skirting the crowd, directed our steps back along the road below the Metropole towards Gibberne's house. But amidst the din I heard very distinctly the gentleman who had been sitting beside the lady of the ruptured sunshade using quite unjustifiable threats and language to one of those chair-attendants who have "Inspector" written on their caps. "If you didn't throw the dog," he said, "who *did*?"

The sudden return of movement and familiar noises, and our natural anxiety about ourselves (our clothes were still dreadfully hot, and the fronts of the thighs of Gibberne's white trousers were scorched a drabbish

brown), prevented the minute observations I should have liked to make on all these things. Indeed, I really made no observations of any scientific value on that return. The bee, of course, had gone. I looked for that cyclist, but he was already out of sight as we came into the Upper Sandgate Road or hidden from us by traffic; the charabanc, however, with its people now all alive and stirring, was clattering along at a spanking pace almost abreast of the nearer church.

We noted, however, that the window-sill on which we had stepped in getting out of the house was slightly singed, and that the impressions of our feet on the gravel of the path were unusually deep.

So it was I had my first experience of the New Accelerator. Practically we had been running about and saying and doing all sorts of things in the space of a second or so of time. We had lived half an hour while the band had played, perhaps, two bars. But the effect it had upon us was that the whole world had stopped for our convenient inspection. Considering all things, and particularly considering our rashness in venturing out of the house, the experience might certainly have been much more disagreeable than it was. It showed, no doubt, that Gibberne has still much to learn before his preparation is a manageable convenience, but its practicability it certainly demonstrated beyond all cavil.

Since that adventure he has been steadily bringing its use under control, and I have several times, and

without the slightest bad result, taken measured doses under his direction; though I must confess I have not yet ventured abroad again while under its influence. I may mention, for example, that this story has been written at one sitting and without interruption, except for the nibbling of some chocolate, by its means. I began at 6.25, and my watch is now very nearly at the minute past the half-hour. The convenience of securing a long, uninterrupted spell of work in the midst of a day full of engagements cannot be exaggerated. Gibberne is now working at the quantitative handling of his preparation, with especial reference to its distinctive effects upon different types of constitution. He then hopes to find a Retarder with which to dilute its present rather excessive potency. The Retarder will, of course, have the reverse effect to the Accelerator; used alone it should enable the patient to spread a few seconds over many hours of ordinary time, and so to maintain an apathetic inaction, a glacierlike absence of alacrity, amidst the most animated or irritating surroundings. The two things together must necessarily work an entire revolution in civilised existence. It is the beginning of our escape from that Time Garment of which Carlyle speaks. While this Accelerator will enable us to concentrate ourselves with tremendous impact upon any moment or occasion that demands our utmost sense and vigour, the Retarder will enable us to pass in passive tranquillity through infinite hardship and tedium. Perhaps I am a little optimistic about the Retarder,

which has indeed still to be discovered, but about the Accelerator there is no possible sort of doubt whatever. Its appearance upon the market in a convenient, controllable, and assimilable form is a matter of the next few months. It will be obtainable of all chemists and druggists, in small green bottles, at a high but, considering its extraordinary qualities, by no means excessive price. Gibberne's Nervous Accelerator it will be called, and he hopes to be able to supply it in three strengths: one in two hundred, one in nine hundred, and one in two thousand, distinguished by yellow, pink, and white labels respectively.

No doubt its use renders a great number of very extraordinary things possible; for, of course, the most remarkable and, possibly, even criminal proceedings may be effected with impunity by thus dodging, as it were, into the interstices of time. Like all potent preparations it will be liable to abuse. We have, however, discussed this aspect of the question very thoroughly, and we have decided that this is purely a matter of medical jurisprudence and altogether outside our province. We shall manufacture and sell the Accelerator, and, as for the consequences—we shall see.

H. G. WELLS.



OUTSIDE the large single window the crepuscular light was dying out slowly in a great square gleam without colour, framed rigidly in the gathering shades of the room.

It was a long room. The irresistible tide of the night ran into the most distant part of it, where the whispering of a man's voice, passionately interrupted and passionately renewed, seemed to plead against the answering murmurs of infinite sadness.

At last no answering murmur came. His movement when he rose slowly from his knees by the side of the deep, shadowy couch holding the shadowy suggestion of a reclining woman revealed him tall under the low ceiling, and sombre all over except for the crude discord of the white collar under the shape of his head and the faint, minute spark of a brass button here and there on his uniform.

He stood over her a moment, masculine and mysterious in his immobility, before he sat down on a chair near by. He could see only the faint oval of her upturned face and, extended on her black dress, her pale hands, a moment before abandoned to his kisses and now as if too weary to move.

He dared not make a sound, shrinking as a man would do from the prosaic necessities of existence.

As usual, it was the woman who had the courage. Her voice was heard first—almost conventional while her being vibrated yet with conflicting emotions.

"Tell me something," she said.

The darkness hid his surprise and then his smile. Had he not just said to her everything worth saying in the world—and that not for the first time!

"What am I to tell you?" he asked, in a voice creditably steady. He was beginning to feel grateful to her for that something final in her tone which had eased the strain.

"Why not tell me a tale?"

"A tale!" He was really amazed.

"Yes. Why not?"

These words came with a slight petulance, the hint of a loved woman's capricious will, which is capricious only because it feels itself to be a law, embarrassing sometimes and always difficult to elude.

"Why not?" he repeated, with a slightly mocking accent, as though he had been asked to give her the moon. But now he was feeling a little angry with her for that feminine mobility that slips out of an emotion as easily as out of a splendid gown.

He heard her say, a little unsteadily with a sort of fluttering intonation which made him think suddenly of a butterfly's flight:

"You used to tell—your—your simple and—and professional—tales very well at one time. Or well enough to interest me. You had a—a sort of art—in the days—the days before the war."

"Really?" he said, with involuntary gloom. "But now, you see, the war is going on," he continued in such a dead, equable tone that she felt a slight chill fall over her shoulders. And yet she persisted. For there's nothing more unswerving in the world than a woman's caprice.

"It could be a tale not of this world," she explained.

"You want a tale of the other, the better world?" he asked, with a matter-of-fact surprise. "You must evoke for that task those who have already gone there."

"No. I don't mean that. I mean another—some other—world. In the universe—not in heaven."

"I am relieved. But you forget that I have only five days' leave."

"Yes. And I've also taken a five days' leave from—from my duties."

"I like that word."

"What word?"

"Duty."

"It is horrible—sometimes."

"Oh, that's because you think it's narrow. But it isn't. It contains infinities, and—and so——"

"What is this jargon?"

He disregarded the interjected scorn. "An infinity of absolution, for instance," he continued. "But as to this 'another world'—who's going to look for it and for the tale that is in it?"

"You," she said, with a strange, almost rough, sweetness of assertion.

He made a shadowy movement of assent in his

chair, the irony of which not even the gathered darkness could render mysterious.

"As you will. In that world, then, there was once upon a time a Commanding Officer and a Northman. Put in the capitals, please, because they had no other names. It was a world of seas and continents and islands——"

"Like the earth," she murmured, bitterly.

"Yes. What else could you expect from sending a man made of our common, tormented clay on a voyage of discovery? What else could he find? What else could you understand or care for, or feel the existence of, even? There was comedy in it, and slaughter."

"Always like the earth," she murmured.

"Always. And since I could find in the universe only what was deeply rooted in the fibres of my being, there was love in it, too. But we won't talk of that."

"No. We won't," she said, in a neutral tone which concealed perfectly her relief—or her disappointment. Then after a pause she added: "It's going to be a comic story."

"Well——" he paused, too. "Yes. In a way. In a very grim way. It will be human, and, as you know, comedy is but a matter of the visual angle. And it won't be a noisy story. All the long guns in it will be dumb—as dumb as so many telescopes."

"Ah, there are guns in it, then! And may I ask—where?"

"Afloat. You remember that the world of which we speak had its seas. A war was going on in it.

It was a funny world and terribly in earnest. Its war was being carried on over the land, over the water, under the water, up in the air, and even under the ground. And many young men in it, mostly in wardrooms and messrooms, used to say to each other—pardon the unparliamentary word—they used to say, ‘It’s a damned bad war, but it’s better than no war at all.’ Sounds flippant, doesn’t it?”

He heard a nervous, impatient sigh in the depths of the couch while he went on without a pause.

“And yet there is more in it than meets the eye. I mean more wisdom. Flippancy, like comedy, is but a matter of visual first-impression. That world was not very wise. But there was in it a certain amount of common working sagacity. That, however, was mostly worked by the neutrals in diverse ways, public and private, which had to be watched; watched by acute minds and also by actual sharp eyes. They had to be very sharp indeed, too, I assure you.”

“I can imagine,” she murmured, appreciatively.

“What is there that you can’t imagine?” he pronounced, soberly. “You have the world in you. But let us go back to our Commanding Officer, who, of course, commanded a ship of a sort. My tales if often professional (as you remarked just now) have never been technical. So I’ll just tell you that the ship was of a very ornamental sort once, with lots of grace and elegance and luxury about her. Yes, once! She was like a pretty woman who had suddenly put on a suit of sackcloth and stuck revolvers

in her belt. But she floated lightly, she moved nimbly, she was quite good enough."

"That was the opinion of the Commanding Officer?" said the voice from the couch.

"It was. He used to be sent out with her along certain coasts to see—what he could see. Just that. And sometimes he had some preliminary information to help him, and sometimes he had not. And it was all one, really. It was about as useful as information trying to convey the locality and intentions of a cloud, of a phantom taking shape here and there and impossible to seize, would have been.

"It was in the early days of the war. What at first used to amaze the Commanding Officer was the unchanged face of the waters, with its familiar expression, neither more friendly nor more hostile. On fine days the sun strikes sparks upon the blue; here and there a peaceful smudge of smoke hangs in the distance, and it is impossible to believe that the familiar clear horizon traces the limit of one great circular ambush.

"Yes, it is impossible to believe, till some day you see a ship not your own ship (that isn't so impressive), but some ship in company, blow up all of a sudden and plop under almost before you know what has happened to her. Then you begin to believe. Henceforth you go out for the work to see—what you can see, and you keep on at it with the conviction that some day you will die from something you have not seen. One envies the soldiers at the end of the day, wiping the sweat and blood from their faces, counting

the dead fallen to their hands, looking at the devastated fields, the torn earth that seems to suffer and bleed with them. One does, really. The final brutality of it—the taste of primitive passion—the ferocious frankness of the blow struck with one's hand—the direct call and the straight response. Well, the sea gave you nothing of that, and seemed to pretend that there was nothing the matter with the world."

She interrupted, stirring a little.

"Oh, yes. Sincerity—frankness—passion—three words of your gospel. Don't I know them!"

"Think! Isn't it ours—believed in common?" he asked, anxiously, yet without expecting an answer, and went on at once: "Such were the feelings of the Commanding Officer. When the night came trailing over the sea, hiding what looked like the hypocrisy of an old friend, it was a relief. The night blinds you frankly—and there are circumstances when the sunlight may grow as odious to one as falsehood itself. Night is all right.

"At night the Commanding Officer could let his thoughts get away—I won't tell you where. Somewhere where there was no choice but between truth and death. But thick weather, though it blinded one, brought no such relief. Mist is deceitful, the dead luminosity of the fog is irritating. It seems that you *ought* to see.

"One gloomy, nasty day the ship was steaming along her beat in sight of a rocky, dangerous coast that stood out intensely black like an India-ink

drawing on grey paper. Presently the Second in Command spoke to his chief. He thought he saw something on the water, to seaward. Small wreckage, perhaps.

“‘But there shouldn’t be any wreckage here, sir,’ he remarked.

“‘No,’ said the Commanding Officer. ‘The last reported submarined ships were sunk a long way to the westward. But one never knows. There may have been others since then not reported nor seen. Gone with all hands.’

“That was how it began. The ship’s course was altered to pass the object close; for it was necessary to have a good look at what one could see. Close, but without touching; for it was not advisable to come in contact with objects of any form whatever floating casually about. Close, but without stopping or even diminishing speed; for in those times it was not prudent to linger on any particular spot, even for a moment. I may tell you at once that the object was not dangerous in itself. No use in describing it. It may have been nothing more remarkable than, say, a barrel of a certain shape and colour. But it was significant.

“The smooth bow-wave hove it up as if for a closer inspection, and then the ship, brought again to her course, turned her back on it with indifference, while twenty pairs of eyes on her deck stared in all directions trying to see—what they could see.

“The Commanding Officer and his Second in Command discussed the object with understanding. It

appeared to them to be not so much a proof of the sagacity as of the activity of certain neutrals. This activity had in many cases taken the form of replenishing the stores of certain submarines at sea. This was generally believed, if not absolutely known. But the very nature of things in those early days pointed that way. The object, looked at closely and turned away from with apparent indifference, put it beyond doubt that something of the sort had been done somewhere in the neighbourhood.

"The object in itself was more than suspect. But the fact of its being left in evidence roused other suspicions. Was it the result of some deep and devilish purpose? As to that all speculation soon appeared to be a vain thing. Finally the two officers came to the conclusion that it was left there most likely by accident, complicated possibly by some unforeseen necessity; such, perhaps, as the sudden need to get away quickly from the spot, or something of that kind.

"Their discussion had been carried on in curt, weighty phrases, separated by long, thoughtful silences. And all the time their eyes roamed about the horizon in an everlasting, almost mechanical effort of vigilance. The younger man summed up grimly:

"'Well, it's evidence. That's what this is. Evidence of what we were pretty certain of before. And plain, too.'

"'And much good it will do to us,' retorted the Commanding Officer. 'The parties are miles away;

the submarine, devil only knows where, ready to kill; and the noble neutral slipping away to the eastward, ready to lie!’

“The Second in Command laughed a little at the tone. But he guessed that the neutral wouldn’t even have to lie very much. Fellows like that, unless caught in the very act, felt themselves pretty safe. They could afford to chuckle. That fellow was probably chuckling to himself. It’s very possible he had been before at the game and didn’t care a rap for the bit of evidence left behind. It was a game in which practice made one bold and successful, too.

“And again he laughed faintly. But his Commanding Officer was in revolt against the murderous stealthiness of methods and the atrocious callousness of complicities that seemed to taint the very source of men’s deep emotions and noblest activities; to corrupt their imagination which builds up the final conceptions of life and death. He suffered——”

The voice from the sofa interrupted the narrator.

“How well I can understand that in him!”

He bent forward slightly.

“Yes. I, too. Everything should be open in love and war. Open as the day, since both are the call of an ideal which it is so easy, so terribly easy, to degrade in the name of Victory.”

He paused; then went on:

“I don’t know that the Commanding Officer delved so deep as that into his feelings. But he did suffer from them—a sort of disenchanted sadness. It is possible, even, that he suspected himself of folly.

Man is various. But he had no time for much introspection, because from the south-west a wall of fog had advanced upon his ship. Great convolutions of vapours flew over, swirling about masts and funnel, which looked as if they were beginning to melt. Then they vanished.

"The ship was stopped, all sounds ceased, and the very fog became motionless, growing denser and as if solid in its amazing dumb immobility. The men at their stations lost sight of each other. Foot-steps sounded stealthy; rare voices, impersonal and remote, died out without resonance. A blind white stillness took possession of the world.

"It looked, too, as if it would last for days. I don't mean to say that the fog did not vary a little in its density. Now and then it would thin out mysteriously, revealing to the men a more or less ghostly presentment of their ship. Several times the shadow of the coast itself swam darkly before their eyes through the fluctuating opaque brightness of the great white cloud clinging to the water.

"Taking advantage of these moments, the ship had been moved cautiously nearer the shore. It was useless to remain out in such thick weather. Her officers knew every nook and cranny of the coast along their beat. They thought that she would be much better in a certain cove. It wasn't a large place, just ample room for a ship to swing at her anchor. She would have an easier time of it till the fog lifted up.

"Slowly, with infinite caution and patience, they

crept closer and closer, seeing no more of the cliffs than an evanescent dark loom with a narrow border of angry foam at its foot. At the moment of anchoring the fog was so thick that for all they could see they might have been a thousand miles out in the open sea. Yet the shelter of the land could be felt. There was a peculiar quality in the stillness of the air. Very faint, very elusive, the wash of the ripple against the encircling land reached their ears, with mysterious sudden pauses.

"The anchor dropped, the leads were laid in. The Commanding Officer went below into his cabin. But he had not been there very long when a voice outside his door requested his presence on deck. He thought to himself: 'What is it now?' He felt some impatience at being called out again to face the wearisome fog.

"He found that it had thinned again a little and had taken on a gloomy hue from the dark cliffs which had no form, no outline, but asserted themselves as a curtain of shadows all round the ship, except in one bright spot, which was the entrance from the open sea. Several officers were looking that way from the bridge. The Second in Command met him with the breathlessly whispered information that there was another ship in the cove.

"She had been made out by several pairs of eyes only a couple of minutes before. She was lying at anchor very near the entrance—a mere vague blot on the fog's brightness. And the Commanding Officer by staring in the direction pointed out to him

by eager hands ended by distinguishing it at last himself. Indubitably a vessel of some sort.

“‘It’s a wonder we didn’t run slap into her when coming in,’ observed the Second in Command.

“‘Send a boat on board before she vanishes,’ said the Commanding Officer. He surmised that this was a coaster. It could hardly be anything else. But another thought came into his head suddenly. ‘It is a wonder,’ he said to his Second in Command, who had rejoined him after sending the boat away.

“By that time both of them had been struck by the fact that the ship so suddenly discovered had not manifested her presence by ringing her bell.

“‘We came in very quietly, that’s true,’ concluded the younger officer. ‘But they must have heard our leadsmen at least. We couldn’t have passed her more than fifty yards off. The closest shave! They may even have made us out, since they were aware of something coming in. And the strange thing is that we never heard a sound from her. The fellows on board must have been holding their breath.’

“‘Aye,’ said the Commanding Officer, thoughtfully.

“In due course the boarding-boat returned, appearing suddenly alongside, as though she had burrowed her way under the fog. The officer in charge came up to make his report, but the Commanding Officer didn’t give him time to begin. He cried from a distance:

“‘Coaster, isn’t she?’

“‘No, sir. A stranger—a neutral,’ was the answer.

“‘No. Really! Well, tell us all about it. What is she doing here?’

"The young man stated then that he had been told a long and complicated story of engine troubles. But it was plausible enough from a strictly professional point of view and it had the usual features: disablement, dangerous drifting along the shore, weather more or less thick for days, fear of a gale, ultimately a resolve to go in and anchor anywhere on the coast, and so on. Fairly plausible.

"'Engines still disabled?' inquired the Commanding Officer.

"'No, sir. She has steam on them.'

"The Commanding Officer took his Second aside. 'By Jove!' he said, 'you were right! They were holding their breaths as we passed them. They were.'

"But the Second in Command had his doubts now.

"'A fog like this does muffle small sounds, sir,' he remarked. 'And what could his object be, after all?'

"'To sneak out unnoticed,' answered the Commanding Officer.

"'Then why didn't he? He might have done it, you know. Not exactly unnoticed, perhaps. I don't suppose he could have slipped his cable without making some noise. Still, in a minute or so he would have been lost to view—clean gone before we had made him out fairly. Yet he didn't.'

"They looked at each other. The Commanding Officer shook his head. Such suspicions as the one which had entered his head are not defended easily. He did not even state it openly. The boarding

officer finished his report. The cargo of the ship was of a harmless and useful character. She was bound to an English port. Papers and everything in perfect order. Nothing suspicious to be detected anywhere.

"Then passing to the men, he reported the crew on deck as the usual lot. Engineers of the well-known type, and very full of their achievement in repairing the engines. The mate surly. The master rather a fine specimen of a Northman, civil enough, but appeared to have been drinking. Seemed to be recovering from a regular bout of it.

"I told him I couldn't give him permission to proceed. He said he wouldn't dare to move his ship her own length out in such weather as this, permission or no permission. I left a man on board, though.'

"Quite right.'

"The Commanding Officer, after communing with his suspicions for a time, called his Second aside.

"What if she were the very ship which had been feeding some infernal submarine or other?' he said in an undertone.

"The other started. Then, with conviction:

"She would get off scot-free. You couldn't prove it, sir.'

"I want to look into it myself.'

"From the report we've heard I am afraid you couldn't even make a case for reasonable suspicion, sir.'

"I'll go on board all the same.'

"He had made up his mind. Curiosity is the great motive power of hatred and love. What did he expect to find? He could not have told anybody—not even himself.

"What he really expected to find there was the atmosphere, the atmosphere of gratuitous treachery, which in his view nothing could excuse; for he thought that even a passion of unrighteousness for its own sake could not excuse that. But could he detect it? Sniff it? Taste it? Receive some mysterious communication which would turn his invincible suspicions into a certitude strong enough to provoke action with all its risks?

