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THE SIXTH SENSE

SHEILA INTERVENES

THE RELUCTANT LOVER

NINETY-SIX HOURS' LEAVE

SONIA

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

BY

STEPHEN McKENNA

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TO

A VERY GALLANT LADY

"THE heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."

ECCLESIASTES vii. 4

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SONIA

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGER WITHIN OUR GATES

"I called my men from my trenches, my quarries, my wharves, and my shears,
All I had wrought I abandoned to the faith of the faithless years.
Only I cut on the timber, only I carved on the stone:
'After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known!'"
RUDYARD KIPLING, "The Palace"

AT the age of three-and-twenty Charles Templeton, my old tutor at Oxford, set himself to write a history of the Third French Republic. When I made his acquaintance some thirty years later he had satisfactorily concluded his introductory chapter on the origin of Kingship. At his death, three months ago, I understand that his notes on the precursors of Charlemagne were almost as complete as he desired. "It is so difficult to know where to start, Mr. Oakleigh," he used to say, as I picked my steps through the litter of notebooks that cumbered his tables, chairs and floor.

Magnis componere parva. I am sensible of a like difficulty in attempting to sketch for the benefit of an eight-weeks-old godson the outlines of a world that was clattering into ruins during the twelve months anterior to his birth. Even were I desirous of writing a social history of England for the last thirty years, I should be placing myself in competition with men more able and better equipped than I am to describe the politics, the diplomacy, the economics, the art and the social habits of the past generation. It is wiser to attempt nothing so comprehensive, but to limit myself to those facets of English life which I have been compelled—*nolens volens*—to study. Others will come after me to tell

the story in its entirety; the utmost I attempt to record is circumscribed, personal reminiscence.

If, therefore, this book ever find favour in the eyes for which it was written, it will be because I have set narrow limits to my task and confined myself resolutely to those limits. For thirty years I have lived among what the world has agreed loosely to call "the Governing Classes." The title may already be obsolescent; sentence of proscription may, as I write, have been passed on those who bear it. At the lowest computation those classes will soon have changed beyond recognition in personnel, function, power and philosophy. This book may then perhaps have something of historical value in portraying a group of men and women who were at the same time my personal friends and representative of those Governing Classes in politics, journalism, commerce and society. I have drawn them as I saw them, without attempting to select or label predominant types. And if there be blank spaces on my canvas, it is to be remembered that I only set out to paint that social group with which I happened to be brought in contact.

Charles Templeton's difficulty in determining his initial date is in smaller degree my difficulty. I could give long introductory accounts of David O'Rane's wanderings before he reached England, or of Jim Loring's boyhood in Scotland, or the early phases of the Dainton fortunes. To do so, however, would involve a sacrifice of the unities of time and place; and when the work was done I should be left with the feeling that it could have been better done at first hand by O'Rane himself, or Lady Loring or Sir Roger Dainton. It is equally difficult to know where the final line is to be drawn. Nearly a year has already passed since the events recorded in the last chapter, yet that same chapter brings no sort of finality to the career of O'Rane, and, should another hand care to use them, the materials for another volume are rapidly accumulating.

I place my first chapter in the late summer of 1898, my last in August 1915. Neither date has been arbitrarily chosen.

I

In 1898 the month of September found me a guest of Roger Dainton at Crowley Court in the County of Hampshire.

In the guide-books the house is described as a "stately

Elizabethan mansion," but at the time of which I am writing it was still a labyrinth of drainage cuttings and a maze of scaffolding and ladders. Suddenly enriched by the early purchase of tied-houses, the Daintons had that year moved five miles away from Melton town, school and brewery. Even in those early days I suppose Mrs. Dainton was not without social aspirations, and when her husband was elected Unionist member for the Melton Division of Hampshire, she seized the opportunity of moving at one step into a house where her position was unassailable and away from a source of income that was ever her secret embarrassment.

Roger Dainton, affluent, careless and indolent, accepted the changed life with placid resignation. The syndicate shoot was left behind with the humdrum Melton Club and the infinitely small society that clustered in the precincts of the cathedral. Mrs. Dainton, big, bustling, and indefatigably capable, fought her way door by door into South Hampshire society, while her husband shot statedly with Lord Pebbleridge at Bishop's Cross, yawned through the long mornings on the Bench, and, when Parliament was not sitting, lounged through his grounds in a shooting-jacket with perennially torn pocket, his teeth gripping a black, gurgling briar that defied Mrs. Dainton's utmost efforts to smarten his appearance.

The atmosphere of the rambling old house was well-suited to schoolboy holidays, for we rose and retired when we pleased, ate continuously, and were never required to dress for dinner. The so-called library, admirably adapted to stump cricket on wet days, contained nothing more arid than "The Sportsman," "Country Life," and bound volumes of "The Badminton Magazine," while Mrs. Dainton's spasmodic efforts to discuss the contents of her last Mudie box met with prompt and effective discouragement. The society, in a word, was healthily barbarian, from our host, aged forty-three, to his over-indulged only daughter, Sonia, aged eleven. Since the days when Tom Dainton and I were fellow-fags, it had been part of my annual programme to say good-bye to my mother and sister a week before the opening of the Melton term, cross from Kingstown to Holyhead, call on Bertrand Oakleigh, my guardian, in London and proceed to Crowley Court for the last week of the summer holidays. It was an unwritten law of our meetings that none but true Meltonians should be invited, and, though the party grew gradually in size, the rule was never relaxed.

In 1898 six of us sat down to dinner with our host and

hostess on the first night of our visit. Sutcliffe, the captain of the school, sat on Mrs. Dainton's right hand—a small-boned, spectacled boy with upstanding red hair and beak-shaped nose, who was soon to be buried in Cambridge with a Trinity Fellowship rolled against the mouth of the tomb. On the other side sat Jim Loring, the Head of Matheson's, as ever not more than half awake, his sleepy grey eyes and loosely-knit big frame testifying that for years past he had overgrown his strength and would require some years more of untroubled leisure before he could overcome his natural lethargy. He had reached the school as "Loring," and though an uncle had died in the interval and his father was now the Marquess Loring, no one troubled to remember that he was in consequence Earl of Chepstow,—or indeed anything but "old Jim Loring,"— imperturbable, dreamy, detached and humorous, with quaint mediaeval ideals and a worldly knowledge somewhat in advance of his years. To me he occasionally unbent, but the rest of the microcosm—his parents and masters included—found him as enigmatic and unenthusiastic as he was placid and good-looking. "There is nothing he cannot or will do"—as Villiers, the master of the Under Sixth, had written in momentary exasperation some terms before.

At the other end of the table I sat on one side of Dainton with Draycott, the house captain of football, opposite me—a blue-eyed, fair-haired boy with a confounding knowledge of early Italian painting and a remarkable pride in his personal appearance. The two remaining chairs were occupied by Tom and Sam Dainton. Tom was at this time of Herculean build, with arms and shoulders of a giant—a taciturn boy with a deep voice, and no idea in his head apart from cricket, of which he was now captain. He and I had stumbled into the friendship of propinquity, and there had never been any reason for dropping it, though I cannot flatter myself he found my company more enlivening than I found his. On the opposite side of the table sat Sam, as yet a Meltonian only in embryo, though we expected him to be of the elect in a week's time.

The one member of the family not present was Sonia, the only daughter, who, in consideration of her eleventh birthday, had been allowed to stay up till a quarter to eight, but no later. I suppose the child got her looks from her mother, though by this time Mrs. Dainton was verging on stoutness, with a mottled skin and hair beginning to seem dry and

lustreless. Sonia, with her velvety brown eyes, her white skin and dark hair, certainly owed nothing to her father, who was one of the most commonplace men I have ever met, whether in mind or appearance. Of medium height, with a weatherbeaten face and mouse-coloured hair, he was growing fleshy—with that uneven distribution of flesh that assails so many men of his age—and suggesting to an observer that eating and exercise were now moving in inverse ratio. I liked him then—as I like him still—but in looking back over seventeen years I find my regard mingled with a certain pathos: he was so ineffectual, so immature and of so uncritical a mind; above all, he was so grateful to anyone who would be polite to him in his own house.

The Entrance Examination at Melton took place the day before term, and in the afternoon Mrs. Dainton suggested that some of us should drive over to the school, inquire how Sam had fared and bring him back to Crowley Court for dinner. As the others were playing tennis, Sonia and I climbed into the high four-wheeled dogcart and were slowly driven by her father up the five-mile hill that separated us from the town.

Melton is one of those places that never change. In a hundred years' time I have no doubt it will present the same appearance of warm, grey, placid beauty as on that September afternoon, when we emerged from the Forest to find the school standing out against the setting sun like a group of temples on a modern Acropolis. Leaving the dogcart at the "Raven," we covered the last half-mile on foot, and, while Dainton called on the Head, I took Sonia to Big Gateway and led her on a tour of inspection round the school. After seventeen years and for all its familiarity I can recall the beauty of the scene in its unwonted holiday desolation. Standing in the Gateway with our faces to the north, we had College to our right and the Head's house to our left; on the eastern, western and northern sides of Great Court lay the nine boarding-houses, and through the middle of Matheson's, in line with Big Gateway, ran the Norman tunnel leading to Cloisters, Chapel and Great School.

It was Sonia's first opportunity of seeing over Melton, and she begged me to miss nothing. We crossed the worn flags of Great Court to the waterless fountain in the middle, lingered to admire the virginia creeper swathing the crumbling grey walls as in a mantle of scarlet silk, and passed through the iron-studded oak door of Matheson's. She inspected our

row of studies and looked out through the closely barred windows to the practice ground of Little End, where the groundman and two assistants were erecting goal posts. For a while we wandered round Hall examining the carved tables and forms, the giant chimney-piece from which new boys had to sing their melancholy songs on the first Saturday of term, the great silver shields that the house had held in unbroken tenure for nine years, and the consciously muscular Cup Team groups that adorned the walls in two lines above the lockers.

Leaving Matheson's, we strolled through Cloisters, and I pointed out the bachelor masters' quarters on one side and on the other the famous "Fighting Green" in which no fights had taken place within human memory. We put our heads inside Chapel, crossed into Great School and walked its length to the dais where stood Ockley's Chair, Bishop Adam's Birch Table and the carved seats of the Monitorial Council running in a half-circle like the places of the priests in the Theatre of Dionysus. I was still descanting on the dignity of that same Council, of which I had lately become a member, when a bell rang faintly in the distance, and we had to retrace our steps to meet the Entrance Examination candidates, who were pouring out of School Library and scattering in search of their anxious parents or guardians.

Sam Dainton headed the stream of inky-fingered twelve-year-olds, only pausing in his precipitant course down School Steps to roll his examination paper into a hard ball and thrust it inside the collar of a smaller, unknown and—so far as I could see—entirely inoffensive fellow-candidate.

"How did you get on?" asked Sonia.

"Oh, I dunno," Sam answered modestly; and then to me, "I say, Oakleigh, who were Abana and Pharpar?"

I made some discreet reference to the rivers of Damascus.

"Golly!" he moaned, with a face of woe. "I said they were the jewels in the breastplate of the High Priest. Never mind. Can't be helped. The chap in front of me said they were Eli's two sons, but that's rot, 'cos *they* were Gog and Magog. I got *that* right. Did you come over alone?"

"Your father's here," I said. "He's bribing Burgess not to read your papers. We'd better get back to Big Gateway."

We were half-way across Great Court when one of the Head's library windows opened, and Burgess, with his quaint, mannered courtesy, asked permission to have a word with

me if I could spare him the time. I entered what was then, and probably is still, the untidiest room in England. Since the death of his wife ten years before, Burgess had ruled, or been ruled, with the aid of a capable housekeeper whose tenure of office depended on her undertaking never to touch a book or paper in the gloomy, low-ceilinged library. From that bargain she can never have departed. Overflowing the shelves and tables, piled up in the embrasures of the windows, littered carelessly in fireplace or wastepaper basket, lay ten years' accumulation of reports, complaints, presentation copies, textbooks, magazines and daily papers.

"Some day it must all be swept and garnished, laddie," he would say when the last of twelve unsmokable pipes had disappeared behind the coal-box. "But I'm an old man, broken with the cares and sorrows of this world. . . . Never take to smoking, laddie; it's a vile, unclean practice." And pending the day when the Augean stable was to be cleansed, he would walk down to Grantham's, the big Melton bookseller, cram the pockets of his cassock with new books, pick his way slowly back to the school, reading as rapidly as his tobacco-stained forefinger could hack the pages, and drop the newest acquisition in the handiest corner of the dusty, dim library.

"Laddie, there is a stranger within our gates, seeking admittance. He will not be denied."

Burgess's meaning was seldom to be grasped in his first or second sentence. I waited while he fumbled for a pipe in the pocket of the old silk cassock without which none of us had ever seen him. By 1898, at the age of five-and-fifty, his physical appearance had run through the gamut of its changes and become fixed. When last we met, seventeen years later, his body was no more thin or bent, his face no more cadaverous, his brown eyes no more melancholy, his voice no more tired and his long white hair no whit less thick than on that September afternoon. And thus he will remain till a puff of wind stronger than the generality blows away the ascetic, wasted frame, and the gentle, sing-song voice is heard no more.

"Where is the divinity that doth hedge a king about?" he demanded of Dainton, or me, or the world at large. "I sat in this, my Holy Place, when a serving-man told me that one stood without and would have speech with me. I bade him begone. 'He insists,' said my serving-man." Burgess sighed and gently shrugged his shoulders. "The sons of

Zeruiah are too hard for me. I bade him enter, and there came to me a lad no bigger than a man's hand. 'Thy name and business, laddie?' I asked. He told me he was known to men as 'David O'Rane,' a wanderer for the first time setting foot in the Promised Land. His speech was the speech of men in far places, who go down to the sea in ships and behold the wonders of the Lord. Shortly he bade me 'See here,' and stated that he proposed to come to my old school anyway, and that was the way *he* regarded the proposition."

"An American, sir?" I asked.

"An Irishman from thine own Isle of Unrest, laddie," Burgess answered. "Journeying from Dan to Beersheba, and pricking through America on his way."

He paused, and Dainton asked what had happened next.

"He is fifteen years of age—a year too old by the rules. My Shibboleths were demanded of the young men at nine-thirty this morning; by the rules he is half a day too late. Rules, the laddie told me, were for ordinary men at ordinary times. 'I, at least,' I said, 'am an ordinary man.' And he smiled and held his peace. 'Who will rid me of this proud scholar?' I asked, and he answered not a word. I threw him books, and he translated them—Homer and Thucydides and the dark places of Theocritus. 'Thou art too old, laddie,' I told him, 'for me to take thee in.' He walked to the door and I asked him whither he went. 'To a decent school,' he made answer. 'No decent school will take Melton's rejections,' I told him. 'Then let them share Melton's shame,' he rejoined. I bade him tarry and tell me of his wanderings: He sits within."

Burgess sighed and relit his pipe. I know few men who smoke more matches.

"Are you admitting him, sir?" I asked.

"The fatherless child is in God's keeping," answered Burgess. He turned to Dainton and murmured, "You recall the Liberator?"

Dainton's eyebrows moved up in quick surprise. "Oh, poor boy!" he ejaculated. It was some while before I was to understand the allusion or the comment, and I had little time now to speculate, as Burgess turned to address me.

"Laddie, he will be in Mr. Matheson's house, and will sit at the feet of Mr. Villiers in the Under Sixth. Were I a just man, I would place him in the Sixth, but I am old and broken with the cares and sorrows of this world. He must learn humility of spirit. He must fag—like Dainton minor;

and be flogged like Dainton minor if he break our foolish rules. He must wait for a study and suffer on the altar of sport in all weathers, as a hundred thousand have done before him. I have communed secretly with thee, laddie, and, when thou goest hence to thine own place, lo! it will be forgotten as a dream that is past."

I bowed in acquiescence.

"Forget not this one thing," he added. "He is a stranger within our gates, having neither kith nor kin. Much will he teach us; somewhat, maybe, can we teach him. Make his path smooth, laddie."

"I'll do my best, sir," I promised. "Where's he going to be till term begins?"

"The Lord will provide," answered Burgess absently. It was his invariable formula when at a loss for a more suitable reply.

Dainton rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Look here, Dr. Burgess," he suggested. "Why shouldn't I take charge of him for a night and a day?"

Burgess eyed him thoughtfully.

"A night and a day are twenty-four hours," he said.

"We shall be nine to one," answered Dainton reassuringly.

"You have not seen him yet."

Burgess rose from his chair and rang the bell. A moment later the door opened, and O'Rane entered the library. He was a boy of medium height with black hair parted in the middle after the American fashion, unusually large black eyes and bronzed face and hands. Though the black eyes sometimes lost their dreaminess and became charged with sudden passion, though the sunken cheeks and sharply outlined bones of the face gave him something of a starving animal's desperation, the reality was considerably less formidable than I had imagined from Burgess's description. In manner he was a curious mixture of the old and new. On being introduced, he drew himself up and clicked his heels, and in speaking he showed a tendency to gesticulate; then without warning his voice would take on a Western drawl, and unexpected transatlanticisms would crop up in his speech.

On learning Dainton's proposal he bowed and accepted with a guarded politeness. We made our way into Great Court, found Sonia and Sam, and set out for the "Raven." On reaching home I mentioned to Loring that we had a new boy requiring a certain amount of special consideration; we span a coin, and Loring took O'Rane for fag, while Sam

was allotted to me. The stranger within our gates said little that night or next morning, though all of us tried, one after another, to engage him in conversation. The ways of the house seemed unfamiliar to him, and he wandered round thoughtfully with his hands in his pockets, rather ostentatiously avoiding any advances.

The next evening, after an early dinner, the racing omnibus was brought round to the door. Tom Dainton, looking like a prize-fighter with his bony, red face and vast double-breasted overcoat, clambered on to the box-seat; Loring, recumbent in an arm-chair till the last possible moment, dragged his sleepy, long body upright and climbed, with a drowsy protest, to Tom's side; Sutcliffe, with his shock of red hair bared to the night and his spectacles gleaming in the light of the lamps, hurried the immaculate and æsthetic Draycott into place and scrambled up behind him. Sam, overcome with sudden timidity and a sense that the familiar was fading past recall, kissed his mother and mounted shyly, indicating a vacant seat for O'Rane. I stayed behind to check the luggage, unearth the coach-horn and wave good-bye, then leapt on to the back step and gave the signal for departure.

As we started down the drive at a canter, our hosts stood silhouetted against the lights of the hall. Dainton removed one hand from the torn pocket of the old shooting-jacket and waved farewell; Mrs. Dainton bowed majestically; Sonia, bare-legged and sandalled, with a gold bracelet round one ankle and the face of a Sistine Madonna, raised both hands to her lips and blew a cloud of tempestuous kisses.

Loring turned encouragingly to Sam.

"My lad, I wouldn't be in your shoes for a thousand pounds this coming year."

Sam smiled without conviction.

"The tumbril passed rapidly down the Rue St. Honoré," Loring went on, "amid the jeers of the populace. This day's victims included the younger Dainton and the *émigré* O'Rane. Both preserved an attitude of stoical indifference till they came in sight of the Place de la Révolution, when Dainton broke down and wept piteously. . . ."

"I didn't," said Sam indignantly.

Loring laughed to himself.

"Cheer up, Sambo," he said. "You're not really to be pitied. O'Rane's going to be my fag."

"Poor brute," said Draycott.

"Who? O'Rane or me?"

"O'Rane, of course."

Loring smiled round the company, turned in his seat and composed himself for slumber. O'Rane looked with interest and a shade of defiance from one face to another.

II

The first few days of the school year were always a busy time for the seniors. Matheson, a mild-eyed mathematician in Holy Orders, with a family defying even his powers of enumeration, observed the wholesome principle of leaving the monitors to take care of his house—a task which, I can say after six years' experience, one generation after another performed with efficiency, justice and a sense of responsibility. His official duties, so far as we could see, were confined to carving the joints at luncheon, giving leave-out, wandering in a transient, embarrassed fashion round Hall when the monitors were taking prep., and scrawling his endorsement of his colleagues' scurrility and invective at the foot of the monthly reports.

When not in form nor engaged in one or other of these functions, he retired to a faded study and struggled with the weekly acrostic in "Vanity Fair." Once each season, when the Cup Team had successfully challenged all comers for possession of the shield, Matheson would emerge dazedly from the half-light, summon the house to a supper in Hall, and after a prodigal distribution of steak-and-kidney pie, ham, tongue, cold fowl, brawn, jelly, meringues, jam roll, lemonade and diluted claret-cup, hold forth with shining eyes and throbbing voice on the glories of British Sport and the umbilical connection between the playing fields of Eton and the battle of Waterloo. It was always a *tour-de-force* of simple-minded sincerity; he spoke as one whose heart was stirred to its depths by the growing glories of his house. And we cheered encouragingly and thought the better of him for it.

There was little opportunity of making O'Rane's path smooth in the early days. At Loring's orders and in accordance with the immemorial "Substance and Shadow" institution, O'Rane was set at the feet of a senior fag, by name Mayhew, with instructions to learn all that was to be learned during his days of sanctuary. For a fortnight no master could send him to Detention School nor give him lines; he

could dodge every practice game on Little End, wear button boots, break bounds, refuse to fag, cut roll-call, or talk in prep. with complete physical impunity. At the end of the second week he had theoretically tasted of the Tree of Knowledge. Ignorance of rules could no longer be pleaded in extenuation of their breach, and justice went untempered by mercy, save in that no boy could be thrashed twice in ten days without written authorization from his housemaster or the Head.

On the last evening of grace I was seated in Loring's study after prep. when Mayhew came in with the cocoa saucepan and cups.

"Does O'Rane know the rules now?" Loring asked. "I haven't seen him on Little End so far."

"I think I've told him everything," Mayhew answered.

"Has he got his footer change yet?"

Mayhew hesitated in some embarrassment.

"He hadn't the last time I talked to him about it."

"He must look sharp," said Loring. "Four times next week, or—he knows the penalty."

Mayhew nodded, and the subject was dropped for a week. Then I was summoned to a Monitors' Meeting. Loring, as ever, lay at full length on the floor in front of his fire, Tom Dainton sprawled in the arm-chair, little Draycott swung his legs in their carefully creased trousers from one corner of the table, and I occupied the only vacant seat in the window.

"About this fellow O'Rane," yawned Loring from the hearthrug. "He's cut Little End all this week, so I propose to have him up and inquire the reason. If none's forthcoming, he must die the death. All agreed?"

He dragged himself to his feet, picked his cane from the wastepaper basket and dealt two echoing blows to the lower panels of the door. The studies in Matheson's were in a line, opening out of the long Hall where the juniors lived and worked and ragged and had their lockers. Two kicks on a study door meant that the monitor inside required a fag, and it was the business of the junior in Hall at that moment—"lag of Hall," as he was called—to eliminate time and space in answering the summons. Two blows of a cane indicated a potential execution. A sudden silence descended on Hall; two light feet jumped over a form, there was a hurried knocking, and a breathless, scared junior thrust his head in at the door.

"Send O'Rane here."

Through the hushed Hall a sigh of relief went up from the forty odd boys who were *not* O'Rane. The name was shouted by one after another, like the summons of a witness in Court. "O'Rane! O'Rane! Spitfire, you're wanted! What's it for, Spitfire? Hurry up, they're muck sick if you keep 'em waiting! Mayhew's voice sympathetically murmured, "Bad luck, old man!" Then there came a second knock at the door.

Loring stood with his back to the fire, bending his cane into an arc round one knee.

"Have you been down to Little End this week?" he asked.

"No."

"You know you have to go four times a week?"

"Yes."

"Have you had leave off from Matheson?"

"No."

"Do you wish to appeal?"

Within living memory no boy in Matheson's had ever exercised his right of appeal—a tribute, I hope, to the substantial justice of succeeding generations of monitors. O'Rane looked round at the four of us with a mixture of sullenness and timidity in his expressive black eyes.

"Guess I'm up against some blamed rule?" he hazarded.

Loring nodded.

"Then there's mighty little use in plaguing old man Matheson."

Loring threw his cane over to Draycott, the captain of football. "Clear Hall," he said to O'Rane.

On receipt of the order there was a scuffling of feet as forty boys jumped up from tables, forms and window-seats. "Clear Hall" was taken up as the marching refrain, and, as the monitors filed in by one door, the last stragglers hurried out by the other, and eighty critical, experienced ears were expectantly strained to appraise the artistry of Draycott's execution. Loring, who was equally averse from thrashing a boy or being present when another carried out the sentence, crossed the room and gazed out of the window.

It was soon over. O'Rane hurried out of Hall, breathing quickly and with rather a flushed face. As he opened the door, interested voices chorused, "Bad luck, Spitfire!" "Who did it?" "I say, you got it pretty tight, Spitfire!" "Was it Draycott? He's not bad for a beginner." We filed back to the study; the date, offence and victim's name

were entered in the Black Book and initialled by Draycott, and we dispersed to our own quarters.

A week later Loring ambled into my study with the remark that O'Rane had still failed to put in an appearance on Little End.

"I don't know what's the matter with him," he said. "If he thinks by just being obstinate . . ." He left the sentence unfinished. All his life Loring had the makings of a martinet, and when roused from his constitutional lethargy could himself be as obstinate as most people. "He's laying up trouble for his little self when the week's out, if he isn't careful."

"What sort of a fag is he?" I asked.

"Oh, not bad. Always looks as if he'd like to throw the boots at my head instead of taking 'em to the boot-room. That's just his fun, though—the playful way of the vengeful Celt. The only thing I care about is that he takes them there."

"I expect he'll shake down in time," I said.

Loring shrugged his shoulders and yawned. "He's pretty generally barred in Hall. Never speaks to anyone, and, if anyone speaks to him, it usually ends in a scrap. He's got the temper of the very devil. The best thing that could happen to him would be if twenty of them sat on his head and ragged him scientifically, just to show him he's not God Almighty's elder brother, even if he *did* get into the Under Sixth straight away."

The end of the week showed no improvement, and O'Rane was once more had up and thrashed. A fortnight later the procedure was faithfully repeated. It was a Saturday night, and when execution had been done, I stayed behind in Loring's study after Draycott and Dainton had left us. There was no prep., and the juniors were reading, fighting, singing, and roasting chestnuts till prayer-time.

"You know, I'm about sick of this," remarked Loring, meditatively stirring the fire with the richly carved leg of a chair purloined from Draycott's study.

"O'Rane?" I asked.

"Yes; Dainton pretty well cut him in two to-night. It's like hitting a girl."

"He's a tough little beast," I remarked for want of something better to say.

"He's a pig-headed little devil," Loring rejoined irritably.

"What does he think he gains by it? Does he imagine we shall get tired of it in time?"

"Don't ask me," I said.

He rolled over on one side and banged the door with the chair-leg. "Send O'Rane here," he said, when a fag answered the summons, and to me as the door closed, "I propose to ask *him*."

O'Rane, when he appeared, looked white and tired, but there was a sullen, smouldering fire in his dark eyes, and his under-lip was thrust truculently forward. Silently he put the saucepan on the fire, produced cocoa and a cake from one of the cupboards and set about opening a fresh tin of condensed milk.

"Is there anything else you want?" he asked, when the task was finished.

"Yes; I should like a moment's conversation with you. Take the arm-chair."

Silently the order was obeyed. As I looked at the thin wrists and ankles, the slight frame made the slighter by the loose American-cut trousers, I appreciated the justice of Loring's remark about 'hitting a girl.'

"What have I done *now*?" he asked wearily.

Loring propped his back against the wall.

"Look here, young man, does it amuse you to be thrashed once in ten days?"

O'Rane's eyes burned with defiance.

"Guess I can hold out as long as you."

"That wasn't my question," said Loring. "Does it . . .?"

"D'you think it amuses anyone to be thrashed by Dainton?"

"No. And it doesn't amuse Dainton to thrash you, or the rest of us to have to look on. I don't know whether you think you'll tire us out. If you do, it's only fair to warn you that as long as I'm head of this house I propose to see that the rules are obeyed."

O'Rane rose from his chair as though the interview were ending.

"Guess I've stuck out worse than this in my time," he observed.

Loring waved him back to his chair. "What's the difficulty?" he demanded. "Why won't you play footer like everybody else?"

O'Rane snorted contemptuously.

"I came here to be educated, not to kick a dime ball about."

We were in the days prior to "Stalky and Co."; "The Islanders" lay in the womb of time; never before had I heard public-school sport criticized, at any rate inside a public school. Loring expounded the approved defence of games: their benefit to health, the fostering of a communal spirit, good temper in defeat, moderation in triumph. For a man who had abandoned Big Side on the day when attendance there ceased to be compulsory for him, the exposition was astonishingly eloquent.

"Guess I didn't come here for that," was all O'Rane would answer.

"Afraid you'll find it's one of the incidentals," Loring rejoined. "I've been through it, Oakleigh's been through it, we've all been through it. It's part of the discipline of the place—like fagging. You don't refuse to do that."

"I'd cleaned a saucepan or two before I came here. 'Sides, that doesn't take time like footling away an afternoon on Little End."

Loring sat with his chin on his knees, perpending his next words. I took occasion to ask how O'Rane spent his precious afternoons.

"In the library mostly. Sometimes in the town hall. Old man Burgess gave me leave."

"What in the name of fortune d'you find to do there?" I asked.

"It's the only place hereabouts where they keep continental papers. I've got some leeway to make up."

We sat in silence till the saucepan boiled, and Loring started handing round the cocoa.

"Then we're to have a repetition of this business every ten days till you get into the Sixth? Tell me—frankly—are you enjoying yourself here?"

"Reckon I didn't come here to enjoy myself."

Loring sighed impatiently.

"Do, for the Lord's sake, stick to the question," he said.

O'Rane's lips curled in a sneer that was almost audible before he spoke.

"I'm having a real bully time in a nickel-plated public school with the English aristocracy crawling round like ants on a side-walk." The words poured out in a single breath. "Guess I can't help enjoying myself."

"D'you get on well with the other fellows?"

"Would you get on well in the middle of a flock of sheep?"

Loring shook his head with a gesture of despair.

"You know, you're not giving yourself a fair chance," he told him. "What's the point of going through life with your hand against every man?"

"And every man's hand against me."

"I dare say. Whose fault is it, you silly ass?"

O'Rane laughed ironically.

"Mine without a doubt."

Loring tried a fresh cast.

"How d'you get on with Villiers?" he asked.

"Like oil and water. He sees fit to make fun of me before the form—says I can't talk English because I say 'grass' and not 'grarse' like the sheep. If I can't talk English, I can't—but I can talk to him in Russian, German, Italian, French, Spanish, Gaelic and Magyar. Then he reports me to the Head."

I did my best not to laugh, but his palpable sense of injustice was sufficiently sincere to be ludicrous.

"I now understand why you go by the name of Spitfire," Loring remarked.

"The dago that first called me that has a broken thumb to remember it by."

At this moment the prayer-bell began to ring, and O'Rane jumped up from his chair. As I strolled in to prayers, Loring called down grievous curses on the race to which O'Rane and I belonged.

"What are we going to do with him, George?" he demanded. "This is mere cruelty to children."

The answer came after call-over. O'Rane passed us at the foot of the stairs on his way to Middle Dormitory. There was the ghost of a smile on his lips as he bade us good-night.

"Good-night, O'Rane," I responded.

"We shall meet in ten days' time."

Loring linked arms with me and entered Draycott's study.

"The fellow's mad, you know," he decided.

III

To give O'Rane his due, for nine days out of ten—or, in less diplomatic language, between thrashings—he caused us singularly little trouble. When Loring, who as a Catholic was excused Early Chapel, hurried through Hall on his way

to Mass at St. Peter's, he would find O'Rane recumbent on a form in front of the fire, peacefully reading till first Roll Call. In the afternoon, when I came back from a walk, he would have changed his position, and I could be sure of finding him curled up in a window-seat with the line of his thin shoulder-blades clearly showing through his coat. As a fag Loring reported him efficient, punctual and tolerably obliging, though their conversation seldom matured into anything more than question and answer. The *modus vivendi* was uncomfortable, but no compromise seemed possible without a surrender of principle.

I believe Matheson descended from Olympus on one occasion and told O'Rane that such slackness in an Under-Sixth-form boy was a deplorable example to the other juniors. The irresistible reply was, of course, that leisure could be purchased at a price, and, as no one else seemed anxious to come into avoidable conflict with authority, the example could hardly be called effectively corrupting. Matheson rubbed his chin and retired to think it over; O'Rane returned, sardonically smiling, to his book.