"The master met him on the after-deck, looming up in the fog amongst the blurred shapes of the usual ship's fittings. He was a robust Northman, bearded, and in the force of his age. A round leather cap fitted his head closely. His hands were rammed deep into the pockets of his short leather jacket. He kept them there while he explained that at sea he lived in the chart-room, and led the way there, striding carelessly. Just before reaching the door under the bridge he staggered a little, recovered himself, flung it open, and stood aside, leaning his shoulder as if involuntarily against the side of the house, and staring vaguely into the fog-filled space. But he followed the Commanding Officer at once, flung the door to, snapped on the electric light, and hastened to thrust his hands back into his pockets, as though afraid of being seized by them either in friendship or in hostility.

"The place was stuffy and hot. The usual chart-rack overhead was full, and the chart on the table was kept unrolled by an empty cup standing on a saucer half-full of some spilt dark liquid. A slightly nibbled biscuit reposed on the chronometer-case. There were two settees, and one of them had been made up into a bed with a pillow and some blankets, which were now very much tumbled. The Northman let himself fall on it, his hands still in his pockets.

"'Well, here I am,' he said, with a curious air of being surprised at the sound of his own voice.

"The Commanding Officer from the other settee observed the handsome, flushed face. Drops of fog hung on the yellow beard and moustaches of the Northman. The much darker eyebrows ran together in a puzzled frown, and suddenly he jumped up.

"'What I mean is that I don't know where I am. I really don't,' he burst out, with extreme earnestness. 'Hang it all! I got turned around somehow. The fog has been after me for a week. More than a week. And then my engines broke down. I will tell you how it was.'

"He burst out into loquacity. It was not hurried, but it was insistent. It was not continuous for all that. It was broken by the most queer, thoughtful pauses. Each of these pauses lasted no more than a couple of seconds, and each had the profundity of an endless meditation. When he began again nothing betrayed in him the slightest consciousness of these intervals. There was the same fixed glance, the same unchanged earnestness of tone. He

didn't know. Indeed, more than one of these pauses occurred in the middle of a sentence.

"The Commanding Officer listened to the tale. It struck him as more plausible than simple truth is in the habit of being. But that, perhaps, was prejudice. All the time the Northman was speaking the Commanding Officer had been aware of an inward voice, a grave murmur in the depth of his very own self, telling another tale, as if on purpose to keep alive in him his indignation and his anger with that baseness of greed or of mere outlook which lies often at the root of simple ideas.

"It was the story that had been already told to the boarding officer an hour or so before. The Commanding Officer nodded slightly at the Northman from time to time. The latter came to an end and turned his eyes away. He added, as an after-thought:

"'Wasn't it enough to drive a man out of his mind with worry? And it's my first voyage to this part, too. And the ship's my own. Your officer has seen the papers. She isn't much, as you can see for yourself. Just an old cargo-boat. Bare living for my family.'

"He raised a big arm to point at a row of photographs plastering the bulkhead. The movement was ponderous, as if the arm had been made of lead. The Commanding Officer said, carelessly:

"'You will be making a fortune yet for your family with this old ship.'

"'Yes, if I don't lose her,' said the Northman, gloomily.

“‘I mean—out of this war,’ added the Commanding Officer.

“The Northman stared at him in a curiously unseeing and at the same time interested manner, as only eyes of a particular blue shade can stare.

“‘And you wouldn’t be angry at it,’ he said, ‘would you? You are too much of a gentleman. We didn’t bring this on you. And suppose we sat down and cried. What good would that be? Let those cry who made the trouble,’ he concluded, with energy. ‘Time’s money, you say. Well—*this time is money*. Oh! isn’t it!’

“The Commanding Officer tried to keep under the feeling of immense disgust. He said to himself that it was unreasonable. Men were like that—moral cannibals feeding on each other’s misfortunes. He said aloud:

“‘You have made it perfectly plain how it is that you are here. Your log-book confirms you very minutely. Of course, a log-book may be cooked. Nothing easier.’

“The Northman never moved a muscle. He was gazing at the floor; he seemed not to have heard. He raised his head after a while.

“‘But you can’t suspect me of anything,’ he muttered, negligently.

“The Commanding Officer thought: ‘Why should he say this?’

“Immediately afterwards the man before him added: ‘My cargo is for an English port.’

“His voice had turned husky for the moment.

The Commanding Officer reflected: 'That's true. There can be nothing. I can't suspect him. Yet why was he lying with steam up in this fog—and then, hearing us come in, why didn't he give some sign of life? Why? Could it be anything else but a guilty conscience? He could tell by the leadsmen that this was a man-of-war.'

"Yes—why? The Commanding Officer went on thinking: 'Suppose I ask him and then watch his face. He will betray himself in some way. It's perfectly plain that the fellow *has* been drinking. Yes, he has been drinking: but he will have a lie ready all the same.' The Commanding Officer was one of those men who are made morally and almost physically uncomfortable by the mere thought of having to beat down a lie. He shrank from the act in scorn and disgust, which were invincible because more temperamental than moral.

"So he went out on deck instead and had the crew mustered formally for his inspection. He found them very much what the report of the boarding officer had led him to expect. And from their answers to his questions he could discover no flaw in the log-book story.

"He dismissed them. His impression of them was—a picked lot; have been promised a fistful of money each if this came off; all slightly anxious, but not frightened. Not a single one of them likely to give the show away. They don't feel in danger of their life. They know England and English ways too well!

"He felt alarmed at catching himself thinking

as if his vaguest suspicions were turning into a certitude. For, indeed, there was no shadow of reason for his inferences. There was nothing to give away.

"He returned to the chart-room. The Northman had lingered behind there; and something subtly different in his bearing, more bold in his blue, glassy stare, induced the Commanding Officer to conclude that the fellow had snatched at the opportunity to take another swig at the bottle he must have had concealed somewhere.

"He noticed, too, that the Northman on meeting his eyes put on an elaborately surprised expression. At least, it seemed elaborated. Nothing could be trusted. And the Englishman felt himself with astonishing conviction faced by an enormous lie, solid like a wall, with no way round to get at the truth, whose ugly murderous face he seemed to see peeping over at him with a cynical grin.

"‘I dare say,’ he began, suddenly, ‘you are wondering at my proceedings, though I am not detaining you, am I? You wouldn’t dare to move in this fog?’

"‘I don’t know where I am,’ the Northman ejaculated, earnestly. ‘I really don’t.’

"He looked around as if the very chart-room fittings were strange to him. The Commanding Officer asked him whether he had not seen any unusual objects floating about while he was at sea.

"‘Objects! What objects? We were groping blind in the fog for days.’

"‘We had a few clear intervals,’ said the Com-

manding Officer. 'And I'll tell you what we have seen and the conclusion I've come to about it.'

"He told him in a few words. He heard the sound of a sharp breath indrawn through closed teeth. The Northman with his hand on the table stood absolutely motionless and dumb. He stood as if thunderstruck. Then he produced a fatuous smile.

"Or at least so it appeared to the Commanding Officer. Was this significant, or of no meaning whatever? He didn't know, he couldn't tell. All the truth had departed out of the world as if drawn in, absorbed in this monstrous villainy this man was—or was not—guilty of.

"'Shooting's too good for people that conceive neutrality in this pretty way,' remarked the Commanding Officer, after a silence.

"'Yes, yes, yes,' the Northman assented, hurriedly—then added an unexpected and dreamy-voiced 'Perhaps.'

"Was he pretending to be drunk, or only trying to appear sober? His glance was straight, but it was somewhat glazed. His lips outlined themselves firmly under his yellow moustache. But they twitched. Did they twitch? And why was he drooping like this in his attitude?

"'There's no perhaps about it,' pronounced the Commanding Officer, sternly.

"The Northman had straightened himself. And unexpectedly he looked stern, too.

"'No. But what about the tempters? Better kill that lot off. There's about four, five, six million

of them,' he said, grimly; but in a moment changed into a whining key. 'But I had better hold my tongue. You have some suspicions.'

"'No, I've no suspicions,' declared the Commanding Officer.

"He never faltered. At that moment he had the certitude. The air of the chart-room was thick with guilt and falsehood braving the discovery, defying simple right, common decency, all humanity of feeling, every scruple of conduct.

"The Northman drew a long breath. 'Well, we know that you English are gentlemen. But let us speak the truth. Why should we love you so very much? You haven't done anything to be loved. We don't love the other people, of course. They haven't done anything for that either. A fellow comes along with a bag of gold. . . . I haven't been in Rotterdam my last voyage for nothing.'

"'You may be able to tell something interesting, then, to our people when you come into port,' interjected the Officer.

"'I might. But you keep some people in your pay at Rotterdam. Let them report. I am a neutral—am I not? . . . Have you ever seen a poor man on one side and a bag of gold on the other? Of course, I couldn't be tempted. I haven't the nerve for it. Really I haven't. It's nothing to me. I am just talking openly for once.'

"'Yes. And I am listening to you,' said the Commanding Officer, quietly.

"The Northman leaned forward over the table.

'Now that I know you have no suspicions, I talk. You don't know what a poor man is. I do. I am poor myself. This old ship, she isn't much, and she is mortgaged, too. Bare living, no more. Of course, I wouldn't have the nerve. But a man who has nerve! See. The stuff he takes aboard looks like any other cargo—packages, barrels, tins, copper tubes—what not. He doesn't see it work. It isn't real to him. But he sees the gold. That's real. Of course, nothing could induce me. I suffer from an internal disease. I would either go crazy from anxiety—or—or—take to drink or something. The risk is too great. Why—ruin!'

"'It should be death.' The Commanding Officer got up, after this curt declaration, which the other received with a hard stare oddly combined with an uncertain smile. The Officer's gorge rose at the atmosphere of murderous complicity which surrounded him, denser, more impenetrable, more acrid than the fog outside.

"'It's nothing to me,' murmured the Northman, swaying visibly.

"'Of course not,' assented the Commanding Officer, with a great effort to keep his voice calm and low. The certitude was strong within him. 'But I am going to clear all you fellows off this coast at once. And I will begin with you. You must leave in half an hour.'

"By that time the Officer was walking along the deck with the Northman at his elbow.

"'What! In this fog?' the latter cried out, huskily.

“‘Yes, you will have to go in this fog.’

“‘But I don’t know where I am. I really don’t.’

“The Commanding Officer turned round. A sort of fury possessed him. The eyes of the two men met. Those of the Northman expressed a profound amazement.

“‘Oh, you don’t know how to get out.’ The Commanding Officer spoke with composure, but his heart was beating with anger and dread. ‘I will give you your course. Steer south-by-east-half-east for about four miles and then you will be clear to haul to the eastward for your port. The weather will clear up before very long.’

“‘Must I? What could induce me? I haven’t the nerve.’

“‘And yet you must go. Unless you want to——’

“‘I don’t want to,’ panted the Northman. ‘I’ve enough of it.’

“The Commanding Officer got over the side. The Northman remained still as if rooted to the deck. Before his boat reached his ship the Commanding Officer heard the steamer beginning to pick up her anchor. Then, shadowy in the fog, she steamed out on the given course.

“‘Yes,’ he said to his officers, ‘I let him go.’”

The narrator bent forward towards the couch, where no movement betrayed the presence of a living person.

“Listen,” he said, forcibly. “That course would lead the Northman straight on a deadly ledge of rock.

And the Commanding Officer gave it to him. He steamed out—ran on it—and went down. So he had spoken the truth. He did not know where he was. But it proves nothing. Nothing either way. It may have been the only truth in all his story. And yet . . . He seems to have been driven out by a menacing stare—nothing more.”

He abandoned all pretence.

“Yes, I gave that course to him. It seemed to me a supreme test. I believe—no, I don’t believe. I don’t know. At the time I was certain. They all went down; and I don’t know whether I have done stern retribution—or murder; whether I have added to the corpses that litter the bed of the unreadable sea the bodies of men completely innocent or basely guilty. I don’t know. I shall never know.”

He rose. The woman on the couch got up and threw her arms round his neck. Her eyes put two gleams in the deep shadow of the room. She knew his passion for truth, his horror of deceit, his humanity.

“Oh, my poor, poor——”

“I shall never know,” he repeated, sternly, disengaged himself, pressed her hands to his lips, and went out.

JOSEPH CONRAD.



THE wide pampa rough with long grass; a vast level disk now growing dark, the horizon encircling it with a ring as faultless as that made by a pebble dropped into smooth water; above it the clear sky of June, wintry and pale, still showing in the west the saffron hues of the afterglow tinged with vapoury violet and grey. In the centre of the disk a large low rancho thatched with yellow rushes, a few stunted trees and cattle enclosures grouped about it; and dimly seen in the shadows, cattle and sheep reposing. At the gate stands Gregory Gorostiaga, lord of house, lands and ruminating herds, leisurely unsaddling his horse; for whatsoever Gregory does is done leisurely. Although no person is within earshot he talks much over his task, now rebuking his restive animal, and now cursing his benumbed fingers and the hard knots in his gear. A curse falls readily and not without a certain natural grace from Gregory's lips; it is the oiled feather with which he touches every difficult knot encountered in life. From time to time he glances towards the open kitchen door, from which issue the far-flaring light of the fire and familiar voices, with savoury smells of cookery that come to his nostrils like pleasant messengers.

The unsaddling over at last, the freed horse gallops away, neighing joyfully, to seek his fellows; but Gregory is not a four-footed thing to hurry himself;

and so, stepping slowly and pausing frequently to look about him as if reluctant to quit the cold night air, he turns towards the house.

The spacious kitchen was lighted by two or three wicks in cups of melted fat, and by a great fire in the middle of the clay floor that cast crowds of dancing shadows on the walls and filled the whole room with grateful warmth. On the walls were fastened many deer's heads, and on their convenient prongs were hung bridles and lassos, ropes of onions and garlic, bunches of dried herbs, and various other objects. At the fire a piece of beef was roasting on a spit; and in a large pot suspended by hook and chain from the smoke-blackened central beam, boiled and bubbled an ocean of mutton broth, puffing out white clouds of steam redolent of herbs and cummin-seed. Close to the fire, skimmer in hand, sat Magdalen, Gregory's fat and florid wife, engaged in frying pies in a second smaller pot. There also, on a high, straight-backed chair, sat Ascension, her sister-in-law, a wrinkled spinster; also, in a low rush-bottomed seat, her mother-in-law, an ancient white-headed dame, staring vacantly into the flames. On the other side of the fire were Gregory's two eldest daughters, occupied just now in serving maté to their elders—that harmless bitter decoction the sipping of which fills up all vacant moments from dawn to bedtime—pretty dove-eyed girls of sixteen, both also named Magdalen, but not after their mother nor because confusion was loved by the family for its own sake; they were twins, and born

on the day sacred to Santa Magdalena. Slumbering dogs and cats were disposed about the floor, also four children. The eldest, a boy, sitting with legs outstretched before him, was cutting threads from a slip of colt's hide looped over his great toe. The two next, boy and girl, were playing a simple game called nines, once known to English children as nine men's morrice; the lines were rudely scratched on the clay floor, and the men they played with were bits of hardened clay, nine red and as many white. The youngest, a girl of five, sat on the floor nursing a kitten that purred contentedly on her lap and drowsily winked its blue eyes at the fire; and as she swayed herself from side to side she lisped out the old lullaby in her baby voice:

A-ro-ró mi niño,
A-ro-ró mi sol,
A-ro-ró pedazos
De mi corazón.

Gregory stood on the threshold surveying this domestic scene with manifest pleasure.

"Papa mine, what have you brought me?" cried the child with the kitten.

"Brought you, interested? Stiff whiskers and cold hands to pinch your dirty little cheeks. How is your cold to-night, mother?"

"Yes, son, it is very cold to-night; we knew that before you came in," replied the old dame testily as she drew her chair a little closer to the fire.

"It is useless speaking to her," remarked Ascension. "With her to be out of temper is to be deaf."

"What has happened to put her out?" he asked.

"I can tell you, papa," cried one of the twins. "She wouldn't let me make your cigars to-day, and sat down out of doors to make them herself. It was after breakfast when the sun was warm."

"And of course she fell asleep," chimed in Ascension.

"Let me tell it, auntie!" exclaimed the other. "And she fell asleep, and in a moment Rosita's lamb came and ate up the whole of the tobacco-leaf in her lap."

"It didn't!" cried Rosita, looking up from her game. "I opened its mouth and looked with all my eyes, and there was no tobacco-leaf in it."

"That lamb! that lamb!" said Gregory slyly. "Is it to be wondered at that we are turning grey before our time—all except Rosita! Remind me to-morrow, wife, to take it to the flock; or if it has grown fat on all the tobacco-leaf, aprons and old shoes it has eaten——"

"Oh no, no, no!" screamed Rosita, starting up and throwing the game into confusion, just when her little brother had made a row and was in the act of seizing on one of her pieces in triumph.

"Hush, silly child, he will not harm your lamb," said the mother, pausing from her task and raising eyes that were tearful with the smoke of the fire and of the cigarette she held between her good-humoured lips. "And now, if these children have finished speaking of their important affairs, tell me, Gregory, what news do you bring?"

"They say," he returned, sitting down and taking

the mate-cup from his daughter's hand, "that the invading Indians bring seven hundred lances, and that those that first opposed them were all slain. Some say they are now retreating with the cattle they have taken, while others maintain that they are waiting to fight our men."

"Oh, my sons, my sons, what will happen to them!" cried Magdalen, bursting into tears.

"Why do you cry, wife, before God gives you cause?" returned her husband. "Are not all men born to fight the infidel? Our boys are not alone—all their friends and neighbours are with them."

"Say not this to me, Gregory, for I am not a fool nor blind. All their friends indeed! And this very day I have seen the Niño Diablo; he galloped past the house, whistling like a partridge that knows no care. Why must my two sons be called away, while he, a youth without occupation and with no mother to cry for him, remains behind?"

"You talk folly, Magdalen," replied her lord. "Complain that the ostrich and puma are more favoured than your sons, since no man calls on them to serve the State; but mention not the Niño, for he is freer than the wild things which Heaven has made, and fights not on this side nor on that."

"Coward! Miserable!" murmured the incensed mother.

Whereupon one of the twins flushed scarlet, and retorted, "He is not a coward, mother!"

"And if not a coward why does he sit on the hearth among women and old men in times like these?"

Grieved am I to hear a daughter of mine speak in defence of one who is a vagabond and a stealer of other men's horses!"

The girl's eyes flashed angrily, but she answered not a word.

"Hold your tongue, woman, and accuse no man of crimes," spoke Gregory. "Let every Christian take proper care of his animals; and as for the infidel's horses, he is a virtuous man that steals them. The girl speaks truth; the Niño is no coward, but he fights not with our weapons. The web of the spider is coarse and ill-made compared with the snare he spreads to entangle his prey." Then, fixing his eyes on the face of the girl who had spoken, he added: "Therefore be warned in season, my daughter, and fall not into the snare of the Niño Diablo."

Again the girl blushed and hung her head.

At this moment a clatter of hoofs, the jangling of a bell, and shouts of a traveller to the horses driven before him, came in at the open door. The dogs roused themselves, almost overturning the children in their hurry to rush out; and up rose Gregory to find out who was approaching with so much noise.

"I know, *papita*," cried one of the children. "It is Uncle Polycarp."

"You are right, child," said her father. "Cousin Polycarp always arrives at night, shouting to his animals like a troop of Indians." And with that he went out to welcome his boisterous relative.

The traveller soon arrived, spurring his horse, scared at the light and snorting loudly, to within two

yards of the door. In a few minutes the saddle was thrown off, the fore feet of the bell-mare fettered, and the horses allowed to wander away in quest of pasturage; then the two men turned into the kitchen.

A short, burly man aged about fifty, wearing a soft hat thrust far back on his head, with truculent greenish eyes beneath arched bushy eyebrows, and a thick shapeless nose surmounting a bristly moustache—such was Cousin Polycarp. From neck to feet he was covered with a blue cloth poncho, and on his heels he wore enormous silver spurs that clanked and jangled over the floor like the fetters of a convict. After greeting the women and bestowing the avuncular blessing on the children, who had clamoured for it as for some inestimable boon, he sat down, and flinging back his poncho displayed at his waist a huge silver-hilted knife and a heavy brass-barrelled horse-pistol.

“Heaven be praised for its goodness, Cousin Magdalen,” he said. “What with pies and spices your kitchen is more fragrant than a garden of flowers. That’s as it should be, for nothing but rum have I tasted this bleak day. And the boys are away fighting, Gregory tells me. Good! When the eaglets have found out their wings let them try their talons. What, Cousin Magdalen, crying for the boys! Would you have had them girls?”

“Yes, a thousand times,” she replied, drying her wet eyes on her apron.

“Ah, Magdalen, daughters can’t be always young and sweet-tempered, like your brace of pretty part-

ridges yonder. They grow old, Cousin Magdalen—old and ugly and spiteful; and are more bitter and worthless than the wild pumpkin. But I speak not of those who are present, for I would say nothing to offend my respected Cousin Ascension, whom may God preserve, though she never married.”