With the rest of Hall his relations at this time were frankly hostile. Mayhew, who was too good-natured and buoyant ever to have an enemy, and Sam Dainton, whose salt he had eaten, were able to preserve a show of intimacy; between them they induced him to discontinue parting his hair in the middle, and on one Leave-out Day to walk over for luncheon at Crowley Court. Almost everyone else regarded him with dislike tempered by a certain discreet fear. Conversations were conducted for his benefit in approved American dialect; knots of boys, too numerous for one man to tackle, gathered round and poured opprobrium on him when he cut the first round of the Cup Ties. Beyond possibility of doubt he was shown that the one unforgivable sin was "Side," and that he was prone to commit that sin not infrequently. More, he transgressed in unfamiliar ways. It was no ordinary question of wearing exceptional clothes, adopting a lordliness of speech, or cultivating an *impressement* of manner; he frankly snubbed the Hall veterans like Sinclair, who was in the Team, professed contemptuous indifference to the prestige or welfare of the house, and on at least one occasion strolled unconcernedly into the Head's library after Sunday Chapel, thereby ranking himself with the highest in the land. Theoretically Burgess was at home on Sunday evenings to anyone who cared to drop in for a talk;

in practice the Sixth, and the Sixth only, conceived themselves capable of appreciating him or worthy of the privilege.

I had no idea that one boy could disgruntle a house so completely. Had his fellows been content to leave him entirely alone, their path and his would have been appreciably smoother; passive disapprobation, however, is a sterile policy for a boy to adopt, and the outspoken asides and collective imitations continued until O'Rane put himself beyond the pale of civilization by his quarrel with Sinclair.

The material for a breach had been accumulating for some time. Sinclair, an old "Colour" and the head of the previous season's bowling averages, represented tradition and the established order. He was a thick-set, bull-necked and slightly bandy-legged boy of sixteen with a complete inability to learn anything that had ever found its way into a book. For five terms he had resisted every effort of his form-master, Bracebridge, to lever him out of the Remove and on the eve of superannuation was still ranking as a junior, the object of veneration to new boys, of sympathy to those who were promoted over his head and of inarticulate dissatisfaction to himself. Something was wrong with a system that left him in Hall—the school slow bowler, still technically liable to be fagged. Something was wrong, and more was required to set it right than the veneration of new boys. And then there came a new boy who boasted he had never seen cricket played and never wanted to; who cut football practice and absented himself from Cup Ties; whose lashing tongue and the blasphemous resources of a dozen languages made short work of exhortations and protests and who seemingly came to Melton with no other object than a desire to revile every institution of public-school life. It was beneath Sinclair's dignity to hover on O'Rane's flank and whistle "Yankee Doodle," but he made himself the rallying point for all sane arbiters of good taste, and indulged in immeasurable silent disapproval.

One Saturday night I was having cocoa in Draycott's study—an æsthetic room with grey paper and a large number of Meissonier artist's-proofs. For bravado—or because Matheson seldom visited a monitor's study—one shelf of his bookcase was filled with the "Yellow Book," another with Ibsen's plays, and a third with the poetry of Swinburne. My host, chiefly memorable to me in those days by reason of his violet silk socks, was dispensing hospitality, when Loring drifted sleepily in and demanded to partake of the feast.

"You must bring your own cup or have a dirty one," said Draycott, inspecting his cupboard shelves.

"Bang on the door and get one washed," Loring recommended, throwing himself on to the rug in front of the fire.

"It's no good. All the fags are over in Matheson's side, getting Leave Out for Wednesday."

"Well, bang and go on banging. They must come back *some* time."

Draycott kicked the door and waited. The only fags in Hall at the time were Sinclair, whose leave had been stopped for the rest of the term, and O'Rane, who was going over to Crowley Court. Sam Dainton had undertaken to get leave for both. The law and custom of the constitution were thrown into conflict, for, while custom decreed that a "school Colour" was never fagged, in the eyes of the law Sinclair was technically "lag of Hall."

"Fag wanted," Sinclair murmured, hardly looking up from his imposition.

O'Rane, who had entered for the Shelton Greek verse prize and was engaged in making his fair copy, glanced casually round the room.

"*I'm* not lag," he observed.

At the sound of voices Draycott repeated his summons.

"I'm blowed if *I* go," said Sinclair. Then, as O'Rane sat bent over his copy of verses, "Go on, will you?"

"Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed
Murmured like a noontide bee,
Shall I nestle near thy side?
Would'st thou me? And I replied,
No, not thee!"

O'Rane read the lines aloud, dipped his pen in the ink and began writing.

"Of course, if you want me to *make* you . . ." said Sinclair menacingly.

There was a moment's pause, both boys rose from their seats, Sinclair took a step forward, they closed. What immediately followed is not clear, but, when Draycott indignantly flung his door open and advanced into Hall, he found Sinclair sprawling on the floor and gasping out, "You're breaking my arm, damn you!" while O'Rane sat on the small of his back and twisted his arm every time the words "Damn you!" passed his lips.

"Are you lag, Sinclair?" Draycott asked, artistically dispassionate. "Take this cup down and wash it."

Sinclair rose and obeyed; O'Rane returned to his interrupted copy of verses, and that same evening after prayers both were thrashed for the comprehensive offence of 'ragging.'

"I hope they make it hot for that young swine," Loring remarked, as he flung his cane into the corner. Many years had gone by since a member of the Team had been thrashed, but the case could not be overlooked. Feeling ran high in the studies, and a good deal higher in Hall. We could hear the Democracy working itself into a frenzy of indignation and sympathy, and the lights in Middle Dormitory had not been turned out for more than five minutes when Loring's prayer began to be answered.

We had adjourned to Tom Dainton's Spartan study—two uninhabitable chairs and a pair of boxing-gloves—and were still discussing the enormity of O'Rane's offence when a sound of scuffling made itself heard above. Then there came a thud, renewed scuffling, two more thuds, some angry voices, a fourth thud, a sharp cry—and sudden silence.

Loring leapt to his feet with anxiety in his grey eyes.

"Hope to God they haven't killed him!" he exclaimed.

We bounded up the stairs to Middle Dormitory. As our footsteps rang out on the stone floor of the passage, bare feet pattered over bare boards, and a dozen spring-mattresses creaked uneasily as their tenants leapt back into bed.

"What's all this row about?" Loring demanded, as he flung open the door.

The moonlight, flooding in through the uncurtained windows, showed us fifteen boys in bed, driven thither by an instinct older and stronger than chivalry; the sixteenth stood with his head bent over a basin, blood flowing freely from a cut on his forehead.

Loring picked his way through a jungle of scattered clothes and overturned chairs.

"What's happened, Palmer?" he asked.

"I knocked my head against the chest of drawers," was the strictly truthful answer. "It's only a scratch."

"Ragging, I suppose? Why were you out of bed after Lights Out?"

Palmer preserved a discreet silence.

"Anybody else been out of bed?" Loring demanded of the twilit room.

"Say, Loring, I guess this is *my* funeral," drawled O'Rane in answer. "*I* opened up his durned head for him."

"I was in it too," said Sinclair.

"So was I."

"So was I."

Loring turned to Palmer. "Put on a dressing-gown and go down to the matron's room. You other fellows—anyone who's been out of bed, put on his trousers and come down to my study. O'Rane and Sinclair, you stay where you are."

On the wholesale execution that followed there is no need to dwell. Castigation in bulk, for some obscure reason, was always known as a 'Regatta' at Melton, and, as Regattas went, this was celebrated on a lavish scale.

"Now I suppose I shall have to show that little beast up to Matheson," said Loring, when all was over. "And I hope Matheson 'll give it him tight. Life's not safe in the same house with him."

There was a knock at the door, and one of our late victims entered in tweed trousers, felt slippers, and pyjama jacket. The bitterness of death was past, and he smiled cheerfully.

"I say, Loring, you know, it wasn't altogether O'Rane's fault. I started it."

Loring looked at the speaker with cold surprise.

"So far as I remember, you've been dealt with."

"Yes, but I didn't want to get him into a row with Matheson. We were about ten to one."

"You seem to have come off second-best," suggested Draycott.

"I know. He's got some filthy Japanese trick. He'd take on half the school as soon as look at them. Palmer doesn't want a row on *his* account."

Loring meditated with his hands in his pockets. "Well, you go off to bed now, Venables," he said. "And when you get there, stay there. Good night."

There the matter ended for a time. After first Roll Call next day, Palmer embarked on a long and patient explanation of his bandaged head. He had been walking quietly down the middle of the dormitory when he caught his foot in the cord of someone else's dressing-gown. Pitching forward and trying to recover his balance . . . Matheson shook an uncomprehending head and hurried away to Chapel.

Public opinion in Hall rose tempestuously within measurable distance of assassination point.

IV

The morrow of the Regatta was a Sunday. I spent the morning dutifully writing to my mother in Ireland and in the afternoon suggested to Loring that if he wished to preserve his figure he had better come for a walk with me. The bait was taken. He had a horror of becoming fat, and, though in fact no heavier than was to be expected of a man with his frame, could usually be roused from his Sunday occupation of pasting book-plates into large-paper éditions-de-luxe by a hint that his weight was rising visibly.

We crossed Great Court, span a coin at Big Gateway and chose the Forest road in the direction of Crowley. As bounds—for all but monitors—ended at the far side of the cricket ground, we anticipated an uninterrupted walk. It was a mild afternoon for the end of October, and we went at an easy pace through the town and into the half-mile belt of trees that screened Melton from the south-west wind and marked the beginning of the long hill which sloped down and down past Crowley Court and Bishop's Cross to Southampton. Mr. Gladstone had died in the May of that year, and Loring, fresh from some hasty, ill-written memoir, was full of the dream once dreamt by the youthful Gladstone in the shadow of St. Peter's, that the world might one day see again the union of all Christian Churches. The traditional and picturesque had captured his imagination as they were to capture it throughout life. He re-created the dream with rare enthusiasm until we were brought to a standstill on the farther fringe of Swanley Forest.

Anyone who is familiar with the neighbourhood of Melton knows that the Southampton road takes a sharp turn to the right at the second milestone on leaving the Forest. We had pushed our way through the fallen leaves and rounded the bend, when I noticed a figure seated on the milestone. The back was turned to us, and the head was bowed as though in sleep.

Loring paused to inhale the sweet, heavy air of the pine woods.

"Humpty Dumpty will have a great fall," he remarked, "if he goes to sleep on milestones."

"It's somebody from the school," I said.

On the ground by the side of the stone lay a straw hat such

as—for no conceivable reason—we were compelled to wear in all weathers. Loring moved forward and then stopped suddenly.

"Oh, my Lord!" he exclaimed. "As if we hadn't thrashed the fellow till we were tired of it!"

I took a second look. The back was bowed till the shoulder-blades stood out in two sharp points, the chin rested on the knees and two thin hands were clasped round two thinner ankles. The attitude was unmistakable, even if I had not recognized the silky black hair floating back from the forehead as the wind blew softly inland from the sea. We walked on and stopped beside him; his eyes were gazing far out over the distant Channel, and he failed to observe our approach.

"A good view," said Loring.

"She's a Royal Mail boat. Lisbon, Gib., Teneriffe, B.A., Rio." I could hardly see the ship, but a wreathing spiral of smoke, mingling with the low clouds, gave me her position. "There's been a home-bound Orient, and two P. and O.'s, and a D.O.A., oh, and one British India. Two a minute, and steaming, steaming to the uttermost parts of the earth."

He spoke in a dreamy, sing-song voice, and his soul was five thousand miles from Melton.

"Is this a usual pitch of yours?" Loring asked.

"It is. When a man wants to think and be alone with no one but his own self by . . . There's days you can smell the sea, and days when the air's so clean and clear you could put out your hand and touch one of the little ships . . ." His voice sank almost to a whisper, ". . . to show the love you have for her, and the lonely, cold sea she's ploughing up into white foam."

Loring looked at me in amazement and shook his head helplessly. To him, who had at that time never set foot in Ireland, the soft and unexpected Irish intonation of O'Rane's voice conveyed nothing; he was as yet unacquainted with the Celtic luxuriance of misery.

"O'Rane!" I said.

His head turned slowly, and, as his eyes met ours, their expression was transformed. Dreaminess and melancholy rushed out of him as his spirit returned from afar; in less than a second he was English again—with occasional lapses into the cadence and phraseology of America.

"Guess I'm up against another of your everlasting rules, Loring," he said.

"The rules aren't mine," Loring returned pleasantly. "I

found 'em here—five years ago. I only have to see they're kept."

"And, if I try to break them, you'll try to break me? Do you think you'll succeed?" he demanded defiantly.

Loring laughed, and by the narrowing of O'Rane's eyes I could see he did not relish laughter at his own expense.

"I've never given the matter a thought."

"In ten—in eight days' time you'll thrash me for walking two miles through Swanley Forest?"

"No—for breaking bounds. If I *do* thrash you. Frankly, I'm getting rather sick of it. Probably you are too. I'm going to suggest that you should accompany Oakleigh and me back to school; you're not breaking bounds if you're with us."

O'Rane looked at him for a moment, and his lip curled.

"Mediaevalism tempered by Jesuitism."

Loring smiled good-humouredly. "Not very gracious, is it? And we probably shan't agree over Jesuits."

O'Rane, to his credit, blushed.

"I apologize. I forgot you were a . . ."

Loring waved away the apology.

"That's all right," he said. "But why come to the oldest school in England if you object to mediaevalism? Possibly you weren't consulted, but, as you *are* here, why not take the place as you find it, or else clear out?"

O'Rane's grip tightened on his ankles.

"I shall stay here till I'm ready for Oxford and I shall stay at Oxford till I've got everything this country can give me. Guess I've knocked about a bit in my time and somehow I was always on the underneath side. Greasy Levantines, Chinese storekeepers, American-German Jews. I'm a bit tired of it. I want to get on top. I've seen Englishmen in most parts of the world—mostly on top—I'm going to join 'em, and get some of my own back grinding other people's faces."

Loring looked at his watch.

"If you don't want to be late for Chapel, it's time we started back. Look here, grinding other people's faces is a laudable ambition so far as it goes, but it's all rather remote. How old are you? Fifteen? Well, you've got another three years here, and you can spend 'em in one of two ways. We can go on thrashing you this term at the rate of once in ten days; then you'll get into the Sixth, there won't be many rules to break, and, if you break 'em, Burgess 'll sack you.

That apart, you can go on living your present life, without a friend in the school, taking no share in the school, no use to man or beast. Or, on the other hand, you can make the best of a bad job and live on decent terms with your neighbours. I make no suggestion. I only ask if there's any particular point in regarding everyone as your natural enemy?"

We walked for a hundred yards or so in silence. Then O'Rane said:

"It doesn't occur to you that every man *is* the natural enemy of every other man?"

Loring flicked a stone out of the road with the point of his stick.

"Because it isn't true," he said.

"When there are two men and only food for one? You'd fight me to the death for that one loaf."

"In practice, yes. Theoretically, I should halve it with you. That's the sort of public-school idea."

"And it doesn't square with the practice. I'm out for the loaves before someone else gets them."

"Always assuming he isn't stronger than you," said Loring.

"Then I'll try and make myself stronger than him."

"And the end of the world will come when the strongest man has starved everyone else. A happy world, O'Rane, a happy end to it, and a glorious use of physical strength."

"That's been the world's rule so far."

"Utter bunkum!" Loring stopped and faced his antagonist. We had reached the cricket ground and the beginning of bounds, so that O'Rane no longer needed a convoy. "For the first years of your life you were so weak that it took one woman to feed you and another to put your clothes on so that you shouldn't die of exposure. On your theory there wouldn't be a woman left alive, far less a child. You must find some other answer to the riddle of existence. You can't do much with all-round hate and promiscuous throat-cutting."

"If someone takes a knife to me, I'll try to get in first blow," O'Rane persisted obstinately.

"Well, that's a slight improvement on knifing at sight. The next discovery for you to make is that your neighbours don't *all* want to trample on you."

O'Rane's eyes fired with sudden, vengeful passion.

"Guess you were born on top, Loring."

"Yes, I've had a very easy time." He swung his stick

thoughtfully and looked up the hill at the school buildings aglow in the light of the setting sun. "But it hasn't made me want to walk on other people's faces. You see, one day the positions might be reversed, so why make enemies? Besides, there's enough misery in the world without adding to it unnecessarily. If I had any energy to spare, I might even try to reduce it. Overhaul your philosophy a bit, O'Rane." A child, bowling a hoop, ran down the road and narrowly avoided treading on my toes. Loring pressed the incident into service. "On your showing, Oakleigh ought to have brained that kid, instead of which he moved politely out of the way. The strong yielding to the weak. Think it over, and you'll find life isn't a bit clear cut. It's full of inconsistencies and oppositions and compromises; we do things for the most illogical reasons. Well, you're back in bounds, and, if you like to stay, you can, and, if you prefer to go on by yourself, we shan't be offended. You're going on? All right; good-bye."

As O'Rane strode away in the twilight I complimented Loring on his discourse.

"The heavy father," he muttered. "And a fat lot of good it's done. You know, that fellow's three parts mad. What were his people thinking about, sending him here?"

"I don't think he's got any," I said.

Loring linked arms with me, and we returned to the school without the exchange of a word. As we entered Big Gateway, he observed:

"He must have been pretty well hammered by someone to get into this state."

And half-way across Great Court I heard him murmur:

"Lonely little devil."

V

Three days later came the second Leave-out Day of term. Loring and I had been invited over to Crowley Court, and after Roll Call we changed our clothes and assembled outside Burgess's house to await the racing omnibus that Dainton was bringing to meet us.

"Are we all here?" Tom asked, as his father came in sight, walking the horses slowly up the hill.

"O'Rane's not coming," Sam answered. "He hasn't finished his 'Shelton' yet."

"All aboard then."

We drove away through the Forest belt, made a large luncheon at Crowley Court, spent the afternoon engaged in a sanguinary ratting expedition round Dainton's farm buildings and returned to Melton in time for house prayers. When we left in the morning, Sinclair and O'Rane had been seated at opposite ends of Hall, employed respectively on overdue impositions and a prize copy of verses. On our way back we passed them walking arm in arm up the hill to Big Gateway and found them, later in the evening, sharing the same form in front of the fire and talking in apparent peace.

"The age of miracles is not yet past," I said to Loring, as I went in to prayers.

"O'Rane told me they'd made it up," he answered, "when he came in to take my boots down."

A term or two later I heard the story of the reconciliation. As the last of us left the house for Leave Out, O'Rane picked up his papers, flung them into his locker and crossed to Sinclair's end of Hall.

"May I speak to you a moment?" he asked.

"It's a free country," was the uncompromising answer.

"Well, I guess there's a certain amount of unfriendliness between us. Is there any use in keeping it up?"

Sinclair looked at him in some surprise, then returned to his writing.

O'Rane sat down on the table, and Sinclair ostentatiously gathered up his books and retired to a window-seat where there was only room for one. "I'm quite happy as I am," he said.

"See here," said O'Rane, without attempting to follow him, "it's going to be a bit awkward if we live three years in the same house without speaking."

"Don't worry about me," Sinclair answered, without looking up. "I shan't be here three years."

"Well, two, if you're so blamed particular."

"Or two either. They'll fire me out at the end of this term."

O'Rane jumped down from the table and walked to the window with his hands in his pockets.

"What the deuce for?" he demanded.

"Super-ed of course, you fool."

Softly whistling, O'Rane picked up the first half-finished imposition.

"Won't you get your remove?" he asked.

"Not an earthly. *I* can't do their dam' stuff."

"You can do this thing: A train going forty miles an hour . . ."

Sinclair flamed with sudden anger.

"Oh, do, for God's sake, go away and leave me in peace," he cried. "I dare say it's all very easy for people like you . . ."

"But I'll show you how to do it."

"I don't *want* to be shown. If I've been shown once I've been shown a million times. It's *no good*! Bracebridge says, 'D'you follow that?' and I say, 'Yes,' and all the time I've not the foggiest conception what he's driving at."

Taking the pen from the other's hand O'Rane wrote down three lines of figures and handed Sinclair the answer.

"And what good d'you think that is?"

"I just think that this is a poorish way of spending a Leave-out Day," O'Rane answered. "If you finish the things off . . ."

"It's all right, my leave's stopped."

O'Rane propped Sinclair's book against the window-ledge and began writing. Outside the sun was shining in the deserted Great Court, and a southerly breeze caught up the fallen creeper leaves and blew them with a dry rustle across the grey flagstones.

"That's no reason for wasting all day over muck of this kind," he remarked. "One pipe letting water into a cistern at the rate of ten gallons a minute, and another pipe letting it out. . . . If you make up your mind to get a remove, guess nothing'll stop you. That's the way I regard the proposition. If you make up your mind to do any dam' thing in this world. . . . Turn up the answers, and see if I've got it right. Our old friend the clock: when will the hands next be at right angles? Echo answers 'When?' I wonder if anybody finds the slightest use for all this bilge when once he's quit school. Turn up the answers. *He's* fixed. How many more have you got to do?"

"Four."

"Anything else?"

"An abstract of three chapters of Div." Sinclair had almost forgotten the quarrel and the enormity of O'Rane's "Side," and was looking with surprised admiration at the quickly moving pen.

"We'll do that this afternoon. I'll give tongue, and you can write it down. See here, surely if you can make old man

Bracebridge give you—or us—decent marks every day for prep. . . ."

"That won't help in the exams."

O'Rane worked three more problems in silence; then he said:

"We must fix the exams. somehow. I don't see it yet, but it can be done. We'll circumvent Bracebridge. And the answer is one ton, three hundredweights, no quarters, eleven pounds, twelve ounces." He threw down his pen and rose with a yawn. "Come for a walk; it's only eleven."

Sinclair felt that some expression of thanks was due from him. It was not easy to frame it, and he was still half-consciously resentful of O'Rane's unasked interference.

"Aren't you taking Leave?" he growled.

"No."

"I thought you were going home with young Dainton."

"I cried off."

A ray of light struggled fitfully through the clouds of Sinclair's brain.

"Did you stay here just to ass about with this filth?" he demanded, rather red in the face, pointing contemptuously to the pile of impositions.

"Well, as I was doing nothing . . ."

"Rot! Did you or did you not?"

"Yes; I did."

Sinclair meditated in an embarrassed silence; then he held out his hand.

"You know, Spitfire, you're not half such a swine as I thought," he admitted handsomely.

"Go and get your hat," O'Rane ordered. "I'll wait for you on Little End."

They walked in Swanley Forest till luncheon, returned to Matheson's for a hurried meal, and set out again along the favourite, forbidden Southampton road. As we returned from Crowley Court, we passed them between the cricket ground and Big Gateway, trudging with arms linked, tired and happy. At the porter's lodge O'Rane darted aside to inspect the notice-board.

"I wanted to see when the Sheltons had to be sent in," he explained.

"Are you going in for it?"

"I don't know. They've got to reach Burgess tomorrow. Come back to Matheson's and finish the Div."

In the still deserted Hall Sinclair sat, pen in hand, while

O'Rane rapidly turned the pages of an Old Testament history and dictated an irreligious abstract. As each sheet was finished, it was blotted and placed on one side. Once O'Rane exhibited some modest sleight of hand. Sinclair had written his name at the top of a fresh piece of paper, and before anything could be added O'Rane begged him to poke the fire. On his return to the table the sheet had disappeared.

Late that night, when Leave was over, and Hall resounded with the voices of elegant young men in brown boots, coloured waistcoats and other unacademic costume, O'Rane descended with inkpot and pen to the changing-room. Seating himself on an upturned boot-basket, he produced from one pocket the foolscap sheet with Sinclair's name at the head, from another an incredibly neat fair copy of a set of Greek Alcaics. Working quickly and in a bad light he produced a far from tidy version, with sloping lines, sprawling characters and not infrequent blots. As the prayer-bell began to ring he endorsed an envelope with the words, "Shelton Greek Verse Prize: The Rev. A. A. Burgess, Litt.D.," and dropped it into the house letter-box.

A week later the results were announced in Great School. We were assembled for prayers when Burgess walked down between the rows of chairs, mounted the dais and paused by the Birch Table. In his hand was the Honour Book, in which were entered the names of all prize-winners together with the subject set and the winning composition. Leaving the book on the table, he unslung his gown from his shoulder, pulled it over his cassock and sank into the great carved chair of Ockley in the middle of the Monitorial Council, facing the school.

Sutcliffe, the captain, seated on his right, inquired if the Shelton Compositions had been judged.

"Aequam memento rebus in arduis
Servare mentem,"

Burgess answered. "Thou art not the man, laddie."

"Is it Loring?" I asked from the other side.

"The prize has not gone to my illustrious Sixth."

"O'Rane," Loring murmured, looking down the school.

"Neither to the less illustrious Under Sixth," said Burgess. He arose and strode to the Birch Table. "The result of the Shelton Greek Verse Prize is as follows: First, Sinclair. *Proxime accesserunt* Sutcliffe and Loring. There were twenty-three entries. I believe this is the first time the

prize has been won by a member of the Remove. Sinclair will stay behind after prayers."

He stalked back to his seat, and the school, after a moment's perplexed hesitation, broke into tumultuous applause. As the name was given out I heard a whispered, "Who? Sinclair? Rot!" Yet there was no one else of that name in the school. Bracebridge spun round in his chair to gaze at his astonishing pupil, and I could see Sinclair, scarlet of face, half-rising from his seat, when Burgess threw his cassock on to the floor and intoned the "Oremus."

There was little reverence in that day's prayers. As monitor of the week I knelt in front of the Birch Table and out of the corner of my eye could see the Fourth patting Sinclair surreptitiously on the back and the Shell turning round with admiring grimaces. Burgess alone seemed unsurprised. "*In nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti,*" he intoned as I finished reading prayers. "*Ire licet,*" he called out, as I returned to his side. The lower forms filed out, till the whole of Great School below the dais was empty, and Sinclair stood blushing by the Birch Table. Burgess opened the Honour Book and ran quickly through the back pages for two years.

"This is the first school prize thou hast won, laddie?" he demanded. "Let it not be the last. Come hither, and on the tablets of thy mind record these my words. Here thou writest thy name, and here the date, and here the English and here thy polished Greek. In a fair, round hand, laddie."

He closed the book with a snap and struggled out of his gown.

"I'm . . . I'm afraid there's a mistake, sir," Sinclair stammered.

"It is as thou sayest. A proparoxyton in the third line where an oxyton should have been. I am an old man, broken with the cares and sorrows of this life, but it may be thou wilt live to see a murrain upon the land, destroying the Scribes of Oxford and the Pharisees of Cambridge, and on that day the last Greek accent will be flung headlong into the Pit. Till that day come, thou shalt continue to pay thy tithe of mint and dill and cummin to the monks of Alexandria."

Sinclair stared at him in piteous bewilderment.

"But I never wrote those lines, sir," he protested.

"Small were thine honour, laddie, if thou hadst." He glanced at the topmost of the pile of compositions. "Of the

making of blots there is no end. Wherefore I said, 'in thy fairest, roundest hand.'"

He rose to his feet and walked down school, while the rest of us followed a few paces behind. Sinclair made one last attempt.

"Sir, I don't know what an Alcaic *is*!"

Burgess laid a hand on his shoulder.

"When the sun of yestere'en sank to rest, laddie, I sat in judgement on these verses. And when he rose in the east this morning, lo! I laboured still at my task. Peradventure thou didst write them in thy sleep. Peradventure as in the book of 'Trilby'—nay, laddie, start not! it is no play of Sophocles. But why vex the soul with idle questionings? Should thy feet bear thee to the Common Room, laddie, I pray thee ask Mr. Bracebridge to commune with me in my house. Mine eyes are dim, yet I descry a young man by the steps of the Temple. Thou sayest it is the young O'Rane? Bid him to me, an he be not taken up with higher thoughts. Good night, laddies!"

With an answering 'good night' we dispersed to our houses and left him to walk across Great Court with O'Rane.

"In the third line, laddie," I heard him beginning, "a proparoxyton where an oxyton should have been."

O'Rane looked up, unabashed, but with generous admiration.

"Didn't I make it oxyton, sir?" he asked.

"Thou didst not. And wherefore didst thou counterfeit the image and superscription of Sinclair?"

O'Rane hesitated discreetly, but, as Burgess too was silent, he elected to embark on a candid explanation.

"*He* wrote his name, sir, and then I bagged the paper . . ."

"'Bagged,' laddie? What strange tongue is this?"

"Stole, sir. I stole the paper and wrote the verses underneath. He doesn't know anything about it."

"Yet wherefore?"

O'Rane shrugged his shoulders.

"It seemed such rot—so hard on him, sir, to be super-ed just because he can't get his remove."

Burgess smoothed his beard and looked at O'Rane with tired, expressionless eyes.

"But the marks for the Shelton Prize are not taken into account in awarding removes," he said.

"No, sir, but you yourself said he was the first fellow to

win the prize out of the Remove. It'll be jolly hard to super him after that."

They had crossed Great Court and were standing at the door of the Head's house.

"And thine own day of reckoning, David O'Rane? Whereof shall that be?"

O'Rane made no answer for some moments; then in a tone from which he strove in vain to banish the note of disappointment:

"I've lost the prize, sir, anyway."

"Thou wilt yet be young when the season returns to us again. But thou hast made of me a mockery and a scorn in the market-place. An thou trip a second time, this place will know thee no more. Good-night, laddie."

"Good-night, sir, and thank you, sir." He lingered for a moment. "Sir . . ."

"Go thy ways in peace, David O'Rane."

"Sir, how did you know it was I?"

"Me, laddie, me. For thirty lean years have I wrestled with the tyranny of Miles Coverdale. Laddie, I am old and broken, but whensoever thou hast stripes laid upon thee for contumacy, whensoever thou breakest bounds or breakest heads, whensoever thou blasphemest in Pentecostal tongues, be assured that the Unsleeping Eye watcheth thee. And now Mr. Bracebridge would have speech of me."

O'Rane turned away, and Burgess addressed the newcomer.

"I'm starting an Army Class this term," he said. "I shall take Sinclair from your form."

"I didn't know he was thinking of the Army," answered Bracebridge.

Burgess fitted his latch-key into the door.

"The Lord will provide," he observed mournfully.

VI

The episode of the Shelton Greek Verse Prize marked a turning-point in O'Rane's early career at Melton and revealed to me for the first time his resourcefulness and concentrated determination no less than his innate and unconscious love of the dramatic. The story was all over the house that evening and was to spread throughout the school next day. Ishmael found himself of a sudden venerated and

courted, and to do him justice he was far too young and human to remain uninfluenced. "Spitfire" dropped into desuetude as a nickname and was replaced by "Raney"; there were no more concerted "raggings" or resultant cut heads, and the former eccentricities of an outsider became the caprices of a hero. In a night and a morning O'Rane became a political leader.

The change was effected with little or no sacrifice of principle. He still came up for judgement before us once every ten days and was formally and efficiently chastised until the end of term, when he received his remove into the Sixth. The flow of his criticism was unchecked, but no longer so bitterly resented. With a little assistance from Sinclair and Mayhew, his social qualities were brought into play: we would hear his voice leading an unlawful sing-song in Middle Dormitory, occasionally he contributed to Mayhew's manuscript "Junior Mathesonian," and an echo of wild stories came to us with all the violence and bloodshed of the late Græco-Turkish War, to be followed by anecdotes of life in the Straits Settlements and Bret Harte tales of the Farther West. No one believed a half of what he said, but the stories —as stories—were good. His personality developed and lent weight to his opinions and criticism; he grew gradually more mellow, less alien in speech and habit of mind. His face became less thin, and the practice of promiscuous expectoration left him.

I was to have ocular proof of his new ascendancy before the end of term. The evening of the last Saturday I was condemned to spend in Hall. There was a high, three-panelled board over the fireplace, carved with the names of monitors and members of either Eleven, and, as I was at that time credited with some facility in the use of a chisel, the unanimous vote of my fellows entrusted me with the arduous task of bringing the jealously guarded record up to date. Planting a chair in the fireplace, to the enduring mortification of a chestnut-roasting party, I settled to my work. The fags gradually resumed their interrupted occupations, and in the intervals of hammering I caught fragments of triangular conversation.

"I say, Raney," Palmer began, "is it true you're coming to watch the Cup Tie on Tuesday?"

O'Rane, seated for purposes of his own on the top of the lockers, six feet up the side of the wall, grunted and went on reading.

"It isn't compulsory, you know," Palmer went on. "You won't be thrashed if you don't."

"Silence, *canaille*," O'Rane murmured.

"I suppose you know the way to Little End? Across the court and under the arch . . . I'll show you, if you like. The Matheson colours are blue and white. The game's quite easy to follow. There are two goals . . ."

O'Rane yawned indolently, closed his book and threw it at the speaker.

"See here, sonny, you'll rupture yourself if you do too much funny-dog. I'm just coming to your dime-show to watch you beach-combers doing your stunt. And when it's all over I want you to start in and tell me what good you think you've done."

One or two voices raised themselves improvingly in defence of sport, the tradition of fair play, working for one's side and not for one's self, physical fitness and the like—much as Loring had done a few weeks earlier.

"You bat-eared lot!" was O'Rane's withering commentary.

"Everyone knows you're an unpatriotic hog," observed Venables.