“Listen to me, Cousin Polycarp,” returned the insulted dame so pointedly alluded to. “Say nothing to me nor of me, and I will also hold my peace concerning you; for you know very well that if I were disposed to open my lips I could say a thousand things.”

“Enough, enough, you have already said them a thousand times,” he interrupted. “I know all that, cousin; let us say no more.”

“That is only what I ask,” she retorted, “for I have never loved to bandy words with you; and you know already, therefore I need not recall it to your mind, that if I am single it is not because some men whose names I could mention if I felt disposed—and they are the names not of dead but of living men—would not have been glad to marry me; but because I preferred my liberty and the goods I inherited from my father; and I see not what advantage there is in being the wife of one who is a brawler and a drunkard and spender of other people’s money, and I know not what besides.”

“There it is!” said Polycarp, appealing to the fire. “I knew that I had thrust my foot into a red ants’ nest—careless that I am! But in truth, Ascension, it was fortunate for you in those distant days you

mention that you hardened your heart against all lovers. For wives, like cattle that must be branded with their owner's mark, are first of all taught submission to their husbands; and consider, cousin, what tears! what sufferings!" And having ended thus abruptly, he planted his elbows on his knees and busied himself with the cigarette he had been trying to roll up with his cold drunken fingers for the last five minutes.

Ascension gave a nervous twitch at the red cotton kerchief on her head, and cleared her throat with a sound "sharp and short like the shrill swallow's cry," when——

"*Madre del Cielo*, how you frightened me!" screamed one of the twins, giving a great start.

The cause of this sudden outcry was discovered in the presence of a young man quietly seated on the bench at the girl's side. He had not been there a minute before, and no person had seen him enter the room—what wonder that the girl was startled! He was slender in form, and had small hands and feet, and oval olive face, smooth as a girl's except for the incipient moustache on his lip. In place of a hat he wore only a scarlet ribbon bound about his head, to keep back the glossy black hair that fell to his shoulders; and he was wrapped in a white woollen Indian poncho, while his lower limbs were cased in white colt-skin coverings, shaped like stockings to his feet, with the red tassels of his embroidered garters falling to the ankles.

"The Niño Diablo!" all cried in a breath, the

children manifesting the greatest joy at his appearance. But old Gregory spoke with affected anger. "Why do you always drop on us in this treacherous way, like rain through a leaky thatch?" he exclaimed. "Keep these strange arts for your visits in the infidel country; here we are all Christians, and praise God on the threshold when we visit a neighbour's house. And now, Niño Diablo, what news of the Indians?"

"Nothing do I know and little do I concern myself about specks on the horizon," returned the visitor with a light laugh. And at once all the children gathered round him, for the Niño they considered to belong to them when he came, and not to their elders with their solemn talk about Indian warfare and lost horses. And now, now he would finish that wonderful story, long in the telling, of the little girl alone and lost in the great desert, and surrounded by all the wild animals met to discuss what they should do with her. It was a grand story, even mother Magdalen listened, though she pretended all the time to be thinking only of her pies—and the teller, like the grand old historians of other days, put most eloquent speeches, all made out of his own head, into the lips (and beaks) of the various actors—puma, ostrich, deer, cavy, and the rest.

In the midst of this performance supper was announced, and all gathered willingly round a dish of Magdalen's pies, filled with minced meat, hard-boiled eggs chopped small, raisins, and plenty of spice. After the pies came roast beef; and, finally, great basins of mutton broth fragrant with herbs

and cummin-seed. The rage of hunger satisfied, each one said a prayer, the elders murmuring with bowed heads, the children on their knees uplifting shrill voices. Then followed the concluding semi-religious ceremony of the day, when each child in its turn asked a blessing of father, mother, grandmother, uncle, aunt, and not omitting the stranger within the gates, even the Niño Diablo of evil-sounding name.

The men drew forth their pouches, and began making their cigarettes, when once more the children gathered round the story-teller, their faces glowing with expectation.

"No, no," cried their mother. "No more stories to-night—to bed, to bed!"

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried Rosita pleadingly, and struggling to free herself; for the good woman had dashed in among them to enforce obedience. "Oh, let me stay till the story ends! The reed-cat has said such things! Oh, what will they do with the poor little girl?"

"And oh, mother mine!" drowsily sobbed her little sister; "the armadillo that said—that said nothing because it had nothing to say, and the part-ridge that whistled and said——" and here she broke into a prolonged wail. The boys also added their voices until the hubbub was no longer to be borne, and Gregory rose up in his wrath and called on someone to lend him a big whip; only then they yielded, and still sobbing and casting many a lingering look behind, were led from the kitchen.

During this scene the Niño had been carrying on a

whispered conversation with the pretty Magdalen of his choice, heedless of the uproar of which he had been the indirect cause; deaf also to the bitter remarks of Ascension concerning some people who, having no homes of their own, were fond of coming uninvited into other people's houses, only to repay the hospitality extended to them by stealing their silly daughters' affections, and teaching their children to rebel against their authority.

But the noise and confusion had served to arouse Polycarp from a drowsy fit; for, like a boa-constrictor, he had dined largely after his long fast, and dinner had made him dull; bending towards his cousin he whispered earnestly: "Who is this young stranger, Gregory?"

"In what corner of the earth have you been hiding to ask who the Niño Diablo is?" returned the other.

"Must I know the history of every cat and dog?"

"The Niño is not cat nor dog, cousin, but a man among men, like a falcon among birds. When a child of six, the Indians killed all his relations and carried him into captivity. After five years he escaped out of their hands, and, guided by sun and stars and signs on the earth, he found his way back to the Christians' country, bringing many beautiful horses stolen from his captors; also the name of Niño Diablo, first given to him by the infidel. We know him by no other."

"This is a good story; in truth I like it well—it pleases me mightily," said Polycarp. "And what more, Cousin Gregory?"

"More than I can tell, cousin. When he comes the dogs bark not—who knows why? his tread is softer than the cat's; the untamed horse is tame for him. Always in the midst of dangers, yet no harm, no scratch. Why? Because he stoops like the falcon, makes his stroke and is gone—Heaven knows where!"

"What strange things are you telling me? Wonderful! And what more, Cousin Gregory?"

"He often goes into the Indian country, and lives freely with the infidel, disguised, for they do not know him who was once their captive. They speak of the Niño Diablo to him, saying that when they catch that thief they will flay him alive. He listens to their strange stories, then leaves them, taking their finest ponchos and silver ornaments, and the flower of their horses."

"A brave youth, one after my own heart, Cousin Gregory. Heaven defend and prosper him in all his journeys into the Indian territory! Before we part I shall embrace him and offer him my friendship, which is worth something. More, tell me more, Cousin Gregory!"

"These things I tell you to put you on your guard; look well to your horses, cousin."

"What!" shouted the other, lifting himself up from his stooping posture, and staring at his relation with astonishment and kindling anger in his countenance.

The conversation had been carried on in a low tone, and the sudden loud exclamation startled them all

—all except the Niño, who continued smoking and chatting pleasantly to the twins.

“Lightning and pestilence, what is this you say to me, Gregory Gorostiaga!” continued Polycarp, violently slapping his thigh and thrusting his hat farther back on his head.

“Prudence!” whispered Gregory. “Say nothing to offend the Niño, he never forgives an enemy—with horses.”

“Talk not to me of prudence!” bawled the other. “You hit me on the apple of the eye and counsel me not to cry out. What! have not I, whom men call Polycarp of the South, wrestled with tigers in the desert, and must I hold my peace because of a boy—even a boy-devil? Talk of what you like, cousin, and I am a meek man—meek as a sucking babe; but touch not on my horses, for then I am a whirlwind, a conflagration, a river flooded in winter, and all wrath and destruction like an invasion of Indians! Who can stand before me? Ribs of steel are no protection! Look at my knife; do you ask why there are stains on the blade? Listen; because it has gone straight to the robber’s heart!” And with that he drew out his great knife and flourished it wildly, and made stabs and slashes at an imaginary foe suspended above the fire.

The pretty girls grew silent and pale and trembled like poplar leaves; the old grandmother rose up, and clutching at her shawl toddled hurriedly away, while Ascension uttered a snort of disdain. But the Niño still talked and smiled, blowing thin smoke-clouds

from his lips, careless of that tempest of wrath gathering before him; till, seeing the other so calm, the man of war returned his weapon to its sheath, and glancing round and lowering his voice to a conversational tone informed his hearers that his name was Polycarp, one known and feared by all men—especially in the south; that he was disposed to live in peace and amity with the entire human race, and he therefore considered it unreasonable of some men to follow him, about the world asking him to kill them. “Perhaps,” he concluded, with a touch of irony, “they think I gain something by putting them to death. A mistake, good friends; I gain nothing by it! I am not a vulture, and their dead bodies can be of no use to me.”

Just after this sanguinary protest and disclaimer the Niño all at once made a gesture as if to impose silence, and turned his face towards the door, his nostrils dilating, and his eyes appearing to grow large and luminous like those of a cat.

“What do you hear, Niño?” asked Gregory.

“I hear lapwings screaming,” he replied.

“Only at a fox perhaps,” said the other. “But go to the door, Niño, and listen.”

“No need,” he returned, dropping his hand, the light of a sudden excitement passing from his face. “’Tis only a single horseman riding this way at a fast gallop.”

Polycarp got up and went to the door, saying that when a man was among robbers it behoved him to look well after his cattle. Then he came back and

sat down again. "Perhaps," he remarked, with a side glance at the Niño, "a better plan would be to watch the thief. A lie, Cousin Gregory; no lapwings are screaming; no single horseman approaching at a fast gallop. The night is serene, and earth as silent as the sepulchre."

"Prudence!" whispered Gregory again. "Ah, cousin, always playful like a kitten; when will you grow old and wise? Can you not see a sleeping snake without turning aside to stir it up with your naked foot?"

Strange to say, Polycarp made no reply. A long experience in getting up quarrels had taught him that these impassive men were, in truth, often enough like venomous snakes, quick and deadly when roused. He became secret and watchful in his manner.

All now were intently listening. Then said Gregory, "Tell us, Niño, what voices, fine as the trumpet of the smallest fly, do you hear coming from that great silence? Has the mother skunk put her little ones to sleep in their kennel and gone out to seek for the pipit's nest? Have fox and armadillo met to challenge each other to fresh trials of strength and cunning? What is the owl saying this moment to his mistress in praise of her big green eyes?"

The young man smiled slightly but answered not; and for full five minutes more all listened, then sounds of approaching hoofs became audible. Dogs began to bark, horses to snort in alarm, and Gregory rose and went forth to receive the late night-wanderer. Soon he appeared, beating the angry barking dogs

off with his whip, a white-faced, wild-haired man, furiously spurring his horse like a person demented or flying from robbers.

"*Ave Maria!*" he shouted aloud; and when the answer was given in suitable pious words, the scared-looking stranger drew near, and bending down said, "Tell me, good friend, is one whom men call Niño Diablo with you, for to this house I have been directed in my search for him?"

"He is within, friend," answered Gregory. "Follow me and you shall see him with your own eyes. Only first unsaddle, so that your horse may roll before the sweat dries on him."

"How many horses have I ridden their last journey on this quest!" said the stranger, hurriedly pulling off the saddle and rugs. "But tell me one thing more; is he well—no indisposition? Has he met with no accident—a broken bone, a sprained ankle?"

"Friend," said Gregory, "I have heard that once in past times the moon met with an accident, but of the Niño no such thing has been reported to me."

With this assurance the stranger followed his host into the kitchen, made his salutation, and sat down by the fire. He was about thirty years old, a good-looking man, but his face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his manner restless, and he appeared like one half-crazed by some great calamity. The hospitable Magdalen placed food before him and pressed him to eat. He complied, although reluctantly, dispatched his supper in a few moments, and murmured a prayer; then, glancing curiously at the

two men seated near him, he addressed himself to the burly, well-armed, and dangerous-looking Polycarp. "Friend," he said, his agitation increasing as he spoke, "four days have I been seeking you, taking neither food nor rest, so great was my need of your assistance. You alone, after God, can help me. Help me in this strait, and half of all I possess in land and cattle and gold shall be freely given to you, and the angels above will applaud your deed!"

"Drunk or mad?" was the only reply vouchsafed to this appeal.

"Sir," said the stranger with dignity, "I have not tasted wine these many days, nor has my great grief crazed me."

"Then what ails the man?" said Polycarp. "Fear perhaps, for he is white in the face like one who has seen the Indians."

"In truth I have seen them. I was one of those unfortunates who first opposed them, and most of the friends who were with me are now food for wild dogs. Where our houses stood there are only ashes and a stain of blood on the ground. Oh, friend, can you not guess why you alone were in my thoughts when this trouble came to me—why I have ridden day and night to find you?"

"Demons!" exclaimed Polycarp, "into what quagmires would this man lead me? Once for all, I understand you not! Leave me in peace, strange man, or we shall quarrel." And here he tapped his weapon significantly.

At this juncture, Gregory, who took his time about

everything, thought proper to interpose. "You are mistaken, friend," said he. "The young man sitting on your right is the Niño Diablo, for whom you inquired a little while ago."

A look of astonishment, followed by one of intense relief, came over the stranger's face. Turning to the young man he said, "My friend, forgive me this mistake. Grief has perhaps dimmed my sight; but sometimes the iron blade and the blade of finest temper are not easily distinguished by the eye. When we try them we know which is the brute metal, and cast it aside to take up the other, and trust our life to it. The words I have spoken were meant for you, and you have heard them."

"What can I do for you, friend?" said the Niño.

"Oh, sir, the greatest service! You can restore my lost wife to me. The savages have taken her away into captivity. What can I do to save her—I who cannot make myself invisible, and fly like the wind, and compass all things?" And here he bowed his head, and covering his face gave way to overmastering grief.

"Be comforted, friend," said the other, touching him lightly on the arm. "I will restore her to you."

"Oh, friend, how shall I thank you for these words?" cried the unhappy man, seizing and pressing the Niño's hand.

"Tell me her name—describe her to me."

"Torcuata is her name—Torcuata de la Rosa. She is one finger's width taller than this young woman," indicating one of the twins who was standing.

"But not dark; her cheeks are rosy—no, no, I forget, they will be pale now, whiter than the grass plumes, with stains of dark colour under the eyes. Brown hair and blue eyes, but very deep blue. Look well, friend, lest you think them black and leave her to perish."

"Never!" remarked Gregory, shaking his head.

"Enough—you have told me enough, friend," said the Niño, rolling up a cigarette.

"Enough!" repeated the other, surprised. "But you do not know; she is my life; my life is in your hands. How can I persuade you to be with me? Cattle I have. I had gone to pay the herdsmen their wages when the Indians came unexpectedly; and my house at La Chilca, on the banks of the Languayú, was burnt, and my wife taken away during my absence. Eight hundred head of cattle have escaped the savages, and half of them shall be yours; and half of all I possess in money and land."

"Cattle!" returned the Niño smiling, and holding a lighted stick to his cigarette. "I have enough to eat without molesting myself with the care of cattle."

"But I told you that I had other things," said the stranger full of distress.

The young man laughed, and rose from his seat.

"Listen to me," he said. "I go now to follow the Indians—to mix with them, perhaps. They are retreating slowly, burdened with much spoil. In fifteen days go to the little town of Tandil, and wait for me there. As for land, if God has given so much

of it to the ostrich it is not a thing for a man to set a great value on." Then he bent down to whisper a few words in the ear of the girl at his side; and immediately afterwards, with a simple "good night" to the others, stepped lightly from the kitchen. By another door the girl also hurriedly left the room, to hide her tears from the watchful censuring eyes of mother and aunt.

Then the stranger, recovering from his astonishment at the abrupt ending of the conversation, started up, and crying aloud, "Stay! stay one moment—one word more!" rushed out after the young man. At some distance from the house he caught sight of the Niño, sitting motionless on his horse, as if waiting to speak to him.

"This is what I have to say to you," spoke the Niño, bending down to the other. "Go back to Languayú, and rebuild your house, and expect me there with your wife in about thirty days. When I bade you go to the Tandil in fifteen days, I spoke only to mislead that man Polycarp, who has an evil mind. Can I ride a hundred leagues and back in fifteen days? Say no word of this to any man. And fear not. If I fail to return with your wife at the appointed time take some of that money you have offered me, and bid a priest say a mass for my soul's repose; for eye of man shall never see me again, and the brown hawks will be complaining that there is no more flesh to be picked from my bones."

During this brief colloquy, and afterwards, when Gregory and his women-folk went off to bed, leaving

the stranger to sleep in his rugs beside the kitchen fire, Polycarp, who had sworn a mighty oath not to close his eyes that night, busied himself making his horses secure. Driving them home, he tied them to the posts of the gate within twenty-five yards of the kitchen door. Then he sat down by the fire and smoked and dozed, and cursed his dry mouth and drowsy eyes that were so hard to keep open. At intervals of about fifteen minutes he would get up and go out to satisfy himself that his precious horses were still safe. At length in rising, some time after midnight, his foot kicked against some loud-sounding metal object lying beside him on the floor, which on examination proved to be a copper bell of a peculiar shape, and curiously like the one fastened to the neck of his bell-mare. Bell in hand, he stepped to the door and put out his head, and lo! his horses were no longer at the gate! Eight horses: seven iron-grey geldings, every one of them swift and sure-footed, sound as the bell in his hand, and as like each other as seven claret-coloured eggs in the tinamu's nest; and the eighth the gentle piebald mare—the *madrina* his horses loved and would follow to the world's end, now, alas! with a thief on her back! Gone—gone!

He rushed out, uttering a succession of frantic howls and imprecations; and finally, to wind up the performance, dashed the now useless bell with all his energy against the gate, shattering it into a hundred pieces. Oh, that bell, how often and how often in how many a wayside public-house had he boasted, in his cups and when sober, of its mellow,

far-reaching tone,—the sweet sound that assured him in the silent watches of the night that his beloved steeds were safe! Now he danced on the broken fragments, digging them into the earth with his heel; now in his frenzy he could have dug them up again to grind them to powder with his teeth!

The children turned restlessly in bed, dreaming of the lost little girl in the desert; and the stranger half awoke, muttering, "Courage, O Torcuata—let not your heart break. . . . Soul of my life, he gives you back to me—on my bosom, *rosa fresca, rosa fresca!*" Then the hands unclenched themselves again, and the muttering died away. But Gregory woke fully, and instantly divined the cause of the clamour. "Magdalen! Wife!" he said. "Listen to Polycarp; the Niño has paid him out for his insolence! Oh fool, I warned him, and he would not listen!" But Magdalen refused to wake; and so, hiding his head under the coverlet, he made the bed shake with suppressed laughter, so pleased was he at the clever trick played on his blustering cousin. All at once his laughter ceased, and out popped his head again, showing in the dim light a somewhat long and solemn face. For he had suddenly thought of his pretty daughter asleep in the adjoining room. Asleep! Wide awake, more likely, thinking of her sweet lover, brushing the dew from the hoary pampas grass in his southward flight, speeding away into the heart of the vast mysterious wilderness. Listening also to her uncle, the desperado, apostrophising the midnight stars; while with his knife he excavates

two deep trenches, three yards long and intersecting each other at right angles—a sacred symbol on which he intends, when finished, to swear a most horrible vengeance. “Perhaps,” muttered Gregory, “the Niño has still other pranks to play in this house.”

When the stranger heard next morning what had happened, he was better able to understand the Niño’s motive in giving him that caution overnight; nor was he greatly put out, but thought it better that an evil-minded man should lose his horses than that the Niño should set out badly mounted on such an adventure.

“Let me not forget,” said the robbed man, as he rode away on a horse borrowed from his cousin, “to be at the Tandil this day fortnight, with a sharp knife and a blunderbuss charged with a handful of powder and not fewer than twenty-three slugs.”

Terribly in earnest was Polycarp of the South! He was there at the appointed time, slugs and all; but the smooth-cheeked, mysterious, child-devil came not; nor, stranger still, did the scared-looking de la Rosa come clattering in to look for his lost Torcuata. At the end of the fifteenth day de la Rosa was at Langueyú, seventy-five miles from the Tandil, alone in his new rancho, which had just been rebuilt with the aid of a few neighbours. Through all that night he sat alone by the fire, pondering many things. If he could only recover his lost wife, then he would bid a long farewell to that wild frontier and take her across the great sea, and to that old tree-shaded stone farm-house in Andalusia, which he had left a boy, and

where his aged parents still lived, thinking no more to see their wandering son. His resolution was taken; he would sell all he possessed, all except a portion of land in the Langueyú with the house he had just rebuilt; and to the Niño Diablo, the deliverer, he would say, "Friend, though you despise the things that others value, take this land and poor house for the sake of the girl Magdalen you love; for then perhaps her parents will no longer deny her to you."