"'Cos I don't kick a filthy bit of skin about in the slime? You lousy, over-fed lap-dog, a fat lot you know about patriotism! See here, Venables, what *use* d'you think you are? Can you ride? No. Can you shoot? No. Can you row? Can you swim? Can you save yourself a God-Almighty thrashing any time I care to foul my hands on you?"

"If you fought fair . . ." Venables began indignantly.

"I fight with my two hands same as you. 'Course, if you fool round with your everlasting Queensberry Rules, don't be surprised if I hitch you out of your pants and break an arm or two. And, meantime, you sit and hand out gaff about patriotism and the fine man you're growing into by playing football. All the time you know you'd be turned up and smacked if you didn't, and you don't cotton on to that. I've a good mind to take you in hand, Venables."

Mayhew, who was struggling with the current number of his paper, laid his pen down and addressed the meeting.

"Proposed that O'Rane do now shut his face," he suggested.

"Seconded!" cried Sinclair, who was lying on his back in the middle window-seat, drinking cocoa through a length of rubber tubing stolen from the laboratory.

O'Rane smiled and drummed his heels against the echoing locker doors.

"Sinks, come here!" he commanded.

There was no movement on Sinclair's part.

"Laddie!" O'Rane's voice took on the very spirit of Burgess. "I'm an old man, broken with the cares and sorrows of this life. I pray thee come to me lest a worse thing befall thee. For and if thou harden thine heart, peradventure I may come like a thief in the night and evilly entreat thee so that thou shalt wash thy couch with thy tears. Then shall thy life be labour and sorrow."

Unprotesting and under the eyes of Hall, Sinclair rolled off the window-seat and ambled round to O'Rane's corner.

"What's the row?" he demanded.

"I'm going to make a man of Venables—make men of them all," was the reply.

There was a whispered consultation, and I caught "Mud-Crushers"—contemptuous appellation of a despised Cadet Corps. "No, I'm blowed if I do," Sinclair flung up to the figure on the lockers. "*I* will if *you* will," whispered O'Rane. A moment's hesitation followed. "It'll be rather a rag," Sinclair admitted.

"We'll start on Palmer," O'Rane pronounced. "He's the biggest. Hither, Palmer."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Palmer, still with a cross of sticking-plaster on his forehead, look up from his book.

"Go to——," he began valiantly enough, and then anti-climactically as he caught sight of me, "What d'you want?"

"Thee, laddie. Sinks and I are old men, broken with the cares and sorrows of this life. If you *don't* come, I don't mind telling you you'll get kidney-punch in Dormitory to-night. That's better. I'm joining the Mud-Crushers on Monday. Sinks is joining too. He didn't want to, but I threatened him with kidney-punch."

"More fool him," returned Palmer, preparing to go back to his book.

"Half a sec.," cried Sinclair, with a restraining hand on his shoulder. "Raney and I are joining the Mud-Crushers on Monday. If you don't join too, and recruit Cottrell, you'll get kidney-punch from us both."

Palmer looked his persecutors up and down. He was no coward and would have left enduring marks on Sinclair, but

of O'Rane's disabling, Japanese methods no one had yet made beginning or end.

"But what's the good of my mucking about in a filthy uniform?" he demanded. "I'm going to be a land agent."

"Decide. Don't argue," ordered O'Rane. "Think how useful a little rifle practice will be when you're invited to murder hapless driven birds."

"But it's all rot . . . "

O'Rane waved him away. "If you will arrange to be in bed at 9.45 to-night, Sinks and I will give ourselves the pleasure of waiting on you."

Palmer hesitated a moment longer.

"Oh, anything for a quiet life," he exclaimed.

"Now go and recruit Venables," said O'Rane. "Sinks and I are old men, broken with the cares and sorrows of this life. We should hate to be dragged into a vulgar brawl, but you may use our names as a guarantee of good faith. I saw a man killed with a kidney-punch out in Kobe once."

The recruiting was going briskly forward when I gathered up my mallet and chisel, picked the chair out of the fireplace and returned to my study. Early in life O'Rane had learned three lessons in collective psychology: a sense of humour is a strong ally; fifty sheep follow when one has butted a gap in a hedge; and the basis of democracy is that all men are entitled to see that their neighbours suffer equally with themselves.

After Third Hour on Monday a batch of forty-three recruits (the Corps was unfashionable in Matheson's) presented themselves at the door of the Armoury graded according to height. I was passing through Cloisters with Tom Dainton, and we heard Sinclair's voice leading the marching song:

"Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em!"

The words aptly described the internal relationships of the Press Gang. The smallest fag marched under the suspicious eye of one slightly larger than himself, the slightly larger was in turn under the surveillance of a fag yet larger. There was an eleventh-hour flicker of mutiny, promptly extinguished.

"I'm hanged if I can see the fun of this," cried Venables, flinging down the pen.

Sinclair, Palmer and Cottrell had already signed and were with difficulty restrained from tearing the would-be deserter limb from limb.

" It's the damnedest silly rot I was ever mixed up with," he grumbled, as he signed his name viciously in the Recruits' Book. " Nobody but a congenital idiot like Raney—— Here, Carlisle, come and sign, curse you ! "

Two days later, term came to an end. My mother and sister were in Cairo, and as I did not fancy spending Christmas by myself in the wilds of the County Kerry, I had accepted Loring's invitation to stay with him in London. We were almost the last to shake little Matheson's hand and leave the house, for Loring never cared what train he took, so long as he was not hurried. He was now lying contentedly back in his arm-chair, divested of his responsibilities as Head of the house and appreciatively tasting the first savour of the holidays. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and O'Rane had just finished packing the last box of books.

" Is there anything more ? " he asked, stretching his back and brushing the dust from his clothes.

" I think not, thanks. You're not a bad fag, young man. I'm quite sorry you've got into the Sixth."

" No more of our ten-day meetings," said O'Rane.

Loring half-closed his eyes.

" Believe me or not," he said, " I always regarded those meetings as a blot on our otherwise delectable friendship. Are you going home for the holidays, Spitfire ? "

" I haven't got a home," O'Rane answered, with a sudden return of his old sullenness.

Loring opened his eyes and bowed apologetically.

" Sorry. I didn't know. No offence meant. What *are* you going to do with yourself ? "

" Oh, I shall find something to do."

" Would it amuse you to stay with me any part of the time ? Oakleigh's coming, in case you feel you can't stand me alone. I'll take you to a Christmas pantomime as a reward for being a good little fag."

" It's awfully kind of you, Loring." O'Rane hesitated and grew very red. " I don't think I shall have time, though."

" Not for one night even ? Loring House, Curzon Street, will find me all the holidays."

" I'm afraid I shall be working."

" Bunkum ! You've not got any work to do."

" I *have*."

" What kind ? "

The old expression of defiance battling with prolonged persecution came into O'Rane's black eyes. " If you *must*

know," he said, "I came here with enough money for one term and I must raise some more. It's awfully kind of you, though. Good-bye. I hope you'll have a pleasant time. Good-bye, Oakleigh."

As the door closed behind him, Loring turned to me with a rueful shake of the head.

"I seem to have a genius for putting my foot into it with him," he observed.

"It couldn't be helped," I said. "He's a mysterious little animal."

Loring sat staring into the fire. At length he roused himself with the question:

"But what's he going to do with his little self? I rather feel as if I'd been what he'd call a 'God-Almighty brute' to him this term. I'd no idea he was . . . I wonder if the Guv'nor can do anything for him."

"I shouldn't dare," I said.

Loring stretched himself and reached for his coat and hat.

"Come along if we're going to catch the 4.10," he said. "I say, what a cheerful prospect for the little beast to look forward to, if he has to do this every holiday."

We were a small party at Loring House that Christmas. The Marquess divided his time between London and Monmouthshire according to the weather and the possibility of hunting; Lady Loring departed to San Remo with the New Year; and Lady Amy arrived spasmodically for a night and a day between visits to school friends, sometimes alone, but once with my cousin, Violet Hunter-Oakleigh, with whom at this time Loring was unblushingly in love. For the most part we had the great house to ourselves for such time as we could spare to be at home. And the arrangement suited all parties. Though devoted to his mother and sister, I always fancied there was a perplexed misunderstanding between Jim and his father. I do not suggest a want of affection, but their minds were cast in different moulds, and I sometimes wonder if the Marquess, with his zest for pleasure and society, ever found common ground with his serious, detached and incurably romantic son. Be that as it may, we had no time to get bored with our own society. Loring's passion for the theatre dated from early years, and if we went once we went five times a week for the period of the holidays. The day was not hard to get through, as we ran breakfast and luncheon into one, rode in the Park on fine afternoons and returned in time to drink a cup of tea, dress, and dine out at one

or other of Loring's favourite eating-houses. Lady Amy accompanied us when she was in town,—a tall, grey-eyed, dark-haired girl of sixteen she was then, wonderfully like her good-looking brother in speech, appearance and manner,—but as a rule the two of us roamed London by ourselves.

Taken all in all, they were very pleasant holidays, though in the last seventeen years I have forgotten nine-tenths of what we did or where we went. Our New Year's Eve party, however, lingers in my memory. Lord Loring took us all to supper at the Empire Hotel. It was the first time I had been there, and from our place overlooking the river we commanded the room. To this day I can recall something of the crowded, brilliantly lit scene : the little tables with their pink-shaded lights, the red uniforms of the orchestra, the waiters in their knee-breeches and silk stockings, the white shoulders of the women and the shimmer of their diamonds. Party followed party, till it seemed as if the great room could never contain them, and in the entrance-hall beyond the stairs we could see fresh parties arriving, more ermine cloaks being shed, new ranks of men settling their waistcoats and straightening their ties as they approached with an air of well-bred, bored indifference, bowing to friends here and there and working slowly forward in search of their tables.

"Not a bad sight, is it?" said Lord Loring. "They stage-manage the thing very fairly well. If only our waiter would unbend to take our orders." He looked round and caught sight of the manager with a plan of the restaurant in his hand, allotting tables and ushering parties through the narrow gangways.

"I'll catch hold of this fellow," said Jim, rising up and intercepting the manager. There was a moment's conversation, punctuated by deprecatory play of the hands and apologetic shrugging of the shoulders. "He says our man will be here in a minute. A wild Grand Duke has just arrived here from Russia and lost his suite on the way. Apparently our waiter is the only man who speaks the lingo."

Lord Loring accepted the situation and began to describe the arrangements for marking the arrival of midnight. On the first stroke of twelve all lights were to be put out; as the last died away there would be a peal of bells, limelight would be thrown on the entrance-hall, and a sledge drawn by dogs would make its appearance with a child on board to symbolize the advent of the New Year . . . He interrupted his

account to give the order for supper to our waiter who had at last arrived.

"Then link hands for 'Auld Lang Syne,'" added Lady Loring.

At that moment I received a disconcerting kick and looked up to find Jim gazing at the end of the table where his father was seated. I followed the direction of his eyes, saw the waiter raise his head and take the wine-list, and as he did so I caught a glimpse of his face.

In a claret-coloured livery coat, black knee-breeches and white stockings stood David O'Rane. Our eyes met, but he gave no sign of recognition and a moment later he had hurried away with an obsequious, "Very good, my lord."

As we waited for our coats an hour or two later, Jim whispered, "I'm going to tell the Guv'nor. It's hardly decent, you know. A Meltonian assing about like that. The Guv'nor must get him out of it." He turned to his father. "I say, dad, did you particularly notice our waiter?"

"Yes. Rather a capable youngster, I thought."

"Well, he's . . . he's . . ." Jim stammered unwontedly and seemed suddenly to repent his purpose.

"What about him?" asked Lord Loring.

"Oh, nothing. He comes from Melton, that's all."

"From the 'Raven'?"

"No, another place farther up the hill," Jim answered vaguely.

"Funny you should meet him here," observed Lord Loring, as he lit a cigar.

And with those words the subject was dropped.

CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF AN ENGLISHMAN

τὴν τε γὰρ πόλιν κοινὴν παρέχομεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτε ξενηλασίαις ἀπείργομέν τινα ἢ μαθήματος ἢ θεάματος, ὃ μὴ κρυφθὲν ἄν τις τῶν πολεμίων ἰδὼν ὠφεληθείη, πιστεύοντες οὐ ταῖς παρασκευαῖς τὸ πλέον καὶ ἀπάταις ἢ τῷ ἀφ' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἐς τὰ ἔργα εὐψύχῳ· καὶ ἐν ταῖς παιδείαις οἱ μὲν ἐπιπόνῳ ἀσκήσει εὐθὺς νέοι ὄντες τὸ ἀνδρεῖον μετέρχονται, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀνειμένως διαιτώμενοι οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἐπὶ τοὺς ἰσοπαλεῖς κινδύνους χωροῦμεν.—THUCYDIDES, ii. 39

I

AFTER the tempestuous months consequent on O'Rane's arrival at Melton, the two succeeding terms were a time of slumber and peace. The omnibus study next to Prayer Room became vacant at Christmas, and on our return at the end of January we found Mayhew, Sinclair and O'Rane in possession. We found also an ominous hand printing-press clamped on to the window-sill, and from this injudicious outcome of an uncle's Christmas largess Mayhew set himself to produce a weekly sheet rivalling "The Times" in authority, the "Spectator" in elegance, and the "Junius Letters" in pointedness of criticism and personality.

Before the term was a month old the Editor had sunk to the thankless and unclean position of compositor, while O'Rane, with his natural taste for ascendancy, poured forth an effervescent stream of leaders, lampoons, parodies, dialogues, stories and poems. It was not easy for anyone of less dominant personality to get his voice heard or his pen's product read during the periods of O'Rane's midsummer madness. At such times he seemed to lose every restraint of sobriety and in a riot of high spirits would be found organizing stupendous practical jokes or subjecting the very stones of Great Court to satirical tirades in facile impromptu verse. Throughout life his vitality was amazing, and from time to

time at school and Oxford it seemed as though he must break out or choke.

Thanks to the printing-press, Mayhew found the circulation of the " Junior Mathesonian " rising with each issue. I have a complete set somewhere, and to read again the ebullitions of O'Rane's untiring pen is to see again the wild, black-eyed, lean-faced, Villonesque figure of the author. He was always at enmity with someone, and the last word in each altercation is usually to be found in his weekly " Dialogues of the Damned," in which the enemy of the moment is depicted explaining to the Devil his presence in hell.

Beresford, Second Master, headed the list. As a disciplinarian who had six several times failed to secure a headmastership elsewhere, he was a formidable authority on the rules and traditions of the school and knew to a nicety exactly where Burgess's loose grip and casual methods were lowering the prestige of Melton. Without in any way opposing the existing policy of letting the Sixth run the school, Beresford gladly conceded that the Sixth should at least set an example. This, he held, was not done when one member roamed dreamily along the Southampton road and engaged in conversation with the varied, disreputable, semi-seafaring tramps who begged their way through Melton to London and on whose account the great road was put out of bounds for all juniors. Burgess declined to limit bounds farther, but supported his colleague to the extent of a few words with O'Rane—a course that strengthened Beresford's conviction that Melton was going to the dogs and sowed plentiful resentment in the breast of O'Rane.

I see no purpose in following up in detail the quarrel with Greenwood (Dialogue III) over the Promenade Concert and the unexplained wrecking of No. 1 Music Room ; nor with Ponsonby (Dialogue VII) over the Freedom of the Press. The " J.M.," smudgily printed by Mayhew and ornately illustrated by Draycott, was certainly not intended to enter the shabby, panelled Common Room over Big Gateway. The internecine animosity of the great, however, is sometimes more marked than their discretion, and Hanson, who had not spoken to Grimshaw since their whist quarrel five years earlier, allowed himself to be seen in one of the bursting Common Room arm-chairs with his feet in the fender and his trousers scorching, engaged in delighted perusal of the Grimshaw Dialogue. Inasmuch as Grimshaw favoured the boys of his own house against all comers, he was unpopular, and

the Grimshaw number of the " J.M." was received with grateful appreciation by all his colleagues, with the exception of Beresford, who had suffered in silence from an earlier week's attack. Succeeding issues were received with slightly less favour, as the minority of victims grew in number. With the appearance of " J.M. VII," Ponsonby decided to refer the case to Burgess, and with the support of six actual fellow-sufferers and a dozen awaiting their turn he constituted himself a deputation. The Head was sympathetic but not helpful. The paper, he pointed out, was issued only to subscribers and seemingly contained nothing of the blasphemous or obscene.

" If it were a matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness," said Burgess, " reason would that I should bear with you."

" I don't feel that any boy—let alone a Sixth-form boy—should be allowed to circulate studied insults to the Staff," rejoined Ponsonby.

" If it be a question of words and names," Burgess advised, " look ye to it."

" O'Rane's in the Sixth," Ponsonby objected. " Unless he's degraded from Sixth-form rank, what am I to do ? "

Burgess affected to think deeply.

" The Lord will provide," he said.

The " Dialogues of the Damned " are an incomplete series, arrested in mid-course at No. VII ; the " J.M.," however, had a life of more than two years and only died when O'Rane, as captain of the school, had to edit the official " Meltonian."

A remove into the Sixth at Melton marked an epoch in most lives. There was, and is, only one Burgess in the scholastic system, and until you met him five hours a day for six days a week you could form no estimate of the range of his knowledge. Every school has its Under Sixth, its Villiers and its mixed assembly of brilliant boys awaiting their remove, mediocre boys who have come to stay and dull boys charitably piloted and tugged into the haven of rest because their housemasters do not care to make monitors of boys in the Fifth. In my time the lot of Villiers was not to be envied, for the dullards slept, the mediocre ragged, and the scholars had to do their best to snatch instruction from the ruins of Babel, assisted by a man whose boast would never have been that he was a ruler of men or an inspired teacher and whose blood almost audibly rushed to his head as he strove to maintain discipline.

Thirty years before Villiers had taken a first in Mods.,

and though the fine edge of his mind had lost its keenness, he held to the Mods. tradition that the Classics should be read in bulk. That, indeed, is the best thing I remember about the man or his system. We scampered through the "Odyssey," "Æneid," and plays of Sophocles at a great rate and with no attention to detail. Pure scholarship, if it ever came, was to come later, and in the meantime Villiers saved succeeding generations from the reproach levelled against a classical education—that the fruit of many years' plodding is to be measured by the assimilation of one book of Horace's Odes or a single play by Euripides. Villiers left us, and we left Villiers, with more than a smattering of great literature.

In the Sixth we read as much or as little as we pleased. Most of us had a scholarship in view, and the degree of our unpreparedness was the degree of attention with which we confined ourselves to the texts. Beyond that minimum the rule was to sit and encourage Burgess to talk. Sometimes he would forget a book and, for want of fixed work, open a Lexicon and choose a word at random. He would give us the childhood and old age of that word, its parents and uttermost collaterals; and from a single word he would treat of ethnology as revealed by language and comparative civilization as measured by the limits of a vocabulary. And from comparative civilization to the institutions and faiths on which a society is built up—the religion and magic that shroud the dark days of the human mind.

Even to a temperamental iconoclast such as O'Rane, I fancy Burgess came as a revelation. At the term's end he showed me a manuscript book entitled "Notes on Theophrastus." To do Burgess justice we had read three pages in thirteen weeks; the rest of the book was consecrated to *obiter dicta*: "The Trade Routes of Turkestan"; "Lost Processes in Stained Glass"; "The Origin of Playing Cards"; "The Margin of Error in Modern Field Artillery"; "The Institution of Arbitrage"; "The Minaret as a Feature in Architecture"; "Surgery in Mediaeval China"—and a score of other subjects. Theophrastus bored us, and we decided to take him as read. The decision once adopted, there was no difficulty in keeping Burgess away from the text.

On reflection I think that O'Rane may, in his turn, have been a revelation to Burgess as much as to the rest of the form. If omniscience were the order of the day, O'Rane seems to have decided to be omniscient. It was a fixed principle with him

never to bring books into form. Burgess would look wearily round and say, " O'Rane, wilt thou read from ' Protinus Aeneas celeri certare sagitta,' laddie ? " And Raney, with his hands clasped behind his back and eyes gazing across to the big open fire, would recite thirty, fifty or a hundred lines as Burgess might decide, in a voice that would cause him to be taken untrained on any stage. In part it was a studied pose, in part I believe he never forgot anything he had twice read. And his memory was minutely accurate. I recall a disputation on one of Bentley's emendations of Horace ; neither Burgess nor O'Rane had a book, but each was prepared to go to the stake for his own version. Sutcliffe was eventually dispatched to School Library, and a reference to the text showed that Burgess was wrong.

" Where were you before you came here ? " Loring asked that evening, when O'Rane and I were sitting in his study after prayers.

" Guess I was in most places," O'Rane answered from the depths of the arm-chair and a book.

" Where were you educated, fathead ? And don't 'guess,' it's a vile Americanism."

Loring affected great precision of speech.

" I—fancy—I—received—instruction—from—numerous—persons—in—a—var-i-ety—of—places." And then with a sudden blaze of light in his big eyes :

> " Much have I seen and known, cities of men,
> And manners, climates, councils, governments,
> Myself not least, but honoured of them all . . .

My God ! ' honoured of them all ' ! " He stopped suddenly.

" The next time you break out, you'll get the cocoa-saucepan at your head," I warned him. " Now answer Jim's question."

O'Rane sat staring at the fire till Loring threw a waste-paper basket at him.

" If you start scrapping——" he began. " Oh, what was your dam' silly question ? Dear man, I was born in Prague, and, as I never stayed six months in the same country till I came to England, you can see my education was a bit of a mixed grill. Father . . ." he hesitated ; it was the first time I had heard him mention any relation, " . . . father used to teach me a bit himself. And once or twice I had a tutor. And for the most part he used to lay on a local priest. That's why I can hardly understand the way you chaps pronounce

Latin and Greek. And then the Great Interregnum, the Wanderjahre. . . ."

"Most of your life's been that," I commented.

"Ah, I did this stunt alone—before I came here. After the war."

"The Greek War?" Loring asked.

"Surely. They killed my father, did the Turks. And when I'd buried him there was nothing much to wait for. He'd given every last penny to the Greeks, so I cleared out and came to England, by way of Japan and the States and a few other places. It was all valuable experience," he added, with a concentrated bitterness that made my blood run cold. When O'Rane spoke in that tone, I could imagine him primed and anxious for murder.

> "And drunk delight of battle with my peers
> Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy,"

he went on. "'Delight of battle'! Oh, my God! These poets and modern war!"

"Did you see anything of it?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I was a kid of thirteen. I saw the—results . . . when they brought my father back to the Piræus."

Loring had been lying on his back with his hands locked under his head. He roused himself now to turn on one side and face O'Rane.

"Was your father Lord O'Rane?" he asked.

Raney's face grew hard and defiant.

"He was."

Loring nodded. "When he was killed the Guv'nor noticed the name. I rather think your property marches with some of ours. You're County Longford, aren't you?"

"The property is. I, Lord Chepstow, am what you would doubtless call a bastard."

Loring sprang to his feet.

"Raney, you damned little swine——!"

"It's true!" O'Rane answered, jumping up and facing him.

"It's not true that I would . . .!"

"Oh, perhaps not. But I've been called it—and by lineal descendants of the Unrepentant Thief, too. You've got nickel-plated manners of course."

"If you were worth a curse, you'd apologize," said Loring hotly.

O'Rane reflected.

"What for?" he demanded. "I'm not ashamed of my father, Loring."

"You'd be a pretty fair louse if you were. Don't make me lose my temper again, you little beast."

O'Rane held out his hand with a curious, embarrassed smile.

"Sorry, Loring. Is that good enough?"

"We can rub along on that."

Some years later my guardian, Bertrand Oakleigh, appeased my curiosity on the subject of the O'Rane fortunes. "The Liberator," after a crowded boyhood of agitation and intrigue, became so deeply implicated in certain acts of Fenianism that he had to leave Ireland in disguise and live abroad for the rest of his life. For thirty years he wandered from one capital to another, preaching insurrection and being disowned by the Government of his own country. When the Foreign Office papers of the period are made public, his name will be found forming the subject of heated diplomatic dispatches. As a neutral his conduct was far from correct in the Polish rising of '63 and the Balkan troubles of '76. When he lived as the guest of the exiled Louis Kossuth, pressure was brought to bear by the secret police, and he moved north into Switzerland. There he met Mrs. Raynter, one of the famous three beautiful Taverton sisters. The influence of Lord O'Rane's personality was not confined to political audiences: she lived with him for three years, and died in giving birth to a son. When Lord O'Rane himself succumbed to wounds received in the Græco-Turkish War, he was only in the fifties. The measure of his power and sway is to be found less in any positive achievement than in the terror he inspired in the less stable Governments of Europe from Russia to Spain.

II

Winter softened into spring, and spring lengthened into the summer that was to be my last at Melton. The few remaining months are engraved deeply on my memory as though I lived an intenser life to capture the last shreds of heritage that the school held out to me. As in a sudden mellowing I found myself on terms of unexpected friendliness with people I had previously disliked or despised. Beresford—lank disciplinarian—invited me to dine in College, and revealed himself unwontedly human and well-informed on Rudyard

Kipling; Ponsonby, whom I had lightly written off as a pretentious ass, proved on better acquaintance to be a man of self-paralysing shyness who lived in almost physical dread of his form; Grimshaw, most stolid of men in official life, shone without warning as a raconteur and mimic of his colleagues. I dined or breakfasted with them all, not excluding little Matheson with his unwieldy tribe of children, and we talked unbroken 'shop' and disinterred old scandals and parted with a sentimental, "You'll be sorry to leave Melton?" "Very sorry, sir."

The vanity of eighteen is long dead, and I can recall with amusement that I had serious misgivings for the school's future after I should have left. For five years and more it had been all my world. I remembered the veneration with which, as a fag, I had gazed on the gladiators of the Eleven and the Witan of the Sixth—gazed and flushed with self-consciousness and shy gratification when one of them ordered me to carry his books across Great Court. In time I too had made my way into the Sixth; there was at first nothing very wonderful or dignified about the position, but by no immoderate stretch of imagination I could fancy myself venerated as I had venerated the heroes of five years before. And without doubt I looked proudly on my work in the Monitorial Council: we had been strict but not harsh, reserved but not aloof, reformers but not iconoclasts—statesmen to a man. At every point we seemed superior to our immediate predecessors, and the only bitterness in our cup was brought by the reflection that this Golden Age would so soon pass away. It was inconceivable that youngsters like Marlowe, Clayton or Dennis could fill our shoes. They were boys. I remember that Loring and I took Clayton on one side and revealed some few of the secrets of our successful rule; I remember, too, how extraordinarily Clayton resented our patronage. . . .

The recorded history of the two last terms is meagre, but I recollect that O'Rane came twice into conflict with authority before we parted. The first time was an unhappy occasion when the May-Day celebrations of the Melton carpet-makers coincided with one of his periodical outbursts. A plethoric meeting of somnolent workmen was being somewhat furtively held in the more somnolent market square: moist, earnest speakers declaimed under a hot sun to a listless audience. When Dainton and I passed through the square, oratory was getting worsted, and the meeting was summoning resolution to spend the rest of the warm May afternoon in sleep. Then

O'Rane appeared galvanically from the West. And soon afterwards from the East, with dragging steps and eyes glued to his book, came Burgess in cap and cassock, his pockets swollen with the books he had bought in Grantham's.

That night O'Rane spent forty-five minutes in the Head's house—an unusual time for anything but sentence of expulsion. Loring and I were walking up and down Great Court with our watches in our hands, prepared to intercede with speeches of incredible eloquence if the worst came to the worst. Through the bright, unblinded library windows we could see Raney pleading; the back of Burgess's white head was visible above his chair, motionless, and seemingly inexorable.

"What's happened?"

The door had opened slowly and shut with a clang. O'Rane was walking towards us with a white face that belied his jaunty step.

"It's not to occur again." The anticlimax was an unintentional trick of phrasing. "Well, it won't. I can't work *that* lay a second time. D'you know he sacked me within five seconds of my entering the room? I—had—to—fight—for—very—life." He breathed hard, linked arms and marched us off for a walk round the Cloisters.

"Drive ahead," said Loring.

"'Laddie, thy portion is with the malefactors. Get thee gone and walk henceforth in outer darkness.' I say, the old man's formidable when he's angry. I said nothing, and he waved me to the door. I didn't move. 'Get thee gone, laddie,' he thundered, 'and let not the sun of to-morrow rise to find thee in this place.' I asked him what I'd done; he sort of suggested that I really knew all the time. I told him *my* version." O'Rane stopped and drew back a step with arms outstretched. "I told him I'd found that sweet May-Day meeting with pot-bellied whimperers gassing over an Eight Hours Day and drinking enough beer to drown 'emselves in. The May-Days *I* know were the ones where the mob broke up half Turin and were shot down by the soldiery: they were men with something to fight for—and ready to fight for it. These sodden voter vermin! If they'd organize with their cursed votes—if they'd fight—if they'd do anything—if they were in earnest——! My God, your English Labour!" His utterance quickened and his voice grew animated to the point of passion. "I told these scabrous dogs to put their lousy shoulders to the wheel. God knows what I didn't call 'em, but they were too sodden to mind, and

I found I was speaking in French half the time. Then they got an idea I'd come over from Paris to champion them, and they cheered no end. So I taught 'em the 'Marseillaise,' and half-way through the second verse Burgess drifted into view. I told him in his library as I'm telling you here . . ."

"I hope to the Lord you didn't!" Loring interjected.

"I told him every last word!" The Cloisters echoed with his excitement. "You bat-ears, you don't understand! *He* did!"

"What did he say?" I asked.

O'Rane hesitated. "He hinted that I wasn't accountable for my actions."

I burst out laughing. The words were so obviously inadequate.

"That's a curious reason for not sacking you," was Loring's comment.

O'Rane's black eyes, seemingly fixed on a gargoyle over Chapel door, were gazing into infinity.

"He said it was the Call of the Blood. And I—I—I just said nothing." His voice sank to a whisper. "I hardly understood."

The vision was for his eyes alone, and to us, uncomprehending, the rapt expression of his face and tense poise of the body were curiously disconcerting. Awkwardly self-conscious, Loring stepped forward and thrust his arm through O'Rane's.

"Pull yourself together, my son," he said.

O'Rane shook free of his arm. "You don't understand! But *he* did. He knew it all. There was one crossed to France in the Revolution, and him they guillotined because he was too powerful. And two died for Greece, and one went fighting for the North and the slaves. And one died by the wayside as the king's troops entered Rome. And one tended lepers in a South Pacific island." He strode up to Loring and stared him defiantly in the face. "And some day men will follow me as they never followed *one* of the others!"

"Come to earth, you lunatic," said Loring; and I was grateful to him for the chill banality of the words.

O'Rane turned disgustedly on his heel.

"You wouldn't understand if you lived to be a thousand," he flung back over his shoulder.

"Come back!" Loring called. "There's nothing to get shirty about."

"You've the soul of a flunkey!"

"All right; so much the worse for me."

"And anyone who's not got your own servants' hall spirit you call a lunatic!"

Loring sat down on the stone seat that ran round the inner wall of Cloisters and beckoned to O'Rane to join him.

"Come and cool down a bit, Raney," he urged. "And for the Lord's sake don't make such a row or you'll bring Linden and Smollett out of their rooms."

"You've got a bourgeois mind, Loring," said O'Rane reflectively.

"Agreed, but don't shout," Loring returned imperturbably. "I want you to tell me—*quite* quietly—how you prove your nobility of soul by running the risk of getting sacked for the sake of making an idiotic speech to a mob of workmen who didn't particularly want to hear you? You tell me I shall never understand, but do at least tell me what I've missed."

"A soul," O'Rane answered simply.

"It's like trying to argue with a woman," said Loring in despair.

The prayer-bell began to ring in the distance, and we made our way out of the Cloisters and across Great Court. O'Rane, at the last moment, decided to stay behind, and we left him curled up on the stone seat, his thin, clean features white in the moonlight and his great deep-set eyes gazing abstractedly across Fighting Green. He was back in Matheson's for Roll Call and sauntered into my study with his hands in his pockets and a straw in his mouth. The flame of emotion had burnt itself out, and he seemed cold, tired and a little melancholy.

"Humble apologies and all that sort of thing," he began, holding out his hand to Loring.

"You haven't yet told us why you did it?" I reminded him.

He wrinkled his brow and shook his head in perplexity.

"Didn't seem as if I could help it. 'Man was born free and is everywhere in chains.' I've been through it a bit—trying to get enough to feed and clothe myself—and it was hell. And sometimes it all comes back to me and I want to blow the whole world up. . . . And sometimes I dream what a glorious thing we could make of life, even for the men who sweep the chimneys and mend the sewers. . . . To-day . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "I'd forgotten the everlasting

Press. After the kings, the nobles; after the nobles, the people; and after the people, the Press. So Burgess says. And Melton's not strong enough to stand the racket if every beach-comber with a halfpenny in his pocket can read that a Melton boy led the 'Marseillaise' in market square."