He was still thinking of these things, when a dozen or twenty military starlings—that cheerful scarlet-breasted songster of the lonely pampas—alighted on the thatch outside, and warbling their gay, careless winter-music told him that it was day. And all day long, on foot and on horseback, his thoughts were of his lost Torcuata; and when evening once more drew near his heart was sick with suspense and longing; and climbing the ladder placed against the gable of his rancho he stood on the roof gazing westwards into the blue distance. The sun, crimson and large, sunk into the great green sea of grass, and from all the plain rose the tender fluting notes of the tinamupartridges, bird answering bird. "Oh, that I could pierce the haze with my vision," he murmured, "that I could see across a hundred leagues of level plain, and look this moment on your sweet face, Torcuata!"

And Torcuata was in truth a hundred leagues distant from him at that moment; and if the miraculous sight he wished for had been given, this was what he would have seen. A wide barren plain

scantily clothed with yellow tufts of grass and thorny shrubs, and at its southern extremity, shutting out the view on that side, a low range of dune-like hills. Over this level ground, towards the range, moves a vast herd of cattle and horses—fifteen or twenty thousand head—followed by a scattered horde of savages armed with their long lances. In a small compact body in the centre ride the captives, women and children. Just as the red orb touches the horizon the hills are passed, and lo! a wide grassy valley beyond, with flocks and herds pasturing, and scattered trees, and the blue gleam of water from a chain of small lakes! There, full in sight, is the Indian settlement, the smoke rising peacefully up from the clustered huts. At the sight of home the savages burst into loud cries of joy and triumph, answered, as they drew near, with piercing screams of welcome from the village population, chiefly composed of women, children and old men.

It is past midnight; the young moon has set; the last fires are dying down; the shouts and loud noise of excited talk and laughter have ceased, and the weary warriors, after feasting on sweet mare's flesh to repletion, have fallen asleep in their huts, or, lying out of doors on the ground. Only the dogs are excited still and keep up an incessant barking. Even the captive women, huddled together in one hut in the middle of the settlement, fatigued with their long rough journey, have cried themselves to sleep at last.

At length one of the sad sleepers wakes, or half wakes, dreaming that someone has called her name. How could such a thing be? Yet her own name still seems ringing in her brain, and at length, fully awake, she finds herself intently listening. Again it sounded—"Torcuata"—a voice fine as the pipe of a mosquito, yet so sharp and distinct that it tingled in her ear. She sat up and listened again, and once more it sounded, "Torcuata!" "Who speaks?" she returned in a fearful whisper. The voice, still fine and small, replied, "Come out from among the others until you touch the wall." Trembling she obeyed, creeping out from among the sleepers until she came into contact with the side of the hut. Then the voice sounded again, "Creep round the wall until you come to a small crack of light on the other side." Again she obeyed, and when she reached the line of faint light it widened quickly to an aperture, through which a shadowy arm was passed round her waist; and in a moment she was lifted up, and saw the stars above her, and at her feet dark forms of men wrapped in their ponchos lying asleep. But no one woke, no alarm was given; and in a very few minutes she was mounted, man-fashion, on a bare-backed horse, speeding swiftly over the dim plains, with the shadowy form of her mysterious deliverer some yards in advance, driving before him a score or so of horses. He had only spoken half a dozen words to her since their escape from the hut, but she knew by those words that he was taking her to Languayú.

W. H. HUDSON.

THAT WHICH REMAINED

I

ODDLY enough, no record exists of the origin of his nickname. "Periwinkle" he had been all through crammer and *Britannia* days. As senior signal midshipman of the Mediterranean flagship, he was still "The Periwinkle," small for his years, skinny as a weasel, with straight black hair, and grey eyes set wide apart in a brown face; the eyelashes, black and short, grew very close together, which gave him the perpetual appearance of having recently coaled ship and neglected to clean the dust from his eyes.

The signal midshipmen of a fleet, especially the Mediterranean Fleet, of those days, were essentially keen on their "job." The nature of the work and intership rivalry provided for that. But with the Periwinkle, signals were more than a mere "job." They formed his creed and recreation: the flag-lockers were tarpaulin-covered shrines; the semaphores spoke oracles by day as did the flashing lamps by night. And the high priest of these mysteries was the flag-lieutenant, a Rugby International and right good fellow withal, but, to the Periwinkle, a very god who walked among men.

To understand something of his hero-worship you would need to have been on the bridge when the fleet put out to sea for tactics. It was sufficient for

the Periwinkle to watch this immaculate, imperturbable being snap out a string of signals apparently from memory, as he so often did, while hoist after hoist of flags leaped from the lockers and sped skywards, and the bridge was a whirl of bunting. Even the admiral, who spoke so little and saw so much, was in danger of becoming a mere puppet in the boy's sight.

But there was more than this to encourage his ardour. The flag-lieutenant, recognising the material of a signalman of unusual promise, would invite the Periwinkle to his cabin after dinner and unfold, with the aid of printed diagrams and little brass oblongs representing ships, the tactical and strategical mysteries of his craft. There was one unforgettable evening, too, when the Periwinkle was bidden to dinner ashore at the Malta Club. The dinner was followed by a dance, whereat, in further token of esteem, the flag-lieutenant introduced him to a lady of surpassing loveliness—the fairest (the Periwinkle was given to understand) of all the Pippins.

The spring gave place to summer, and the island became a glaring wilderness of sun-baked rock. For obscure reasons of policy the fleet remained at Malta instead of departing on its usual cruise, and week after week the sun blazed pitilessly down on the awnings of the anchored ships. Week by week the Periwinkle grew more brown and angular, and lost a little more of his wiry activity. The frequent stampedes up and down ladders with signals for the admiral sent him into a lather like a nervous horse;

at the end of a watch his hair was wet with perspiration and his whites hung clammily on his meagre limbs. After a while, too, he began to find the glare tell, and to ease the aching of his eyes, had sometimes to shift the telescope from one eye to the other in the middle of a signal. As a matter of fact, there was no necessity for him to read signals at all: that was part of the signalman's duty. And if he had chosen to be more leisurely in his ascent and descent of ladders, no one would have called him to account. But his zeal was a flame within him, and terror lest he earned a rebuke from the flag-lieutenant for lack of smartness, lent wings to his tired heels.

It was August when the flag-lieutenant sought out the fleet surgeon in the wardroom after dinner, and broached the subject of the Periwinkle.

"P.M.O., I wish you'd have a look at that shrimp; he's knocking himself up in this heat. He swears he's all right, but he looks fit for nothing but hospital."

So the Periwinkle was summoned to the fleet surgeon's cabin. Vehemently he asserted that he had never felt better in his life, and the most the fatherly old Irishman could extort from him was the admission that he had not been sleeping particularly well. As a matter of fact he had not slept for three nights past; but fear lest he should be "put on the list" forbade his admitting either this or the shooting pain behind his eyes, which by now was almost continual. The outcome of the interview, however, was an order to turn in forthwith. Next morning

the Periwinkle was ignominiously hoisted over the side in a cot—loudly protesting at the indignity of not even being allowed to walk—*en route* for Bighi hospital as a fever patient.

II

The news of the world is transmitted to naval stations abroad by cable, and promulgated by means of wireless telegraphy to ships cruising or out of reach of visual signalling. At Malta the news is distributed to ships present in harbour by semaphore from the Castile, an eminence above the town of Valetta, commanding the grand harbour and nearly opposite the naval hospital.

One morning a group of convalescents were sunning themselves on the balcony of the hospital, and one, watching the life of the harbour through a telescope, suddenly exclaimed, "Stand by! They're going to make the Reuter telegram. I wonder how the Navy got on at Lord's."

"It's hopeless trying to read it," said another, "they make it at such a beastly rate."

The Periwinkle, fuming in bed in an adjacent ward, overheard the speaker. In a second he was on his feet and at the open window, a tousled-haired object in striped pyjamas, crinkling his eyes in the glare. "I can read it, sir; lend me the glass."

"You ought to be in bed, my son. Haven't you got Malta Fever?"

"It's very slight," replied the Periwinkle—as

indeed it was,—“and I’m quite as warm out here as in bed. May I borrow your glass?”

He took the telescope and steadied it against a pillar. The distant semaphore began waving, and the group of convalescents settled down to listen. But no sound came from the boy. He was standing with the eye-piece held to his right eye, motionless as a statue. A light wind fluttered the gaudy pyjamas, and their owner lowered the glass with a little frown, half-puzzled, half-irritated.

“I—it’s—there’s something wrong——” he began, and abruptly put the glass to his left eye. “Ah, that’s better. . . .” He commenced reading, but in a minute or two his voice faltered and trailed off into silence. He changed the glass to his right, and back to his left eye. Then, lowering it, turned a white scared face to the seated group. “I’m afraid I can’t read any more,” he said in a curiously dry voice; “I—it hurts my eyes.”

He returned the glass to its owner and hopped back into bed, where he sat with the clothes drawn up under his chin, sweating lightly.

After a while he closed his left eye and looked cautiously round the room. The tops of objects appeared indistinctly out of a grey mist. It was like looking at a partly fogged negative. He closed his right eye and repeated the process with the other. His field of vision was clear then, except for a speck of grey fog that hung threateningly in the upper left-hand corner.

By dinner-time he could see nothing with the right

eye, and the fog had closed on half the left eye's vision.

At tea-time he called the sister on duty:

"My eyes—hurt . . . frightfully." Thus the Periwinkle, striving to hedge with destiny.

"Do they?" sympathised the sister. "I'll tell the surgeon when he comes round to-night, and he'll give you something for them. I shouldn't read for the present if I were you."

The Periwinkle smiled grimly, as if she had made a joke, and lay back, every nerve in his body strung to breaking-point.

"Can't see, eh?" The visiting surgeon who leaned over his bed a few hours later looked at him from under puzzled brows. "Can't see—d'you mean . . ." He picked up an illustrated paper, holding it about a yard away, and pointed to a word block type: "What's this word?"

The Periwinkle stared past him with a face like a flint. "I can't see the paper. I can't see you . . . or the room, or—or—anything. . . . I'm blind." His voice trembled.

To the terror by night that followed was added physical pain past anything he had experienced or imagined in his short life. It almost amazed him that anything could hurt so much and not rob him of consciousness. The next room held a sufferer who raved in delirium: cursing, praying, and shrieking alternately. The tortured voice rose in the stillness of the night to a howl, and the Periwinkle set his

teeth grimly. He was not alone in torment, but his was still the power to meet it like a man.

By the end of a week the pain had left him. At intervals during this period he was guided to a dark room—for the matter of that, all rooms were dark to him—and unseen beings bandied strange technicalities about his ears. "Optic neuritis . . . retrobulbar . . . atrophy." The words meant nothing to the boy, and their meaning mattered less. For nothing, they told him, could give him back his sight. After that they left him alone, to wait with what patience he might until the next P. & O. steamer passed through.

His first visitor was the chaplain, the most well-meaning of men, whose voice quavered with pity as he spoke at some length of resignation and the beauty of cheerfulness in affliction. On his departure, the Periwinkle caught the rustle of the sister's dress.

"Sister," said the boy, "will you please go away for a few minutes. I'm afraid I have to swear—out loud."

"But you mustn't," she expostulated, slightly taken aback. "It's—it's very wicked."

"Can't help that," replied the Periwinkle austere. "Please go at once; I'm going to begin."

Scandalised and offended—as well she might be—she left the Periwinkle to his godless self, and he swore aloud—satisfying, unintelligible, senseless lower-deckese. But when she brought him his tea an hour later she found he had the grace to look ashamed of himself, and forgave him. They subsequently

became great friends, and at the Periwinkle's dictation she wrote long cheerful letters that began: "My dear Mother," and generally ended in suspicious-looking smudges.

Everyone visited the Periwinkle. His brethren from the fleet arrived, bearing as gifts strange and awful delicacies that usually had to be confiscated, sympathising with the queer, clumsy tenderness of boyhood. The flag-lieutenant came often, always cheerful and optimistic, forbearing to voice a word of pity: for this the Periwinkle was inexpressibly grateful. He even brought the Fairest of All the Pippins, but the boy shrank a little from the tell-tale tremor she could never quite keep out of her voice. Her parting gift was an armful of roses, and on leaving she bent over till he could smell the faint scent of her hair. "Good-bye," she whispered; "go on being brave," and, to his wrathful astonishment, kissed him lightly on the mouth.

There was the admiral's wife too—childless herself—who, from long dealings with men, had acquired a brusque, almost masculine manner. As soon as he had satisfied himself that she evinced no outward desire to "slobber," the Periwinkle admitted her to his friendship. He subsequently confessed to the sister that, for a woman, she read aloud extremely well. "Well, I must be goin'," she said one day at parting. "I'll bring John up to see you to-morrow." When she had gone, the Periwinkle smote his pillow. "John!" he gasped.

"John" was the admiral.

Even the crew of his cutter—just the ordinary rapscallion duty-crew of the boat he had commanded—trudged up one sweltering Sunday afternoon, and were ushered with creaking boots and moist, shiny faces into his ward.

“Bein’ as we ’ad an arfternoon orf, sir,” began the spokesman, who was also the coxswain of the boat. But at the sight of the wavering, sightless eyes, although prompted by nudges and husky whispers, he forgot his carefully-prepared sentences.

“We reckoned we’d come and give you a chuck-up, like, sir,” concluded another, and instead of the elaborate speech they had deemed the occasion demanded, they told him of their victory in a three-mile race over a rival cutter. How afterwards they had generously fraternised with the vanquished crew—so generously that the port stroke—“’im as we calls ‘Nobby’ Clark, sir, if you remembers”—was at that moment languishing in a cell, as a result of the lavish hospitality that had prevailed. Finally, the Periwinkle extended a thin hand to the darkness, to be gripped in turn by fourteen leathery fists, ere their owners tiptoed out of the room and out of his life.

III

The Periwinkle found blindness an easier matter to bear in the ward of a hospital than on board the P. & O. liner by which he was invalided home. A naval sick-berth steward attended to his wants,

helped him to dress, and looked after him generally. But every familiar smell and sound of ship-life awoke poignant memories of the ship-life of former days, and filled him with bitter woe. He was morbidly sensitive of his blindness, too, and for days moped in his cabin alone, fiercely repelling any attempt at sympathy or companionship. Then, by degrees, the ship's doctor coaxed him up into a deck-chair, and sat beside him, warding off intruders and telling stories with the inimitable drollery that is the heritage of the surgeons of P. & O. liners. And at night, when the decks were clear, and every throb of the propellers was a reminder of the home they were drawing near to, he would link his arm loosely within the boy's and together they would walk to and fro. During these promenades he invariably treated the Periwinkle as a man of advanced years and experience, whereby was no little balm in Gilead.

Many people tried to make a fuss of the boy with the sullen mouth, whose cheek-bones looked as if they were coming through the skin, and who had such a sad story. Wealthy globe-trotters, Anglo-Indians, missionaries, and ladies of singular charm and beauty, all strove according to their lights to comfort him. But by degrees they realised he never wanted to play cat's-cradle or even discuss his mother, and so left him in peace.

But the boy had a friend beside the doctor, a grizzled major from an Indian frontier regiment, returning home on furlough with a V.C. tacked on to his unpretentious name. At first the Periwinkle

rather shrank from a fresh acquaintance—it is a terrible thing to have to shake hands with an unknown voice. But he was an incorrigible little hero-worshipper, and this man with the deep steady voice had done and seen wonderful things. Further, he didn't mind talking about them—to the Periwinkle; so that the boy, as he sat clasping his ankles and staring out to sea with sightless eyes, was told stories which, a week later, the newspaper reporters of the kingdom desired to hear in vain.

He was a philosopher too, this bronzed, grey-haired warrior with the sun-puckered eyes: teaching how, if you only take the trouble to look for it, a golden thread of humour runs through all the sombre warp and woof of life; and of "Hope which . . . outwears the accidents of life and reaches with tremulous hand beyond the grave and death."

This is the nicest sort of philosophy.

But for all that it was a weary voyage, and the Periwinkle was a brown-faced ghost, all knees and elbows and angularities, by the time Tilbury was reached. The first to board the ship was a lady, pale and sweetly dignified, whom the doctor met at the gangway and piloted to the Periwinkle's cabin. He opened the door before he turned and fled, and so heard, in her greeting of the Periwinkle, the infinite love and compassion that can thrill a woman's voice.

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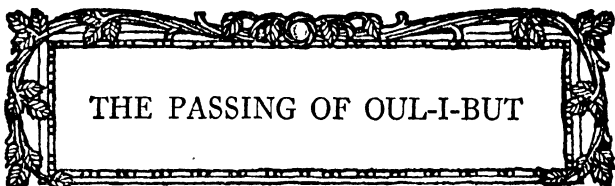
In a corner of the railway carriage that carried them home, the Periwinkle—that maimed and

battered knight—still clung to the haft of his broken sword. “I meant to do so jolly well. Oh, mother, I meant you to be so jolly proud of me. The flag-lieutenant said I might have been . . . if only it had been an arm or a leg—deaf or dumb . . . but there’s nothing left in all the world . . . it’s empty—nothing remains.”

She waited till the storms of self-pity and rebellion passed, leaving him biting his fingers and breathing hard. Then little by little, with mysterious tenderness, she drew out the iron that had entered the boyish soul. And, at the last, he turned to her with a little fluttering sigh, as a very tired child abandons a puzzle. She bent her head low—

“This remains,” she whispered.

BARTIMEUS.



THE PASSING OF OUL-I-BUT

CHAN-TIE, the Curlew, sat on a rock near the end of Great Bear Point and gazed blankly north at the Arctic Ocean. Spring had not yet weakened the chill manacles of that rock-bound coast, and the heavy ice stretched from her very feet, but Chan-tie's expression reflected nothing of the light of the strengthening sun.

She turned her broad fat face to her mother. "Aule-lik-tahai, let us start," she said slowly.

But Kug-yi-yuk, the Swan, was old, also she was comfortable, also she was busy making the master of all Husky fish-hooks. One set of lean brown sinewy fingers held a glistening fish bone, three inches long, and the other set ceaselessly twisted a needle-pointed flint into one end of it. She bent over it, twisting and screwing, till the flint point poked through, then she looked at Chan-tie with a grunt of satisfaction. "It is good, but I am a fool!"

Chan-tie's face expressed nothing. "Why?" she said, lazily.

The old woman's eyes peered out across the level ice. Half a mile from shore a lumpy line of hummocks broke its crystalline surface, and, behind these, out of sight of the caribou that walked out to sun themselves, lifted a clump of dome-like mounds.

From the height on which they sat, a brownish-yellow figure could be seen; it crept slowly from one dome to another, then stooped and disappeared. Kug-yi-yuk pointed:

"That is why," she said, with a tinge of regret at her own words. "Oul-i-but lost two yesterday, and, see, I make him another."

She leaned back, and behind the film over her glazed eyes there moved something memorial and tender. It did not seem so long ago, that time when Oul-i-but had stalked into the women's quarters, and put his hand on her shoulder and said "Come." She had come, willingly and with not a little pride, for Oul-i-but was the strongest man and the best hunter of the tribe, and she had never regretted it. Now—even as the fish-hooks had dropped from his palsied fingers into the green abyss below—her mind sank into the depths of an unwonted reflection.

The sun drooped slowly, but her busy hands stayed not, whatever her thoughts. She rounded the jagged hole and pushed another bone nearly through it, pointing upward till the two made a V with the one leg shorter than the other, then she lashed the angle firmly with sinew, and punched another hole for the line. "It is finished," she said sharply. "Pi-huk-tuk, let us go home."

They clambered carefully down the smooth rocks, and, once on the level ice, Chan-tie looked curiously at her mother. "What is it?" she ventured. "Will he go?"

Kug-yi-yuk's leathern face sharpened into a grim despair. "Yes—my daughter, he will go."

There was no one about in the camp when they reached it. A few lean, sharp-nosed, bushy-tailed dogs smelt at them, but, scenting no meat, set off to look for game of their own. The older woman stopped at the tunnel that led into the largest igloo, and crawled in on her knees, Chan-tie following. Within, the light spread dimly, revealing a blackened dome pierced by a small square hole through which a spot of sky looked strangely blue. Over against the wall an old man lay on a deer-skin and stared at them with blank eyes. In the middle of the igloo a hole was cut, and the clean, green water lipped its dirty edge; around and against the circular wall the floor was raised, and here fur robes and greasy deer-skin clothing lay in heaps.

Kug-yi-yuk stooped over the old man. His face was drawn like parchment, and the cheek-bones stood out sharp and white. "Oul-i-but is hungry," she said softly.

Her husband raised himself slowly and lifted his dim eyes to her own. "I will eat now," he whispered weakly, "and then eat no more!"

"It is the end," wailed Kug-yi-yuk, throwing herself face down beside him.

Oul-i-but looked at her for a moment, his features like a mask, and turned to Chan-tie. "You have heard," he said dominantly, "I would eat."

Chan-tie returned his stare, but there was wonder and terror in her own, then she picked up a copper knife. Its blade was long and of the yellow metal that lies in lumps on the shore of Victoria Land, and

its haft, a dull brown wood, was teak, from the bones of a vanished British ship.