"Quite right, too. It gives the school a dam' bad name."

"Oh, I agree—now," he answered limply. "He told me to choose my punishment."

"And what did you say?" I asked.

"I said, 'You aren't sacking me then, sir?' He said, 'Sacking, laddie? What strange tongue is this?' And then I knew I was all right. Clayton 'll be captain next year. He'd have made *me*, otherwise. Can't be helped. And I guess I got Melton in my vest pocket most ways. Good night, bat-ears. I'm going to bed."

As the door closed behind him Loring sighed to himself.

"If he isn't sacked for this, he'll be sacked for something else," he predicted. "I hope it won't be till I'm gone, because he refreshes me. D'you remember his first term?"

"He's extraordinarily popular now," I said.

"He's the most fearless little beast I've ever met. And there's such a glorious uncertainty about him. One moment he's your long-lost brother, the next he's slanging you like a pickpocket in about six languages, the next he's apologizing and shaking hands. I suppose he'll be captain the year after next. It'll be an eventful time for the school."

O'Rane's other conflict with authority was less impassioned and on a smaller scale. He had absented himself from Chapel for the better part of the term, and Burgess one day inquired the reason.

"I don't believe all the stuff they hand out there, sir."

"Have I asked thee to believe it, laddie?" demanded Burgess, who had almost ceased to expect polished diction from O'Rane.

"Well, sir, if I *pretend* to believe it . . ."

"Have I asked thee to pretend, laddie?"

"But, if I go, sir, people naturally assume . . ."

"And how long has David O'Rane given ear to the vain repetitions of the Synagogue and Market-place?"

For the moment Raney experienced some difficulty in finding an answer. Then he said:

"I'll go if you want me to, sir."

"Laddie, thou art of an age to determine this for thyself. I am an old man, broken with the cares and sorrows of this

life. Peradventure the wisdom and truth that were taught me while I hanged yet upon my mother's breast no longer charm the ears of the younger men. Peradventure

> 'The Saints and Sages that discussed
> Of the two Worlds so learnedly are thrust
> Like Foolish Prophets forth; their words to scorn
> Are scattered, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.'

Herein thou must walk thine own road, laddie.

> 'Certain points, left wholly to himself,
> When once a man has arbitrated on,
> We say he must succeed there or go hang.
> . . . . he must avouch,
> Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,
> The form of faith his conscience holds the best,
> Whate'er the process of conviction was:
> For nothing can compensate his mistake
> On such a point, the man himself being judge:
> He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.'

An thou thinkest thou canst learn aught from the life of the man Christ Jesus, laddie, thy time will not be lost."

Thereafter O'Rane attended Chapel with assiduity until the breaking-up service on the last day.

For weeks we had been saying good-bye to Melton, dismantling our studies, packing our books, seeking out porters and groundmen to press upon them our last tip. The final morning saw us seated betimes at Leaving Breakfast—a quaint Saturnalia whereat all discipline departed and every junior in Hall was compelled to read a rimed criticism of the departing monitors. I recall that Tom Dainton, who had almost single-handed won the Cricket Shield and established Matheson's in a tenth year of unbroken tenure, received a rousing send off; Loring and I were let down lightly, while Draycott was pointedly informed that his hair was unduly long and his clothes an eyesore.

We were allowed no reply to the chastening criticism, but acerbity was forgotten when we joined hands and sang "Auld Lang Syne" with one foot on the table. For five years to my certain knowledge the long table had collapsed annually under the unwonted strain; to break at least one leg was now part of the accepted ritual, and, though Matheson had spent money and thought on a cunning scheme of underpinning, by dint of concerted rocking and a sword-dance executed by Dainton, we wrung a groan from the ill-used board and doubled all four legs into the attitude of a kneeling camel before the bell sounded for first Roll Call.

My last Chapel was Loring's first. Catholic or no he felt the service was not to be missed. We sat side by side, and determined there should be none of the foolish weakness exhibited by other generations of leaving monitors. Yet as the organ started to play the last hymn, he failed to rise, and, as voices all round me began to sing " Lead, kindly Light," I found I could not join in.

From Chapel we went to Big School for our last Roll Call. The prize compositions of the year were read aloud, and the scholarship results at Oxford and Cambridge announced. There followed a long distribution of gilt-edged, calf-bound books; three malefactors were led to Bishop Adam's Birch Table and flicked publicly across the back of the hand; there remained but one thing more.

" School Monitors ! " Burgess called out.

All ten of us lined up facing the Council with our backs to the school. The birch was handed to Sutcliffe, who reversed it, restored it to Burgess and returned—divested of authority—to Second Monitor's seat. The ritual was repeated with the other nine, and Burgess called up the new monitors. To each of them the birch was handed and by each returned. Then Clayton, the Captain-Elect, rose from Sutcliffe's old seat, advanced to the edge of the dais, knelt down in front of the Birch Table, facing the school, and read the old Latin prayers that—despite their taint of popery—Queen Elizabeth had authorized us to continue, always provided we dropped the monkish pronunciation.

The last scene was laid in Burgess's library, where each of us was presented with a copy of Browning's " Men and Women."

" Peradventure ye have heard his words upon my lips ere now," he said. " Laddies, these partings like me not. I am an old man, broken with the cares and sorrows of this world, yet it may be that in this transitory life an old man's counsel may avail you in the dark places of the earth. Come to me, laddies, if ye judge not an old man's arm be too weak to help you. At this time and in this place will I say but this: Sutcliffe, thou wilt consume thy days weighing the jots and tittles of learning. Therein is thine heart buried, and I do not gainsay thee. Dainton, thou shalt be known in Judah as a mighty man of valour. Thou art ceasing to be a child and must put away childish things. Hearken no more to the voice of children playing in the market-place: gird thee for battle to be a soldier of the Lord. Oakleigh, thine

heart melteth away and becometh water all too easily. Thou hast riches and learning, but little singleness of purpose. Not for thee the dust of the arena—thou art too prone to hesitate and weigh thy doubt. Best canst thou serve thy neighbour by girding on the harness of others; thou hast friends and kinsmen in the first places of the Synagogue: succour them."

He looked at Loring and paused. "Laddie, I could have made of thee a scholar, but thou wouldst not. Thou canst be a statesman, but thou wilt not. The illusion of a great position surrounds thee, and thou art content to gather in thy vessels of gold and silver, thine ivory and peacocks, thy choice books and paintings. Anon thou wilt awaken and question thyself saying, 'Wherefore have I lived?' Ere that day come I counsel thee to journey to a far country on an embassage from thy soveran lord. I charge thee to scorn the delights of Babylon lest, in the empty show of Kingship, the vanity of gorgeous apparel, the uttering of words in thy Council of Elders, thou conceive that thy duty to God and to thy neighbour hath been fulfilled. Laddies, an old man's blessing goeth with you."

III

And thus we were taught and fitted to be rulers of men.

As the London train steamed away from Melton Station, Loring leant out of the carriage window for a last sight of the school buildings clustering white in the July sunshine on the crest of the hill. Secretly I believe we were both feeling what a strange place Melton would be without us.

"Six years, old son!" he observed, drawing his head in. "Dam' good years they were, too. Wonder how long it'll be before you Radicals abolish places like this."

"There are lots of other things I'd abolish first," I said. It was a mental convention with Loring to regard me as a jaundiced, fanatical Marat, and with the argumentativeness of youth I played up to his lead.

"What *good* has Melton done?" he challenged.

At one time my faith in public schools was such that I generously pitied anyone who had struggled to manhood in outer darkness. Infirmity of judgement or approaching middle age make it daily harder for me to divide the institutions of the world into the Absolutely Good or the Utterly Bad. It is probably wise to raise up a class of men who shall

be educated and not technically instructed—wide horizons and an infinite capacity for learning constitute an aim sufficiently exalted. That was the aim of Melton, and we were well educated within narrow limits that excluded modern history, economics, English literature, science and modern languages. We never strove to be practical and had a pathetic belief in the validity of pure scholarship as an equipment for life.

I still regard the study of Greek as invaluable training in accuracy, subtlety of thought and sense of form; but I am not so ready as once to go to the stake for Greek in preference to all other subjects. Again, I still hold that the character-moulding in a great public school is adequate—conceivably, however, as fine characters might be moulded in other ways, and there are moments when I sympathetically recall O'Rane's impatient oft-repeated outcry that England survived in spite of her public schools.

The good and bad were so inextricably mixed. Cricket and football kept us physically fit and morally clean; we learned something of co-ordination and discipline—as other nations may perhaps learn those same lessons from military training. We picked up an enduring and light-hearted acquaintance with responsibility and acquired among members of our own class a rigid sense of even-handed justice which I seem always to find breaking down when that same class is weighed in the scales against another. Most doubtful blessing of all, we were brought up to the public-school standard of conduct.

No foreigner, no Englishman unless he be of the public-school class, will ever understand that strange medley. It is triumphantly characteristic of higher social England in its inconsistency, its intolerance and its inadequacy; in its generosity, too, its loftiness and its pragmatical efficiency. I never 'sneaked,' though the price of silence were an undeserved thrashing; I never lied to master or monitor, though I have adorned my crimes before appearing in the dock; I never entered for an examination with dates or names scrawled on my cuff, though I habitually used translations, and syndicated my work with others in my form. The standard forbade the one and allowed the other, and I have spent half my life doing things that are rationally unjustifiable and only to be defended on the ground that they were Good Form. For all my Radicalism I was not brave enough to fling down the challenge.

There *is* no Radicalism in schools—I had no business to use the word. After devastating the Debating Society with proposals for disembowelling kings or strangling priests, I have gone back to my study and duly thrashed some junior who forewent the age-old custom of walking bareheaded past Burgess's house. Never once dared I stand up to the conventional, "Thou shalt not brag. Thou shalt not affect an interest in thy work. Thy neighbours' likes and dislikes shall be thine." The list could be extended indefinitely, and for ten years after leaving Melton I was to find those queer schoolboy limitations and inconsistencies reproduced throughout the governing class in England. "One must pay a cardsharper," says Tolstoi, in describing Vronsky's code of principles, "but need not pay a tailor; . . . one must never tell a lie to a man, but one may to a woman; . . . one must never cheat anyone, but one may a husband; . . . one must never pardon an insult, but one may give one, and so on."

In moments of uncritical pride I judge the tree by its fruit. It is the public-school men, grumbling at their work, who—shall we say?—govern the Indian Empire, with resentment of praise from others and no thought of praising themselves. Versatile, light-hearted and infinitely resourceful, if cholera sweep the land, they will step from one dead man's shoes to another's and leave a village to govern a province. Haggard and drawn with long weeks of eighteen-hour days, they will yet find time to mistrust the man who is not of their race or speech or school and growl at him who offends by his clothes or enthusiasms or aspirates. And the Indian Empire goes afresh to perdition with every new fall in the rupee or change in the colour of the Government minute paper. In moments of pride I think of the unwritten law "Thou shalt never let a man down": it is the breath of the public-school spirit. Yet criticism tells me that the public schools have no monopoly, and, if one miner be unjustly discharged from employment, a hundred thousand of his fellows will come out on strike.

"What good has Melton done you?" Loring blandly repeated.

In his mood of mockery I could not speak of my opal-tinted dreams, my consciousness that Melton and Burgess had inspired me with a hundred visions of mankind regenerated through my efforts. At eighteen everything seemed so easy: the world was blind but not selfish—except for the high and dry Tories who were to be quietly put out of the

way if they proved obdurate; everyone else would yield to reason—and my eloquence.

The favourite vision was a crowded meeting swayed to laughter or tears or passion by my words—a memory of Mr. Gladstone's last public speech on the Armenian atrocities. At other times, when my Irish fluency had been too rudely interrupted, I pictured myself as heir to Parnell's heritage of masterful silence. Cold, inflexible, contemptuous—I had seen him in Dublin when I was a boy of seven, and externals counted for so much that will-power seemed a matter of compressed lips and folded arms. I was but eighteen, and my Radicalism a matter of inheritance rather than conviction. It took years of painful disillusionment to discover how much fanaticism is required to shake the resolution of others; and years more to find how completely I was lacking in it. One morning, when I had attempted to catch the Speaker's eye some fourteen times in the course of an all-night sitting, I walked out of the House and spent the day asleep in a Turkish bath; on awaking I recalled Burgess's words, "Not for thee the dust of the arena, laddie." The superman vision was at last dispelled.

"Well, I had a dam' good time there," I said to Loring, by way of closuring the Melton debate.

In common with many others Loring drew pleadings against Radicalism which would have delighted a lawyer. To begin with, there *were* no such people as Radicals—he at any rate had never met them. The professed Radicals of his acquaintance were a handful of mere agitators, misleading a too credulous electorate that was not yet fit to exercise the franchise; morally the Radical party was negligible because its sole ambition was, by sheer force of numbers, to take away anything anybody had got—he for one would never acquiesce in confiscation merely because a majority voted it. Then in our arguments I would confront him with the Will of the People—for some strange reason only capable of interpretation by Radicals. The phrase had a curious hypnotic effect on us both, for he would invariably retaliate with the statement that the sole custodians of the People's Will were to be found in the House of Lords. And infallibly we would both lose our tempers over the first Home Rule Bill.

"At heart you're quite sound," he was good enough to say on this occasion.

On reaching London we drove to Loring House, where I spent the night before crossing to Ireland. A month later

we met for Horse Show week. Loring stayed with me, and we went to Dublin together to join the Hunter-Oakleighs, who were cousins of mine and at this time head of the Catholic branch of the family. Half-way through September I put in a week at House of Steynes, and was not surprised to find that Loring had included my cousin Violet in the party. In the first week of October we returned to London, picked up Draycott, who had spent a stifling summer, loose-tied and low-collared, in the Quartier Latin, and descended upon Oxford to order the decoration of our rooms.

Draycott had been banished to Old Library, to his present disgust and subsequent reconciliation, and allotted a gloomy first-floor set which for the next three years was to be the scene of 'Planchette' séances and roulette parties. Loring and I had been given one of the coveted double suites in Tom, and for the length of an afternoon we condemned furniture and carpets, issued orders to a deferential, tired upholsterer, and finally emerged into the autumn sunlight of the Quad with a feeling of modest triumph that there would be few rooms in Oxford to compare with ours.

On the following Friday we made our first formal appearance.

Writing after sixteen years that have been neither unvaried nor uneventful, I find that Oxford lingers in my memory as an adventure never before experienced even in my first days at Melton, never afterwards repeated even when I lived first in London, or fought my Wiltshire elections, or entered the House. I like to fill a fresh pipe and lean back in my chair, conjuring up a thousand little personal scenes—of no importance in the world to anyone but myself: my first Sunday luncheon, when I was the guest of Jerry Westermark, and the rest of the company were third-year men like him, entitled to an arm-chair by the fire in Junior Common Room. The first luncheon I myself gave half-way through the term, my anxiety not to leave out even one of my new friends, and my anger with Crabtree of Magdalen who invited himself at the last moment and filled me with eleventh-hour fears that the food would run short. My first 'Grind,' where I pocketed ten pounds by backing Loring, who won the race at the price of a broken collar-bone. My first Commem., when I lost my heart to Amy Loring. My first appearance in the Schools and my confounding *ad hoc* knowledge of St. Paul's journeys. My first . . .

It is always the first impression that seems to endure

longest, but there were friendships I made and lost wherein I can fix no date. Tom Dainton, over the way at Oriel, dropped out of my circle at some time or other; we nodded on meeting at the Club, and each would invite the other's assistance in entertaining his relations, but a day came when I felt unworthy of Tom's earnest and muscular Blues. And I have no doubt he shook a puzzled head over the 'footlers' with whom I had cast in my lot. Equally there came a day when I found myself using a man's Christian name for the first time, and the last piece of ice drifted out to sea.

I like to re-create the atmosphere of eager activity, of new-won freedom and approaching maturity. Six years at Melton had been a time of bells and chapels, first schools and roll calls, compulsory games and 'Lights Out'; at Oxford I was a man, with liberty in moderation to cut lectures and private hours, go to bed when I liked, organize a banquet and participate from time to time in wholesale destruction of property, no man saying me nay. The differences were great enough to mask the resemblances. I hardly noticed that I was being regulated by a new House Standard with more than Meltonian observance of taboo rules and caste distinctions. We wore no College colours, we dressed for the theatre, and the 'Rowing Push' were at pains not to know the 'Footlers' who beagled or hunted. But we were all unconscious and in deadly earnest, whether we testified to our abhorrence of Balliol, or walked up Headington Hill and back by Mesopotamia discussing the abolition of private property or lounged in chairs round a piled-up fire talking and smoking—and, for variety, smoking and talking.

Not unless I die and be born again shall I a second time know the joy of living in a city of three thousand men, all of them my soul's friends—save such as came from other colleges or the despised quarters of my own.

"Oakum, come and talk to me!"

I can still hear the voice echoing through the morning silence of Peck, still see a foreshortened face, chin on hands, and white teeth gripping a straight-grained pipe.

"Hallo, Geoffrey! D'you think I could get one of your windows?"

"Better not try!"

There is a pause in the dialogue while I kick up a handful of small stones and leap nimbly away from the siphon which Geoffrey Hale has just stolen from Rawbones, his neighbour

across the landing, and shattered in a thousand pieces not three feet from where I stand. A stone rises.

"Poor shooting!" from Geoffrey.

My next aim is better, and there is the sharp musical note of broken glass. Thirty heads projecting over thirty flower-boxes chant in chorus, "Porter-r-r! Mr. Oakleigh!" while I abandon dignity and hasten to the nearest staircase, to the end that one broken window may be distributed throughout the College and charged to "General Damage Account." Rawbones will bear the undivided charges of his siphon.

In the early months of the war I had occasion to spend a few hours in Oxford. The colleges were filled with soldiers and the Schools had been turned into a hospital, while Belgian refugees looked unfamiliarly down from the choicest rooms in St. Aldates or the High. It was the Oxford of a nightmare, but, though I saw no more than a dozen undergraduates throughout the city, there was hardly college or shop or house that did not hold the spirit of a man I had known. Ghostly, muffled rowing men still ran through the Meadows in the gathering dusk of a winter afternoon; ghostly scholars on bicycles, with tattered gowns wrapped round their necks and square note-books clutched precariously under their arms, shot tinkling under the very wheels of the sempiternal horse-trams; ghostly hunting men, mud-splashed and weary, cracked conscientious whips in the middle of the Quad. At six-and-thirty the elasticity and *abandon* are gone, but I would give much to shout one more conversation from one drawing-room window to another, to spend an hour pouring hot sealing-wax into the keyhole of a neighbour's oak, to deck a life-size Apollo Belvedere in cap and gown and deposit him in Draycott's bed. The power and daring have left me, but I thank Heaven that the wish remains.

On that first day Loring and I advanced silently and with sudden shyness through Tom Gate. The knots of men in lodge or street were embarrassingly preoccupied and indifferent to us. Never had I imagined that the great personalities of a public school could count for so little. "The Earl of Chepstow; Mr. G. Oakleigh," picked out in white on a black ground, reminded us reassuringly that we too had a stake in the College, but for an hour we were well content to arrange our books and experiment with the ordering of our furniture, deliberately shrinking from an appearance in public until the time came for us to present ourselves to the Dean. In Hall, and on our way to be admitted by the Vice-Chancellor, we

fell in with other Meltonians and offered the effusive friendship of loneliness to men perhaps previously ignored. Here and there I met someone I had not seen since private-school days. Once the alliance was formed under stress of agglomeration, we spent the remainder of the afternoon in a serried mass inspecting each other's rooms, ordering wine, tobacco and bedroom ware in the town and at tea-time valorously venturing into the Junior Common Room.

Within the next two days Loring and I received a number of cards, unceremoniously doled out by a messenger in short-sighted communion with a manuscript list of all freshmen worth knowing, as compiled by an informal committee of second and third year men. A number of Athletic Secretaries wrung from us promises of conditional allegiance which we were too timorous to withhold, and our respective tutors propounded what lectures and private hours we were to attend. Within a week we had returned many of the calls, ceremoniously and in person, returning a second and third time if our host were not at home; breakfast invitations began to be bandied about, and the Clubs in search of new members examined our eligibility.

As the one Liberal in a room full of silent Imperialists who consumed surprising quantities of dessert and paid no attention to the debate beyond applauding perfunctorily at the end of each oration, I remember impassionately haranguing the "Twenty Club" on the unreasonableness of Chamberlain's attitude towards President Kruger. At the "Mermaids," where the consumption of food and drink was even greater, I read the part of "Charles Surface"; nay, more, in a burst of enthusiasm I perpetrated a paper on "Irish Music" for the Essay Club, in those days a despised and persecuted church not infrequently screwed up in the catacombs of Meadow Buildings and left to support life on coffee, walnut cake, pure reason and some astonishingly rich Lowland dialects. Liberalism burned flickeringly in the autumn of '99, and the university Liberal clubs contended with flattering rivalry for my unresisting and largely uninterested body.

The term was still young when Loring was elected a member of the Loders, and soon afterwards he joined the Bullingdon. As he now dined at the Club table in Hall, I gathered Draycott and Mowbray, a Wykehamist named Finck-Boynton and two Etonians, Bertie Grainger and Mark Seton, and founded a mess next to the Guest Table, whence we

could throw bread at almost any friend in Hall. There we sat and criticized the kitchen, the High Table and our neighbours, decided a hundred knotty points of conduct and elaborated a pose which should mark us out as men of originality, fearlessness and distinction without any of the distressing immaturity of mind betrayed by our fellow-freshmen.

In looking back on the early days I find something very ingenuous and engaging in our delusion of originality. Whether we ragged the rooms of the meek, hysterical Ainsworth (who was alleged to hold private prayer-meetings and intercede by name for the souls of lost undergraduates), whether we serenaded Greatorex, the mathematical tutor, on the night he had a Colonial Bishop staying with him, whether we established an informal breakfast club at the Clarendon because we could get no hot food in College on Sundays, we were soberly and seriously convinced that earlier generations had never thought of doing such things before. For three years I watched with mild exasperation three successive drafts of amazingly juvenile men clumsily aping the achievements of us, their seniors.

New prejudices grew to a rank birth, but one or two old convictions came to be shaken. I no longer looked on Eton as a forcing-house of ineffective snobbery, nor on Winchester as the home of well-bred, uniform inertia; I ceased to say that while one Carthusian was occasionally tolerable, more than one would dominate and scatter the most varied society; gradually I found that something might be said even for men who had never been to a public school. Loring shook his head in puzzled and not entirely affected disapproval of my social adventures and, though punctiliously courteous to my guests, would not infrequently condemn them categorically as 'stumers' when they were gone.

Yet on reflection I learned more of men and books from a reserved and aggressively sensitive colony of young Scotch graduates than from many a more decorative sect in the first-floor rooms of Canterbury. MacBain, a threadbare Aberdonian, would drift in on a Sunday night, when Loring was away dining with the Loders, and we would sit till the small hours talking of Renan and a non-miraculous Christianity. Frazar, who was taking the Modern Language School, would lie back sipping whisky and filling the grate with half-smoked cigarettes as he talked of life at the Sorbonne and the wonderful appreciation of modern French poetry that he would one day publish. Carmichael, an embittered, one-idea'd revo-

lutionary, would throw Marx at my head and give fierce descriptions of his Board-school struggles before a scholarship set him free to peddle his brains in the market on equal terms with his fellows. At Melton we seemed all drawn from one class, brought up in the same channels of thought, given the same books to read.

When educational reformers fill "The Times" with their screeds, I am tempted to wonder whether it much matters what a man be taught so long as he meet enough men who have been taught something else. I worked hard at Oxford and did tolerably well in the Schools: perhaps they taught me how to learn, but the gaps in my knowledge when I came down make me look on the curriculum as "a chaos upheld by Providence." And then I think of three thousand men from a hundred schools and a thousand homes, flung behind the enchanted, crumbling walls to bring their theories, ethics, enthusiasms and limitations into the common stock; and at such times I wonder what better schooling a Royal Commission could secure for the plastic imagination of nineteen.

For all our poses Oxford gave us a taste of that world in which most of us were to pass our lives—an obsolete, artificial, inadequate world if you will, but the one wherein we had to find social and administrative salvation. We felt the heavy democratic control of public opinion when the notoriety-hunting Glynne was ducked in Mercury for giving luncheon in his rooms to the too-well-known Gracie (I never discovered her surname) from the florists in the Broad; we saw something of the ideal Equality of Opportunity when Carmichael went from a scholarship to a fellowship and then to a provincial Professorship of Economics and ultimately to an exalted position in, I think, the Board of Education; by the College cliques and fashions, the social mistrusts and jealousies, the canons and taboos, we were in some sort forearmed against the absurdities, the unworthinesses and irreconcilabilities that awaited us outside Oxford.

A fruitful lesson of my first term was furnished by the Duke of Flint. He was a freshman, an Etonian, a "Gourmet" and a member of the Bullingdon. Any week in which he was drunk less than five times was no ordinary week; any story that could be repeated in decent company was not from his hiccoughing lips. Without question the most unmitigated degenerate I have ever met, the sole excuse to be made for him was that by inheritance his blood was sufficiently tainted to infect a dozen generations. Yet I cannot think it was in

a spirit of commiseration that Oxford took the little ruffian to its bosom, inviting him to its luncheons and electing him to its clubs; there was something at once shamefaced and defiant in the way his friends proclaimed—without challenge—that he was "not at all a bad fellow, really! rather fun, in fact." From the night when he staggered down the High in the purple dress-coat of the "Gourmets," breaking the shop windows with his bare hand and I bound him up and put him to bed, to the day not many weeks ago when he died of general paralysis, I watched his social career with interest.

We none of us had much time for introspection in those eager, early days. I was swearing rapid friendships, eating aldermanic banquets and conscientiously flitting from one to another of my new clubs with the zeal of a neophyte and the greed of a man who knows that after the dull, inadequate dinner of Hall an unlimited dessert awaits him. Loring and I had refused to compete for the Melton close scholarships, as the money was not essential to us, and we could now idle for a twelvemonth over Pass Mods. and leave three serious years for our final schools. A minimum of lectures satisfied our tutors, and the rest of the time we could argue and read and smoke eternally new and expensive mixtures, which we backed against all comers and changed perhaps thrice in a term.

Once I came near my sole acquaintance with martyrdom. It was in the early weeks of the South African War, when to be a pro-Boer was not healthy. The wholeness of my skin and the peace of our rooms were due in equal measure to the fact that I had many friends and that those who knew me not agreed with Loring that I could not really mean what I said. My fellow-rebel Manders, who knew no one and only left his garret in Meadows to bicycle hotly round outlying Oxfordshire villages preaching sedition, was incontinently divested of his trousers and hurled into Mercury.

"These damned farmers!" Loring exclaimed, as he returned to our rooms, leaving Manders to retrieve his spectacles and wade inshore. "They've got to be taught a lesson."

"It'll cost you a hundred million pounds," I answered. "God knows how many men. And all because the said farmers claim the right to keep their own territory to themselves."

"A hundred million pounds!" he snorted.

"That's what Labouchere said the other night in the

House," I retorted, with all an undergraduate's faith in the figures and opinions of others.

"Oh, of course, if you believe a man like that! A man who frankly doesn't believe in the Empire, a Little Englander . . ."

"I shouldn't be surprised if he was right," I said.

"Just for a few pounds you'd rather like to see us beaten," he cried. To this hour I recall with amazement the passions aroused by that war.

"I'm not in favour of a war against a free people conducted on behalf of Illicit Diamond Buyers. Besides the few pounds there are men's lives—and a little question of right and wrong."

"You ought to support your country right *or* wrong."

"I beg to differ," I said, and we carried the discussion heatedly back to Majuba and the question whether or no Mr. Gladstone's body should be exhumed and hung in chains.

The war was to come very near home before many weeks had passed. After Black Friday, Roger Dainton raised a troop of horse and took them out; Tom Dainton was given a university commission and followed a few weeks later. In the Easter term "The Earl of Chepstow" was painted out and "The Marquess Loring" substituted. The "damned farmers" had added a very pleasant, easy-going, undistinguished man to the lengthening list of casualties.

IV

To men of my generation, men who are now in the middle thirties, the South African War marked the end of many things. I can just remember, as a child of six, the fall of Mr. Gladstone's third administration. We were in Ireland at the time, and my father, a few months before his death, burst into the dining-room with a paper in his hand, his face white and drawn with disappointment. I can still recall his tone as he said, "We're beaten!" After that, though I was growing older, I seemed to hear little of politics. The excitement of the Parnell Commission came to be drowned in the more sinister excitement of the Divorce. I remember, remotely and indistinctly, fighting a young opponent at my private school over the rejection of the second Home Rule Bill; two years later Liberalism went behind a cloud, the Liberal Unionists came in, welcomed and desired, and almost

immediately—as it seemed—we were busy preparing for the Diamond Jubilee.

One thing that the Boer War ended was the Jubilee phase, the Victorian position of England in the world. Seated at a first-floor window half-way up Ludgate Hill I watched the little old Queen driving to the service of thanksgiving at St. Paul's escorted by troops drawn from every quarter of the globe. The blaze of their uniforms has not yet quite died from my eyes. I awoke with quickly beating heart to some conception of the Empire over which she ruled, some realization of the gigantic growth in our wealth and power during the two generations that she had sat the throne. There followed the Naval Review. It was as though we flung a mailed gauntlet in the face of anyone who should venture to doubt our supremacy. For more than two years after that England basked in the consciousness of invincibility.

The early months of humiliation and disaster ended my generation's boyhood. Until that time there had been nothing to disturb us; the splendour of our national might seemed enduring, and it needed the severest of our first Transvaal reverses to remind us that the Jubilee pageant was over and our lath-and-plaster reputation being tested by fire and steel. Tom Dainton invited me to a solitary breakfast one Sunday and mentioned his father's decision to raise a troop of yeomanry. We made inquiries about the university commissions that were being granted, and, though I was rejected for shortness of sight, Tom passed with triumphant ease and dropped out of Oxford for more than two years. At the end of the Christmas Vacation came the news of Lord Loring's death. Possibly because his son and I were living together, possibly by the shock of contrast with the peaceful, untroubled life we had led formerly, the war cloud loomed oppressively over me during my first year, so that the ordinary existence in college seemed curiously artificial. We might have been playing in some indifferent show at a country fair, with passers-by who refused to interest themselves in us. After a year the country's prospects in the war began to brighten; we grew used to the casualty lists and masterly retreats; the centre of gravity changed, and Oxford began to resume her normal life.

At the end of my third year we were to have the unusual sight of men, who had been away fighting for two years or more in another continent, returning to resume their position as undergraduates. I was spending the beginning of the

Long Vacation with Loring at Chepstow, when we received a wire inviting us both to Crowley Court to welcome the two Daintons back from the Front. Neither Loring nor I had been to Hampshire since leaving Melton and, as Mrs. Dainton pledged herself that "all the old party" would be invited, we accepted with alacrity. Sutcliffe, who was doing a vacation course at Cambridge, broke into his work to join us, and Draycott was on the platform when we arrived at Waterloo.

I remember—though it is a petty enough thing to recall—rather resenting Draycott's presence. He had got into a set that I disliked—a set that was, I suppose, "at once as old and new as time itself." Its members went exquisitely dressed in coats of many colours; they made a considerable to-do with crossings and genuflections in chapel, and private shrines and incense in their bedrooms. They also introduced an unnecessary 'r' into 'Catholic' and 'Mass,' largely, I think, with a view of frightening the parents who had reared them in the straitest sect of Protestantism. If you dropped in upon any one of them at any hour of the afternoon, you would be assailed with exotic hospitality—Turkish coffee, Tokay, Dutch curaçao, black Spanish cigarettes, Uruguayan maté, Greek resined wine and a drink which to this day I assert to be sulphuric acid and which my offended host assured me was a priceless *apéritif* unobtainable outside Thibet or the French Congo. In college it was said vaguely that they knew "all about Art"; they certainly had a pretty taste in bear-skins, Persian rugs and the more self-indulgent style of upholstery. If their nude, plaster statuettes were once decently petticoated in blotting paper annexed from the old Lecture Room, I suppose they were so clothed a hundred times, until Roger Porlick disgraced himself in Eights Week by punting up the Cher with a stark hamadryad tethered as a mascot to the box of his punt. After that the plaster casts were hidden.

Once deprived of his audience, Draycott had either to drop his pose or explain it elaborately to friends who had known him before its adoption. He chose the easier course, and we very comfortably renewed the life, relations and atmosphere we had left behind at Crowley Court three years before. The party assembled piecemeal, as O'Rane had to wait till the end of the Melton term, and our hosts spent some days at the War Office before they were restored to their family.

On the eve of Speech Day Mrs. Dainton suggested that I

should drive over to Melton and bring O'Rane back with me. In the absence of her husband she had gratified a cherished aspiration by purchasing a motor-car, and this was placed at my disposal. In the old days Roger Dainton, who had been brought up among horses from boyhood, declared roundly that nothing would induce him to invest in a "noisy, smelly, terror-by-day" that made life unbearable for peaceful pedestrians in the rare moments when it was not breaking down and being pushed or pulled ignominiously home.

"He's an absurd old Tory," Mrs. Dainton told me. "Everybody's getting one nowadays; Lord Pebbleridge, over at Bishop's Cross, has three."

So in imitation of her august neighbour, a car was bought. It was one of several small changes that the long-suffering Roger found waiting to be inflicted on him: dinner had been put back to a quarter-past eight and was now served by a butler and two footmen; to hang about the grounds till 8.20 was no longer admitted as a valid excuse for not dressing.

As soon as I promised to drive over to the school, Sonia announced her intention of accompanying me. For a year or two O'Rane had been something of a public character in Melton, and with Sam to bring her news of him in the holidays, she had not lacked the material of that hero-worship in which all girls of fifteen appear to indulge. O'Rane liked his sympathetic audience as well as another man, and the two were good friends. On Leave-out Days he would pace the Southampton road dreaming, as Napoleon may have dreamed at eighteen, his wild, romantic vision steadied and kept in focus by the consciousness of his own proved endurance and concentration. Sonia would meet him and trot patiently alongside while he cried to the rolling heavens. Then and now I felt and feel a strange embarrassment in hearing him: he was so unrestrained and lacking in conventional self-consciousness that my skin pricked with a sudden infectious emotion which I tried to suppress. He reminded me of a great actor in everyday clothes declaiming Shakespeare in a fashionable drawing-room. At this time the only two souls on earth who believed in the reality of his dreams were Sonia and—the dreamer.

We panted and clanked through the Forest, pulled up by the roadside to let the boiling water in our radiator cool down and finally arrived at Big Gateway as the school came out of Chapel and wandered up and down Great Court waiting for

Roll Call. We watched Burgess coming out of Cloisters and through the Archway, struggling with gown and hood, stole and surplice, all rolled into a tubular bundle and flung over one shoulder like a military overcoat.

"What went ye forth for to see, laddie?" he inquired, as we shook hands. "A reed shaken by the wind?"

"We've come to take O'Rane away with us, sir," I answered.

He sighed pensively, and, as he shook his head, the breeze played with his silky white hair.

"Canst thou find no ram taken by his horns in a thicket?" he demanded.

"What sort of captain did he make, sir?" I asked.

Burgess stroked his long beard and looked from me to Sonia and back again to me.

"Greater love hath no man than this," he said, "that a man lay down his life for his friends. He is an austere man, yet reapeth not that he did not sow, neither gathereth he up that he did not straw. And at the sound of his voice the young men will leave all and follow him even to the isles of Javan and Gadire." He paused till the bell for Roll Call had finished ringing. "Nicodemus, come and see."

Sonia and I squeezed our way in among two or three hundred parents who had profited by proximity to the Head to inquire how 'Bernard' had fared that term; the giant intellect of Burgess was left to discover unaided who 'Bernard' might be. We listened to the Prize Compositions, the Honours of the year, and the removes of the term. Then Sonia's hand slipped through my arm, and her brown eyes suddenly softened. The prizes were being distributed, and we watched and listened until I, at any rate, grew sore-handed and weary of hearing O'Rane's name called out. I began, too, to pity the fags who would have to stagger across Great Court under the growing burden of that calf-bound, gilt-edged pile. He himself went through the ceremony in a dispirited, listless fashion, his thoughts running forward to the moment when he would have to reverse the birch and hand it back to Burgess, while the new captain slipped into his seat and read prayers over his body.

"*In nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.* I should like all boys who are leaving this term to say good-bye to me in my house. *Ire licet.*"

The school poured out into Great Court and formed up in a double line. O'Rane was cheered from School Steps

to the Head's house, as no one to my knowledge had been cheered since Pelham gave up his house and retired after forty-three years. The Leaving Books were handed out,—still "Men and Women" as in my day,— the last hand-shakes exchanged. Outside the library windows the school was waiting for O'Rane's reappearance.

"Be not overmuch puffed up with pride, laddie," said Burgess, when they were alone. "Boy is a creature of simple faith and easy enthusiasm. True, in thine youth thou wast clept 'Spitfire' and 'The Vengeful Celt'——"

"Sir . . . ?"

Burgess waved away the interruption. "Did I not tell thee of the Unsleeping Eye? Laddie, I am old and broken with the cares and sorrows of this life, yet it may be that the counsel of age may profit a young man. Yet not with thee. To thee I say not, 'Do this' or 'Do that'; there is nought thou canst not do, laddie—thou also art among the prophets." He held out his hand abruptly, and O'Rane took it.

"Sir, I want to thank you . . ." he began.

"For that I forbade thee not when thou didst crave admittance?"

"A thousand things beside that, sir. Everything. . . ."

"The fatherless child is in God's keeping, laddie," said Burgess gently, disengaging his hand. "And thy father and I were young men together. Thou didst know this thing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet thou namedst it not?"

O'Rane hesitated and then burst out with a touch of his old universal defiance.

"I wanted to make you take me on my merits, sir."

"Hard is the way of him who would presume to offer help to David O'Rane!" Burgess answered, with a shake of the head.

"But I'd won through *so* far, sir; I wanted to see how much longer——"

"I blame thee not, laddie. Well, thou hast endured to the end and hast brought new honour to my kingdom. Counsel I withhold from thee: truly the Lord will provide. Fare thee well, David O'Rane."

On our way back to Crowley Court I put Raney outside, in case he preferred the company of his own thoughts for the present. He sat for a few moments with his chin on his chest, but as the car left the town he engaged the chauffeur

in earnest conversation, and as we slowed down in front of the house he jumped out and came to the door with the words, "Simpson damns electricity and steam. He swears by oil. Well, if cars are going to knock out horses and you need petrol to drive your cars, there's going to be a tremendous demand for oil in the near future. I want to get in before the rush, I'm going to study oil——"

"You're a soulless Wall Street punter," I said.

Twenty minutes before he had been saying good-bye to Melton with moist eyes and unsteady speech. That phase was now ancient history, and—characteristically enough—he was ready to fling the whole blazing vigour of his vitality into the next.

"Come and find Mrs. Dainton," I suggested.

"Jove! I'd quite forgotten about her," was his ingenuous answer.

Tom and his father arrived that evening in time for dinner. We fired the first shot with our soup and, when Mrs. Dainton and Sonia left us, we were still fighting out the big battles with dessert knives, nutcrackers and port glasses to mark the positions. Concentration Camps were hotly canvassed at one end of the table, soft-nosed bullets at the other. Sutcliffe, who was rapidly acquiring the White Paper habit, flung out disconcerting dates and figures at the more vulnerable gaps in Dainton's argument, and Draycott, with a bad attack of paradox, proved to his own satisfaction that we had lost the war and alternately that no war had taken place.

"Well, it's all over now," said Dainton, as the decanter went its last round. "I think it's done us good, you know. We wanted a bit of stuffing knocked into us."

O'Rane had sat through the dinner in one of his effective silences. As the others pushed back their chairs and sauntered into the hall, he caught my arm and drew me through an open French window into the garden.

"There, there, there you have it," he stammered excitedly, "first hand! From a man who's been out there! 'We were getting a bit slack and wanted stiffening.' My God!"

"It was true as far as it went," I pointed out.

"And is that the only lesson he's learnt? Man, before this war we could put Europe in our vest pocket. Now they've taken our measure. You don't read the foreign papers."

Barely three years had elapsed, but I confess I had forgotten that when Raney, in the period of fagdom, suffered voluntary martyrdom once in ten days, it was in order to spend his unmolested afternoons studying the continental Press.

"D'you *still* do that?" I asked.

"In the same old way. All through the war, everything I could get hold of in the Public Library. It's instructive reading, George. They—simply—*hate*—us—abroad; and they aren't as much scared of us as they used to be. We've made an everlasting show of our weakness, and we had a close call of being attacked while our hands were full."

"Who *wants* to attack us?" I asked.

"Anyone with anything to gain. France, as long as we hold Egypt; Russia, as long as we hold India; Germany, as long as we threaten the trade of the world with our fleet. 'Well, it's all over now.' When I hear people talking like that . . . You dam' British don't deserve to survive."

He ground the glowing end of his cigar into the loose gravel with a savage twist of his heel.

"Come off the stump, Raney," I said. "Anyone can make a damn-you-all-round speech. What d'you want done?"

"Ten years' organization of the British Empire," he answered. "If we mustered our full resources, we could snap our fingers at any other power."

My political convictions exist to be discarded, and before the war had been six months in progress I had ceased to call myself a pro-Boer; a year or two later I was an impenitent Liberal Leaguer. In my progress from one pole to the other I lived in philosophic doubt tempered by profound distrust of the word 'Imperialism' and the vision of Rand Jews which it conjured up.

"Hang it, we've only just finished one war," I said. "I don't want another."

"You can have an organized empire and a competent army without going to war."

"I doubt it," I said. "The temptation's too great. The first day I was given an air-gun—this is many years ago, Raney—I winged a harmless, necessary milch cow. The alpha and omega of British policy should be to have a navy so efficient that no one can attack us and an army so inefficient that we daren't attack anyone else. If you aim at all-round efficiency, you'll probably have the rest of Europe on your back and you'll certainly go bankrupt."

He was preparing an explosive retort when one of the drawing-room windows opened, and Sonia came towards us.

"Bedtime?" I asked, as she held out her hand.

"Rot, isn't it?" she answered, wrinkling her nose. "I shall be sixteen next birthday, too."

"When *I* was your age . . ." O'Rane began improvingly.

"I used to thrash you two or three times a month," I put in.

Sonia looked at him wonderingly.

"Is that true, David?" she demanded.

He nodded his head.

"You beast, George!!" Sonia burst out with a concentrated venom that abashed me.

O'Rane glanced in momentary surprise at the rigid, indignant little figure with the clenched fists and bitten lip. Then he caught her up in his arms.

"Bambina, you're the only person in the whole world who loves me. George couldn't help himself, though; I was out for trouble. And I could have knocked him down and broken every bone in his body if I'd wanted to—just as I could now. Only he was right and I was wrong. Kiss me good night, sweetheart."

He lowered her gently till her feet touched the ground, but sudden shyness had come over her, and she would only hold out a hand.

"Clearly I'm in the way," I said, as I moved towards the house.

"I'm coming too," Sonia called out. "No, David, you're grown up now."

He snorted indignantly.

"That's a rotten reason. Are you never going to kiss me again? This year?" She shook her head. "Next year? Some time?"

"Some time. Perhaps."

She ran into the house, and O'Rane and I took one more turn along the terrace before following her.

"Grown up!" he exclaimed, after a moment's silence.

"That's still rankling?" I asked.

"No, I was just thinking. I fancy I was pretty well grown up before we ever met, George."

"As much as you ever will be," I suggested.

"As much as I ever want to be, old son. It's been like an extraordinary dream, you know, these last four years. Everything topsy-turvy. . . . I was years and years older

than you and Jim when you used to thrash me. . . . If you can imagine yourself coming to a place like Melton after knocking about all round the world, living from hand to mouth. . . . The holidays were the time I really worked. D'you remember when you and Jim found me at the Empire Hotel? You've never mentioned it from that day to this. I'm not ashamed of it and, though you two had your eyes bulging out of your head, I don't suppose with all your conventionality you think the worse of me for it. Anyway I don't care a damn if you do." He paused and lit a cigarette. "I'm going to have a holiday now, George. Idle about till October. And then in the holidays—vacations, you call 'em, don't you?—I shall get hold of soft, genteel jobs—private tutor to aristocratic imbeciles——"

"And then?"

He yawned luxuriantly.

"And then I shall settle down to earn a great deal of money. I'm never going through the old mill again, George. And when I've earned it I shall buy a villa at Naples and rot there. Are you going into the drawing-room? I don't think I shall, it's such a grand night out here. I want to think over this amazing country of yours, where a man can drop from the skies—I was junior steward on a 'Three Funnel' liner just before—drop down, find his feet, find people to employ him and weigh him out scholarships. . . . George, so far as I can make out, after four years here, there's not a damn thing you don't fling open to the veriest dago and pay him handsome to take the job. 'Ejectum litore, egentem excepi . . .' No, that's a bad omen." He spun round and smote me on the shoulder. "I owe a lot to this rotten country and I shall owe a lot more before I'm through with it. Now I'm going to take charge of the piano and sing songs to you. . . ."

It was O'Rane who went into the drawing-room, and I who stayed outside in enjoyment of the night. Roger Dainton took the opportunity of a quiet stroll and a few moments' conversation. While in London he had been sounded in the matter of a baronetcy. I believed him when he protested that his troop of yeomanry had been raised without any thought of what honours or decorations he might draw from the lucky tub after the war. I almost believed him when he said he thought of accepting the offer because it would gratify his wife. And I felt a certain wonder and pity that in his curiously unfriended state, half-way between two social

spheres, he should come for advice to a man less than half his own age.

V

"Lodgings for the October Term"

Square cards inscribed with that device had offered me welcome for three years, and in the last term of my third year Loring and I settled seriously to the task of finding a new home against the day when we should be flung, time-expired, from our loved quarters in 'Tom. 'Seriously' in spirit if not in method, for we chartered a coach-and-four, invited a dozen men to breakfast and set out from Canterbury Gate with luncheon-baskets sufficient to feed a company. Proceeding impressively up King Edward Street we doubled back into St. Ebbs in search of what Loring called "working-class tenements for virtuous Radicals." Failing to find anything that suited us, we returned by Brewer Street and inspected Micklem Hall, but there was a garden attached, and we should have been constrained to walk a beagle-puppy. Leaving the last question open, I dispossessed Loring of the box-seat and drove for the next half-hour, because he had laid me five to three that there was no such college as Wadham, and seven to two that if there were I could not find it.

I remember we lunched a mile or two north of Woodstock because Crabtree of Magdalen, who had as usual invited himself and assumed direction of our movements, insisted that our last year must be undisturbed. In the late evening we returned triumphantly to Oxford and collided with a tram at the bottom of the Turl. A languid voice from the first-floor window of 93D High Street inquired if we needed anything.

"Lodgings for the October and two succeeding terms," Loring called back.

"These aren't bad digs," answered the voice, and Crabtree was left to sort out the Corporation tram while Loring and I inspected the house opposite.

"They've got the makings of very decent quarters," he admitted handsomely. "Decoration vile," he added in an aside, "but then, what d'you expect of a B.N.C. man? A furtive creature with obliquity of vision ushered us in. We must get rid of him, George. Find out whether he is the landlord or a B.N.C. don or merely our young friend's male parent."

I ascertained that the man of repellent aspect was the landlord.

"I suppose we must take your ghastly digs," said Loring between a yawn and a sigh.

The following October we moved in and gave a housewarming—with the town band engaged to play waltzes outside while we dined. It was a bachelor dinner, but Grayes of Trinity and Henderson and Billing of the House chartered rooms at the "Dumb Bell," and came over in Empire gowns, chestnut wigs, cloaks and cigarettes. We danced until the band went home to bed and then led our guests round to inspect and praise our decorations and observe the absence of Pringle, the landlord, who had been exiled to a cottage on Boar's Hill.

"Best bedroom, second-best bedroom," Loring explained. "Spare bedrooms also ran. Bathroom. All that messuage. Lounge. Kitchen. Usual offices. Hot and cold. Electric lights and bells. Gent's eligible town residence."

It was eligible in every way, with window-seats overlooking the High from which we could watch passers-by surreptitiously trying to pick up the half-crown that Loring from time to time glued to the pavement. The house had been repainted inside and out, there were new carpets and furniture, a grand piano in one room and two Siamese kittens in every other. Old Lady Loring used to complain of dust when she came to visit us, but her son assured her that this was but a concession to my democratic spirit. We were certainly comfortable. As Loring observed the first night, "Now we've every excuse for neglecting our work"

He was reading Greats; I, History. We both expected seconds, hoped for firsts and told our friends thirds. What our tutors thought, I have no idea. Loring never consulted his unduly.

"I pay the College eight pounds a term tuition fees," he reasoned. "I'll make it twice that if they'll leave me alone. I want to think. Your society alone, George, is an Undenominational Education."

So he breakfasted at nine, cut lectures till one, lunched at the Club and hacked twenty miles in the afternoon. From tea till dinner he would wander round Oxford buying prints and large-paper editions; after dinner he would take a kitten on his knee and read German metaphysics aloud to it with a wealth of feeling in his voice. At eleven we would pay one or two calls or sit talking till a late hour.

It was Andrew Lang, I believe, who said that the reason why there were no good books on Oxford life was because they were all written by women who had spent one day in—Cambridge. I sometimes fancy that Oxford reformers are really Oxford novelists off duty. We went through the transition from boyhood to man's estate in some of this world's loveliest surroundings Does it matter what we read or when we read it? A time had to come when each of us had the choice of working uncompelled or not working at all; we could not be given lines and detention all our life, and at Oxford I worked hard. So did Loring, for all his outward pose of idleness. We read seven hours a day for two-thirds of the vacation and were not wholly unoccupied even during term.

Looking back on it all I can find no period of mental development to compare with my last year at Oxford. It was no small thing to read a thousand years of history, however superficially. I began to touch general principles, to discard cherished preconceptions and little by little to hammer out a philosophy of my own. In political science and economy Loring's school overlapped mine to some extent, and in the rambling 'Schools shop' we talked lay the germ of the Thursday Club. Every week of term and for a year or two after I came down, some ten of us would meet and dine together. There was a "book of the week"—too long or dull for all to read—which one would undertake to digest and expound. "Saint Simon's Memoirs," the "Contrat Social," the "Paston Letters" were among the works we had served up to us minced and réchauffé.

Later on, when Loring had dropped out, we became more purely political. Carmichael brought us in touch with socialist writers, and a week-end visit from Baxter Whittingham of Lincoln and Shadwell was responsible for my brief taste of working-class conditions some years later. I cannot hope that anyone nowadays looks at "Thursday Essays," which we published in 1904 as a statement of Young Oxford Liberalism, but, though it had little effect on the outside world, it consolidated its authors. Seddon of Corpus, who wrote on "Unemployment," is now in the Insurance Commission; Terry of Lincoln, the author of "Small Holdings," was private secretary to the President of the Board of Agriculture; Ainger, Mansfield, Gregory and I, who spread ourselves on "Public Economy," "Federation and the National Ideal," "The Tendrils of Socialism," and "The Irish Question Once More,"

all found our way into the House at the time of the 1906 Election.

Loring, too, matured on lines of his own. It would perhaps be truer to say that he developed that dual personality of which the germs had been existent at Melton. He was a cynic and an idealist,—no uncommon union,—a pessimist and a practical reformer, honestly believing that the world was gradually deteriorating, that to cleanse the corruption was beyond man's powers, and yet that it was worth his own while to run the lost race to a finish.

I always fancy I can trace three phases through which he passed, three sources of inspiration. At school his taste for the romantic and picturesque found satisfaction in the Church of which he was a member: Eternal Rome captured his imagination, and, while I aspired to a vague universal brotherhood, he hoped and believed that Temporal Power would some day be once more œcumenical and that the warring world would in time find peace in a new age of faith. Oxford and the society of his fellow Catholics broke into the dream. Doctrinally he was unsettled by the philosophy he read for 'Greats,' and the fabric and organization of his Church brought disillusionment when he saw them at close quarters. Old Lord Loring had made the house in Curzon Street a centre for English Catholicism. I remember balls and bazaars, receptions and committee-meetings without end. Catholic marquesses were rare, they had to work hard; they were also valuable as giving social respectability to a persecuted Church. An inconspicuous, undistinguished peer assumed rather an exalted position in a small religious communion where everyone knew everyone else. I imagine more people spoke of 'dear Lord Loring' than would have been the case had his religion been, say, that of the Established Church. His son felt and expressed extreme repugnance for the position he was expected to fill. The Catholic Church *in partibus infidelium* was not a trading company, and he declined to have his name published on the prospectus to inspire confidence among doubting subscribers.

On ceasing to be a Catholic in anything but name, he had a second bout of mediaevalism, and dreamed, as Disraeli dreamed in the 'Young England' days, of a re-vitalized, ascendant aristocracy. The reality of the dream passed quickly; it is questionable how much faith Disraeli himself put into his vision, though anything was possible while the political revolution of the first Reform Bill was still seething.

It is doubtful if Loring ever considered his idealized aristocracy of philosopher-kings otherwise than with a sentimental, unhistorical regret. And when he abandoned hope of seeing mankind regenerated either by the spiritual influence of his Church or the temporal influence of his order, I think he abandoned hope of seeing mankind regenerated at all. Life thereafter became a private, personal matter; he preserved a fastidious sense of what was incumbent on him to do and a pride in not being false to his own standards. What happened to the world outside his gates was an irrelevance with which, in his growing detachment and surface cynicism, he declined to interest himself.

It was at Oxford that he passed from the first to the second of his three phases. We were none of us more than a few months distant from the untravelled world of men's work—sub-consciously we were all striving after a self-expression that should leave its mark on that work. Heaven be thanked! not one of us dreamed how ineffective our personalities were to prove, how unromantic our humdrum work, how meagre our hard-bought results! In the twelve years that passed between these last terms and the outbreak of a war that at least brought spaciousness back to human life, I can think of only one of my friends who failed to become in greater or less degree commonplace. That was O'Rane, and his store of the romantic could never quite be exhausted. He was too fearless of soul. A commonplace mind and life are the lot of the conventional, and conventionality is the atmosphere in which alone the timid can exist. To defy a convention may not gain a man the whole world, but it not infrequently saves his soul.

O'Rane came up in my last year as one of a mixed draft from Melton. Mayhew and Sam Dainton we knew, but the others were little more than names to us. Dutifully Loring and I gave a couple of Sunday breakfasts and sighed when our guests left us for a walk round the Parks before luncheon. The meals were as difficult as they were long, for the freshmen were shy, and we had outgrown our taste for early morning banquets. When conversation was fanned into life, we found it sadly juvenile. Were we not fourth-year men, a thought jaded, and with difficulty interested in anecdotes of a scout's eccentricities or descriptions of unsuccessful flight from proctors? When the last guest pocketed his half-guinea straight-grained pipe (which we had been forced to admire) and clattered down the stairs to walk a dejected terrier of

mixed ancestry through Oxford, Loring shook his head despairingly.

"We were *not* like that, George," he asserted.

"We were rather a good year, of course," I agreed.

He emptied a succession of ash trays, thoughtfully replaced the cushions on the sofas and straightened the antimacassars.

"Twelve of them, weren't there?" he asked. "And they'll all invite us back, every jack man of them."

"And we shall have to go, too," I also sighed, "and make sport for them, after waiting half an hour in a room full of the unknown while our host hurriedly splashes himself next door and apologizes for having forgotten all about the invitation.

"*We* never did that!"

"Once," I said.

We called on O'Rane the first night of term, and compelled him to dine with us the second. I had not forgotten a slight disappointment of my own early days. One of my best friends at Melton had been Jerry Pinsent: we shared the omnibus-study in Matheson's and stayed with each other in the holidays. I fully expected that, as a second-year man, he would take me by the hand and guide my feet among the pitfalls of etiquette—largely the imagination of a self-conscious freshman—with which I understood Oxford to be set. Pinsent was affable, even kindly. He offered me a seat in his mess and introduced me to his friends. Alas! it was not enough. I found it indecent that he should have surrounded himself so completely and so speedily. I was immoderately jealous of his friends' free-and-easy Christian-name habit, and as two of them were Blues (Pinsent himself was a fine oar until he broke his wrist in a bicycling accident) I decided very unworthily that he was a snob and a faithless friend. With equal self-consciousness I determined that O'Rane should never charge me with aloofness or want of cordiality.

We invited no one to meet him. There would be time for that later, and in any case he was likely to be known all over Oxford before the term was out.

"He shall stand on his hind-legs and do his tricks for us alone," said Loring, who pretended to laugh at O'Rane in order to conceal an admiration not far removed from affection. "The wild beast that has been fed into domesticity."

There was little enough of the wild beast about O'Rane in the year of grace 1902. The starved look had gone out of

his face, and his eyes were no longer those of a hunted animal at bay. We leant out of the window to squirt soda-water on to him as he came down the High with light, swinging step and an engaging devil-may-care swagger. He walked bareheaded, and the fine, black hair—ornately parted and brushed for the occasion—blew into disorder as the autumn wind swept down the street with a scent of fallen leaves and a hint of the dying year.

"You know, Raney, you'd have made an extraordinarily beautiful girl," said Loring reflectively as they met.

"If the Almighty'd known the Marquess Loring had any feeling in the matter——" O'Rane began.

"Poets would have immortalized your eyes," Loring pursued with a yawn. "Painters would have died in despair of representing their shadowy, unfathomable depths——" He raised his hand and waved it rhythmically, "'Their shadowy, unfathomable depths,' you can't keep from blank verse! Have a cigarette, little stranger. Being an alleged man, you're a bit undersized and effeminate."

O'Rane caught Loring by one wrist and with a single movement brought him to his knees.

"Effeminate?" he demanded.

Loring attempted to reconcile dignity with a kneeling position.

"Oh, you've got a certain vulgar strength," he admitted, "like most modern girls. But you've got the hands and feet of a professional beauty. Of course you may not have stopped growing yet."

"I'm five feet nine! I admit I've not much *fat* on me!"

Honour was satisfied, and I separated the combatants. For his height Loring was very well proportioned, but he hated an imputation of fatness almost as much as O'Rane hated being teased about his slightness of body or smallness of bone. He certainly made up into a very beautiful woman when the O.U.D.S. played "Henry V" and he took the part of Katherine. The intention had been to follow the practice of years and invite a professional actress from London; O'Rane's performance, however, was too good to be set aside. I have a photograph of the company with Raney seated in the middle. With his small, sensitive mouth and white teeth, his clean-cut nose and long-lashed, large black eyes, he makes a very attractive girl.

"This is a wonderful place," he said, as we sat down to dinner. "I've been sight-seeing to-day."

"Anything worth seeing?" asked Loring, whose substantially accurate boast it was that he had never been within the walls of a strange college.

We found that O'Rane had been prompt and thorough, ranging from the "Light of the World" in Keble Chapel to the scene of Amy Robsart's death, and from the gardens of Worcester to Addison's Walk. He talked of Grinling Gibbons' carving with a facility I envied when it was my fate to conduct my mother and sister round Oxford.

"Wonderful place," he repeated. "Choked up with the débris of mediaevalism. Atmosphere rather worse than a tropical swamp. Last refuge of dead enthusiasms and hotbed of sprouting affectations."

He jerked out the criticism and turned his attention to the soup.

"You're very disturbing, Raney," I said. "For four years you knocked Melton inside out; can't you leave Oxford alone? I'm rather fond of it."

"So am I—already. I'm fond of any place that picks a man up and sets him on his legs. I'm fond of England as you two can never be."

"You're extraordinarily old-fashioned, Raney."

"If to be grateful is to be old-fashioned." He leant back and gazed at the ceiling. "I think it's a workable philosophy. There are people who can do things I can't do, and there are people who can't do the things I can. It's a long scale—strong, less strong, weak, more weak. If every man helped the man below him. . . . You fellows would say I'm superstitious. I dare say. If you're the one man to come out of an earthquake alive, you start believing in a special providence. . . . I've been helped a bit—and I've once or twice helped another man. Whenever I could, in fact. And from the depths of my soul I believe if I said 'no' when I was asked . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and left the sentence unfinished.

"Well, go on!" It was Loring who spoke, not without interest. "What would happen?"

"I should be damned out of hand. I don't mean a bolt from heaven, but I . . . I should never be able to do anything again. I should be hamstrung."

"Black superstition," was Loring's comment.

"Not a bit of it! There's a fear of subjective damnation far more vigorous than the outer darkness and worm-that-dies-not nonsense."

"You're on too high a plane for dinner," said Loring. "You should cultivate the pleonectic side of life. I've had two roes on toast, and I'm going to have a third."

VI

Never have I known time pass so quickly as during that last year. Early in the Michaelmas term both Loring and I developed acute 'Schools-panic': we barred ourselves inside '93D' and read ten hours a day, planning retreats in Cornwall for the vac., when we were to rise at dawn, bathe in the sea and work in four shifts of four hours each. The cottage was almost taken when a revulsion of feeling led us to adopt an attitude of melancholy fatalism. We said—what was true enough—that life under such conditions was not worth living; we added—what was less true—that we did not care whether we got firsts or fourths.

Gradually the door of '93D' was unbarred. We dined in Hall once or twice a week and attended clubs to eat dessert for which—as we were out of College—other people paid. The men of our year had by this time been infected with our own morbid state of conscience, but there were still happy second-year men without a care in the world, and freshmen who—so far as I could see—were living solely for pleasure.

In Oxford during springtime, with the chestnuts, lilac and laburnum blazing into colour, it is nothing short of sacrilege to read Select Charters and Documents of Constitutional History. As the evenings lengthened we used to find alfresco coffee-parties being held in a corner of Peck. I made the acquaintance of Summertown, an irrepressible, freckled, red-haired little Etonian, the permanent thorn in the side of his father, Lord Marlyn, who was at this time Councillor of Embassy in Paris. It was his practice to drag a table, chairs and piano into the Quad and dispense coffee and iced champagne cup to all who passed. O'Rane would be found at the piano,—or on top of it with a guitar across his knees,—and the rest of us would lie back in long wicker chairs, gazing dreamily up at the scarlet and white flowers in the window-boxes, the flaky, grey-black walls, and far above them the early stars shining down from the darkening sky.

I had predicted that Raney's personality would impress itself upon Oxford, though I never underestimated the difficulty in a place so given over to particularism and fierce local

jealousies. At this time the only men who had a reputation outside their own colleges were perhaps six in number: Blair of Trinity, who walked round Oxford of an afternoon with a hawk on his wrist; "Pongo" Jerrold, who kept pedigree bloodhounds; Granville, the President of the O.U.D.S.; Johnny Carstairs, who removed the minute hand from the post office clock in St. Aldate's every night of the Michaelmas term; and perhaps two more, of whom O'Rane was one. As so often, the world knew him for his accidents and overlooked his essence. He was quoted as a Union speaker of wild gesticulation and frenzied Celtic eloquence; as a pamphleteer and lampoonist who could seemingly write impromptu verse on any subject, in all metres and most languages; as the author of ninety-five per cent of "The Critic," a short-lived weekly started by Mayhew, who, I am convinced, would establish morning, evening, monthly and quarterly periodicals the day after being washed up on the beach of a desert island.

Inside the College he was chiefly famed for turbulence, invective and irreverence. "Lord, he hath a devil," is supposed to have been the comment of one Censor: he certainly had more than one man's vitality. With his faculty of omnipresence, he was known to all, though he could show little hospitality and was averse from appearing too often at the table of others. Indeed we could only get him round to 93D High Street on presentation of an ultimatum, and it was useless to trouble over the arrangement of a dinner, as he was then—as always—sublimely indifferent to all he ate and drank. The only hunger he seemed to know was the hunger for self-expression, and he gratified it with tongue and pen in his work, his friendships and his animosities. These last were short-lived, but as violent as if he were still the unreclaimed 'vengeful Celt' of schooldays, and, as at Melton, he was usually to be found carrying on a shower-and-sunshine quarrel with one or other member of Senior Common Room.

"*Sacré nom de chien!*" he roared to heaven as we crossed Tom Quad one night after dining at the High Table. "They are children and snobs and spiteful old women! Little Templeton, your loathly tutor, wears a dog collar and expounds the Gospel of Jesus Christ, first of the Sansculottes, who regarded not the face of a man." He drew a fresh breath and gripped me by the lapels of my coat. "The beast drowned me in Upper Ten shop the livelong night. 'E'm effreed E'm a little leete, Mister O'Reene. Lard Jarn Carstairs' affection for the perst office clerck makes it herd to be punctual.' Then anecdotes

of Rosebery as an undergraduate and the everlasting Blenheim Ball! *A bas les snobs!*" He seized a stone and flung it madly at the window of the Professor of Pastoral Theology. "And they all worked off horrid little academic scores on some poor devil at Queen's who had the hardihood to publish a History of War and trespass on their vile preserves. *Conspuez les accapareurs!*" His voice rose with a vibrant, silver ring, and through the archway from Peck came a roar of welcome with bilious imitations of a view-hallo. "Summertown must be giving a coffee-binge," he announced. "Come and sing to 'em, George!

> As one that for a weary space hath dined
> Lulled by the voice of disappointed dons. . . ."

He broke from me and joined the coffee-party at a hand-gallop, to be greeted by the solicitous inquiries of a generation which held that a dinner unsucceeded by real or assumed intoxication might be "a good dinner enough, to be sure, but . . . not a dinner to ask a man to."