Her father followed every movement, for Chan-tie was slow and did things with a dull deliberation, but Oul-i-but had reasons for not being in a hurry. She hacked a piece of ice, freshwater ice, from the blackened walls of the igloo, punched a hole in it and put a wooden skewer through the hole. Then she found a shallow stone lamp, of the shape that was used on the hills of Thrace two thousand years before, and into the lamp put a handful of moss, and over the moss poured seal oil. Then with flint, steel and touchwood from her fire-bag, and a few short vigorous strokes, and a careful puffing of round fat cheeks, the oil rippled into a yellow-white flame. Lastly, she put the lamp nearly under the piece of ice that swung on the skewer in the wall, and watched it drip slowly into a pan.

All of this Oul-i-but saw, and, tottering to the hole, took Kug-yi-yuk's fish-hook in his trembling fingers and with weak skilfulness fastened it to a long line of twisted sinew. The end of this he passed over a forked stick and attached it to a string of dew-claws that quivered and sounded with the slightest motion. He sat motionless. Behind him lay Kug-yi-yuk in a heaving heap, and, in front, Chan-tie held out blubber and a bowl of water, but Oul-i-but moved not.

An hour passed. Outside, the noises of camp came faintly, dogs barked and men called—and then—suddenly the string of dew-claws trembled and

tinkled. Oul-i-but snatched at the taut line and pulled nervously, and it came in through his lean fingers till below, in the green depths, the lithe shape of a salmon flashed at the end of his quivering line. Then, as the water heaved, the old arms tired. Instantly the great fish plunged, the hook parted, and the sinew lay slack in Oul-i-but's grasp.

He peered at the line and pressed it between his bony finger-tips. Kug-yi-yuk had lifted her head and stared at him from the floor; Chan-tie's eyes, big with wonder and fear, were fixed on him. He stood up very gently, drew in the line and laid it in a coil at his feet. "Bring Nun-ok," he said slowly, "I would see Nun-ok."

At the words Kug-yi-yuk wailed anew and crawled to her husband's feet. "Wait, Oul-i-but, wait. Not now."

But Oul-i-but only said wearily, "I am very tired, and I must go," and motioned to Chan-tie who got down on her knees and crawled shapeless into daylight. Then there was silence in the igloo save for the old woman's sobs, and over the lamp the ice dripped slowly into the bowl, and strange shadows of Oul-i-but's figure were thrown on the curving wall, till Nun-ok, the Bear—the son-in-law of Oul-i-but—shuffled in. He was short and broad, and the black hair lay sleek in a straight line above his beady black eyes. He knew what was coming, so waited till the old voice sounded again.

"Oul-i-but is weary. I would go as a chief of my tribe, and, since I have many years, I will go to-morrow."

Nun-ok's heart stirred within him. Thirty years ago, Oul-i-but had taken him hunting. In mid-winter he had taught him to fish, and whiled away the long darkness with tales and ancient legends of the Arctic. In the spring he used to guide him to the sleeping walrus and stand between the lad and a quick death in green water. In the summer, when the bands of caribou does came north to drop their young, it was Oul-i-but who saw that the boy fleshed his long copper knife, and so, through all the seasons of danger and ease, of plenty and of hunger, Oul-i-but walked beside Nun-ok till manhood came to the young hunter and he took Chan-tie to wife.

Nun-ok had seen much of death—he had lived on the narrow edge of it for years, and many old men had departed on the way that Oul-i-but would go. So he did not mind that so much, but it also meant that the tribe would have to move, and this was regrettable, for, opposite where the grey rocks came down to the rim of the land, there was a cliff, and beyond the cliff a flat expanse over which one could drive the caribou to their plunging destruction. Therefore he knew that this summer he would not see the fat, grey, tumbling deer drop smashing on to the pointed rocks, as they had the summer before. But also remembering many things he looked long and understandingly at Oul-i-but till he caught the old man's eyes, and in them brooded the mystical shadow of mortality. So with full leadership pending over him, Nun-ok drew himself up as becomes a

leader, and said, "To-morrow my father shall go as a chief goes."

The women watched Oul-i-but for a time after Nun-ok departed, for there was something in the finality of the men's speech that had answered all their questionings. He no longer seemed ancient and helpless, for was he not a wise traveller about to take the most wonderful journey of all? In the season of the year, drifting ice-fields, carefully chosen, were used to carry the tribes to their hunting and fishing grounds. That was a long journey and a slow one. But Oul-i-but, brave chief, was going on a still longer journey to still better hunting-grounds, and never before was he so sure of the journey's end. The peoples that suck at the paps of a fruitful earth are not thereby rendered brave and tender, but rather those who, in the stark and iron-bound wilderness, wage an endless war against danger and famine. So it was that his kin turned with love to Oul-i-but. There was no more place for tears or lament, his going was settled and honour should attend him. Nun-ok, the Bear, passed the word to Aiv-ik, the Walrus, and Tuk-tu, the Caribou, and from the naming of these men it may be seen that they were hunters all. They met as the Arctic night came down, and, ere the shimmering Aurora had reached its zenith, the last igloo of Oul-i-but took form. Twenty feet in diameter the base blocks circled, and Nun-ok stood inside, deftly locking them together as they rose with diminishing sweep.

Soon the white dome was out of reach, and he cut

a block of his own and stood on it, while Aiv-ik and Tuk-tu swung their long knives beneath the ripples of red and yellow and green that spilled out of the wonderful arch of flame overhead. There was no waste of time or energy as the igloo rounded and closed its perfect curve. Then Nun-ok cut a six-inch square hole in the middle of the roof, hewed his way out at the floor-line, builded the exit and the tunnel, and, on top, stuck a gleaming walrus tusk, that all men might know that this was the house of death.

With the grey of dawn a whisper ran through the camp, and, ere morning came, the great igloo was seen, a little way apart, broad and high, with the walrus tusk glinting on its top. Then they all knew, and Oul-i-but himself tottered over and scanned it as closely as his dim eyes might, and, feeling the slow curve of its rising walls, his soul was glad, for, in his memory, no chief had gone away in so big an igloo as that. So he went slowly back and told Kug-yi-yuk and Chan-tie that all was well, and asked for the things that he had made, and found and treasured all his life.

The hearts of the women, having put away their weeping, were charged with a great desire to serve this wayfarer, and they brought, first, his copper knife and the short spear with the steel head that bit through the walrus hide and sank deep, while the haft shot up to the surface through troubled waters. Also his long steel knife that he got from the Englishman who sought the end of the earth, even though

Oul-i-but told him that only death lived there; and he had seen the Englishman once again, after blowing the snow off his face as he lay in the place of death. Then Kug-yi-yuk found his flint that came from Lind Island where Victoria Strait turns north to the ocean, and the steel and finger-ring that the captain of a whaler had given him for a white bearskin.

All these things were placed beside the old man, and the women ransacked far corners and brought out new caribou robes a fishing line and hooks, and a lamp; all new and fit for the use of the departing chief; and his fingers were trembling among them when Nun-ok thrust in his broad shoulders. "It is ready, my father."

Oul-i-but climbed to his feet, and, for a space, turned his eyes slowly to all parts of the igloo. Nun-ok and the women were silent and motionless, while, for a long time, the old man stood with lips parted in an inaudible whisper of farewell to his home. He stooped and won painfully into daylight. At the mouth of every mound grey figures stood watching his fated steps, and the wolfish dogs crouched without a quiver, their jaws gaping like spots of crimson picked out with glistening fangs. On one side lifted the black cliffs, and, to the north, the level ice blinked league after league to the place of death that the Englishman had found.

So he passed through the watching tribe to his last home, and Chan-tie and Kug-yi-yuk spread the robes and others brought food—deer meat from the last great hunt of last summer, and walrus flesh of

the day before, and long strips of soft, delicate blubber; fish stiffened in the frost, and leaves of the tea muskeg that they had got from Yellow Knife Indians near the Bay. The hunting had been good all winter and the traveller was glad of it; for, when one is going to the best country of all, it is much more comfortable to leave one's tribe in a state of happiness and plenty than in misery and want.

Then his friends trooped in with kindly words, trooped in till the place was carpeted with small, round, brown men, whose quick narrow eyes swung restlessly from Oul-i-but to the meat. So the feasting began, and they ate as do those who need neither fire nor water for existence.

He watched them—these friends, tried and true. He did not touch flesh. His figure was tense and rigid, his eyes more blind than ever, but within moved memories, stirred into life by this parting feast and the faces around him. The women had gone, for this was man's business, and Kug-yi-yuk's devotion was at an end. Thus the hours passed till the eating ceased and the gaze of his guests turned toward him, and all fear and regret and doubt fell away; for the gods of the silent places had spoken to Oul-i-but.

"Unwak, the night has come for me," he said, slowly rising and surveying them with uncertain vision, "and I have asked you to come and eat, that I may say good-bye. I go on a long journey, but at the end will be your friends and mine, who have gone already. But before I go, I would speak of

myself that you may remember Oul-i-but, the Shining Ice, that was so long your chief."

Nun-ok, still sucking at a strip of blubber, got up; but Oul-i-but waved him down. "The time will be when you will do all the speaking even as I do now."

The ring of copper-coloured faces swung toward Nun-ok and, as the beady eyes glanced sidewise at him, the whites of them shone lustrous between their narrow lids. A little murmur, half amused, half indignant, ran through the igloo, then Oul-i-but's tired old voice creaked on:

"It is well that you should remember that I was your chief—that I made this tribe brave and strong." He hesitated a moment, and then shouted weakly, "Who was your greatest hunter?"

The brown men swayed as they sat, and called back, "Oul-i-but."

"Who was your strongest man?"

Again the echo thundered, "Oul-i-but was the strongest."

"And now who was the bravest?"

"Oul-i-but," the answer came, but not so certainly as before.

The old man peered from face to face and said bitterly, "Will any come with me on my long journey?"

A hush fell in the igloo. It was as if the black-eyed men were suddenly petrified, and in the silence could be heard the women's voices outside, calling to the dogs. Oul-i-but's thin lips lifted, showing

the rusty teeth and shrunken gums within. "Now—who was the bravest man?"

The still circle twitched into life and the black eyes gleamed. "Oul-i-but," they answered, and this time with no uncertainty.

"I have told you that I am going to see our friends. They will ask about you. What shall I say to your first wife, Aiv-ik?" A grin flashed from man to man. Aiv-ik was troubled, but they knew he must answer. He dared not send word that this second one was either better or worse than the first; he feared trouble at home as much as he did angering a spirit.

"There is nothing to tell," he said sulkily. "I will wait and carry the word myself."

Oul-i-but nodded wisely. "And for my part I will say nothing save what you would have her know. There is a word, however, for yourself ere I go. I bid you change your throwing of the spear. It is well to remember that from your kayak two spears' length is enough. On the ice the foot tells when it is firmly placed, but you throw from your kayak as from strong ice."

Aiv-ik, not a little angered, got up quickly; but a growl rippled round the silent circle, and Oul-i-but turned to Nun-ok and his trembling arms went about the man's broad shoulders.

"My son will be a great chief and the tribe will grow strong and follow where he leads, and I would speak because you are the new chief. It is easy to go first, and the paddle is like a duck's feather in

your hands, and the kayak sings under you when you kill the fat black seals. And it is easy to be wise and brave when the caribou cover the plains like moss, and the salmon and trout feed in the shallow water. All this I have seen long ago before you were children, and my heart is weary with remembering. But when the ice closes up tight, and Un-orri, the North Wind, blows, then the caribou go south to the land of little sticks, and the sky is no longer dark with the goose and the swan and the big grey ducks. The walrus moves slowly along the bottom of the sea, and only his nose is beyond the water of his blow-hole when he comes up to breathe. Nun-ok, the bear, walks abroad, and he also seeks food, while the she-bear lives and starves beneath the banks of snow that she may bring forth her young. Then also come hunger and the sickness that takes men in their sleep, and then it is that you must remember that you are a chief."

"Even as my father," said Nun-ok, looking at him steadfastly.

The bent figure straightened, and a glimmer lit the fading eyes. "You have spoken. Not till you give yourself for the tribe will you have the heart of a chief."

Nun-ok stooped and fingered the string of dew-claws that lay with the rest of the traveller's gear. "Tell us of these before you go," he said thoughtfully, swinging them into a tinkling rhythm.

The quiet circle leaned forward, imperceptibly closing in. The black eyes grew blacker and brighter,

like little sparks of diamond flame in which glittered the lust and fury of the chase. And into the frenzy of their thoughts dropped Oul-i-but's voice, old, cracked, and weak, but broken and burning with the memory of that great hunt.

"It was a long time ago, before my people came down the narrow water that leads to the big sea where there are no holes in the ice. It was the middle of the winter, and the rest was as I have told you—famine and sickness. Un-orri blew for many days and the ice was thick, and a great white bear came and walked round our igloos and we could see his footmarks at the doors, for he too was very hungry. So, on the third day, the father of Aiv-ik and the father of Tuk-tu went out to kill him, for I was very sick and could not hold my spear. All that day we waited, but they came not, nor heard we any noise of man or bear. So, in the morning of the fourth day, the mother of Tuk-tu, being very hungry was also brave, and walked out to see, and came to a big hummock that was north of the camp. There she saw the father of Aiv-ik and the father of Tuk-tu lying with their faces in the snow and their shirts torn and bloody, and between them sat the bear, biting at the point of a spear that stuck out of his side. The bear looked, but did not move, and kept on biting at his wound; and she ran very quickly and told me."

Here Oul-i-but's voice rose and grew louder and stronger, and cast away all semblance of age or weakness or the death that awaited him. "I spoke to

the spirits and told them that my tribe had need of me, and asked them to take away my sickness and give me strength again. Even as I spoke the strength came, and I rose up, and my back and knees and arms were well again, and I bent my spear with my hands, which no other man has done or can do. So I went to meet the bear.

"He saw me," the old voice rang on, "and he was still biting at his wound; so I called, 'I have come to kill you, and I will give your skull to the dogs. Still he did not move, so I said, 'It is a rat and no bear that I see'; and then he looked at me, and the blood of my friends was on his breast and head. He was very big and thin, and his eyes were small and red. He came very fast, and I put the butt of my spear in a little hole in the ice, pointing the blade at the blood on his chest, and when he turned to strike my side I turned also the spear and he ran on it, till it went into his breast as far as my arm is long. So the spear broke in his body, and I struck with my dag till he died with his mouth open to slay me."

The passion died in the old man's tones, the force of them dwindling as he went slowly on. "We drew him to the igloos, also the fathers of Tuk-tu and Aiv-ik, and the tribe ate the bear and I gave his skull to the dogs."

"And my father?" said Aiv-ik.

"And mine?" put in Tuk-tu.

"The tribe was large," whispered Oul-i-but painfully, for his strength was going fast. "Also it was

very hungry. We killed no more for many days—but we ate not their spirits, which I shall soon see.”

Tuk-tu and Aiv-ik regarded each other silently. It was true—he could not have eaten their spirits.

There fell a hush, and the brown men looked at Oul-i-but. Beneath them, almost imperceptible tremors palpitated through the ice, as the blind tides set in toward the land, and, even as they looked, the weight of his years fell on the old man and he grew immeasurably aged. None of them spoke, for they knew what would come next.

Then, faint and trembling, he said, “I go before, but we shall meet again. I am old and very weak, but where I go there is food and rest and happiness. Remember me, for I am very weary and would say good-bye.”

The nearest man rose, put his hands on the traveller's shoulders, kissed him on mouth and brows, and, stooping, crawled out of the igloo, and, after him, came another and another, kissing the dim eyes, caressing the bent figure, till there was only Nun-ok left. And last, the new chief held the old one closely to him for a moment, gazing earnestly into the withered face, expressing courage, affection, hope, and farewell—all these in a mute understanding way. Then he looked about and saw that the remnants of food were properly placed, that the fishing-line was in order, that the deerskin robes were dry and comfortable.

Now the moment had come when Oul-i-but should not see any more of earth, and Nun-ok caressed him

for the very last time. "I will remember, my father," he whispered, with his arms around the old man's neck, then he, too, stooped and disappeared. The traveller stared at the mouth of the tunnel. It threw a patch of reflected light that spread with soft radiance in this fine new igloo of his. Then the patch changed and lessened, and the igloo grew darker and soon it took strange irregular forms and vanished altogether, till he looked up and caught the pin-point of a star through the six-inch hole overhead.

Nun-ok had crawled out into the centre of a little crowd, and, since a chief must serve a chief, he had silently placed the blocks that sealed the igloo for ever. Also he found that the women had packed the tribe's possessions in sledges, had harnessed the dogs, and men and women alike waited his command.

The Arctic day had dwindled, and in the north flashed the first banners of a great Aurora. Whatever of darkness there was, seemed luminous, and away southward, to east and west, loomed the black cliffs of Great Bear Point. There were no shadows of a storm, and the ice lay before them clean and hard.

Now the spirit of a chief is one worthy of reverence. It was, therefore, the custom of the little brown men to travel for a day and a night in order that it might not be hurt or soiled in its passage by sound or sight of mortals. Furthermore, since the weight of their life bore heavily on them, and distress and hunger were brothers to all, it was written that one hungered or in danger might use the igloo of death. He must,

however, make sure that the spirit was gone, and then the robes, the flint and steel, and all that was there might be used with reverence and care. If he had wherewith to pay, he should pay, but, if not, he should bless the spirit and depart, leaving all things in order.

At a sign from Nun-ok they drew off a little on the first step of their journey, then the sledges and the little people halted in an irregular curve, their faces toward the igloo. For a moment there was a silence as of death. The great Aurora blossomed into a fiery spray and rippled into a marvellous riot of life, beside which the winking stars looked pale and thin. Gusty waves of colour trembled through it from end to end, while it shot forth spears and arrows and battalions of light, that seemed to drown and engulf everything in the purple sky. The tribe saw it, but noted not, save that it spoke of troubled weather; they were waiting for a sign, and presently the sign came.

Nun-ok raised his hand, and there floated across the stark ice to Oul-i-but the farewell call of his people. It was the cry of those who face danger to one who has fought his last fight, the voice of the fear and courage and mystery and love that broods in the hearts of the men of the far north, and it rang sharp and clear up toward the stars, and it drifted into the igloo of Oul-i-but. "Good-bye," they called. "We shall meet again. Good-bye, Oul-i-but, good-bye."

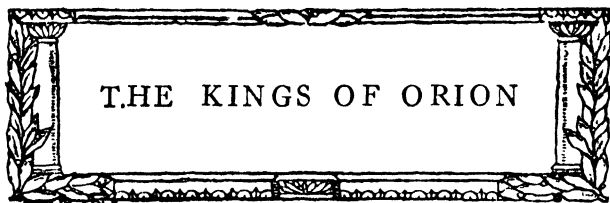
The old man raised his head at the sound of it,

for he was still watching the place on the floor where the patch of light had died. These were the last voices he should hear on earth. For a little time he would mark the trembling of the ice and the press of the north wind past his igloo. He would catch a few fish, and eat and rest, and then he would go to sleep, and not notice anything any more till he woke up in the far country among his old friends. But this last call must be answered, so, with effort and failing strength he climbed on Nun-ok's block and put his mouth as near as he might to the hole in the roof, and sent out his soul in one last word to his people.

Faintly it lifted, for the end was not far away. Still fainter it came down the wind, where waited the black-eyed fur-clad men, while the black-nosed bushy-tailed dogs lay on the snow and bit at the ice between their toes. At the sound of it, they called again, more clearly, more strongly, and then stood motionless for the answer.

But all they heard was Un-orri, the North Wind, talking to himself, as he came down from the land of the white death.

ALAN SULLIVAN.



"An ape and a lion lie side by side in the heart of a man."
Persian Proverb.

SPRING-FISHING in the North is a cold game for a man whose blood has become thin in gentler climates. All afternoon I had failed to stir a fish, and the wan streams of the Laver, swirling between bare grey banks, were as icy to the eye as the sharp gusts of hail from the north-east were to the fingers. I cast mechanically till I grew weary, and then with an empty creel and a villainous temper set myself to trudge the two miles of bent to the inn. Some distant ridges of hill stood out snow-clad against the dun sky, and half in anger, half in a dismal satisfaction, I told myself that fishing to-morrow would be as barren as to-day.