"What sort of a blind was it, Raney?" asked one. "Where's Flint? Paralytic, I suppose? Don't run about on a full stomach or you'll be 'ick."

I had good opportunity of studying "disappointed dons" when I happened to spend a week-end in Oxford a short time after Campbell-Bannerman had broken down and resigned. Without exception everyone I met who had been the new Prime Minister's contemporary at Balliol regarded himself as a *premier manqué*. "I remember when I was up with Asquith . . ." they all began. "Asquith and I came up together," one man told me. "We got first in Mods. the same term, sat next each other in the Schools, were viva'ed together and took our firsts in Greats together. Then, of course, he went to the Bar, and I"—a little bitterly—"I thought of going to the Bar, too, but they offered me this fellowship, and I've been here ever since lecturing on the Republic of Plato."

When once O'Rane was at the piano I did not trouble my head with the shortcomings of the Senior Common Room. Flinging away the end of his cigar he struck a chord. "If that fat, bourgeois-looking fellow Loring will get me my guitar, I'll sing something you've never heard before," he said; and when the guitar was brought, "I heard a girl singing it in a fishing-boat on the Gulf of Corinth." He sang in modern Greek, and at the end broke into a fiery declamation of "The Isles of Greece," and from that passed on to wild, unpolished

folk-songs and tales of Irish kings before the hapless Norman invasion—utterly wanting in self-consciousness, and hanging tale to the heels of tale, each arrayed in language of greater splendour than the last.

It is thirteen years since I heard him, but the thrilling voice and shining black eyes are as fresh to my memory as though it were yesterday. Of the silent, lazy half-circle in the wicker chairs, fully two-thirds have fallen in the war; of the rest, Travers has gone to the Treasury, Simson and Gates are in orders, and Carnaby, whom I still see leaning against the piano and still shaking with his little dry cough, nearly broke O'Rane's heart by dying of phthisis before he was three-and-twenty. I met him in Mentone during the last weeks of his life. "Give little Raney my love," he panted. "He *made* Oxford for me."

Sometimes I think O'Rane with his invincible sociability 'made' Oxford for a good many people. His rooms—in Loring's phrase—were like a gathering of the Aborigines Protection Society, and he was always pressing us to meet his new discoveries. "D'you know Bakewell?" he would ask. "Lives in Meadows, rather a clever fellow. He's a bit shy and not much to look at, but there's . . . there's . . . there's good stuff in him."

Loring invariably declined such invitations, but he picked up the formula and parodied it.

"Raney!" he would call from the window-seat of the digs. "Come over here, little man. There's a fellow down here I want you to meet. He's not much to look at, but there's . . . there's good stuff in him. That's the merchant, accumulating cigarette ends out of the gutter. He's a bit elderly, and he's come down in the world rather, but in a properly organized Democratic Brotherhood . . . You undersized little beast, you've nearly killed my best Siamese! Come here, Christabel, and don't pay any attention to the off-scourings of the Irish bogs. One of these days, Kitty, we'll save up our pennies and buy a dwarf wild-ass and keep her in a cage and call her Raney." And at that, of course, O'Rane would begin the process of what he called "taking the lid off hell."

Où sont les neiges d'antan? Within six weeks we were scattered, and in twice six years I never recaptured that "first fine careless rapture" of living hourly in company with Loring and O'Rane, the two men whom I most loved in the world. The date of the final schools drew on apace,

and when they were past we underwent limpness and reaction for a day. Only one day, for as we sat down to dinner Loring said with a forced, uneasy smile that only half-hid his emotion, "George, d'you appreciate we've only got six days more?"

"Don't talk about it!" I exclaimed.

"Six days. H'm. I say, why shouldn't we stay up another year and read Law or something?"

I shook my head.

"All our year's going down and the digs. are taken. 'Sides, it'll be just as bad in a year's time."

We faced our fate, only determining to alleviate it by making good use of the last moments. The House was giving a ball and, as I was one of the stewards, I can say that we treated ourselves generously in the allotment of tickets. Lady Loring was to chaperon our party, and by a triumph of organization we found beds for all at '93D.' Between Schools and Commem. there were a thousand things to do, from the arrangement of valedictory dinners to the return of borrowed volumes and the sale of innumerable text-books. By our last Sunday all was clear, and we invited O'Rane to punt us as far up the Cher as he could get between ten and one.

"It's not been bad fun," Loring observed, as we glided out of the Isis and O'Rane began to struggle with a muddy bottom and an adverse current. "Dam' *good* fun, in fact," he added with emphasis. "What are you going to do now, George?"

"I've not the foggiest conception," I said.

The Congested Districts Board was relieving me of land and personal labour in Ireland, but, as it paid me probably more than I should have secured in the open market, there seemed little point in my superfluously trying to earn a livelihood in any of the professions. Sometimes I thought of improving my mind by a year's travel, sometimes I thought of occupying time by reading for the Bar—more usually, however, I waited for something to turn up.

"What about you?" I asked. "Are you going to take Burgess's advice?"

"And bury myself as an extra attaché in some God-forsaken Embassy? Not if I know it! I might have, before the Guv'nor died. As it is, I shall have a certain amount of property to manage and if you Radicals ever come back I shall go down and wreck your rotten Bills a bit. Otherwise

I propose to live the life of beautiful uselessness. In punting, as in everything else, our little man seems to effect the minimum of result with the maximum of effort."

Raney drew his pole out of the water and splashed us generously.

"Hogs!" he observed dispassionately.

"Go on punting, you little beast, and don't mess my flannels!"

The pole was dropped back and the punt moved slowly forward.

"Yes," said O'Rane, "it's very sad, but you're both hogs. As long as there's a full trough for you to bury your snouts in. . . . Faugh! the sour reek of the pig-bucket hangs about the bristles of your chaps."

"I'm glad I used to thrash you at school," I said.

"What good d'you imagine it did?" he flung back.

"None at all, but I don't get the opportunity now."

He punted in silence under Magdalen Bridge and along the side of Addison's Walk. When we had shot under the bridge by the bathing-place, he broke silence to say:

"I wouldn't go through that first term again for something! My God, I was miserable! Up in dormitory I used to wait till the other fellows were asleep and then bury my head in the clothes and cry. It was an extraordinary thing—frightfully artificial. I'd have died rather than let them hear me; so I hung on—sort of biting on the bullet—till it was quite safe, and, when they were sound asleep, out it came. I don't think I've ever been so lonely before or since. I wanted to be friends, you were all my blood and breed—not like in the old Chicago days. And then—oh, I don't know, everything I did was wrong, and you all seemed such utter fools. . . . Still, I won through."

"And you bear no malice?" asked Loring. His voice had grown suddenly gentle.

"On your account?" O'Rane laughed. "Jim, you've been an awful good friend to me."

"Most of your troubles are your dam' silly fault, you know."

"Yes, I suppose they are. And always will be. And I'll never, never, never give in till I die!"

Stooping down he ran the pole through its leather loops, picked up a paddle and seated himself on the box.

"What are you going to do, little man?" Loring asked, "when you go down?"

"Depends."

"What on?"

"The state of the world," Raney answered. "As soon as I've finished here, I've got money to make, and when I've done that, I'm going to marry a beautiful wife. And then . . . and then . . . I'm not quite sure, I've only seen the surface of this country. Folk here have been real good to me; I'd like to do something in return. I . . . No, Jim, don't ask me to tell you. Now and again I see visions, but you're so damned unenthusiastic. . . . And people who talk about what they're *going* to do, never seem to do anything at all. Wait till I've got something to show, something better than a 'maximum of effort and a minimum of result. . . .'"

"You've not done badly so far," I put in.

He snorted contemptuously.

"If you've got faith . . ."

Loring settled himself more comfortably on the cushions.

"Didn't you once have a turn-up with Burgess on that same subject?" he inquired.

"That was the lunatic faith of believing things you can't prove! My faith is that a man can do anything he's the will to do."

Loring clasped his hands lazily behind his head.

> "Where do you find his star?—his crazy trust
> God knows through what or in what? It's alive
> And shines and leads him, and that's all we want."

The lines quoted, he yawned and began to fill a pipe. "Tell me about your tame star, Raney."

O'Rane drew in to the bank, shipped his paddle and stepped ashore.

"Give me a hand in getting her over the rollers," he said. "Rough, manual labour's all you're fit for."

"I'd much sooner stay here and be wafted over by an act of faith."

"I'll give you three seconds and then I shall take the luncheon-basket," Raney answered, pulling a gold turnip-watch out of his trouser pocket. It was the first but not the last time that I saw it. On the back was a monogram which could with some difficulty be read as 'L. K.'—a memorial of Kossuth. I fancy it was the one piece of personal property that O'Rane carried from the old world to the new.

VII

Our party for Commem. had all the elements of failure I have been back to Oxford three or four times since 1903, and they ordered this matter better than in my day. The go-as-you-please spirit of London society spread quickly, and from the account of my young cousins, the Hunter-Oakleigh boys, I gather that of late years a man would invite one girl to place herself under the shadowy protection of an unknown chaperon and spend three agreeable days and nights dancing, supping, lunching and basking on the river in his sole company.

We were less enterprising and more dutiful. Any sisters who had come out were invited, and where sisters ran short we fell back on cousins or family friends so well known as to retain no suggestion of romance. There were five men—Loring, Dainton, Summertown, O'Rane and myself, balanced by Lady Loring, Lady Amy, a Miss Cressfield, Sally Farwell and my cousin Violet. It was understood that Loring would want to dance chiefly with my cousin, and that Dainton and Miss Cressfield would form an incomparable alliance of stolidity and silence; Summertown, who had injured his knee playing polo, volunteered to keep Lady Loring amused; his sister, Lady Sally, was allotted to O'Rane; and I was to take charge of Amy Loring.

The arrangement looked well enough on paper, but I foresaw serious defects in the working. For one thing, O'Rane and his victim had never met; for another, I had seen nothing of Amy Loring since my first Commem. On that occasion—though, Heaven forgive me! I was but nineteen or twenty—I had fallen deeply in love with her, and was preparing the way for a declaration when she deliberately dropped some remark to remind me of the difference in our religions. After that we rather carefully avoided each other—till by degrees we felt we could safely become friends again. I suppose it is now fifteen years since she cut me short and spared me some part of the disappointment; neither of us has married. The secret was our own, and Loring was innocent of irony when he said, "You and Amy know each other by now, you'll get on all right."

The most serious menace to our party came on the morning of the first ball. Tom Dainton rushed up from his

digs. in Oriel Street to tell us Miss Cressfield had taken to her bed with an internal chill and would be unable to join us.

"Awful bore!" he growled in his deep voice. "Spoils the numbers. I'd better cry off."

"Can't you get someone in her place?" I asked.

"At this time of day? It wouldn't be civil."

Loring took me into a corner and suggested one or two names. Our difficulty was that Tom usually trampled his partners under foot if they risked dancing with him and petrified them with his silence if they begged for mercy and sat out.

"Amy's good for half-hour spells of cricket shop if he can get—— I say, Tom, why don't you ask Sonia up?"

"Mater wouldn't let her come," he boomed in reply. "She's only sixteen. Not out yet."

"'Out' be damned!" I said. "She can glue her hair up for two nights. I'll see she gets partners. You can try it anyway; we'll send a round-robin wire to Lady Dainton."

And the wire was sent, signed by the five of us. An answering wire of acceptance was delivered at luncheon, and in the late afternoon a touring-car drew up outside the digs., and a slim figure in dust-coat and motor-veil ran lightly up the stairs with a steadying hand to an elaborate but still unstable coiffure.

"Lord Loring, it's perfectly ripping of you!" Sonia exclaimed, as he and I met her at the stair-head.

"You needn't call me *Lord* Loring even if your hair *is* up," he answered, as they shook hands. "It was 'Loring' when last we met."

"Oh, we were all children then! How do you do, Mr. Oakleigh?"

"Call me that again and I let your hair down!" I said. "Let me introduce you to Lady Loring and the rest of the party. Then you'll have to go and dress."

I hurried through the introductions, inspected the table in the dining-room and sought that corner of Loring's bedroom to which I had been banished for the following three nights. There was a wonderful to-do with opening and shutting doors, whisperings and exhortations, lendings and borrowings, all conducted through the medium of Lady Loring's ubiquitous maid. The hour of dinner was reached before the party began to assemble, and long past before the last laggard had appeared. Lady Loring, white-haired,

plump and unruffled, caught me glancing at my watch and took me aside.

"George, my dear, forgive an old busybody and tell me who is to take little Miss Dainton in." I consulted my list and found that the honour fell to Summertown. "The poor child's so nervous she daren't come down; Amy's trying to comfort her. First ball, you know. Thinks she looks a fright, you know. If you can give her a little confidence . . ."

"I'll send O'Rane in with her," I said. "They've known each other for years."

I called him up and was explaining the new arrangement of places when the door opened, and Sonia came in—white from her little satin slippers to the band of silk ribbon round her hair. For all her maturing figure she scarce looked her boasted sixteen years: the oval Madonna face and beseeching brown eyes were still those of a child. When last I saw her, twelve years later, there was hardly an appreciable change in her appearance. "George, my dear, she looks like a baby angel," whispered Lady Loring, as I gave her my arm The rest of the party sorted itself into pairs and followed us. "Bambina, you're divine!" I heard Raney saying, by way of inspiring confidence. Unlike the majority of such remarks, this one was free of exaggeration.

As a rule one ball is very much like another, though on this occasion there were one or two differences. As a steward I displayed much fruitless activity, and covered miles in search of some heartless A who had told a tearful Miss B to meet him "just inside the door," where traffic was most congested. Anxious friends gripped my arm with an,—"I say, old man, I'm one short. D'you feel like doing the Good Samaritan touch? She's a friend of my sister's, goes over at the knee a bit, but otherwise all right. I don't want to be stuck with her the whole night." Dowagers petitioned me to have the windows shut, or confided the disappearance of a brooch, "*So* long, with sapphires *here* and *here*, and the pin a little bent. I've had it for years and wouldn't lose it for anything."

At the end of half an hour I retired to Summertown's rooms in Canterbury and changed my first collar. It was unnecessary, but I wished to present an appearance of strenuousness. The music of the lancers began as I entered Tom Quad, and pairs of figures, garish or sombre in the evening light, hastened their leisurely pace along the broad terrace. Sonia met me by appointment at the door of the

cathedral, and I was reluctantly compelled to pilot her to O'Rane's garret in Peck.

"I just wanted to see it," she told me, as we tried to make ourselves com ortable in the most Spartan room in Oxford. Two wicker chairs, a table without a cloth, a rickety sideboard and a bookcase with three Reading Room books were all the furniture; there were no ornaments, no pictures, and only one photograph—a signed snapshot of Sonia paddling a canoe on the river at Crowley Court.

"It was very tactful of him to put the photograph out," I said.

"Doesn't he always . . . ?" Sonia began, and then blushed.

"Always, Sonia," I answered. "I was only teasing you. You're rather a friend of his, aren't you?"

She nodded, and in her eyes there was adoration such as is given few men to inspire.

"Has he ever told you about the time before he came to England?" she asked.

"Little bits," I said.

"He told me everything," she answered proudly.

"I'm sure it wasn't all fit for the young——"

"I'm not young, Mr. Oakleigh."

"And I'm sure a good part of the language was—unparliamentary, Miss Dainton. However, that by the way. He's a good little man——"

"You are patronizing!" she interrupted.

"He's a man; he's little—compared with Jim Loring or myself, for example——"

"He's worth more than you and Loring put together!"

"Speaking for myself, I agree," I said.

"There's nothing he can't do!"

"He's done pretty well so far," I conceded, and lit a cigarette.

"It's nothing to what he *will* do. After Oxford he's going to set out to seek his fortune,"—Sonia had dropped into the very language of a fairy-story. "And when he comes back——"

"You'll marry him," I said at a venture.

"Yes."

"When was all this fixed up?" I asked.

She held out her left hand to me: the third finger was encircled with a piece of blue ribbon. "To-night."

"He bagged that off the cheese-straws at dinner," I said.

"I don't care if he did," she answered.

"It'll wash off in the bath to-morrow morning."

There was a sound of feet ascending the stairs three steps at a time. The door was flung open, and O'Rane burst into the room.

"I shall keep it as long as I live," Sonia declared.

O'Rane pointed an accusing finger at her.

"Bambina, what d'you mean by cutting me?" he demanded.

"Is it time? I've been telling George——"

He threw his arm round her, bent down and kissed her on the lips.

"What's the good of telling *him*? What's the good of telling anyone? *They* don't understand. Nobody but you and me. . . . George, I suppose you know that in addition to being frightfully in the way, you're cutting Lady Amy?"

I threw away my cigarette and made for the door.

"In the words of my tutor, the estimable Mr. Templeton," I said, "Thees ees erl vary irraygular, Meester O'Reene. I think I shall go and tell Lady Loring, Sonia, and leave her to break it to your parents."

Sonia clasped her hands in supplication.

"Dear George, don't be mean! It's an absolute secret!"

"You can tell it to the Devil himself for all I care!" cried O'Rane in defiance.

The only person to whom, in fact, I told the news was Amy Loring.

"But how absurd!" she exclaimed. "Sonia's only a child. He's not much more than a boy himself."

"Time will work wonders," I said.

"But will he have anything to marry on?"

"He's never had a shilling to call his own since he was thirteen and a half. It's just the sort of thing he would do."

Lady Amy shook her head, unconvinced.

"It isn't fair on her. I know David, I'm awfully fond of him; I think he's really brave, and I should quite expect any girl to fall in love with him. But——" She shook her head again. "I mean, they're too young to know what they're talking about; this is the first time she's had her hair up. If I were Lady Dainton, I should give her a good talking to."

"But it's a dead and utter secret," I reminded her. "I don't suppose Lady Dainton will hear anything about it till it's all over."

" Till they're married ? " she asked in dismay.

" Yes."

" Or till it's broken off ? "

" Raney's not likely to break it off ! "

" *She* may. You must remember he's about the only man she's ever met."

The band struck up the opening bars of a new waltz, and we returned to the ballroom, leaving the subject of our conversation to take care of itself. Contact with O'Rane always made me fatalistic and more than naturally helpless.

CHAPTER III

BERTRAND OAKLEIGH

" The common problem, yours, mine, everyone's,
Is—not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means : a very different thing !
No abstract intellectual plan of life
Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,
But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
May lead within a world which (by your leave)
Is Rome or London, not Fool's-Paradise.
Embellish Rome, idealize away,
Make Paradise of London if you can,
You're welcome, nay, you're wise."
ROBERT BROWNING, " Bishop Blougram's Apology "

I

I LEFT Oxford with a sense of oppressive loneliness. It was not entirely the sorrow of parting from a place I had for four years loved but too well ; it was not altogether the prospect of making a fresh start — I was pleasurably excited by that ; the feeling of forlornness arose, I think, from the recognition that the next step would have to be taken alone. I suppose I am shy ; certainly I lack initiative. There had hitherto always been someone to keep me in countenance—Loring at my private school, at Melton and, later, at Oxford, and there had always been someone to act as a stimulus. At one time it was Burgess, who laid the foundation of any knowledge I have gleaned, and made me as temperate, passionless and sterile as I have become — as deeply imbued, perhaps, with the indifference that masquerades as toleration.

At another time I was stirred from philosophic doubt by the fanaticism of O'Rane. The fire he lit burned too brightly to last, but by strange irony as it began to flicker

I came under the influence of my guardian Bertrand Oakleigh, a man so disillusioned that in very factiousness of opposition I was driven to fan the dying embers of my young enthusiasms. My intimate acquaintance with him began in the autumn of 1904, some fifteen months after I had come down. In the interval I must admit to a feeling of intellectual homelessness.

The last moments of the Oxford phase came at the end of July after six weeks in Ireland with my mother. I returned to London and picked up Loring, and the two of us presented ourselves for our vivâs. There was little worthy of record in my own case. A fat-faced man in a B.D. hood opened at random the Index and Epitome to the Dictionary of National Biography, turned the leaves, shut the book with a snap and called my name. For perhaps six minutes I drew on my imagination for the early life of the Young Pretender; then in an oily, well-fed voice my examiner remarked, "Thank you. That will do." I disliked the voice, I disliked the man. He is probably a bishop now.

When my own ordeal was over I strolled round the Schools to see how the Greats men were getting on. To my delight I found Loring in the middle of his vivâ—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the vivâ was in progress, for I have no idea when it started. Maradick of Corpus was examining, and everyone seemed to be enjoying himself. The candidate was leaning back with his chair tilted at an angle and his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat; so far as a layman could judge he was making out an effective case against the Pragmatism of William James, of which, by an appropriate coincidence, Maradick was regarded as one of the greatest living exponents. The scornful demolition went on unchecked until Loring introduced some such name as Müsseldorf.

"Who?" interrupted Maradick.

"Müsseldorf. Johan Müsseldorf of Nürnberg. Died about 1830. It's his 'Prolegomena' I'm quoting. He exploded Pragmatism before James was born."

"Exploded? Well, er . . . that's as may be. I remember now you mentioned him in one of your papers. He's not very well known in this country."

"I don't know about this country," Loring rejoined. "He's shamefully neglected in this university. Yet he undoubtedly anticipated Schopenhauer on Will. Or if you look at Lincke's 'Note on Berkeley's Subjective Idealism' . . ."

"Lincke, did you say?" inquired another of the examiners.

The remainder of that vivâ has passed into history, and when I went up to take my M.A. three years later the story was told me of three different people. On the last day of the written work, Loring had expressed dissatisfaction with his papers, and I heard later that when he began his vivâ the examiners regarded him as a hopeless, unsalvageable third. They asked formal questions, and he replied by burlesquing such of their lecture theories as he had picked up at second hand. It was by pure chance that he mentioned Müsseldorf, but the awe of unfamiliarity with which the name was received led him to try experiments with the mass of mid-nineteenth century metaphysics that for two years I had seen him reading in the window-seats of '93D' or reciting of an evening to a restless Siamese kitten.

I arrived in time to see the three examiners taking counsel together, while Loring looked on with the good-natured tolerance of a man who is prepared to give up his whole day in a good cause.

"We think, my colleagues and I," said Maradick at length, "that this discussion had better be continued in another room. Perhaps you will come this way with me? We should like to hear you more fully on this subject, but of course there are other candidates to consider."

I have only Loring's unchecked, picturesque narrative of what took place during the next hour, as I was not sure whether the public was admitted to this private, auricular examination.

"They'll give me a first on that," he predicted, as we walked up the High together. "Bound to! Oh, it was one of our better vivâs! I hauled out every German philosopher I'd ever heard of, and a fair sprinkling that I made up on the spot, carefully adding an outline of their work and pointing out where they differed from our esteemed old friend Lincke. Maradick don't know much about modern German metaphysics, and he knows a dam' sight less about the German language. I quoted long passages to establish my points, and when I couldn't think of any to suit, I just made 'em up! I'd no idea my German was so fluent. If they *don't* give me a first, I'll expose Maradick for pretending to recognize quotations from two non-existent authors named Frischmann and Reichwald respectively." He led the way to the station with an obvious sense of a good day's work done.

I imagine that every man, before he attains wisdom, endures a part or the whole of a walking tour. O'Rane had propounded the idea in the course of our last term, and his eloquence was sufficient to shake even Loring. On leaving Oxford we repaired to House of Steynes, where Raney was awaiting us with a haversack and ash-plant, and without giving our enthusiasm a chance to cool we struck south with no more destination nor time-limit than was implied in the determination to walk until we quarrelled or grew tired of walking. It is a tribute to our friendship that three weeks later we reached Loring Castle, Chepstow, unsundered and harmonious.

There was, I suppose, too much variety for us to grow weary of each other's society. Marching without map or time-table, we billeted ourselves for the night on any friend we encountered on the way, and when none was available we put up at the first hotel that promised adequate bathing accommodation. Our kit was not immoderate—brushes, razors, sponges and pyjamas. When we needed clean clothes we bought them, and got rid of the old through the parcels post. This last was the only matter of disagreement between us, for Loring professed an overwhelming desire to heap unwelcome gifts on the unsuspecting men who chanced to be in the public eye at the moment.

"I've walked clean through these boots," I remember his remarking one night at Windermere, as I yawned through an attack on the current Education Bill in a fiery local organ. "George, d'you think your friend Dr. Clifford would like some capital brown bootings? Or Lord Hugh Cecil?" He seized the paper from my hands and turned the pages thoughtfully. "Eugene Sandow! That does it! Why, it may be his birthday to-morrow for all you know!" And it was only by concerted physical force that we restrained him.

The result of our Schools reached us at Shrewsbury: Loring had got a first and I a second.

"It's one in the eye for dear old Burgess," he remarked, when we congratulated him. "I shall go down to Melton next term and ask for an extra half, just to score him off. And now I really *can* take things easily."

"Why don't you stand for a fellowship?" I asked. I remembered his dread of leaving Oxford and found it in my heart to envy him his chance of living on and off in—say All Souls for another half-dozen years.

"Why in God's name should I?" he demanded. "I've satisfied myself, and anyone else who's interested in the subject, that I've got some ability. Now the only artistic thing is to waste it. There's no distinction in belonging to an effete aristocracy unless people can be induced to think you're being thrown away. I'm going to be a Dreadful Object Lesson."

He leaned back in his chair, yawned and sat with closed eyes until we roused him.

"Seriously, what are you going to do?" O'Rane inquired.

Loring adopted the manner of a Hyde Park orator.

"Live abroad," he said, "and squander the rents that I wring from the necessitous poor. Come back in time to shoot the birds or hunt the foxes that have overrun my tenants' land. Go down to the House once every few years to vote against democratic measures. Marry an actress of questionable virtue and die, leaving a son who has only to take the trouble to be born in order to become an hereditary legislator and a permanent obstacle to the People's Will. It'll be very hard work, but someone must do it, or Drury Lane and the Liberal Publication Department would have to close down. That's what's expected of tenth transmitters of foolish faces, isn't it, George?"

"It's the least you can do," I assured him.

"And the most. That's the sad part about it." His face grew reflective and his voice lost its note of banter. "Time was when I hugged delusions and called them ideals. I used to think there was room in the body politic for men who were rich enough and high placed enough to be quite independent of party considerations,—men who could wait and take long views, men without seats to lose or constituents to bother about, men who couldn't be bought because there was nothing big enough to offer them. The enormous majority of M.P.s go into politics for what they can get out of them—legal jobs, office, local honour and glory—and it gets worse every time another poor man is elected. They can't afford to wait, these poor men; therefore they can hold no independent view; therefore they'll accept any dam', dirty, dishonest shift their leaders may suggest. And so public life gets more sordid every day."

I suggested that with all its faults our English public life was still ethically the cleanest in the world and was so far from consistently deteriorating that it was still some

way above eighteenth-century England. If he found it corrupt it was for him to raise it to his ideal.

"My dear George," he answered, "the ideal perished on the day I discovered Unionists and Radicals both talking of 'big views' and 'the higher patriotism' and at the same time helping themselves out of the public purse. No, no! *Suave mari magno.* I shall endeavour not to marry the actress of questionable virtue, but I shan't attempt to etherialize politics. They're too dirty, for one thing, and they're too dam' dull for another."

He might have added that they were too uncertain. In twenty years' tolerably close observation it is the unexpected changes of politics that impress me most—the big Bills that evoke none of the expected opposition, the little Bills that break Ministries, the inflation or sudden pricking of a reputation, the constant shifting and re-arranging of parties. Ten days after Loring's criticism of politics on the score of their dullness, the three of us were at Chepstow waiting for the weather to mend before pushing on to London. The Khaki Parliament does not rank high among periods of consummate human dignity: its birth was overshadowed and embarrassed by the South African War; its early and middle life were given over to Education and Licensing Bills of which I imagine even their authors were not unduly proud. Then without warning came the news that Chamberlain had declared for Mercantilism, Protection, Fair-Trade—whatever name was dug out of the economy primers before the movement was baptized with the name of Tariff Reform.

The Unionist party divided, prominent Ministers left the Cabinet and a battle royal raged between 'Free Fooders' and 'Whole Hoggers,' while the Tariff Commission scoured the business centres of the kingdom in search of evidence to support the Chamberlain indictment. To the layman it seemed as if Mr. Balfour's continued tenure of office could be counted by weeks, and as 'General Election' came back to men's lips, political interest revived throughout the country and there arose a lust for Social Reform only comparable to the famous summer weeks of the French National Convention.

My interest in politics, long confined to sterile criticism of the Education and Licensing Acts enlivened by fierce denunciation of the Government's indentured labour in South Africa, became of a sudden constructive, vital and effective. Returning to town in October I took rooms in King Street, St.

James's and resuscitated the Thursday Club. The Government had a wonderful knack of shamming death and never dying, and in 1903 we seemed within a month or two of dissolution. A comprehensive programme was needed, and speaking for Youth, Liberalism, Oxford, we rushed into print with our "Thursday Essays."

I can see now that there was little originality in the book. Half-unconsciously we hearkened to the voices that were murmuring round about us and, with the impetuosity of youth, always went one better than anyone else, including, at a late date, the official programme-mongers headed by the new Liberal Prime Minister at the Albert Hall. Campbell-Bannerman might postpone the settlement of Ireland, but we were not so faint-hearted; Mr. Birrell might plead for Simple Bible Teaching as a solution of the religious education difficulty, we boldly declared for secularism, and so throughout our six or eight chapters.

Glancing at the old "Essays" with their Oxford omniscience and glittering epigram, their logic—and faith in logic, their assurance and perfervidity, I feel very old or very young, I am not sure which. We Liberal Leaguers of 1903 were to have so strange a history in the next ten years. The old Radicalism of Boer War days, the Peace-Retrenchment-and-Reform Radicalism was, in 1903, hardly respectable: we thought as 'imperially' as the truest Chamberlain stalwart. Dilke, with his "Greater Britain," was our pattern Radical statesman, and the federation of the Empire took place of honour in our manifesto. By a curious irony the 1906 election was too successful: there were too many Nonconformists seeking to recast Education and suppress Beer, too many Labour men with visions of expensive Social Reform. The Liberal League—most gentlemanly of parties—was captured; its leaders retained their positions of command by undertaking to push other people's Bills. Not till the Great War broke out did they come to their own again.

Dilke was our model abroad, but, when the vociferous, Radico-Labour-Nonconformist majority demanded Social Reform and a new heaven and earth, we were constrained to seek fresh guidance. We found it in the Webb handbooks for bureaucrats. With their stupendous mastery of detail, their analysis and classification, their prescriptions for every variety of social ill, they were an incomparable vade-mecum for legislators in a hurry. They appealed to the lazy man and the Oxford mind. I remember my relief some years later

in reading "The Break-up of the Poor Law," for unemployment had never seemed easy till I found the industrial population divided by percentages, ticketed and mobilized, ultimately pressed into penal colonies in the case of recalcitrancy. I had a perfect scheme cooked, eaten and digested for the Labour man who demanded unemployment legislation and the silly-season correspondent who inquired in general terms whether the unemployed were not really the unemployable. The Webb influence was paramount in the meetings of the Thursday Club, and in our essays on Social Reform I trace a Webb-derived mechanical conception of the State, a lust for sweeping legislation, a disregard for mere flesh and blood and a growing reliance on governmental control and coercion.

Our book was produced in 1904, but I did not wait to assist at its publication. In the autumn of 1903 my eyesight —never strong—underwent one of its eclipses, and my doctor ordered me a sea-voyage. For a year I wandered round the world, still full enough of the Dilke ideal to make special study of British colonies and possessions abroad. I went alone, because Loring, one of the few acceptable companions with money and leisure to spare, answered my invitation in Dr. Johnson's words: "No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in jail with a chance of being drowned. . . . A man in a jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company." The Daintons, however, who were wintering in Cairo, travelled with me as far as Alexandria.

A couple of days before we started I went down to Crowley Court to join them. Tom, who had lately bought himself a small car, motored his brother and O'Rane over from Oxford to say good-bye. They returned the same evening, but in their brief visit there was time for an embarrassing upheaval. I noticed that Lady Dainton was rather flushed and ill at ease during luncheon, and in the course of the afternoon O'Rane gave me the reason.

"She's a damned, interfering meddler!" he burst out, with no other introduction to the subject. "Lady Dainton, of course, who else? She had the cheek to tell me she didn't like my writing to Sonia so much."

"What's her objection?" I asked.

"Oh, Sonia's too young, and speaking as her mother—my God, I thought that ullage was kept for penny novelettes! The girl of the present day . . . Well, the long and the short of it was—I didn't mean to—but I told her Sonia and I were

engaged. That gave her something to think about, George."

He strode fiercely across the lawn with his hands clasped Napoleonically behind his back.

"What did she say?" I asked, hurrying to overtake him.

"Wouldn't *hear* of it, don't you know?" he answered mimickingly. "We were a pair of children, don't you know? I'd behaved scandalously in mentioning such a thing, it was monstrous; what had I got to support her on? It was all her fault for ever letting Sonia go to Oxford, young men were not to be trusted, and after the years she'd known me, don't you know?" He blew a long breath. "She couldn't have said much more if we'd eloped."