At the inn door a tall man was stamping his feet and watching a servant lifting rod-cases from a dog-cart. Hooded and wrapped though he was, my friend Thirlstone was an unmistakable figure in any landscape. The long, haggard, brown face, with the skin drawn tightly over the cheek-bones, the keen blue eyes finely wrinkled round the corners with staring at many suns, the scar which gave his mouth a humorous droop to the right, made up a

whole which was not easily forgotten. I had last seen him on the quay at Funchal bargaining with some rascally boatman to take him after mythical wild goats in the Desertas. Before that we had met at an embassy ball in Vienna, and still earlier at a hill station in Persia to which I had been sent post-haste by an anxious and embarrassed government. Also I had been at school with him, in those far-away days when we rode nine stone and dreamed of cricket averages. He was a soldier of note, who had taken part in two little wars and one big one; had himself conducted a political mission through a hard country with some success, and was habitually chosen by his superiors to keep his eyes open as a foreign attaché in our neighbours' wars. But his fame as a hunter had gone abroad into places where even the name of the British army is unknown. He was the hungriest shikari I have ever seen, and I have seen many. If you are wise you will go forthwith to some library and procure a little book entitled *Three Hunting Expeditions*, by A. W. T. It is a modest work, and the style is that of a leading article, but all the lore and passion of the Red Gods are in its pages.

The sitting-room at the inn is a place of comfort, and while Thirlstone warmed his long back at the fire I sank contentedly into one of the well-rubbed leather arm-chairs. The company of a friend made the weather and the scarcity of salmon less the intolerable grievance they had seemed an hour ago than a joke to be laughed at. The landlord came in

with whisky, and banked up the peats till they glowed beneath a pall of blue smoke.

"I hope to goodness we are alone," said Thirlstone, and he turned to the retreating landlord and asked the question.

"There's naeboddy bidin' the nicht forbye yoursels," he said, "but the morn there's a gentleman comin'. I got a letter frae him the day. Maister Wiston, they ca' him. Maybe ye ken him?"

I started at the name, which I knew very well. Thirlstone, who knew it better, stopped warming himself and walked to the window, where he stood pulling his moustache and staring at the snow. When the man had left the room, he turned to me with the face of one whose mind is made up on a course but uncertain of the best method.

"Do you know this sort of weather looks infernally unpromising? I've half a mind to chuck it and go back to town."

I gave him no encouragement, finding amusement in his difficulties.

"Oh, it's not so bad," I said, "and it won't last. To-morrow we may have the day of our lives."

He was silent for a little, staring at the fire. "Anyhow," he said at last, "we were fools to be so far up the valley. Why shouldn't we go down to the Forest Lodge? They'll take us in, and we should be deucedly comfortable, and the water's better."

"There's not a pool on the river to touch the stretch here," I said. "I know, for I've fished every inch of it."

He had no reply to this, so he lit a pipe and held his peace for a time. Then, with some embarrassment but the air of having made a discovery, he announced that his conscience was troubling him about his work, and he thought he ought to get back to it at once. "There are several things I have forgotten to see to, and they're rather important. I feel a beast behaving like this, but you won't mind, will you?"

"My dear Thirlstone," I said, "what is the good of hedging? Why can't you say you won't meet Wiston?"

His face cleared. "Well, that's the fact—I won't. It would be too infernally unpleasant. You see, I was once by way of being his friend, and he was in my regiment. I couldn't do it."

The landlord came in at the moment with a basket of peats. "How long is Capt—Mr. Wiston staying here?" I asked.

"He's no bidin' ony time. He's just comin' here in the middle o' the day for his denner, and then drivin' up the water to Altbreac. He has the fishin' there."

Thirlstone's face showed profound relief. "Thank God!" I heard him mutter under his breath, and when the landlord had gone he fell to talking of salmon with enthusiasm. "We must make a big day of it to-morrow, dark to dark, you know. Thank Heaven, our beat's down-stream, too." And thereafter he made frequent excursions to the door, and bulletins on the weather were issued regularly.

Dinner over, we drew our chairs to the hearth, and fell to talk and the slow consumption of tobacco. When two men from the ends of the earth meet by a winter fire, their thoughts are certain to drift overseas. We spoke of the racing tides off Vancouver, and the lonely pine-clad ridges running up to the snow peaks of the Selkirks, to which we had both travelled once upon a time in search of sport. Thirlstone on his own account had gone wandering to Alaska, and brought back some bear-skins and a frost-bitten toe as trophies, and from his tales had consorted with the finest band of rogues which survived unchanged on this planet. Then some casual word took our thoughts to the south, and our memories dallied with Africa. Thirlstone had hunted in Somaliland and done mighty slaughter; while I had spent some never-to-be-forgotten weeks long ago in the hinterland of Zanzibar, in the days before railways and game preserves. I had gone through life with a keen eye for the discovery of earthly paradises, to which I intend to retire when my work is over, and the fairest I thought I had found above the Rift valley, where you have a hundred miles of blue horizon and the weather of Scotland. Thirlstone, not having been there, naturally differed, and urged the claim of a certain glen in Kashmir, where you may hunt two varieties of bear and three of buck in thickets of rhododendron, and see the mightiest mountain-wall on earth from your tent door. The mention of the Indian frontier brought us back to our professions, and for a little

we talked "shop," with the unblushing confidence of those who know each other's work and approve it. As a very young soldier Thirlstone had gone shooting in the Pamirs, and had blundered into a Russian party of exploration which contained Kuropatkin. He had in consequence grossly outstayed his leave; having been detained for a fortnight by an arbitrary hospitality; but he had learned many things, and the experience had given him strong views on frontier questions. Half an hour was devoted to a masterly survey of the East, until a word pulled us up.

"I went there in '99," Thirlstone was saying,— "the time Wiston and I were sent——" and then he stopped, and his eager face clouded. Wiston's name cast a shadow over our reminiscences.

"What did he actually do?" I asked after a short silence.

"Pretty bad! He seemed a commonplace, good sort of fellow, popular, fairly competent, a little bad-tempered perhaps. And then suddenly he did something so extremely blackguardly that everything was at an end. It's no good repeating details, and I hate to think about it. We know little about our neighbours, and I'm not sure that we know much about ourselves. There may be appalling depths of iniquity in every one of us, only most people are fortunate enough to go through the world without meeting anything to wake the devil in them. I don't believe Wiston was bad in the ordinary sense. Only there was something else in him—*somebody else*, if you like,—and in a moment it came uppermost, and

he was a branded man. Ugh! it's a gruesome thought."

Thirlstone had let his pipe go out, and was staring moodily into the fire.

"How do you explain things like that?" he asked. "I have an idea of my own about them. We talk glibly of ourselves and our personality and our conscience, as if every man's nature were a smooth, round, white thing, like a chuckiestone. But I believe there are two men—perhaps more—in every one of us. There's our ordinary self, generally rather humdrum; and then there's a bit of something else, good, bad, but never indifferent—and it is that something else which may make a man a saint or a great villain."

"The Kings of Orion have come to earth," I quoted.

Something in the words struck Thirlstone, and he asked me what was the yarn I spoke of.

"It's an old legend," I explained. "When the kings were driven out of Orion, they were sent to this planet and given each his habitation in some mortal soul. There were differences of character in that royal family, and so the *alter ego* which dwells alongside of us may be virtuous or very much the reverse. But the point is that he is always greater than ourselves, for he has been a king. It's a foolish story, but very widely believed. There is something of the sort in Celtic folk-lore, and there's a reference to it in Ausonius. Also the bandits in the Bakhtiari have a version of it in a very excellent ballad."

"Kings of Orion," said Thirlstone musingly. "I like that idea. Good or bad, but always great! After all, we show a kind of belief in it in our daily practice. Every man is always making fancies about himself; but it is never his workaday self, but something else. The bank clerk who pictures himself as a financial Napoleon knows that his own thin little soul is incapable of it; but he knows, too, that it is possible enough for that other bigger thing which is not his soul, but yet in some odd way is bound up with it. I fancy myself a field-marshal in a European war; but I know perfectly well that if the job were offered me, I should realise my incompetence and decline. I expect you rather picture yourself now and then as a sort of Julius Cæsar and empire-maker, and yet, with all respect, my dear chap, I think it would be rather too much for you."

"There was once a man," I said, "an early Victorian Whig, whose chief ambitions were to reform the criminal law and abolish slavery. Well, this dull, estimable man in his leisure moments was Emperor of Byzantium. He fought great wars and built palaces, and then, when the time for fancy was past, went into the House of Commons and railed against militarism and Tory extravagance. That particular king from Orion had a rather odd sort of earthly tenement."

Thirlstone was all interest. "A philosophic Whig and the throne of Byzantium. A pretty rum mixture! And yet—yet," and his eyes became abstracted. "Did you ever know Tommy Lacelles?"

"The man who once governed Deira? Retired now, and, lives somewhere in Kent? Yes, I've met him once or twice. But why?"

"Because," said Thirlstone solemnly, "unless I'm greatly mistaken, Tommy was another such case, though no man ever guessed it except myself. I don't mind telling you the story, now that he is retired and vegetating in his ancestral pastures. Besides, the facts are all to his credit, and the explanation is our own business. . . .

"His wife was my cousin, and when she died Tommy was left a very withered, disconsolate man, with no particular object in life. We all thought he would give up the service, for he was hideously well off; and then one fine day, to our amazement, he was offered Deira, and accepted it. I was short of a job at the time, for my battalion was at home, and there was nothing going on anywhere, so I thought I should like to see what the East Coast of Africa was like, and wrote to Tommy about it. He jumped at me, cabled offering me what he called his Military Secretaryship, and I got seconded, and set off. I had never known him very well, but what I had seen I had liked; and I suppose he was glad to have one of Maggie's family with him, for he was still very low about her loss. I was in pretty good spirits, for it meant new experiences, and I had hopes of big game.

"You've never been to Deira? Well, there's no good trying to describe it, for it's the only place in the world like itself. God made it and left it to its

own devices. The town is pretty enough, with its palms and green headland, and little scrubby islands in the river's mouth. It has the usual half-Arab, half-Portugee look—white green-shuttered houses, flat roofs, sallow little men in duck, and every type of nigger from the Somali to the Shangaan. There are some good buildings, and Government House was the mansion of some old Portugee seigneur, and was built when people in Africa were not in such a hurry as to-day. Inland there's a rolling forest country, beginning with decent trees and ending in mimosa-thorn, when the land begins to rise to the stony hills of the interior; and that poisonous yellow river rolls through it all, with a denser native population along its banks than you will find anywhere else north of the Zambesi. For about two months in the year the climate is Paradise, and for the rest you live in a Turkish bath, with every known kind of fever hanging about. We cleaned out the town and improved the sanitation, so there were few epidemics, but there was enough ordinary malaria to sicken a crocodile.

“The place was no special use to us. It had been annexed in spite of a tremendous Radical outcry, and, upon my soul, it was one of the few cases where the Radicals had something to say for themselves. All we got by it was half a dozen of the nastiest problems an unfortunate governor can have to face. Ten years before it had been a decaying strip of coast, with a few trading firms in the town, and a small export of ivory and timber. But some years

before Tommy took it up there had been a huge discovery of copper in the hills inland, a railway had been built, and there were several biggish mining settlements at the end of it. Deira itself was filled with offices of European firms, it had got a Stock Exchange of its own, and it was becoming the usual cosmopolitan playground. It had a knack, too, of getting the very worst breed of adventurer. I know something of your South African and Australian mining towns, and with all their faults they are run by white men. If they haven't much morals, they have a kind of decency which keeps them fairly straight. But for our sins we got a brand of Levantine Jew who was fit for nothing but making money and making trouble. They were always defying the law, and then, when they got into a hole, they squealed to Government for help, and started a racket in the home papers about the weakness of the Imperial power. The crux of the whole difficulty was the natives, who lived along the river and in the foothills. They were a hardy race of Kaffirs, sort of far-away cousins to the Zulu, and till the mines were opened they had behaved well enough. They had arms, which we had never dared to take away, but they kept quiet and paid their hut-taxes like men. I got to know many of the chiefs, and liked them, for they were upstanding fellows to look at and heaven-born shikaris. However, when the Jews came along they wanted labour, and, since we did not see our way to allow them to add to the imported coolie population, they had to fall back upon the

Labonga. At first things went smoothly. The chiefs were willing to let their men work for good wages, and for a time there was enough labour for everybody. But as the mines extended, and the natives, after making a few pounds, wanted to get back to their kraals, there came a shortage; and since the work could not be allowed to slacken, the owner tried other methods. They made promises which they never intended to keep, and they stood on the letter of a law which the natives did not understand, and they employed touts who were little better than slave-dealers. They got the labour, of course, but soon they had put the Labonga into a state of unrest which a very little would turn into a rising.

"Into this kettle of fish Tommy was pitchforked, and when I arrived he was just beginning to understand how unpleasant it was. As I said before, I did not know him very well, and I was amazed to find how bad he was at his job. A more curiously incompetent person I never met. He was a long, thin man, with a grizzled moustache, and a mild sleepy eye—not an impressive figure, except on a horse; and he had an odd lisp which made even a shrewd remark sound foolish. He was the most industrious creature in the world, and a model of official decorum. His papers were always in order, his dispatches always neat and correct, and I don't believe anyone ever caught him tripping in office work. But he had no more conception than a child of the kind of trouble that was brewing. He never knew an honest man from a rogue, and the result

was that he received all unofficial communications with a polite disbelief. I used to force him to see people—miners, prospectors, traders, anyone who had something to say worth listening to, but it all glided smoothly off his mind. He was simply the most incompetent being ever created, living in the world as not being of it, or rather creating a little official world of his own, where all events happened on lines laid down by the Colonial Office, and men were like papers, to be rolled into packets and properly docketed. He had an Executive Council of people like himself, competent officials and blind bats at anything else. Then there was a precious Legislative Council, intended to represent the different classes of the population. There were several good men on it—one old trader called Mackay, for instance, who had been thirty years in the country—but most were nominees of the mining firms, and very seedy rascals at that. They were always talking about the rights of the white man, and demanding popular control of the government, and similar twaddle. The leader was a man who hailed from Hamburg, and called himself Le Foy—descended from a Crusader of the name of Levi—who was a jackal of one of the chief copper firms. He overflowed with Imperialist sentiment, and when he was not waving the flag he used to gush about the beauties of English country life and the grandeur of the English tradition. He hated me from the start, for when he talked of going 'home' I thought he meant Hamburg, and said so; and then a thing happened which made him hate me

worse. He was infernally rude to Tommy, who, like the dear sheep he was, never saw it, and, if he had, wouldn't have minded. But one day I chanced to overhear some of his impertinences, so I hunted out my biggest sjambok and lay in wait for Mr. Le Foy. I told him that he was a representative of the sovereign people, that I was a member of an effete bureaucracy, and that it would be most painful if unpleasantness arose between us. But, I added, I was prepared, if necessary, to sacrifice my official career to my private feelings, and if he dared to use such language again to his Majesty's representative I would give him a hiding he would remember till he found himself in Abraham's bosom. Not liking my sjambok, he became soap and butter at once, and held his tongue for a month or two.

"But though Tommy was no good at his job, he was a tremendous swell at other things. He was an uncommonly good linguist, and had always about a dozen hobbies which he slaved at; and when he found himself at Deira with a good deal of leisure, he became a bigger crank than ever. He had a lot of books which used to follow him about the world in zinc-lined boxes—your big paper-backed German books which mean research—and he was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and corresponded with half a dozen foreign shows. India was his great subject, but he had been in the Sudan and knew a good deal about African races. When I went out to him, his pet hobby was the Bantu, and he had acquired an amazing amount of miscellaneous learning. He

knew all about their immigration from the North, and the Arab and Phœnician trade-routes, and the Portuguese occupation, and the rest of the history of that unpromising seaboard. The way he behaved in his researches showed the man. He worked hard at the Labonga language—which, I believe, is a linguistic curiosity of the first water—from missionary books and the conversation of tame Kaffirs. But he never thought of paying them a visit in their native haunts. I was constantly begging him to do it, but it was not Tommy's way. He did not care a straw about political expedience, and he liked to look at things through the medium of paper and ink. Then there were the Phœnician remains in the foothills where the copper was mined—old workings, and things which might have been forts or temples. He knew all that was to be known about them, but he had never seen them, and never wanted to. Once only he went to the hills, to open some new reservoirs and make the ordinary Governor's speech; but he went in a special train and stayed two hours, most of which was spent in lunching and being played to by brass bands.

“But, oddly enough, there was one thing which stirred him with an interest that was not academic. I discovered it by accident one day when I went into his study and found him struggling with a map of Central Asia. Instead of the mild, benevolent smile with which he usually greeted my interruptions, he looked positively furtive, and, I could have sworn, tried to shuffle the map under some papers. Now

it happens that Central Asia is the part of the globe that I know better than most men, and I could not help picking up the map and looking at it. It was a wretched thing, and had got the Oxus two hundred miles out of its course. I pointed this out to Tommy, and to my amazement he became quite excited. 'Nonsense,' he said. 'You don't mean to say it goes south of that desert. Why, I meant to——' and then he stammered and stopped. I wondered what on earth he had meant to do, but I merely observed that I had been there, and knew. That brought Tommy out of his chair in real excitement. 'What!' he cried, 'you! You never told me,' and he started to fire off a round of questions, which showed that if he knew very little about the place, he had it a good deal in his mind. I drew some sketch-plans for him, and left him brooding over them.

"That was the first hint I got. The second was a few nights later, when we were smoking in the billiard-room. I had been reading Marco Polo, and the talk got on to Persia and drifted all over the north side of the Himalaya. Tommy, with an abstracted eye, talked of Alexander and Timour and Genghis Khan, and particularly of Prester John, who was a character that took his fancy. I had told him that the natives in the Pamirs were true Persian stock, and this interested him greatly. 'Why was there never a great state built up in those valleys?' he asked. 'You get nothing but a few wild conquerors rushing east and west, and then some squalid khanates. And yet all the materials were there—

the stuff for a strong race, a rich land, the traditions of an old civilisation, and natural barriers against invasion.'

"'I suppose they never found the man,' I said.

"He agreed. 'Their princes were sots, or they were barbarians of genius who could devastate to the gates of Peking or Constantinople, but could never build. They did not recognise their limits, and so they went out in a whirlwind. But if there had been a man of solid genius he might have built up the strongest nation on the globe. In time he could have annexed Persia and nibbled at China. He would have been rich, for he could tap all the inland trade-routes of Asia. He would have had to be a conqueror, for his people would be a race of warriors, but first and foremost he must have been a statesman. Think of such a civilisation, *the* Asian civilisation, growing up mysteriously behind the deserts and the ranges! That's my idea of Prester John. Russia would have been confined to the line of the Urals. China would have been absorbed. There would have been no Japan. The whole history of the world for the last few hundred years would have been different. It is the greatest of all the lost chances in history.' Tommy waxed pathetic over the loss.

"I was a little surprised at his eloquence, especially when he seemed to remember himself and stopped all of a sudden. But for the next week I got no peace with his questions. I told him all I knew of Bokhara, and Samarkand, and Tashkend, and Yarkand. I showed him the passes in the Pamirs and the Hindu

Kush. I traced out the rivers, and I calculated distances; we talked over imaginary campaigns, and set up fanciful constitutions. It was a childish game, but I found it interesting enough. He spoke of it all with a curious personal tone which puzzled me, till one day when we were amusing ourselves with a fight on the Zarafshan, and I put in a modest claim to be allowed to win once in a while. For a second he looked at me in blank surprise. 'You can't,' he said; 'I've got to enter Samarkand before I can' . . . and he stopped again, with a glimmering sense in his face that he was giving himself away. And then I knew that I had surprised Tommy's secret. While he was muddling his own job, he was salving his pride with fancies of some wild career in Asia, where Tommy, disguised as the lord knows what Mussulman grandee, was hammering the little states into an empire.

"I did not think then as I think now, and I was amused to find so odd a trait in a dull man. I had known something of the kind before. I had met fellows who after their tenth peg would begin to swagger about some ridiculous fancy of their own—their little private corner of soul showing for a moment when the drink had blown aside their common sense. True, I had never known the thing appear in cold blood and everyday life, but I assumed the case to be the same. I thought of it only as a harmless fancy, never imagining that it had anything to do with character. I put it down to that kindly imagination which is the old opiate for failures. So I

played up to Tommy with all my might, and though he became very discreet after the first betrayal, having hit upon the clue, I knew what to look for, and I found it. When I told him that the Labonga were in a devil of a mess, he would look at me with an empty face and change the subject; but once among the Turcomans his eye would kindle, and he would slave at his confounded folly with sufficient energy to reform the whole East Coast. It was the spark that kept the man alive. Otherwise he would have been as limp as a rag, but this craziness put life into him, and made him carry his head in the air and walk like a free man. I remember he was very keen about any kind of martial poetry. He used to go about crooning Scott and Macaulay to himself, and when we went for a walk or a ride he wouldn't speak for miles, but keep smiling to himself and humming bits of songs. I dare say he was very happy—far happier than your stolid, competent man, who sees only the one thing to do, and does it. Tommy was muddling his particular duty, but building glorious palaces in the air.

“One day Mackay, the old trader, came to me after a sitting of the precious Legislative Council. We were very friendly, and I had done all I could to get the Government to listen to his views. He was a dour, ill-tempered Scotsman, very anxious for the safety of his property, but perfectly careless about any danger to himself.

“‘Captain Thirlstone,’ he said, ‘that Governor of yours is a damned fool.’

"Of course I shut him up very brusquely, but he paid no attention. 'He just sits and grins, and lets yon Pentecostal crowd we've gotten' here as a judgment for our sins do what they like wi' him. God kens what'll happen. I would go home to-morrow, if I could realise without an immoderate loss. For the day of reckoning is at hand. Maark my words, Captain—at hand.'

"I said I agreed with him about the approach of trouble, but that the Governor would rise to the occasion. I told him that people like Tommy were only seen at their best in a crisis, and that he might be perfectly confident that when it arrived he would get a new idea of the man. I said this, but of course I did not believe a word of it. I thought Tommy was only a dreamer, who had rotted any grit he ever possessed by his mental opiates. At that time I did not understand about the Kings from Orion.

"And then came the thing we had all been waiting for—a Labonga rising. A week before I had got leave and had gone up country, partly to shoot, but mainly to see for myself what trouble was brewing. I kept away from the river, and therefore missed the main native centres, but such kraals as I passed had a look I did not like. The chiefs were almost always invisible, and the young bloods were swaggering about and bukkng to each other, while the women were grinding maize as if for some big festival. However, after a bit the country seemed to grow more normal, and I went into the foothills to shoot, fairly easy in my mind. I had got up to a place

called Shimonwe, on the Pathi River, where I had ordered letters to be sent, and one night coming in from a hard day after kudu I found a post runner half-dead of fatigue with a chit from Utterson, who commanded a police district twenty miles nearer the coast. It said simply that all the young men round about him had cleared out and appeared to be moving towards Deira, that he was in a devil of a quandary, and that, since the police were under the Governor, he would take his orders from me.

“It looked as if the heather were fairly on fire at last, so I set off early next morning to trek back. About midday I met Utterson, a very badly scared little man, who had come to look for me. It seemed that his policemen had bolted in the night and gone to join the rising, leaving him with two white sergeants, barely fifty rounds of ammunition, and no neighbour for a hundred miles. He said that the Labonga chiefs were not marching to the coast, as he had thought, but north along the eastern foothills in the direction of the mines. This was better news, for it meant that in all probability the railway would remain open. It was my business to get somehow to my chief, and I was in the deuce of a stew how to manage it. It was no good following the line of the natives’ march, for they would have been between me and my goal, and the only way was to try and outflank them by going due east, in the Deira direction, and then turning north, so as to strike the railway about half-way to the mines. I told Utterson we had better scatter, otherwise we

should have no chance of getting through a densely populated native country. So, about five in the afternoon, I set off with my chief shikari, who, by good luck, was not a Labonga, and dived into the jungly bush which skirts the hills.

"For three days I had a baddish time. We steered by the stars, travelling chiefly by night, and we showed extraordinary skill in missing the water-holes. I had a touch of fever and got light-headed, and it was all I could do to struggle through the thick grass and wait-a-bit thorns. My clothes were torn to rags, and I grew so footsore that it was agony to move. All the same we travelled fast, and there was no chance of our missing the road, for any route due north was bound to cut the railway. I had the most sickening uncertainty about what was to come next. Hely, who was in command at Deira, was a good enough man, but he had only three companies of white troops, and the black troops were as likely as not to be on their way to join the rebels. It looked as if we should have a Cawnpore business on a small scale, though I thanked Heaven there were no women in the case. As for Tommy, he would probably be repeating platitudes in Deira and composing an intelligent dispatch on the whole subject.

"About four in the afternoon of the third day I struck the line near a little station called Palala. I saw by the look of the rails that trains were still running, and my hopes revived. At Palala there was a coolie stationmaster, who gave me a drink and a little food, after which I slept heavily in his office

till wakened by the arrival of an up train. It contained one of the white companies and a man Davidson, of the 'roist, who was Hely's second in command. From him I had news that took away my breath. The Governor had gone up the line two days before with an A.D.C. and old Mackay. 'The sportsman has got a move on him at last,' said Davidson, 'but what he means to do Heaven only knows. The Labonga are at the mines, and a kind of mine-guard has been formed for defence. The joke of it is that most of the magnates are treed up there, for the railway is cut and they can't get away. I don't envy your chief the job of schooling that nervous crowd.'

"I went on with Davidson, and very early next morning we came to a broken culvert and had to stop. There we stuck for three hours till the down train arrived, and with it Hely. He was for ordinary a stolid soul, but I never saw a man in such a fever of excitement. He gripped me by the arm and fairly shook me. 'That old man of yours is a hero,' he cried. 'The Lord forgive me! and I have always crabbed him.'

"I implored him in Heaven's name to tell me what was up, but he would say nothing till he had had his pow-wow with Davidson. It seemed that he was bringing all his white troops up the line for some great demonstration that Tommy had conceived. Davidson went back to Deira, while we mended the culvert and got the men transferred to the other train. Then I screwed the truth out of Hely. Tommy had got up to the mines before the rebels arrived, and had

found as fine a chaos as can be imagined. He did not seem to have had any doubts what to do. There were a certain number of white workmen, hard fellows from Cornwall mostly, with a few Australians, and these he got together with Mackay's help and organised into a pretty useful corps. He set them to guard the offices, and gave them strict orders to shoot at sight anyone attempting to leave. Then he collected the bosses and talked to them like a father. What he said Hely did not know, except that he had damned their eyes pretty heartily, and told them what a set of swine they were, making trouble which they had not the pluck to face. Whether from Mackay, or from his own intelligence, or from a memory of my neglected warnings, he seemed to have got a tight grip on the facts at last. Meanwhile, the Labonga were at the doors, chanting their battle-songs half a mile away, and shots were heard from the far pickets. If they had tried to rush the place then, all would have been over, but, luckily, that was never their way of fighting. They sat down in camp to make their sacrifices and consult their witch-doctors, and presently Hely arrived with the first troops, having come in on the northern flank when he found the line cut. He had been in time to hear the tail-end of Tommy's final address to the mine-owners. He told them, in words which Hely said he could never have imagined coming from his lips, that they would be well served if the Labonga cleaned the whole place out. Only, he said, that would be against the will of Britain, and it was his

business, as a loyal servant, to prevent it. Then, after giving Hely his instructions, he had put on his uniform, gold lace and all, and every scrap of bunting he possessed—all the orders and 'Golden Stars' of half a dozen Oriental States where he had served. He made Ashurst, the A.D.C., put on his best Hussar's kit, and Mackay rigged himself out in a frock-coat and a topper; and the three set out on horseback for the Labonga. 'I believe he'll bring it off,' said Hely, with wild eyes, 'and, by Heaven, if he does, it'll be the best thing since John Nicholson!'

"For the rest of the way I sat hugging myself with excitement. The miracle of miracles seemed to have come. The old, slack, incompetent soul in Tommy seemed to have been driven out by that other spirit, which had hitherto been content to dream of crazy victories on the Oxus. I cursed my folly in having missed it all, for I would have given my right hand to be with him among the Labonga. I envied that young fool Ashurst his luck in being present at that queer transformation scene. I had not a doubt that Tommy would bring it off all right. The Kings from Orion don't go into action without coming out on top. As we got near the mines I kept my ears open for the sound of shots; but all was still—not even the kind of hubbub a native force makes when it is on the move. Something had happened, but what it was no man could guess. When we got to where the line was up, we made very good time over the five miles to the mines. No one interfered with us, and the nearer we got the greater

grew my certainty. Soon we were at the pickets, who had nothing to tell us; and then we were racing up the long sandy street to the offices, and there, sitting smoking on the doorstep of the hotel, surrounded by everybody who was not on duty, were Mackay and Ashurst.

"They were an odd pair. Ashurst still wore his uniform; but he seemed to have been rolling about in it on the ground; his sleek hair was wildly ruffled, and he was poking holes in the dust with his sword. Mackay had lost his topper, and wore a disreputable cap, his ancient frock-coat was without buttons, and his tie had worked itself up behind his ears. They talked excitedly to each other, now and then vouchsafing a scrap of information to an equally excited audience. When they saw me they rose and rushed for me, and dragged me between them up the street, while the crowd tailed at our heels.

"'Ye're a true prophet, Captain Thirlstone, Mackay began, 'and I ask your pardon for doubting you. Ye said the Governor only needed a crisis to behave like a man. Well, the crisis has come; and if there's a man alive in this sinful world, it's that chief o' yours.' And then his emotion overcame him, and, hard-bitten devil as he was, he sat down on the ground and gasped with hysterical laughter, while Ashurst, with a very red face, kept putting the wrong end of a cigarette in his mouth and swearing profanely.

"I never remember a madder sight. There was the brassy blue sky and reddish granite rock and

acres of thick red dust. The scrub had that metallic greenness which you find in all copper places. Pretty unwholesome it looked, and the crowd, which had got round us again, was more unwholesome still. Fat Jew boys, with diamond rings on dirty fingers and greasy linen cuffs, kept staring at us with twitching lips; and one or two smarter fellows in riding-breeches, mine managers and suchlike, tried to show their pluck by nervous jokes. And in the middle was Mackay, with his damaged frocker, drawling out his story in broad Scots.

“‘He made this laddie put on his braws, and he commandeered this iniquitous garment for me. I’ve raxed its seams, and it’ll never look again on the man that owns it. Syne he arrayed himself in purple and fine linen till he was like the king’s daughter, all glorious without; and says he to me, “Mackay,” he says, “we’ll go and talk to these uncovenanted deevils in their own tongue. We’ll visit them at home, Mackay,” he says. “They’re none such bad fellows, but they want a little humouring from men like you and me.” So we got on our horses and started the procession—the Governor with his head in the air, and the laddie endeavouring to look calm and collected, and me praying to the God of Israel and trying to keep my breeks from working up above my knees. I’ve been in Kaffir wars afore, but I never thought I would ride without weapon of any kind into such a black Armageddon. I am a peaceable man for ordinar’, and a canny one, but I wasna myself in that hour. Man, Thirlstone, I was

that overcome by the spirit of your chief, that if he had bidden me gang alone on the same errand, I wouldna say but what I would have gone.

“‘We hadna ridden half a mile before we saw the indunas and their men, ten thousand if there was one, and terrible as an army with banners. I speak feeguratively, for they hadna the scrap of a flag among them. They were beating the war-drums, and the young men were dancing with their big skin-shields and wagging their ostrich feathers, so I saw they were out for business. I’ll no’ say but what my blood ran cold, but the Governor’s eye got brighter and his back stiffer. “Kings may be blest,” I says to myself, “but thou art glorious.”

“‘We rode straight for the centre of the crowd, where the young men were thickest and the big war-drums lay. As soon as they saw us a dozen lifted their spears and ran out to meet us. But they stopped after six steps. The sun glinted on the Governor’s gold lace and my lum hat, and no doubt they thought we were heathen deities descended from the heavens. Down they went on their faces, and then back like rabbits to the rest, while the drums stopped, and the whole body awaited our coming in a silence like the tomb.

“‘Never a word we spoke, but just jogged on with our chins cocked up till we were forenent the big drum, where yon old scoundrel Umgazi was standing with his young men looking as black as sin. For a moment their spears were shaking in their hands, and I heard the click of a breech-bolt. If we had

winked an eye we would have become pincushions that instant. But some unearthly power upheld us. Even the laddie kept a stiff face, and for me I forgot my breeks in watching the Governor. He looked as solemn as an archangel, and comes to a halt opposite Umgazi, where he glowers at the old man for maybe three minutes, while we formed up behind him. Their eyes fell before his, and by and by their spears dropped to their sides. "The father has come to his children," says he in their own tongue. "What do the children seek from their father?"

"Ye see the cleverness of the thing. The man's past folly came to help him. The natives had never seen the Governor before till they beheld him in gold lace and a cocked hat on a muckle horse, speaking their own tongue and looking like a destroying angel. I tell you the Labonga's knees were loosed under them. They durstna speak a word until the Governor repeated the question in the same quiet, steely voice. "You seek something," he said, "else you had not come out to meet me in your numbers. The father waits to hear the children's desires."

"Then Umgazi found his tongue and began an uneasy speech. The mines, he said, truly enough, were the abode of devils, who compelled the people to work under the ground. The crops were unreaped and the buck went unspeared, because there were no young men left to him. Their father had been away or asleep, they thought, for no help had come from him; therefore it had seemed good to them, being freemen and warriors, to seek help for themselves.

““The Governor listened to it all with a set face. Then he smiled at them with supernatural assurance. They were fools, he said, and people of little wit, and he flung the better part of the Book of Job at their heads. The Lord kens where the man got his uncanny knowledge of the Labonga. He had all their heathen customs by heart, and he played with them like a cat with a mouse. He told them they were damned rascals to make such a stramash, and damned fools to think they could frighten the white man by their demonstrations. There was no brag about his words, just a calm statement of fact. At the same time, he said, he had no mind to let anyone wrong his children, and if any wrong had been done it should be righted. It was not meet, he said, that the young men should be taken from the villages unless by their own consent, though it was his desire that such young men as could be spared should have a chance of earning an honest penny. And then he fired at them some stuff about the British Empire and the King, and you could see the Labonga imbibing it like water. The man in a cocked hat might have told them that the sky was yellow, and they would have swallowed it.

“““I have spoken,” he says at last, and there was a great shout from the young men, and old Umgazi looked pretty foolish. They were coming round our horses to touch our stirrups with their noses, but the Governor stopped them.

“““My children will pile their weapons in front of me,” says he, “to show me how they have armed

themselves, and likewise to prove that their folly is at an end. All except a dozen," says he, "whom I select as a bodyguard." And there and then he picked twelve lusty savages for his guard, while the rest without a cheep stacked their spears and guns forenent the big drum.

"Then he turned to us and spoke in English. "Get back to the mines hell-for-leather, and tell them what's happening, and see that you get up some kind of a show for to-morrow at noon. I will bring the chiefs, and we'll feast them. Get all the bands you can, and let them play me in. Tell the mines fellows to look active, for it's the chance of their lives." Then he says to the Labonga, "My men will return," he says, "but as for me I will spend the night with my children. Make ready food, but let no beer be made, for it is a solemn occasion."

"And so we left him. I will not describe how I spent last night mysel', but I have something to say about this remarkable phenomenon. I could enlarge on the triumph of mind over matter. . . .'

"Mackay did not enlarge. He stopped, cocked his ears, and looked down the road, from which came the strains of *Annie Laurie*, played with much spirit but grievously out of tune. Followed *The British Grenadiers*, and then an attempt at *The March of the Priests*. Mackay rose in excitement and began to crane his disreputable neck, while the band—a fine scratch collection of instruments—took up their stand at the end of the street, flanked by a piper in khaki who performed when their breath

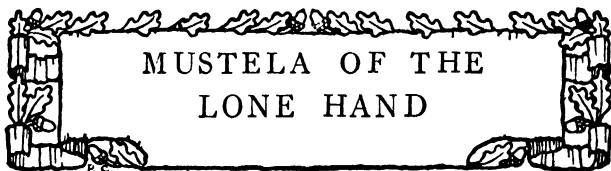
failed. Mackay chuckled with satisfaction. 'The deevils have entered into the spirit of my instructions,' he said. 'In a wee bit the place will be like Falkirk Tryst for din.'

"Punctually at twelve there came a great hulla-baloo up the road, the beating of drums and the yelling of natives, and presently the procession hove in sight. There was Tommy on his horse, and on each side of him six savages with feather head-dress, and shields and war-paint complete. After him trooped about thirty of the great chiefs, walking two by two, for all the world like an Aldershot parade. They carried no arms, but the bodyguard shook their spears, and let yells out of them that would have scared Julius Cæsar. Then the band started in, and the piper blew up, and the mines people commenced to cheer, and I thought the heavens would fall. Long before Tommy came abreast of me I knew what I should see. His uniform looked as if it had been slept in, and his orders were all awry. But he had his head flung back, and his eyes very bright and his jaw set square. He never looked to right or left, never recognised me or anybody, for he was seeing something quite different from the red road and the white shanties and the hot sky."

The fire had almost died out. Thirlstone stooped for a moment and stirred the peats.

"Yes," he said, "I knew that in his fool's ear the trumpets of all Asia were ringing, and the King of Bokhara was entering Samarkand."

JOHN BUCHAN.



It was in the very heart of the ancient wood, the forest primeval of the North, gloomy with the dark green, crowded ranks of fir and spruce and hemlock, and tangled with the huge windfalls of countless storm-torn winters. But now, at high noon of the glowing Northern summer, the gloom was pierced to its depths with shafts of radiant sun; the barred and chequered transparent brown shadows hummed with dancing flies; the warm air was alive with the small, thin notes of chickadee and nuthatch, varied now and then by the impertinent scolding of the Canada jay; and the drowsing tree-tops steamed up an incense of balsamy fragrance in the heat. The ancient wilderness dreamed, stretched itself all open to the sun, and seemed to sigh with immeasurable content.

High up in the grey trunk of a half-dead forest giant was a round hole, the entrance to what had been the nest of a pair of big, red-headed, golden-winged woodpeckers, or "yellow-hammers." The big woodpeckers had long since been dispossessed—the female, probably, caught and devoured, with her eggs, upon the nest. The dispossessor, and present tenant, was *Mustela*.

Framed in the blackness of the round hole was a

sharp-muzzled, triangular, golden-brown face with high, pointed ears, looking out upon the world below with keen eyes in which a savage wildness and an alert curiosity were incongruously mingled. Nothing that went on upon the dim ground far below, among the tangled trunks and windfalls, or in the sun-drenched tree-tops, escaped that restless and piercing gaze. But *Mustela* had well fed, and felt lazy, and this hour of noon was not his hunting hour; so the most unsuspecting red squirrel, gathering cones in a neighbouring pine, was insufficient to lure him from his rest, and the plumpest hare, waving its long, suspicious ears down among the ground shadows, only made him lick his thin lips and think what he would do later on in the afternoon, when he felt like it.

Presently, however, a figure came into view at sight of which *Mustela*'s expression changed. His thin black lips wrinkled back in a soundless snarl, displaying the full length of his long, snow-white, deadly-sharp canines, and a red spark of hate smouldered in his bright eyes. But no less than his hate was his curiosity—a curiosity which is the most dangerous weakness of all *Mustela*'s tribe. *Mustela*'s pointed head stretched itself clear of the hole, in order to get a better look at the man who was passing below his tree.

A man was a rare sight in that remote and inaccessible section of the Northern wilderness. This particular man—a woodsman, a "timber-cruiser," seeking out new and profitable areas for the work

of the lumbermen—wore a flaming red-and-orange handkerchief loosely knotted about his brawny neck, and carried over his shoulder an axe whose bright blade flashed sharply whenever a ray of sunlight struck it. It was this flashing axe, and the blazing colour of the scarlet-and-orange kerchief, that excited Mustela's curiosity—so excited it, indeed, that he came clean out of the hole and circled the great trunk, clinging close and wide-legged like a squirrel, in order to keep the woodsman in view as he passed by.

Engrossed though he was in the interesting figure of the man, Mustela's vigilance was still unsleeping. His amazingly quick ears at this moment caught a hushed hissing of wings in the air above his head. He did not stop to look up and investigate. Like a streak of ruddy light he flashed around the trunk and whisked back into his hole, and just as he vanished a magnificent long-winged goshawk, the king of all the falcons, swooping down from the blue, struck savagely with his clutching talons at the edges of the hole.

The quickness of Mustela was miraculous. Moreover, he was not content with escape. He wanted vengeance. Even in his lightning dive into his refuge he had managed to turn about, doubling on himself like an eel. And now, as those terrible talons gripped and clung for half a second to the edge of the hole, he snapped his teeth securely into the last joint of the longest talon and dragged it an inch or two in.

With a yelp of fury and surprise, the great falcon strove to lift himself into the air, pounding madly with his splendid wings and twisting himself about, and thrusting mightily with his free foot against the side of the hole. But he found himself held fast, as in a trap. Sagging back with all his weight, *Mustela* braced himself securely with all four feet and hung on, his whipcord sinews set like steel. He knew that if he let go for an instant, to secure a better mouthful, his enemy would escape; so he just worried and chewed at the joint, satisfied with the punishment he was inflicting.

Meanwhile the woodsman, his attention drawn by that one sudden yelp of the falcon and by the prolonged and violent buffeting of wings, had turned back to see what was going on. Pausing at the foot of *Mustela's* tree, he peered upwards with narrowed eyes. A slow smile wrinkled his weather-beaten face. He did not like hawks. For a moment or two he stood wondering what it was in the hole that could hold so powerful a bird. Whatever it was, he stood for it.

Being a dead shot with the revolver, he seldom troubled to carry a rifle in his "cruisings." Drawing his long-barrelled "Smith and Wesson" from his belt, he took careful aim and fired. At the sound of the shot, the thing in the hole was startled and let go; and the great bird, turning once over slowly in the air, dropped to his feet with a feathery thud, its talons still contracting shudderingly. The woodsman glanced up, and there, framed in the dark of

the hole, was the little yellow face of Mustela, insatiably curious, snarling down upon him viciously.