"Well, what's going to happen now?"

He flung his hands out in wild gesticulation, and his black eyes were round and hot with angry surprise.

"She declined to recognize the engagement and told me I was to consider it off," he said. "I told her I proposed to marry Sonia. '*That* is for *us* to decide!'" He clutched my arm and marched me the length of the lawn. "George, she's getting damnably pompous since they made Dainton a bart. We seemed to have reached a bit of an impasse. '*I* don't recognize even an understanding,' she said, 'and I shall not permit Sonia to do so. If you persist in this—nonsense, my husband and I shall have to consider whether it is advisable for you and Sonia to have any opportunities of meeting, don't you know? If you will take my advice . . .' Pah! And then she handed it out. I must think of my career, I was a mere boy; you needed to be married to appreciate that marriage was an expensive luxury . . ."

"You seem to have taken it in the neck, Raney," I said, as he choked and grew silent in his disgust.

"Pretty fairly. I'm not to write. I'm honour-bound not to mention the subject to Sonia on pain of having the door shut in my face next time. 'Of course, we shouldn't like that. You're an old friend. Perhaps if you had sisters of your own, don't you know?' She started to get patronizing, George, so I asked her to tell me whether she admitted me to the house because I was *fit* to be admitted, or out of pity because I hadn't a home of my own and was a bastard——"

At the risk of writing myself down old-fashioned and conventional, I admit there are two or three words that send a shiver through me.

"My dear Raney . . .!" I began

He laid a hand on my arm.

"You can't improve on what she said, old man," he assured me.

"Call a spade 'a spade' by all means," I said, "but not 'a bloody shovel.' Especially with women. They have to pretend to be shocked."

He threw up his head with a mirthless laugh.

"There was devilish little pretence about Lady Dainton. It wasn't a word I ought to have used, and apparently it wasn't a thing I ought to have been. I suppose—she hadn't—heard about it before." He stood silent for many moments. "I asked her whether my presence was still acceptable. Of course she was bound . . . did it very nicely, all the same. She said I was as welcome as before last June."

He took out a pipe and began filling it. I have met few men to whom the trite metaphor of 'blowing off steam' was so applicable.

"Was that all?" I asked.

"I told her I regarded myself as being still engaged to Sonia." His eyes suddenly blazed and his voice rose. "And that I'd marry her if the whole world was in our way. Children indeed! Does she think there's some fixed age for falling in love?" Again he blew a long breath. "She said she couldn't be responsible for what I chose to fancy about myself, but that I knew her views. There the row ended."

There was a subdued leave-taking that night, and for some days the gloom spread by Lady Dainton seemed to hang round her house and family. For all my wisdom and superiority in discussing the rash engagement with Amy Loring, I was sorry to see it broken off. Two, three years before I had been as anxious as O'Rane to marry and I do not know that a disappointment hurts less at eighteen than later in life. It is true that there was no pecuniary embarrassment in my case, but at that age I refused to regard it as a serious obstacle in O'Rane's path. If anyone wanted money, he either manœuvred himself into a job or put his shoulders to the wheel and made it. The one course, I then fondly believed, was as delightfully simple as the other. In few words, Lady Dainton was entirely wrong and O'Rane entirely right.

I carried that opinion with me to Cairo and beyond. The days of our passage out were days in which Sonia would come on deck in the morning rather white of face and waterily bright of eye. By night, as we strolled aft and looked out over the creaming wake, I would try to invent little consoling

speeches and tell her of men who had amassed fortunes almost in an hour; and she—at sixteen and a half—would gaze across the gulf that separated her from one-and-twenty. On that day she would marry him if she married beggary with him, though beggary was but so much rhetoric on her lips. O'Rane's future, as they had mapped it out together a dozen times, included two things that stood out above the rest—the revival of the title that had died with his father and a fortune wherewith to restore his father's estate. From so determined a republican no less could be expected.

The month I spent in Cairo made me doubtful whether Raney had not met his match in Lady Dainton. Even conceding the practicability of her daughter's generous assumptions, I doubted whether fair time would be granted for their maturing. Lady Dainton's ambition carried her far and fast; she was now, after five years' assiduity, reckoned unhesitatingly as of county family; a like assiduity directed on London would, in another five years, leave no house unstormed. I know no one outside an Oscar Wilde play who talked so persistently of the difference between those who were 'in Society' and the others who were not. I studied her method —and was astonished by its simplicity. She engaged a good suite at Shepheard's, aware beforehand of the class of visitors she was likely to meet there; by perseverance and an agreeable manner she succeeded in getting to know all who—in her own phrase—were 'worth knowing'; and with the aid of an undeniable flair for organization she made up other people's minds for them and tirelessly arranged expeditions and parties. (It was curiously like the 'Pinkerton's Hebdomadary Picnics' of "The Wrecker.") And on her return to England there started a paper-chase of invitations, beginning, "I hope you are not one of the people who think friendships abroad should be forgotten at home, like some dreadful indiscretion . . ."

I left Cairo with the feeling that Lady Dainton, were her circumstances ever reduced, would always be worth bed, board and a retaining-fee for a Lunn and Perowne Pleasure Cruise.

I also thought that David O'Rane, undergraduate, must cut an insignificant figure in her dominating eyes.

II

The world would be appreciably less unbearable if men and women could travel abroad without describing their travels on their return.

After the absence of a year, in which I made my way from London through Africa, India, Australia to South America and back again through the States, Japan, China and Russia, I am free to admit that I sinned frequently and soliloquized interminably to men who neither knew nor wished to hear about the countries I had visited. I was very young at the time, and that must be my excuse Greater age, and my sufferings at the hands of others, will now restrain my pen and limit me to a single reminiscence.

On my way home in the late summer of 1904 I broke the journey at Paris to stay with Johnny Carstairs, who was now—after a truncated career at Oxford—established as an honorary attaché at the Embassy. I never visit Paris without turning into the Luxembourg to see what Whistlers are on view and this time, as I came out into the Gardens, I saw Draycott. He looked shabby and unshaven, but not more so than any conscientious English student in the Quartier Latin, and at no time since he exchanged the extreme of foppery for the extreme of Bohemianism had a frayed shirt or porous boots seemed valid reason in his eyes for cutting a friend.

"The reason?" Carstairs echoed, when we met for *déjeuner* in the Café d'Harcourt. "I know it, of course, but——"

Three months of diplomacy had left Carstairs responsible and enigmatic.

"Don't be professional," I said.

"I'm not free to say," he answered. "You may take it he left his country for his country's good, and, if he goes back, click!" He made the gesture of handcuffs snapping over his wrists.

I made no comment. Since that day I should be sorry to count up the number of men who have gambolled a longer or shorter distance on Draycott's road. They have waylaid me at the House or Club, sometimes on the quayside at Calais—threadbare, furtive and spirituous, even at ten in the morning. They have all been offered the opening of a lifetime and need but twenty pounds for their outfit; and they have all accepted half a crown with gratitude, and most have returned unblush-

ingly once a week until the day when they were met with blank refusal. Draycott's case was the first of my experience —and the most complete.

After four-and-twenty hours in London I crossed to Ireland and joined my mother and sister in Kerry. Our meeting was in the nature of a *conseille de famille*, to decide what we were going to do and where we were going to do it. Health and the habit of years mapped out my mother's course for her—the Riviera for the winter, Italy for the spring and Lake House, County Kerry, for the summer and autumn. It was a placid but tolerable programme, and Beryl, who had left school two months before, adopted it eagerly. My mother then came to the remaining and unanswerable question:

"What about you, George?"

As so often with men of weak initiative, the question—with a little judicious delay—was answered for me. My uncle and former guardian wrote from an address in the County Clare, inviting himself to come for an indefinite period and shoot an unstated number of snipe with me. My mother, who secretly feared and openly resented Bertrand's overbearing manner and restlessly critical tongue, sighed—and accepted her fate. He arrived grumbling at the eight-mile drive, and in the course of ten days left not one stone upon another. The food, the beds, the hours, the shooting—there was nothing too great or too small for his exasperating notice—Beryl was twice reduced to tears, and my mother developed questionable headaches and a taste for lying hours at a time in her room. At heart Bertrand was one of the kindest men I have ever met, but his humour was of the Johnsonian, sledgehammer type, to be met with methods of equal brutality or treated with passive indifference. On the whole I was well treated. For one thing, I seldom have the energy to lose my temper; for another, he had been responsible for me during the greater part of my sentient life, so that, when he poured scorn on English public schools and universities, I could point out that I went to Melton and Oxford at his bidding.

"And so now you've written a book," he growled one night after dinner. "What d'you want to do that for?"

"Money," I said. "'No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.'"

"H'm. You won't make money out of *that* kind of book."

"Then you've read it?" I said.

Bertrand knocked the ash from his cigar and thought out a disparaging answer.

"Oh, I looked at it," he said vaguely. "It's unequal. Some parts worse than others."

"It was written by several people," I explained.

"Which part was your handiwork?"

"Which did you think the worst?" I asked in turn.

My uncle looked at me suspiciously.

"You're not proud of your precious babe," he observed.

"The opportunity would be too irresistible for you if I were."

Then he laughed, and with that laugh was born the friendship of many years. It was a pity, he felt, that a young man should bury himself in the dreariest house of the dampest county of the damnedst island in the world. Why should I not come to London, see a little of politics and society, 'try it on the dog, so to say'—which by amplification meant testing the principles of "Thursday Essays" on a popular meeting? If, as a good, catholic hater, there was one thing he hated more than another, it was writing letters: why should I not sign on as his secretary? Though untrained, I should learn much, and anyone with enough superfluous energy to rush into print could handle his correspondence before breakfast.

"Rather you than me, George," said my mother when I discussed the proposal with her. "You won't find it easy. . . ." But I had heard something of Bertrand Oakleigh's house in Princes Gardens and was not unwilling to endure discomfort in establishing myself there.

"I shall be delighted to come, Uncle Bertrand," I told him.

"For God's sake don't call me 'uncle,'" he growled. And with an afterthought that seemed lacking in logic, "I'm not your nurse, you know."

So in the autumn of 1904 I crossed from Ireland, sublet my rooms in King Street and set myself to study secretarial deportment and the ways and character of Bertrand. At this time he was within a few months of seventy, massively built, with massive forehead and, I think, a massive brain behind it. A wealthy bachelor, with powerful digestion and love of rich food, good wine and strong cigars, he entertained prodigally and had all the admiration of Regency days for a creditable trencherman. (My father rather offended him by dying young, and he looked askance at my shortness of sight and weakness of heart, as though the great-nephew were about to complete the disgrace initiated by the nephew.) In his boorishness and courtesy, his healthy animalism and encyclopædic

intellect, his hatred of society and insistence on living in it, he was to me a perplexing bundle of anomalies.

Some sides of his character—his disillusionment, independence and far-reaching capacity for verbal hatred—were attributable to early struggles and later disappointments. After leaving Trinity College he saw fit to quarrel with his father and, spending his last shillings in getting to London, he picked up a living from the gutters of Fleet Street, first as a reporter and then on the editorial staff of a since-defunct paper. While still working with one hand at journalism, he saved enough money to get called to the Bar and collected a rough-and-tumble practice from solicitors of the kind that sooner or later get struck off the Rolls. Eventually he took silk and became respectable, and from the Bar to the House of Commons was a short and well-trodden road.

Older members will still recall the Dilke-Chamberlain group below the gangway: Bertrand turned to it as a compass needle swings to the magnetic north. In '80 he was too young to expect preferment, but after the split I believe he was sounded on the subject of the Solicitor-Generalship. With characteristic perversity he affronted Mr. Gladstone by refusing "the indignity of knighthood" and in consequence remained for thirty years a private member, the leader in 'caves' and critic of governments, a formidable opponent but a terrifying ally, with a mordant tongue, a confounding knowledge of procedure and—I am afraid—a love of mischief-making for its own sake.

His hates were chiefly of interest to the persons hated and are far too numerous to set out. It could hardly be otherwise in the case of a man who seemed to acquire scandal intuitively. Knowing him as I now do, I should be reluctant to send any boy of four-and-twenty to live in daily communion with him; for though, like all professional cynics, he came in time to be disregarded, it is of doubtful good for any young man to see the world in quite the condition of corruption in which Bertrand depicted it. Jews and Scots, Tories and Nonconformists, lawyers and humanitarians, he hated them by classes: within the Radical core his antagonism was directed both against the men who lagged behind and those who raced beyond the insular individualism by which alone salvation could come. I always felt that were a guillotine ever set up near the Houses of Parliament, he would—by his own standards of justice—be the sole survivor.

Hide the fire-works or disperse the spectators, and he

was another man. His antipathies were so far from being reciprocated that Princes Gardens was a political Delphi. His judgement and knowledge of men were good enough for Ministers to consult him on appointments, chiefly—by some curious irony—ecclesiastical preferment, and it is not too much to say that he never tripped. I always imagine that he stirred a busy finger in the concoction of Honour Lists, though this part of the correspondence he kept to himself.

Birthday and New Year Honours, however, played a small part. Land Valuation Leagues submitted him their propaganda, Disarmament Societies asked how far it would be safe to oppose a vote, and I have known very highly placed officials to consult him on points of party management. His own description of himself was sometimes "a party boss," sometimes "an extra Whip" and usually "the official unpaid corrupter of the Liberal party." This last phrase seldom failed to drop from his lips at the end of a big political dinner when he, after being corrupted by the flattery of a Minister, in turn corrupted conscientious objectors at the rate of nine courses and a bottle of Louis Rœderer per man.

I soon ceased to wonder at my uncle's objection to sending out invitations in his own hand. For luncheon he kept open house, and any man might come to seek or offer advice and continue coming till a more than ordinarily brutal insult convinced him that his presence was no longer welcome; it was at dinner that his formal entertaining displayed itself. On Mondays we had "these damned official Liberals"—candidates and members; ex-Ministers and leaders of dissentient minorities; ecstatic, white-hot Nonconformist pastors and worried party journalists trying to reconcile the two-and-seventy jarring sects into which Liberalism split after the Chesterfield speech. Bertrand would glower at them, individually and in bulk, but, as the shrill, earnest voices rose and mingled, I could see his eyes travelling from time-server to *intransigeant*, as though his fingers were on the pulse of the whole unwieldy, centrifugal party. And when he had looked longer than usual at a man, he would wander round the table and murmur casually, "Stay behind for another cigar when the Bulls of Bashan have gone."

The Thursday dinners and the guests invited to them were marked in his book with a D—which stood for Duty, Dull or Damnable, according to his temper.

"I have to do it, George," he explained, with a half apologetic headshake. "For fifty years I've dined with them, and

they must come and dine with me. If I refused to meet 'em . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "All my time would be taken up inventing excuses. Take my tip and dine out on Thursdays. I'll put you up for the Eclectic. Don't miss Saturday, though. The Saturday dinners are sometimes quite amusing."

In ten years I do not believe I missed a single Saturday dinner and for reward I think I have met what Lady Dainton would call "everybody worth meeting" in Bohemian, artistic, un-Social London. Looking round the long table at the authors and musicians, the returned travellers and soldiers on leave from a forgotten fringe of Empire, I was always reminded of a well-attended dinner of the Savage Club. You were invited—not for what you were, but for what you had done or because you could talk; and Bertrand in black tie and short jacket radiated a new urbanity over the gathering. We dined soon after eight and sat talking into the early morning. About midnight a sprinkling of actors and Sunday journalists would drop in for sandwiches, champagne and cigars. If there were vocalists or composers, the piano was dragged in from the morning-room; I used to hear a good deal of poetry recited before or in lieu of publication, and, whenever Carden, the "Wicked World" cartoonist, was with us, he would sit with one leg thrown across the other, his cigar at an acute angle and a spiral of blue smoke curling into his eyes, while he covered the backs of the ménus with caricatures in charcoal. I have a drawer full of them somewhere—Trevor-Grenfell who penetrated the Himalayas by a new pass, Woodman as 'Lord Arthur' in "Eleventh Hour Repentance," Mihanovitch at the piano and a dozen more.

Failing professional talent, my uncle would be called on to make sport. The only men I know who eclipsed him in memory were Burgess and O'Rane, and he had lived so long in London, hearing and storing the gossip of every hour, that it was almost impossible to find him at fault. That he was a stimulating talker, experimenting in thought and taking risks in conversation, I judge from the eagerness of his guests to get him started, and—to put the same test in other words—by the keen competition to secure invitations for a Saturday dinner. I remember a Thursday night when Loring came and wrestled with Bertrand over the official Catholic attitude towards Modernism. I met him in the street a few weeks later, and he begged me to congratulate him.

"What's happened?" I asked.

"You ought to know," he answered. "It came in your fist. I've been asked for a Saturday."

And Loring was in small things the least enthusiastic of men.

My secretarial duties took no more than an hour or two a day, and at the beginning of 1905 I followed my uncle's advice and put some of my political formulæ to a practical test by going down three or four times a week to the Wensley Hall Settlement in Shadwell. The impulse came from Baxter-Whittingham, who wrote to remind me of "our pleasant talks at Oxford" and to say that not a man could be spared with the working classes in their present scandalous condition of neglect. Thirty per cent of my generation worked for longer or shorter periods in one or other of the university and college missions: my seniors, laid by the heels in the slumming epidemic of the eighties and nineties, were there before me, and my juniors continued the supposedly good work after my defection. I therefore speak with misgiving and a sense of personal unworthiness in confessing that East End mission work left me singularly and embarrassingly cold. From some lukewarmness of spirit I failed to catch the enthusiasm which made my fellows dedicate their lives to the work and allowed them all to drop it when a dawning practice or the design of matrimony laid more pressing claim to their leisure. Bertrand, indeed, indulged a favourite form of disparagement as soon as I made my intention known to him.

"I've been through all that," he told me. "It's all right; you'll outgrow it."

And I outgrew it in some ten weeks. Others have told me they made lasting and unique friendships. Such good fortune did not come my way. I doubted, and still doubt, the possibility of friendship between a Shadwell stevedore and the angular, repellent product of an English public school and university; this is not to put one above the other, but merely to disbelieve the existence of a common intellectual currency. Further, I am too self-conscious to run a Boys' Club or play billiards with the men without a sense of unreality and a fear of being thought patronizing. I question my own moral and social right, moreover, to conduct raids into the houses of Thames watermen; and, if anyone seek to justify such mission work as I found in progress at Wensley Hall on the ground that it showed rich and poor how the other lived, it is mere platitude to answer that the poor revealed to me as little of their normal life as I to them of

mine. Throughout my time in Shadwell I felt like a bogus curate at an endless choir treat.

And, if in looking back on it all I do not wholly regret the weeks I spent there, it is because of my consciously earnest and religiously hearty fellow-workers in the mission field. Chief of them in 1905 was Baxter-Whittingham, or simply "Baxter," as he was known to all Shadwell but myself, sometime scholar of Lincoln and a man ten years my senior, who had gone from Oxford to the East End and never returned. It was the fashion at Wensley Hall to regard Whittingham as a Latter-Day Saint (I use the phrase in its unspecialized sense, without reference to the school of Brigham Young); and I am ready to believe that in thirty per cent of his character Whittingham was entirely saintly. Admiring disciples told me how he lived in a single room of a workman's cottage on fifteen shillings a week with a supererogatory fast thrown in on any colourable pretext. The first thirty per cent of him compassionately and whole-heartedly loved the poor. Another twenty per cent was given up to an emotionalism bordering on sensuality in ritual, music and art.

And the remaining fifty per cent of Baxter-Whittingham was pure *arrivisme*. He had risen early and cornered the market in poverty: there was no one to equal him on East End Housing Problems, the Drink Question, Sweating and the Minimum Wage. His little "Other Half of London" and "England's Shame" created a considerable sensation and were accepted without criticism. Indeed, who was in a position to criticize the man who knew Shadwell and had lived there ten years? When the disciples prevailed on him to stand in the 1906 election his candidature aroused an interest that spread far beyond the limits of his division. And when he was returned a party was waiting, ready made, in the smoking-room of the House of Commons. Ministers might shake their heads irritably over another Incorruptible, but many a private member felt easier in his mind for the presence of the hollow-cheeked, thin-lipped figure in the loose-fitting, semi-clerical clothes, who seemed to carry England's poor in one pocket and England's conscience in another.

> **And then, and then came Spring, and, rose in hand,**
> **My threadbare Penitence a-pieces tore.**

I left Wensley Hall at the beginning of the 1905 Season, lured by cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches.

Early in April I met John Ashwell at a dinner-dance given by the Sinclairs: he casually elicited my name and address, satisfied himself of my *bona fides* and went to work like an industrious, dapper, well-fed little mole. Within a week strange cards arrived for me without explanation, within a month they had assumed the dimensions of a moderate snowstorm.

"Who *is* Mr. John Ashwell?" I asked my uncle one morning, throwing over a card bearing his compliments.

"A Society promoter," Bertrand answered. "D'you know Lady Ullswater? Those two have started a registry office for eligible young men." He handed back the card. "Your name's on the books. He sends lists of dancing men to struggling hostesses at so many guineas a dozen. Lady Ullswater brings girls out at a hundred pounds a head, with another fifty pounds if there's a presentation; for three hundred pounds and all expenses—a couple of thousand in all, say—she'll give a ball at the Empire Hotel. 'Lady of Title willing to chaperone young girl of good family. Introductions.' *You've* seen her advertisements—every spring for the last fifteen years. Ashwell takes a commission on any suitable match he brings off in a girl's first season. Don't cherish too many illusions about London Society, George; anybody can get there who's willing to pay. And unless you're particularly anxious to be married off to someone you don't know, I should advise you to avoid Ashwell. A year or two ago I heard him with my own ears tell a woman that he'd got a man he wanted her daughter to meet—heir to a viscounty and a good deal of money: only an uncle in the way, and *he* was a bad life. Of course if you feel you're immune, the pander to plutocracy is as amusing to study as anyone else."

Bertrand's description was not of a kind to send me out of my way in search of Ashwell, but in the course of nine years I saw as much of him as I wanted to. Of an artificial society he was, perhaps, the most artificial member.

III

Failing to learn much of working-class conditions at first hand, I decided to reform them from the distant security of Westminster.

It was a few weeks after my apostasy from the Wensley

Hall Settlement that I asked my uncle what steps he advised me to take in order to get myself elected to the House of Commons. "Thursday Essays" seemed to have committed me to a political career, and faithful reading of the party press had put my mind in fine ferment over the immorality of the Unionist handling of Education, Licensing and Indentured Labour. Moreover, like most of those who had learned their political economy from Mill, I was intellectually offended that the dead heresy of Protection should be dragged from the grave it shared with Bi-metallism and galvanized into life. And I suffered all the fierce irritation of the impatient idealist at sight of a lethargic Government slumbering in office and barring the path of hurrying academic reformers. I felt that much must be swept away and much more built up. I had nailed on the public doors my theses of Federation, Land Reform, Franchise Adjustment, Single-Chamber Government and the rest. The offer of the Viceroyalty of India would not have kept me from the House.

"Want to stand?" Bertrand echoed. "My dear boy, you'll outgrow that phase."

"But the hopeless chaos!" I protested. "We've become an Imperial people, an industrial nation, and we're still trying to run with an obsolete machine."

"And—you—think—you—can—alter—it?" Paper and ink can never reproduce the cold scorn of his voice.

"I can have a dam' good try," I answered, with assurance.

Bertrand went to his writing-table and scribbled a note.

"Take this to Abingdon Street," he said, handing it to me. "You'll find you're more than welcome these hard times. I should go there on foot," he added gloomily—"along Knightsbridge and through the Park, where you can see the trees and hear the birds singing. London has its charms in the Season, George. And you're a dancing man, aren't you?"

I admitted the charge.

"You'll soon outgrow *that*," he hastened to add, as though repentant of having found one good thing in life. "Well, *chacun à son goût*. But you'd find, if you came to the Gallery once or twice . . ."

"Is there any phase in life I *shan't* outgrow, Bertrand?" I asked.

He selected a cigar, pinched it, lit it and blew a cloud of smoke.

"No," he answered at length.

"And what happens at the end of it all?"

"You die."

"Well, what keeps *you* going? What phase are you in?"

He stared out of the window at the stream of hansoms and omnibuses rolling in a double line east and west.

"The great spectacle of life," he replied, with a wave of the hand. "You see it rather well from the House or the Club. That reminds me, I'd better put your name down. Come and lunch there to-day, and I'll show you the place. Yes, the great movement of men. I'm not tired of that yet. But you've got ideals, you're going to do things, you aren't content to sit and watch—and that's why I'm warning you against the House. There you'll only find jobs and disappointed men and backbiting and a spirit of compromise. However, you wouldn't believe me though I rose from the dead to tell you; a man has to find these things out for himself. You'd better tell the Whips who you are."

I walked down to the Central Office reflecting that Bertrand, to judge by his tone, had perhaps not yet quite escaped the phase of idealism.

His forecast of my reception was accurate enough. There were seats to fight in borough and county, north and south, east and west. I could have my choice, and with a year-book open on my knee I made comparative tables of the majorities against me. In the course of the interview there was diplomatic skirmishing on both sides as the Central Office reconnoitred to find out how much I was prepared to put down, and I tried to ascertain how far the Party Funds would help me. In consideration of a sum I was not willing to furnish, I could have the reversion of a safe seat in a mining area: at the other end of the scale, the Whips would pay all expenses if I would consent to break my shins on the five thousand Unionist majority in South St. Vincent's. Eventually, I undertook to pay my own expenses and fight the Cranborne division of Wiltshire, where there was a hostile majority of one thousand eight hundred. Then I jumped into a hansom and joined my uncle for luncheon at the Eclectic Club.

"The charm of this place," explained Bertrand as he led me up the great staircase, "is that once you're a member you can be sure of meeting most of the men you want to and all the ones you don't. It's not political, so you find scallywags of all types. That's why it's called the Eclectic."

The great, grimy eighteenth-century building—Hamilton's

finest work, I always think—is too well known to need description, and anyone who has driven down Pall Mall or up St. James's Street is familiar with the line of bow-windows overlooking Marlborough House, and the row of choleric members who stare disgustedly at the street on wet days and revile the English climate. Within a few months I was privileged to take my place among them, and Bertrand spent an industrious week introducing me to the rules, conventions and personalities of the Club.

It was a rare opportunity for his favourite pastime of drawing indictments against professions. At one end of the dining-room he showed me a disillusioned close corporation of invertebrate Civil Servants, counting the days till they could abandon their judicious sterility and retire on a pension; at another, the corner where members of the Bar lunched hurriedly and discussed appointments. There was an embrasure traditionally reserved for peers and invariably raided by shy new members, and an elastic table by the fireplace where parliamentarians gathered to refight the battles of the House. The sharp division and mutual jealousy of the coteries reminded me strongly of Oxford, and, as election was in the hands of the whole Club, every ballot had the gambling excitement of a snap-division. If the Civil Servants supported a candidate too warmly, the Bar would rally; blackball in hand: the parliamentarians, on the other hand, held that a club was one thing and an almshouse for permanent officials quite another. And they voted in accordance with this reasoned conviction.

The ideal candidate was, of course, the unknown man with the unplaced backers: he might, indeed, be attacked on the rustic principle that the function of strangers is to have half-bricks heaved at them; or he might creep in unscathed, to the lasting mortification of men who would afterwards have liked to blackball him. Not once or twice have I heard the question, "How did *he* get in? I suppose I didn't know about him at the time, or I'd have pilled him like a shot."

"Is Adolf Erckmann a member?" I asked my uncle in a surprised whisper as we came upon a stumpy, bearded, scarlet-faced man breathing stertorously through thick lips and resting on the end of a sofa the reddest and most naked head it has ever been my fate to see.

"I don't think any Club is really complete without him," was Bertrand's guarded answer. "He represents so much."

In the last ten years Erckmann has come to represent considerably more than in 1905: his social development in those days had hardly begun, and outside the City his name was still comparatively unfamiliar. There, if you were a banker, you knew Erckmann Brothers of Frankfort, London and New York; in the Rubber Market you met Erckmann Irmaos of Para; and if you touched the South American chemical trade, it was long odds you bought from Erckmann Hermanos of Valparaiso. Moreover, it was difficult to deal in English real estate, South African diamonds, Norwegian timber or Alaskan furs without rubbing shoulders with Erckmann or the retinue of younger sons who picked up the tips and aspirates he let fall and in return allowed themselves to be seen dining with him or yawning through the exquisite musical parties he gave in Westbourne Terrace.

With his ceaseless activity and Midas touch he must have been worth a cool million even in 1905 when he was no more than forty and had been divorced but once. His wealth thereafter increased by geometrical progression, and slackening his attendance on business he turned his talents to society. The knighthood came in the Coronation Honours of 1911, the baronetcy two years later. There he stuck, for the second divorce brought him more notoriety than credit: the freeborn electors of Grindlesham, perhaps through inability to understand his speech, accepted his largess but rejected his candidature—twice in 1910 and once in the by-election of 1913; and just when the opening of the Cripples' Institute brought his name high again in the list of Government creditors the war broke out, and Sir Adolf—with all his raffish, lesser theatrical entourage—stumbled helplessly backward into his social underworld. He will, of course, re-emerge after the war, for his type is old as Nineveh or Tyre: Petronius wrote of the feast he gave under Nero, and Alcibiades probably dined with him before mutilating the Hermæ.

For want of a better landmark, Loring used sometimes to refer to our early years in London as "the days before one met Erckmann," and anyone who saw how he and his rowdy little circle dominated such houses as they entered will be grateful for the definition.

The summer of 1905, my first season, was undisturbed by him, though for two and a half months I danced, on an average, in eight houses a week. It may be that the future will find us too sober and too poor to revive the glories and

excesses of those days, and in that case I am glad I grasped my opportunities while they lay within reach. As Bertrand predicted, I was to outgrow the phase, but, ere disillusion came with weariness, the life of those summer months was a long, unbroken dream. Now the men are mostly dead, the women widowed: the great houses are closed, the orchestras disbanded and bankrupt.

Yet for a moment at a time they still live. A hansom once more jingles through some Square to a striped awning and length of red carpet. Throwing the door open, Loring and I descend with our coats over our arms, press through the throng of interested idlers, give up our hats, pocket a ticket, pull on our gloves and warily squeeze our way past the couples on the stairs. I have forgotten half their names, but the faces are still familiar, and the little jargon of the ball-room shouted from the door to the whirling dancers. "You free any time? Missing two? Right! Many thanks. I suppose you're booked for supper? Well, sup with me—early and often." An odd bar of a forgotten waltz is enough to call the whole scene into life—the blues and whites and pinks of the dresses, the line of prim, weary chaperons round the walls, the lazy, stereotyped chatter, the drowsy scent of flowers, and the wonderful size and softness of the girls' tired eyes as daylight broke coldly into the yellow, stifling rooms.

There was a happy-go-lucky *camaraderie* about it all. An invitation once accepted left you a marked man. "Are you going to the Quentins' on Friday? Well, come with us! We've got one or two people dining first. . . . Eight-thirty. I don't know whether you got my name. . . . Oh, that was rather clever of you! I never listen, myself. You'll find the address in the Red Book, and I'll push you along and introduce you to mother when she comes up from supper. Have you been selected for the Fortescues' next week? Then we shall meet there. . . ."

And so from April to May, from May to June. I could stand late hours and ball champagne in those days, the whole of my world was treading the same round, and at twenty-four it was the rarest fun imaginable. Ten years later finds the ardour damped, but I should like to hear "The Choristers" played once more, I should like to dance again with Amy Loring, to see her brushing back the dark curl that always broke loose over her forehead, to talk again our tremendous trivialities. And I would give much to hear

—say—Lady Pebbleridge's butler thundering out the names at Carteret Lodge—and to see the men stepping forward in response. . . .

It was at the Pebbleridges' ball that I met the Daintons again. The house was small and the crowd was large. I had half decided to go on to the Marlores' in hopes of finding more room there when I discovered Lady Dainton and Sonia, pressed into a corner and pretending to enjoy themselves. Lady Pebbleridge had invited them as she invited all her Hampshire neighbours, but they were still strangers to London and knew no one. I acquired merit by finding the girl some partners, giving Lady Dainton an early supper and, when the room cleared, dancing with Sonia and trying to remove the bad impression which her first London ball had left on her. She had come on from the second Court and was looking far too attractive to be left standing in a corner ; moreover, ever since our passage to Egypt the winter before, I had enlisted under her colours against her mother and felt it incumbent on me to provide such consolation as lay in my power.

Beyond the statement that she had not seen nor heard from O'Rane in eighteen months, I gleaned little information in the course of my second supper on the subject of her chequered romance. At third-hand she learned that Raney's vacations were spent in studying English industrial conditions ; he had put in time as an unskilled worker on the Clyde, as an extra harvest-hand in Wiltshire, and finally—though I never learned in what capacity—as a miner in the coal-fields of Nottinghamshire. What his purpose was, neither Sonia nor I pretended to guess ; I judged from her tone that she was aggrieved at his experimenting in manual labour when by merely expressing the desire he could have secured an invitation to Crowley Court.