"Gee," muttered the woodsman, "I might hev' knowed it was one o' them pesky martens! Nobody else o' *that* size 'd hev the gall to tackle a duck-hawk!"

Now, the fur of Mustela, the pine-marten or American sable, is a fur of price; but the woodsman—subject, like most of his kind, to unexpected attacks of sentiment and imagination—felt that to shoot the defiant little fighter would be like an act of treachery to an ally.

"Ye're a pretty fighter, sonny," said he, with a whimsical grin, "an' ye may keep that yaller pelt o' yourn, for all o' me!"

Then he picked up the dead falcon, tied its claws together, slung it upon his axe, and strode off through the trees. He wanted to keep those splendid wings as a present for his girl in at the Settlements.

Highly satisfied with his victory over the mighty falcon—for which he took the full credit to himself—Mustela now retired to the bottom of his comfortable, moss-lined nest and curled himself up to sleep away the heat of the day. As the heat grew sultrier and drowsier through the still hours of early afternoon, there fell upon the forest a heavy silence, deepened rather than broken by the faint hum of the heat-loving flies. And the spicy scents of pine and spruce and tamarack steamed forth richly upon the moveless air.

When the shadows of the trunks began to lengthen, Mustela woke up, and he woke up hungry. Slipping

out of his hole, he ran a little way down the trunk and then leapt, lightly and nimbly as a squirrel, into the branches of a big hemlock which grew close to his own tree. Here, in a crotch from which he commanded a good view beneath the foliage, he halted and stood motionless, peering about him for some sign of a likely quarry.

Poised thus, tense, erect and vigilant, *Mustela* was a picture of beauty swift and fierce. In colour he was of a rich golden brown, with a patch of brilliant yellow covering throat and chest. His tail was long and bushy, to serve him as a balance in his long, squirrel-like leaps from tree to tree. His pointed ears were large and alert, to catch all the faint, elusive forest sounds. In length, being a specially fine specimen of his kind, he was perhaps a couple of inches over two feet. His body had all the lithe grace of a weasel, with something of the strength of his great-cousin and most dreaded foe, the fisher.

For a time nothing stirred. Then from a distance came, faint but shrill, the *chirr-r-r-r* of a red squirrel. *Mustela*'s discriminating ear located the sound at once. All energy on the instant, he darted towards it, springing from branch to branch with amazing speed and noiselessness.

The squirrel, noisy and imprudent after the manner of his tribe, was chattering fussily and bouncing about on his branch, excited over something best known to himself, when a darting, gold-brown shape of doom landed upon the other end of the branch, not half a dozen feet from him. With a screech of warning

and terror, he bounded into the air, alighted on the trunk, and raced up it, with Mustela close upon his heels. Swift as he was—and everyone who has seen a red squirrel in a hurry knows how he can move—Mustela was swifter, and in about five seconds the little chatterer's fate would have been sealed. But he knew what he was about. This was his own tree. Had it been otherwise, he would have sprung into another, and directed his desperate flight over the slenderest branches, where his enemy's greater weight would be a hindrance. As it was, he managed to gain his hole—just in time—and all that Mustela got was a little mouthful of fur from the tip of that vanishing red tail.

Very angry and disappointed, and hissing like a cat, Mustela jammed his savage face into the hole. He could see the squirrel crouched, with pounding heart and panic-stricken eyes, a few inches below him, just out of his reach. The hole was too small to admit his head. In a rage he tore at the edges with his powerful claws, but the wood was too hard for him to make any impression on it, and after half a minute of futile scratching, he gave up in disgust and raced off down the tree. A moment later the squirrel poked his head out and shrieked an effectual warning to every creature within earshot.

With that loud alarm shrilling in his ears, Mustela knew there would be no successful hunting for him till he could put himself beyond the range of it. He raced on, therefore, abashed by his failure, till the taunting sound faded in the distance. Then his

bushy brown brush went up in the air again, and his wonted look of insolent self-confidence returned. As it did not seem to be his lucky day for squirrels, he descended to earth and began quartering the ground for the fresh trail of a rabbit.

In that section of the forest where *Mustela* now found himself, the dark and scented tangle of spruce and balsam-fir was broken by patches of stony barren, clothed unevenly by thickets of stunted white birch, and silver-leaved quaking aspen, and wild sumach with its massive tufts of acrid, dark-crimson bloom. Here the rabbit trails were abundant, and *Mustela* was not long in finding one fresh enough to offer him the prospect of a speedy kill. Swiftly and silently, nose to earth, he set himself to follow its intricate and apparently aimless windings, sure that he would come upon a rabbit at the end of it.

As it chanced, however, he never came to the end of that particular trail or set his teeth in the throat of that particular rabbit. In gliding past a bushy young fir-tree, he happened to glance beneath it, and marked another of his tribe tearing the feathers from a new-slain grouse. The stranger was smaller and slighter than himself—a young female—quite possibly, indeed, his mate of a few months earlier in the season. Such considerations were less than nothing to *Mustela*, whose ferocious spirit knew neither gallantry, chivalry, nor mercy. With what seemed a single flashing leap he was upon her—or *almost*, for the slim female was no longer there. She had bounded away as lightly and instantaneously

as if blown by the wind of his coming. She knew Mustela, and she knew it would be death to stay and do battle for her kill. Spitting with rage and fear, she fled from the spot, terrified lest he should pursue her and find the nest where her six precious kittens were concealed.

But Mustela was too hungry to be interested just then in mere slaughter for its own sake. He was feeling serious and practical. The grouse was a full-grown cock, plump and juicy, and when Mustela had devoured it his appetite was sated. But not so his blood-lust. After a hasty toilet he set out again, looking for something to kill.

Crossing the belt of rocky ground, he emerged upon a flat tract of treeless barren covered with a dense growth of blueberry bushes about a foot in height. The bushes at this season were loaded with ripe fruit of a bright blue colour, and squatting among them was a big black bear, enjoying the banquet at his ease. Gathering the berries together wholesale with his great furry paws, he was cramming them into his mouth greedily, with little grunts and gurgles of delight, and the juicy fragments with which his snout and jaws were smeared gave his formidable face an absurdly childish look. To Mustela—when that insolent little animal flashed before him—he vouchsafed no more than a glance of good-natured contempt. For the rank and stringy flesh of a pine-marten he had no use at any time of year, least of all in the season when the blueberries were ripe.

Mustela, however, was too discreet to pass within

reach of one of those huge but nimble paws, lest the happy bear should grow playful under the stimulus of the blueberry juice. He turned aside to a judicious distance, and there, sitting up on his hindquarters like a rabbit, he proceeded to nibble, rather superciliously, a few of the choicest berries. He was not enthusiastic over vegetable food, but, just as a cat will now and then eat grass, he liked at times a little corrective to his unvarying diet of flesh.

Having soon had enough of the blueberry patch, *Mustela* left it to the bear and turned back toward the deep of the forest, where he felt most at home. He went stealthily, following up the wind in order that his scent might not give warning of his approach. It was getting near sunset by this time, and floods of pinky gold, washing across the open barrens, poured in along the ancient corridors of the forest, touching the sombre trunks with stains of tenderest rose. In this glowing colour *Mustela*, with his ruddy fur, moved almost invisible.

And, so moving, he came plump upon a big buck-rabbit squatting half asleep in the centre of a clump of pale green fern.

The rabbit bounded straight into the air, his big, childish eyes popping from his head with horror. *Mustela's* leap was equally instantaneous, and it was unerring. He struck his victim in mid-air, and his fangs met deep in the rabbit's throat. With a scream the rabbit fell backwards and came down with a muffled thump upon the ferns, with *Mustela* on top of him. There was a brief, thrashing struggle,

and then Mustela, his forepaws upon the breast of his still quivering prey—several times larger and heavier than himself—lifted his blood-stained face and stared about him savagely, as if defying all the other prowlers of the forest to come and try to rob him of his prize.

Having eaten his fill, Mustela dragged the remnants of the carcass under a thick bush, defiled it so as to make it distasteful to other eaters of flesh, and scratched a lot of dead leaves and twigs over it till it was effectually hidden. As game was abundant at this season, and as he always preferred a fresh kill, he was not likely to want any more of that victim, but he hated the thought of any rival getting a profit from his prowess.

Mustela now turned his steps homeward, travelling more lazily, but with eyes, nose and ears ever on the alert for fresh quarry. Though his appetite was sated for some hours, he was as eager as ever for the hunt, for the fierce joy of the killing and the taste of the hot blood. But the Unseen Powers of the wilderness, ironic and impartial, decided just then that it was time for Mustela to be hunted in his turn.

If there was one creature above all others who could strike the fear of death into Mustela's merciless soul, it was his great-cousin, the ferocious and implacable fisher. Of twice his weight and thrice his strength, and his full peer in swiftness and cunning, the fisher was Mustela's nightmare, from whom there was no escape unless in the depths of some hole too narrow for the fisher's powerful shoulders to get into.

And at this moment there was the fisher's grinning, black-muzzled mask crouched in the path before him, eyeing him with the sneer of certain triumph.

Mustela's heart jumped into his throat as he flashed about and fled for his life—straight away, alas, from his safe hole in the tree-top—and with the lightning dart of a striking rattler the fisher was after him.

Mustela had a start of perhaps twenty paces, and for a time he held his own. He dared no tricks, lest he should lose ground, for he knew his foe was as swift and as cunning as himself. But he knew himself stronger and more enduring than most of his tribe, and therefore he put his hope, for the most part, in his endurance. Moreover, there was always a chance that he might come upon some hole or crevice too narrow for his pursuer. Indeed, to a tough and indomitable spirit like Mustela's, until his enemy's fangs should finally lock themselves in his throat, there would always seem to be a chance. One never could know which way the freakish Fates of the wilderness would cast their favour. On and on he raced, therefore, tearing up or down the long, sloping trunks of ancient windfalls, twisting like a golden snake through tangled thickets, springing in great airy leaps from trunk to rock, from rock to overhanging branch, in silence; and ever at his heels followed the relentless, grinning shape of his pursuer, gaining a little in the long leaps, but losing a little in the denser thickets, and so just about keeping his distance.

For all Mustela's endurance, the end of that race, in all probability, would have been for him but one swift, screeching fight, and then the dark. But at this juncture the Fates woke up, peered ironically through the grey and ancient mosses of their hair, and remembered some grudge against the fisher.

A moment later Mustela, just launching himself on a desperate leap, beheld in his path a huge hornets' nest suspended from a branch near the ground. Well he knew, and respected, that terrible insect, the great black hornet with the cream-white stripes about his body. But it was too late to turn aside. He crashed against the grey, papery sphere, tearing it from its cables, and flashed on, with half a dozen white-hot stings in his hindquarters prodding him to a fresh burst of speed. Swerving slightly, he dashed through a dense thicket of juniper scrub, hoping not only to scrape his fiery tormentors off, but at the same time to gain a little on his big pursuer.

The fisher was at this stage not more than a dozen paces in the rear. He arrived, to his undoing, just as the outraged hornets poured out in a furiously humming swarm from their overturned nest. It was clear enough to them that the fisher was their assailant. With deadly unanimity they pounced upon him.

With a startled screech the fisher bounced aside and plunged for shelter. But he was too late. The great hornets were all over him. His ears and nostrils were black with them, his long fur was full of them, and his eyes, shut tight, were already a flaming anguish with the corroding poison of their stings.

Frantically he burrowed his face down into the moss and through into the moist earth, and madly he clawed at his ears, crushing scores of his tormentors. But he could not crush out the venom which their long stings had injected. Finding it hopeless to free himself from their swarms, he tore madly through the underbrush, but blindly, crashing into trunks and rocks, heedless of everything but the fiery torture which enveloped him. Gradually the hornets fell away from him as he went, knowing that their vengeance was accomplished. At last, groping his way blindly into a crevice between two rocks, he thrust his head down into the moss, and there, a few days later, his swollen body was found by a foraging lynx. The lynx was hungry, but she only sniffed at the carcass and turned away with a growl of disappointment and suspicion. The carcass was too full of poison even for her not too discriminating palate.

Mustela, meanwhile, having the best and sharpest of reasons for not delaying in his flight, knew nothing of the fate of his pursuer. He only became aware, after some minutes, that he was no longer pursued. Incredulous at first, he at length came to the conclusion that the fisher had been discouraged by his superior speed and endurance. His heart, though still pounding unduly, swelled with triumph. By way of precaution he made a long detour to come back to his nest, pounced upon and devoured a couple of plump deer-mice on the way, ran up his tree and slipped comfortably into his hole, and curled up to sleep with the feeling of a day well spent. He had

fed full, he had robbed his fellows successfully, he had drunk the blood of his victims, he had outwitted or eluded his enemies. As for his friends, he had none—a fact which to Mustela of the Lone Hand was of no concern whatever.

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Now, as the summer waned, and the first keen touch of autumn set the wilderness aflame with the scarlet of maple and sumach, the pale gold of poplar and birch, Mustela, for all his abounding health and prosperous hunting, grew restless with a discontent which he could not understand. Of the coming winter he had no dread. He had passed through several winters, faring well when other prowlers less daring and expert had starved, and finding that deep nest of his in the old tree a snug refuge from the fiercest storms. But now—he knew not why—the nest grew irksome to him, and his familiar hunting-grounds distasteful. Even the eager hunt, the triumphant kill itself, had lost their zest. He forgot to kill except when he was hungry. A strange fever was in his blood, a lust for wandering. And so, one wistful, softly-glowing day of Indian summer, when the violet light that bathed the forest was full of mystery and allurements, he set off on a journey. He had no thought of why he was going, or whither. Nor was he conscious of any haste. When hungry, he stopped to hunt and kill and feed. But he no longer cared to conceal the remnants of his kills, for he dimly realised that he would not be returning.

If running waters crossed his path, he swam them. If broad lakes intervened, he skirted them. From time to time he became aware that others of his kind were moving with him, but each one furtive, silent, solitary, self-sufficing, like himself. He heeded them not, nor they him; but all, impelled by one urge which could but be blindly obeyed, kept drifting onward toward the west and north. At length, when the first snows began, Mustela stopped, in a forest not greatly different from that which he had left, but even wilder, denser, more unvisited by the foot of man. And here, the *Wanderlust* having suddenly left his blood, he found himself a new hole, lined it warm with moss and dry grasses, and resumed his hunting with all the ancient zest.

Back in Mustela's old hunting-grounds a lonely trapper, finding no more golden sable in his snares, but only mink and lynx and fox, grumbled regretfully:

"The marten hev quit. We'll see no more of 'em round these parts for another ten year."

But he had no notion why they had quit, nor had anyone else—not even Mustela himself.

C. G. D. ROBERTS.

QUESTIONS & SUGGESTIONS

THE LOST GOD

1. Describe (1) the appearance, (2) the character of James O'Shaughnessy Albro.

2. "This air is deadly—rotten with fever. Faugh! It's animal. It's—it's like a tiger's throat!"

Go through the story and pick out other vivid and powerful phrases like this simile of the tiger's throat.

3. Try to reproduce the wonderful description of what happened when the dynamite charge went off.

4. "Good God!" breathed Bartlet. "He couldn't get out!"

Explain this.

5. (a) Read Mr. H. G. Wells' story *Jimmy Goggles the God*.

(b) Joseph Conrad has often described places similar to the scene of this story. Look out some of these passages.

6. The writer of this story has been described as "A New Kipling." Why?

OLD GADGETT

1. How old was Gadgett? How had he spent his life?

2. In what county did he live? And what was the nature of the country?

3. Describe the manufacture and appearance of the set of teeth.

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4. Write an imaginary conversation with Old Gadgett about town life and modern ways.

5. What other stories about country folk have you read, either in prose or verse?

6. Do you consider this a funny story? If so, what is it that makes you laugh? What kind of humour is it?

COBBLER, COBBLER, MEND MY SHOE

1. Describe the characters you meet in Chelsea.

2. What did the old man lament when he came to Chelsea? Why was he so glad to find Mr. Mullins?

3. What other stories do you know connected with shoes, or boots, or shoemakers?

4. Read Shakespeare's *Henry V.*, Act IV. Sc. iii. Find out what you can about a play by Thomas Dekker, in which the principal characters are shoemakers.

5. Who was St. Crispin? Look him up, and read his story.

6. What kind of story is this? What do you think of it?

THE ILL-REGULATED DESTINY OF KIN YEN, THE PICTURE-MAKER

1. What five characters did Kin Yen learn to draw? What was the serious drawback to them?

2. What was his first commission?

3. Quote some mock-Chinese proverbs.

4. There are a number of tricks of style which give

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the funny mock-Chinese atmosphere. Pick some of them out, and explain what has been done.

5. What were the final prophecies of Kin Yen when convinced of the presence of the spirits of his ancestors?

6. What kind of story would you call this? and what kind of humour?

THE PAUPERS

1. What other writer whose books you have probably read has shown his deep sympathy with the poor in the workhouse? Enlarge on this.

2. What was there for the Farewell dinner?

3. Look through the story for little intimate touches which add to the pathos and truth.

4. In what county did these events take place? How do you know?

5. If you have read *She Stoops to Conquer* you will remember that Mr. Hardcastle had a "stock" story about the Grouse in the gunroom. What was old Jan's "stock" story about? Why is it so pathetic? Look up Mr. Hardcastle.

6. What was the wonderful thing about Miss Scantlebury's clock? What is mentioned about Jan's waist-coat? What is the importance of such things in a short story like this?

THE NEW ACCELERATOR

1. Describe any "Slow-Motion picture" you have seen on the screen. Compare it with the story.

2. What would be the result of dosing a man regularly with Gibberne's drug?

252 QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

3. The first thing they noticed after taking the drug was a "sort of faint pat, patter, like rain falling on different things." What was that? And what happened to the falling glass?

4. Describe the playing of the band.

5. What will be the advantages of the Accelerator when it comes into use "in three strengths . . . distinguished by yellow, pink and white labels"?

6. What is there about this fantastic story that makes it seem credible?

THE TALE

1. What do you mean by "atmosphere" in a story? The atmosphere in this story is very pronounced. Describe it in your own way.

2. How did they know in spite of the fog that they were close to land? And where did they first make out the neutral vessel?

3. Go through the story and note points that could never have been written by a landsman.

4. What grounds were there for the Commanding Officer's suspicion? Do you think the Northman was guilty? And if so, did the Englishman act rightly?

5. Describe the Northman, and his cabin.

6. You have probably never read another story in the least like this—in style at any rate. What makes it so unique?

NIÑO DIABLO

1. Describe the appearance of Niño Diablo. How are his strange powers accounted for?

QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS 253

2. What was the story he told to the children?
3. How was Cousin Polycarp "paid out for his insolence"?
4. The plot of the story is very slight—you could easily write it on a post card. Write the plot in half a dozen lines.
5. The plot is the least important thing about this story. What is the most important thing?
6. There are a number of Spanish (or half Spanish) words in this story: poncho—armadillo—Madre del Cielo—pampa—maté—papita—madrina—puma—rosa fresca—desperado. What do they mean, and why do we find them here?

THAT WHICH REMAINED

1. What is a flag-lieutenant and a P.M.O.?
2. Do you know what is meant by semaphore? Look up the alphabet—and learn it if it interests you.
3. Do you think the story is true? If so, what makes you think so?
4. Who visited the Periwinkle in hospital? And who befriended him on the liner?
5. What did the Indian frontier major with a V.C. say about "Hope"?
6. How is it that the story is pathetic without being sloppy?

THE PASSING OF OUL-I-BUT

1. How is a Husky fish-hook made? And how is the fishing done?

254 QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

2. How did Oul-i-but know it was time to go? And who was to take his place? Describe him.
3. Draw a picture and a diagram of an igloo.
4. What is the Esquimaux' idea of life after death?
5. Describe Oul-i-but's great bear hunt.
6. What makes one feel sure that this story was written by one who knows the North and the Esquimaux people?

THE KINGS OF ORION

1. What is the point of the rather long prologue about Wiston?
2. Explain the title.
3. Describe the meeting between the Governor and Umgazi.
4. Read for the sake of comparison Rudyard Kipling's story *The Man who would be King*.
5. "That's my idea of Prester John."
What was Tommy's idea?
6. "An ape and a lion lie side by side in the heart of a man."—Persian Proverb.
Do you know any other famous books or stories which the proverb might fit?

MUSTELA OF THE LONE HAND

1. What kind of animal was Mustela? Describe his appearance, and, if you can, draw a sketch.
2. Look out the following words in the dictionary if you do not already know their meaning:
Chickadee. Tamarack. Sumach. *Wanderlust*.

QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS 255

3. Where did Mustela live? What was his nest like? And what did he live on—as a rule, and now and then?

4. How did “the fisher” die?

5. “The marten hev quit. We’ll see no more of ’em round these parts for another ten year.”

Explain what had happened.

6. What are the essential points of a really good wild-animal story? Do you find them here?

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