" Does your mother . . ." I began tentatively.

Sonia shrugged her pretty, white shoulders.

" She says he can come and stay with us if he wants to," she told me. " It looks as if he doesn't want to."

" I'm fairly sure that's not the reason," I said. " But he's a wild, eccentric creature—as you'll find when you're married to him."

Sonia drew on her gloves and picked up her fan.

" If I ever am," she said despondently.

I lit a cigarette and adopted a sage, mature tone.

" As soon as you two have got anything to marry

on," I assured her, "your people will recognize the engagement."

"We're not even engaged any more. Mother told him . . . As if I were a child!" She broke off, pushed her chair back and began to walk towards the door of the supper-room.

"Go on," I said as I followed her.

"Mother told him he'd—he'd behaved improperly in putting such ideas into my head. Putting such ideas! Mother *won't* see I've grown up. And then David got very angry and told her I might consider myself free of the engagement or not, just as I pleased. And he would never mention the subject till I did. George, I'm thoroughly depressed and, if I talk to you any longer, I shall say undutiful things."

A few weeks later I prevailed on Bertrand to invite the Daintons to dinner. He had met Lady Dainton on the Committee of the War Fund—an organization for the benefit of men permanently injured in the Transvaal; he had also taken an active dislike to her as he did to all bustling, capable women. She had joined the Committee one day and captured it the next. The meetings were held at the house which Sir Roger had taken for the season in Rutland Gate, and within a week there was an imposing programme of concerts, bazaars and charity performances. It is bare justice to Lady Dainton, who initiated and controlled the organization in its smallest detail, to say that the revenue of the Fund doubled in the six months following her accession to the Committee. I am not sure, however, that this was any recommendation in my uncle's eyes.

"*He's* a bore, and *she's* a snob," he declared. "Don't we know enough such without gratuitously adding to the number?"

"I'm asking solely on the girl's account," I said.

"My *dear* George!"

The unaffected mistrust of his expression set me laughing.

"You needn't be anxious," I told him. "They're newcomers to London——"

"And want to nobble the place!" he growled. "*I* know the type, George. Climbing, climbing. . . . They're beer, aren't they? I dislike brewers."

"I don't suppose they'll ask you to buy any."

"More honest of them if they did. A brewer's bad, but a brewer who's ashamed of his brewing . . ."

"Are you going to invite them or are you not?" I interrupted.

Bertrand sighed like a furnace.

"Make it one of our Dull Evenings," he begged resignedly. "*Really* dull; wipe off all old scores. You can ask Ashwell, and Lady Ullswater, she'll be very helpful to them, and—oh, I'll leave it in your hands. Give me somebody tolerable on either side."

The dinner took place some weeks later in the early part of May, and for a Thursday and a designedly Dull Evening was quite bearable. I took in Sonia and had Sally Farwell on my left; her mother, Lady Marlyn, went in with my uncle. I have forgotten how the others sorted themselves out, but conversation was maintained at an even flow, and no one seemed in an undue hurry to leave. And to Bertrand or anyone trained by him to look dispassionately on at "the great movement of life," there was a quarter scene from the Human Comedy being played round his own table. The actors steadied to their pose as the butler cried their names. I observed that the Daintons had wasted no time since we met at Carteret Lodge: they were blasés and overdriven with the wearing life of Society.

"I've *said* I'd give a ball," sighed Lady Dainton. "Really . . . dreadful fatigue, don't you know?"

And Lady Ullswater sidled up, shaking her wonderful head of perennially chestnut hair.

"Not if you go the right way about it, dear Lady Dainton. Of course it's rather presumptuous of *me* to advise *you*, but . . ."

And in front of me, through me and over my head at dinner, Sonia and Sally Farwell bandied impressive names. With both of them it was the first Season, and each seemed to aim at showing the other—and me—the important figure she had succeeded in cutting. Sir Roger, always shy and more than ever out of his element, postured as the bluff Tory Squire who hated London and all its works. John Ashwell, who was the son of a highly respected North-country solicitor before he took to peddling names of eligible bachelors, shook his head over the plebeian admixture of society, illustrated by an account of that day's luncheon with the dowager Duchess of Flint. Even poor Lady Marlyn, who was stone-deaf, caught the infection of play-acting and pretended to hear and appreciate the dialect stories of the American attaché on her right.

I sometimes think life would be simpler and more sincere if we had an official "Who's Who" with our incomes, their source, our professions or public positions, our parents and other relatives, not excluding those who lived abroad, with the reason for their retirement. My uncle himself, who told the story of his proffered knighthood a thought too freely, would have been called the son of a middle-class farmer—but for the fact that Ireland boasts no middle class. My own estate owed its existence to the old penal laws against Catholics: less polished generations used to say it was acquired by apostasy from God and theft of a brother's birthright. I do not dispute the charge and am gradually restoring the stolen property in exchange for adequate compensation under the latest Land Purchase Scheme. If the facts were recorded in a form accessible to the public, there would have been added piquancy attaching to my "Justice for Ireland" speeches a few months later. But the mystery, romance and make-believe of social intercourse would have departed. And our one public virtue would drop out of play, for we should no longer indulge the kindliness of respecting our neighbours' susceptibilities.

As it was I had the ill-luck to offend Sonia. Despite the weariness she inspired in me with what the republican O'Rane would have called "upper-ten-shop," it was unintentional. I have always kept up a curiously frank, rather cynical and entirely honour-among-thieves friendship with her: we know each other to the marrow, and, while in ignorance of any quality other than common egotism that should attract anyone of her temperament to anyone of mine, I have never ceased to admire her on purely physical grounds. I am still content to sit as I sat beside her that evening, gazing at the heavy coils of her brown hair, the red, moist lips, the brown, rather wistful eyes and the singularly beautiful arms and shoulders gleaming white through the transparency of her sleeves. I can understand any man falling in love with her; I can understand any man wanting to live his whole life with her—for a month.

Offence came by Tony Crabtree. Ascertaining that I knew him, she invited my opinion, and with the sense of stumbling unexpectedly on a too rare opportunity, I told her all that I knew and much that I thought.

"He's a great friend of ours," she cut in disconcertingly when I paused for breath.

"He's a *bad* man, Sonia," I repeated.

"He's the best fun out," she insisted; "you don't know him."

"You know him well?"

"He dines with us about once a week; he's taking an awful lot of trouble over our ball. I wanted you to dine and meet him."

"I'll *dine* with pleasure——"

"I shall ask him too. He's always inquiring after you. I thought you were rather friends at Oxford."

"We never exchanged an angry word," I said. "I don't like him all the same, though."

Yet, when I dined in Rutland Gate the following week, Crabtree was there. The household indeed revolved round him, and the majesty of Lady Dainton was subjugated by the majesty of Crabtree. I was to meet him on and off for the next ten years: on one or two occasions there was unwelcome intimacy in our relations, and, though we have now drifted apart, I still see and wonder at his faculty of success. At Oxford he was primarily the man who cadged invitations, directed other people's parties and exploited a heartiness of manner and a certain social position in the university for what they were worth in cash or its equivalents. "A man always and everywhere on the make," was Loring's definition after meeting him on the Bullingdon. As a log-roller and picker-up of unconsidered meals, he had no equal, and his activity was characterized by the most frugal spirit. Though he dined with us three or four times, we never entered his rooms in Magdalen or Long Wall, and his mode of life was to live on a social aspirant for eight weeks and then propose the spoiled Egyptian for membership of the Club. The following term saw him billeted on a new victim. It was an arrangement that suited all parties save, perhaps, the Bullingdon.

I fancy he had considerably outlived his popularity by the time he went down, and in anyone else's hands the system would have gone to pieces in a year. My excuse for this digression must be a desire to emphasize the sufficiency of his brazenness and *empressement* of manner to put his critics out of countenance. I can see him now, with his big loose-limbed frame, his smooth face, and black hair carefully parted in the middle—dining at someone else's expense and constituting himself the life and soul of the party. In tearing spirits, yet never losing control of himself; drinking freely, but never drunk; open, but never candid; careless, but

never off his guard—he was a disconcertingly cold and calculating man, clever and technically honest, though I would trust him no further than I could see him. After coming down he went to the Bar and pushed his way into a fair practice; several years later he married a widow rather older than himself, and, as his first public act was to appear as Conservative candidate in one of the Glasgow divisions, I infer that his wife had money. Immediately after the outbreak of war I found him hurrying through the Horse Guards in a staff captain's uniform. Though doubtful of his ability to "tell at sight a chassepot rifle from a javelin," I was in no way surprised.

His career is still young, and he has hardly aged at all since the night when I met him at dinner in Rutland Gate. I have no idea how long he had been known to the family, but it was pretty to see him slap Sir Roger on the back, to hear him call Sonia by her Christian name or address his host as "Dainton." He was prolific of suggestions for the forthcoming ball, drawn largely from experience of what was done by "my cousin Lord Beaumorris" at some period, I imagine, before that nobleman's second and latest bankruptcy.

By the end of the evening my dislike of him was no less, but it was diluted with a certain envious admiration.

IV

Social amenities make a petty thing of life, and from the loftiness of a time when our souls are supposed to be enlarged by war I look back to find an infinite littleness in the artificial round we trod during my idle early days in London. My uncle, who was ashamed of betraying enthusiasm, took mischievous delight in employing a low scale of values, and at five-and-twenty I fancied that to be cynical was to be mature. I trace a curious inability to distinguish the essentials of existence, and had anyone used such a phrase at that time I am sure I should have demanded rhetorically, "What *are* the essentials?"

Thus, Lady Dainton's first ball for Sonia was of little enough moment for men associated τοῦ εὖ ζῆν ἕνεκα, and, in my eyes, the greatest of its many surprises was that I induced Bertrand to accompany me and stay out of his bed till after four. There was no merit in my own attendance. Sonia invited me verbally, her mother by means of a card eight

inches by six; a week before the night panic descended on the family; they requisitioned their friends' lists, and I received three more cards with three sets of compliments, while on the day itself I was told by telephone that if I knew of one or two additional men I was to bring them punctually. So Bertrand, whose study of the great movement of men had never led him within the Empire Hotel, found himself incontinently deprived of his second cigar and packed into a cab on the stroke of ten-fifteen.

From the moment of our arrival I could prophesy success. Lady Dainton, I know, secured anticipatory and retaliatory invitations for Sonia; Lady Ullswater, who helped her to receive, reckoned up numbers and all they represented in her obscure finances; Ashwell wandered through the long rooms with an air of modest proprietorship, telling marchionesses of the balls he had left and duchesses of the balls he was going to. All the men obtained food, several of the girls obtained partners; and Dainton, who appeared five several persevering times in the supper-room, had the gratification of meeting at least one appreciative guest who observed, in the intervals of filling a capacious cigarette-case, "Dunno the merchant who's runnin' the show, but he does you pretty well, what?"

At ten-thirty the ball's fate lay still on the knees of the gods, but by eleven the rush had set in. I could see Sonia's face brightening, her eyes lighting up like the eyes of a political agent as he shepherds his stalwarts to the poll. Tall and short, dark and fair, stout and lean, they surged forward in an endless black and white stream, as desirable a set of young men as the combined talents of Ashwell and Lady Ullswater could bring together.

"She's launched!" said Bertrand, after an hour of the scene, and we walked upstairs in search of a cigar. By the buffet we found Dainton standing alone and drinking a surreptitious glass of champagne.

"Who does he remind you of?" my uncle asked me as we gained the lounge, and when I hesitated—"Don't you remember your Du Maurier?"

And then, of course, there leapt before my eyes the picture of Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns's husband at one of Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns's parties: a jaded but unprotesting figure, leaning against the wall and dully blinking at his lady's social captures; heavy-eyed, drooping-jawed, with bulging shirt-front and necktie askew. One hand stifles

a yawn, the other guardedly conceals the watch at which he is glancing with furtive resignation. Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns, meanwhile, is rising from triumph to social triumph; he is paying the bill—and wondering wherein lies the fascination of it all.

As it was too crowded to dance and too early to sup, we took a couple of arm-chairs and ordered coffee. Overheated defaulters joined us from time to time, and Crabtree favoured us with his presence long enough to inquire: (i) how much I thought this touch was costing the old boy, (ii) what he would cut up for, (iii) what sort of place Crowley Court was, and (iv) whether I thought "The Trade" was likely to buck up at all.

"Who is your objectionable fat friend?" Bertrand asked when we were alone again.

"Objectionable—yes. Fat—yes. But no friend," I answered. "His name is Crabtree, and you are the only man in London whom he has not yet told that he is related to the intermittently bankrupt and always disreputable Lord Beaumorris."

"And he's running after this Dainton girl?"

"It's healthy exercise," I said, "and he hasn't run very far as yet."

"Well, well!" He sighed. "Marriage is a race in which the bookmaker invariably bolts with the money."

"What you want is some supper," I said.

"No, I want to watch the people a bit more. Who's the Greek god who just went by?"

"The man who waved?"

"Yes. Face all eyes."

"That was David O'Rane," I said.

My uncle made me repeat the name and then sat silently smoking for fully ten minutes. I thought he was falling asleep, but he suddenly roused himself to ask:

"What O'Rane is he?" and, when I had given a short account of my dealings with him for the last seven years, "Why the devil didn't you tell me you knew him?"

"I never imagined you'd even heard of his existence," I answered in some surprise.

"I hadn't. That's just it. George, I should like to meet the boy. No, no! Not now. When he's disengaged. He'll only think me an old bore, but I'm curious. . . . He's a very beautiful creature."

"And quite mad," I said. "If you won't accept my

kind invitation to supper, I shall go down to find someone who will."

An hour later, with the consciousness that I had done nothing to justify my presence in the hotel, I sought out Sonia. A double line of claimants was closing in round one of the square, white pillars, and towering over the shoulders of the rest I caught sight of Crabtree's sleek, black head. While Sonia stood breathless with excitement and bright-eyed with sheer joy of existence, he warded off the crowd like a policeman regulating traffic.

"Now then, Sonia, what about it?" I asked.

"Next but five," she called back, while Crabtree waved a large hand and boomed:

"Move along there, young feller, don't make a crowd!"

"The next is ours, isn't it, Miss Dainton?" inquired a decorous little voice from under my elbow.

"Time you were in bed, young 'un," Crabtree retorted menacingly.

O'Rane wormed his way past me and presented himself. In a moment's hush I heard the sharp tap of the leader's baton; for the last time Crabtree roared his wearisome "Move along there, please," and, as the music began, Sonia glided out on his arm into the middle of the room, barely turning to cry over her shoulder, "Come back later!"

"My duty's done, Raney," I said. "Come upstairs."

"I shall stay here a bit," he answered, following Sonia round the room with his eyes.

"Please yourself. You can't smoke here, and there's some old Green Chartreuse upstairs."

"Damn Green Chartreuse!" he returned.

"You shouldn't say that even in joke," I told him, as I started to elbow my way back to my old corner.

Bertrand, I found, was at supper, and our retreat had been invaded by a score of men who by rights ought to have been dancing. They were chiefly Tom's gladiatorial friends from Oriel, now scattering to various units of the Army—Penfold to the 17th Lancers, Moray to the Irish Guards and Kent to the Rifle Brigade. Of the others, I knew Prendergast of Melton and New College, who was now a clerk in the Foreign Office and a purveyor of cheap mystery, and we were soon joined by Sinclair and Mayhew. Both were combining business with pleasure, for the former was playing for Yorkshire against the M.C.C. at Lord's, and the latter had hurried townwards to negotiate a position on the staff of "The

Wicked World" as soon as his last Oxford term was over. Stragglers came and went, but our numbers remained steady and the group was completed by the arrival of Loring.

"This will never do!" he exclaimed. "Why aren't you chasing the hours with flying feet? Why aren't you letting joy be unconfined and all that sort of thing? Chartreuse? I can hardly believe it! Of course, if you insist. . . . Sinks, go and dance!"

"I've been cut," Sinclair returned contentedly.

"Faint heart never won fair lady. You said Chartreuse, didn't you? I like to make quite sure. You been cut too, George?"

"We've all been cut," I said.

Loring looked round and pointed an accusing finger at an immaculate, pale, fair-haired youth with sensational waistcoat buttons and a white gardenia. I knew him by sight, as the illustrated papers were always publishing his photographs in country-house groups, and the reviews alternated between describing his novels as "impossibly brilliant" and "brilliantly impossible."

"No woman born of woman has ever cut Valentine Arden," he said.

"One had three partners," Arden replied with dreamy detachment. "One could not do justice to them all. 'Solomon in all his wisdom . . .' and they had hot red faces." He retired into himself and sat lost in contemplation of a smoke-ring till it wavered and burst.

"You're a contemptible lot," said Loring with scorn. "No more idea of duty . . . oh, my Lord! here's Raney! Go and dance, you little beast!"

"I've been cut," O'Rane protested with an air of originality. "If you're so keen on duty . . ." He pointed to the tray of liqueur glasses. "And it's *so* fattening. Go and work it off, Jim."

Loring shook his head.

"I'm going home. I sat in that filthy House all the afternoon, dined with my uncle, whose port would disgrace a preaching friar, let alone a cardinal. I then attended a political crush, turned up here, talked to my host, gave my hostess supper, had two dances with my hostess's daughter . . ."

"You were favoured," O'Rane observed.

"I was irresistible. So would anyone have been after so much 1900 Perrier Jouet. . . . However, that's neither here nor there. I enjoyed those two dances, because I was the

means of dislodging one Crabtree and seeing him packed off to feed dowagers."

"There's some value in a title yet," I said. "I tried and failed."

"How much of the Perrier Jouet . . . ? Half a bottle? No man, not even George Oakleigh, was irresistible on a beggarly half-bottle. I think I shall go to bed now; you're dull dogs; I'm doing all the talking. Anyone walk as far as Curzon Street? Good night, everybody."

His departure was the signal for a general break-up, and a moment later O'Rane and I were alone. He was silent and out of humour, and I did not need to be told that his efforts to dance with Sonia had been fruitless. I mentioned casually that my uncle wanted to meet him and suggested he should dine with us before going back to Oxford. This, he told me, was impossible: he was up to his eyes in work and had already wasted more time than he could afford.

"Your Schools aren't for a year," I pointed out.

"No, but I only work during term. In the vac. I see life."

I recalled what Sonia had told me on the subject.

"What's it all for?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You must do *some*thing."

"Yes, but—messing about at the bottom of a mine? It would be cleaner for you and more amusing for me if you came and stayed with me in Ireland."

"Or with the Daintons in Hampshire. There's quite a run on me. Sonia's frightfully offended because I haven't been near Crowley Court for a year and a half."

Than O'Rane, no man was harder to convince that he could ever be in the wrong.

"When people are engaged . . ." I began.

Almost fiercely he cut me short.

"And the engagement laughed at, and you threatened with the door and blackguarded for taking advantage of a girl's youth. . . . And your letters held up; I was forgetting that. God! George, if you'd the pride of a cur . . . !" He stopped abruptly, stretched his hand out for the cigarettes and lit one. "I went to Dainton," he continued more calmly, "and asked if he'd let me marry Sonia on a thousand a year—it was like bargaining with a Persian Jew over the price of a camel. He wouldn't commit himself. I told him I'd have the money two years after coming down from Oxford, and he stroked his fat cheeks and told me I didn't know the difficulties of making

money. . . . Difficulties! As though Almighty God hadn't shot 'em down all round us so that we shall have something in life to overcome! And that from a man who inherited a brewery and let it down till he's glad to sell it at two-thirds the valuation of twenty years ago! Yes, the Daintons are washing their hands of—commerce. I told him—all this was in Sonia's presence—that I'd be judged by my own vain boastings. I'd come up in three years' time to show him if I'd made good, and if she'd wait . . . Or if she wouldn't . . . I left her a free hand. . . ."

"It was only fair," I put in.

"To me, yes."

"To *her*."

"To *me*, George. There's not much merit in being faithful to a promise. But when you're not bound in any way, when it's just a matter of your own pride . . . Sonia must show if she can make good three years hence. If we both come up true—well, there you are."

He threw his cigarette away, yawned, and sank lower into the chair.

"When did all this happen?" I asked.

"Oh, a year ago. More. It was just after the row."

"Well, what's the trouble to-night?"

O'Rane's eyes, always an interesting study in rapid emotion, became charged with sudden anger.

"She thinks I've cooled off because I don't write," he said. "George, I'm flesh and blood, I can't write—not letters that Lady Dainton would pass—to a girl I want to be my wife."

"Why don't you go and see her occasionally?" I suggested.

"I've got other work."

"I bet you don't get fat on what you earn carting hay in Wiltshire."

"I don't do it for the money. I want to know the lives these fellows are leading. Man's entitled to 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,' and there are moments when I begin to doubt if every man the wide world over is getting what I claim he's entitled to. I didn't think *I* was when I was a kid of fourteen. I don't think sweated labourers, prostitutes, incurables, children with tainted blood—I don't think *they*'re getting all they're entitled to. The average Armenian, the natives of the Belgian Congo—I'm not easy in my mind about them, George. But before I die—my

God ! " He turned suddenly as a hand came to rest on his shoulder, and a voice behind him remarked :

" You're young to be talking of death, Mr. O'Rane."

" Let me introduce you to my uncle, Raney," I said.

He sprang to attention with the same click of the heels I had observed in Burgess's library some seven years before. As their hands met, Bertrand searched the lean, animated face and looked steadily into the expressive, defiant black eyes.

" I understand you are the late Lord O'Rane's son ? " Raney drew himself up to the last inch of his height, for all the world like a rock-python waiting to strike. " Your father was a close personal friend of mine," Bertrand went on ; " I am very proud to meet his son."

I set the words down as they were spoken ; and, to read, there is little enough in them. Yet, when I heard them uttered, I still recall that my eyes began to smart. Bertrand's manner — half-sneering, half-openly brutal — had taken on a new courtliness towards a boy fifty years his junior. I do not regard myself as a man of undue sensibility : the change of tone was not created by my imagination. O'Rane lowered his eyes, bowed and murmured :

" Thank you, sir."

I have never seen a quicker or completer conquest.

Gradually we relaxed our self-consciousness. I brought Bertrand a chair and gave him a cigar to smoke.

" Until two hours ago," he told O'Rane, " I knew no more of your existence than, I expect, you knew of mine."

" Oh, I'd heard a lot about you, sir," Raney answered.

" Lies from George ? "

" No, sir. True talk from my father. My first term at Melton I turned you up in 'Whitaker.' "

" The ' London Directory ' would have done as well," said Bertrand.

" Is it too late for me to call ? "

" By no means. Were you too proud to come before ? "

" Too superstitious, sir."

Bertrand leant forward and laid his hand on O'Rane's knee.

" George was talking about you to-night," he said. " I could have offered a helping hand, perhaps."

" Perhaps that was what I was afraid of, sir."

My uncle looked at him with amusement.

" You are—an independent young man," he said.

"I believe in Destiny," said O'Rane, with an answering smile.

"What on earth has that to do with it?" asked Bertrand.

"I wasn't going to lie down and die as long as there was preordained work to do. Destiny *meant* me to win through."

"She didn't help you much," I said.

"I'm not so sure. I dropped down once on the sidewalk in Chicago, and a woman took me in and nursed me round. Nursed me by day and—earned her living by night. When I went to pay her back and say good-bye before I sailed, she was dead. Just two months in all. And if ever a woman's soul fluttered straight to heaven——"

"What are your plans for the future?" Bertrand interrupted prosaically. He, too, seemingly, found O'Rane's intensity of feeling and speech a little disconcerting at first.

Raney woke suddenly from his reverie.

"I'm going back to Oxford to-morrow, sir."

"And after to-morrow?"

"I've got my Schools next year."

"I think George said you'd taken one first. What do you expect in your finals?"

"Commercially, there's no point in an honour school unless you take a first. After that, I have money to make. After that . . ."

He broke off and shrugged his shoulders.

"It will be Destiny's turn," I suggested.

O'Rane turned to me with a good-humoured smile.

"I suppose it's all a wild welter of words to you, George?" he asked.

"No more than any other hypothesis unsupported by evidence," I said. "Your preordained mission . . ."

"Isn't there one form of work you can do better than all others? Haven't you one supreme aptitude? Form an alliance between aptitude and opportunity . . ."

"And you get a man of Destiny?" I said.

"I leave you the honour of the phrase."

Bertrand glanced at his watch and pushed his chair hurriedly back.

"A quarter to four!" he exclaimed. "I must get home. George, I want you to arrange for David—excuse me, it was your father's name too—for David to come and dine with us. A Saturday, of course. I hope you will come, David. I'll charge you for your dinner, if you like; and I think you owe me one evening after seven years."

" I'll come any time you ask me, sir."

" I'll leave you in George's hands. By the way, mysticism is too fine and rare a thing to rationalize for youthful sceptics. You will no more make your creed intelligible to George than you will teach me to play chess without a board. Good night, my boy."

" Good night, sir. I—I wish I hadn't waited so long."

" Perhaps it was preordained for the strengthening of your faith," my uncle answered, with a smile.

O'Rane and I returned to the ballroom to take leave of Lady Dainton. Barely six couples remained, and at the end of each dance one or two white, exasperated mothers darted forward, whispering angrily, " You *must* come now, dear." Even Crabtree had gone, and Sonia was breathlessly battling with her partner, Summertown, to win the even sovereign he had ventured with the leader of the band on a test of endurance. The band eventually won by doubling its pace, whereupon Summertown claimed a foul and stood in the middle of the room shouting, " Ob-jeck-shun ! " till Roger Dainton silenced him with an offer of bones and beer.

" Good night, Sonia, and many thanks," I said. " It was the star turn of the season."

" Good night, Bambina," said O'Rane. " See you again some day."

" Good night, dear one," she answered casually ; and then, with a show of contrition, " I'm sorry we didn't have that one together."

" So am I, but it can't be helped now."

" There were such *crowds* of people I *had* to dance with," she explained.

O'Rane shook hands and came away with me. Perhaps he felt, as I did, that the explanation was in the nature of an anticlimax.

V

During the first half of the 1905 Season I saw the Daintons three times : after their ball it is hardly an exaggeration to say we met daily. Our new feverish intimacy was not entirely of my seeking, and I am free to admit that Lady Dainton's capable energy left me then, as it leaves me now, with a feeling of scared bewilderment, while the measure of Sonia's success in subjugating London came rapidly to be the measure of my dislike for her. When, however, my uncle fell a victim

to internal gout and departed for Marienbad at the end of June, he left me a house, a box at Covent Garden, a voluminous correspondence and the financial welfare of the War Fund to engage my spare time. This last spelt Lady Dainton and afternoon meetings in Rutland Gate. I nerved myself to face the inevitable and wired an invitation to O'Rane to stay with me when term was over.

He kept me company till Goodwood, and one of our first acts was to dine with the Daintons. I say it in no ungracious spirit, but at this time it was hardly possible not to dine with the Daintons. Turn up the files of the "Morning Post" and you will read some four or five times a week that a very successful ball had been given the previous evening by Mrs. X., "who looked charming in an Empire gown of ivory silk brocade," that among those present were the "Duchess of This, the Countess of That, Lady Dainton and Miss Dainton," and that dinners were given before the ball by "the Duchess of Here, the Countess of There and Lady Dainton." Lord Loring and other well-known dancing men are reported to have looked in during the evening.

Sometimes I feel my life has been embittered by the failure of the "Morning Post" to distinguish me by name; not until I entered the House was I segregated from the herd of "well-known dancing men," and this was more a compliment to the parliament of a great, free people than to myself, for by that time I had bidden almost complete farewell to Claridge's and the Ritz, the Empire Hotel and those ill-constructed tombs in Grosvenor Place that were tenanted, upholstered and beflowered for a night between two eternities of desolation.

By that time, too, the Daintons had scaled an eminence where I could hardly hope to follow them. The "Tickler" and the "Catch" were never wearied of publishing full-length, whole-page photographs of "Sir Roger Dainton, Bart., the popular member for the Melton Division of Hampshire," and Lady Dainton, "who is organizing a sale of work on behalf of the victims of the Vesuvius eruption." If a hospital *matinée* took place, Miss Sonia Dainton sold programmes; a theatrical garden-party, and she managed a stall; a mission bazaar, and she pinned in fading buttonholes at half a crown a time. And punctually the "Tickler" or "Catch" would depict her at work with her fellows—Lady Hermione Prideaux, all teeth and hat, on one side; and Miss Betty Marsden, the light comedy star from the Avenue Theatre, on the other.

And when the last Vesuvius victim had been clothed in crewel work and London had emptied, the indefatigable cameraman would take wing to the country and photograph "Lady Dainton and her daughter at their beautiful Hampshire seat."

Sonia repaid the trouble as well as Lady Hamilton or La Gioconda. And I think if hard work by itself is to be rewarded, Lady Dainton got no more than her deserts. *Ex pede Herculem*, and I judge her day by the hour she spared for the War Fund. The Committee Meeting was taken comfortably and unhurriedly in her stride. She was at the time a dignitary of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, a Primrose League Dame, a Visitor to half a dozen girls' schools, the president of several Nursing and Needlework Guilds and—I believe—a vice-president of every Girls' Club, Rescue Home, Purity League and Association of Decayed Gentlewomen in the kingdom. Lady Dainton was one of those women who accumulated arduous and unpaid offices as dukes collected directorships in the golden days of the company-promoting 'nineties. What is more, she worked hard at all of them. When I think of her hurrying from Committee to Prizegiving, and from Prizegiving to Sale of Work, I almost cease to regard woman as man's physical inferior, though I may still wonder how far the world's general welfare would have been retarded had she remained at home with her feet on a sofa and a novel in her lap.

I certainly think Sonia would have lived happier if she had never set foot in London. Her personal success went to her head, and it took ten years of three lives and a war at the end to sober her and restore some sense of perspective. "You can give corn to *thoroughbreds*," my uncle would begin—and then I usually changed the subject. A woman, in Bertrand's Oriental eyes, was the plaything of so much sexual passion, irresponsible and unsafe until she was veiled and married, and even then perverse and unbalanced.

"To a man, sex is an incident," he would say; "to a woman, it's everything in this world and the next. You are too full of idealism, George. You pretend man's perfectible, that woman's got a capacity for disinterested self-sacrifice. You'll outgrow that phase, my boy; you'll find that with all our inventions and discoveries and religions and philosophies and civilization and culture, we're devilish little way removed from the beasts. That young woman—I mention no names if it's a sore point with you—may turn into an admirable mother, but as an unsatisfied beast of prey . . . My dear

boy, it's not her *fault*, and you and your friends have contributed to make her what she is."

Contributed, perhaps. But, if not her fault, neither was it ours, but the fault of Society and human nature, the action and reaction of the sexes. As the year drew to its close I was too deeply immersed in politics to watch the social comedy, but in the summer and autumn there was little else to do. For five months I observed the psychological development of a girl who was physically attractive—and nothing more: not gifted, not clever, not accomplished, of no spiritual grandeur—a dainty, brilliant, social butterfly. Sonia was no more than that: I doubt if she ever will be more. Yet men are so constituted that it was enough to assure her triumph.

O'Rane and I observed in company. He was pledged to bear-lead young Summertown through the United States in August and September, and till that time I prevailed on him to leave the industrial conditions of England alone. The emptiness of our life must, I fear, have galled him, and, looking back on it all, I made a mistake in bringing him in view of Sonia and her gaudy fellow-butterflies. Technically they met as old friends without a claim on one another, each free to repent in any given way of their rash early engagement. In practice the liberty was one-sided: the greater Sonia's emancipation, the more critical he became; and Sonia, who was no fonder of criticism than any good-looking girl in her first season, grew first restless, then resentful and finally rebellious. When I said good-bye to Raney at Euston, I felt he was not leaving a day too soon; and this is not to blame him, but to underline the impossible position he and Sonia had taken up.

Before he left I recall a series of indecisive skirmishes. There was, for example, the Covent Garden engagement, in which I was routed. With a misguided idea of friendliness and in an attempt to separate Crabtree and Sonia before the whole of London had coupled their names, I placed my uncle's box at the Daintons' disposal, and, whenever we found an opera we liked, Lady Dainton, Sonia, Raney and I used to dine together either in Princes Gardens or Rutland Gate and drive down together to Covent Garden. O'Rane was a musician; I had an untutored love of music; Lady Dainton, I fancy, felt it was the right thing to do, and Sonia was too overwrought and overexcited to mind what the invitation was so long as she could accept it. Roger Dainton, who rimed 'Lied' with 'Slide,' professed zeal for the House

of Commons on such occasions, and on reflection I admire him for his frank Philistinism. With Sonia chattering unconcernedly through "Tristan," and with her mother leaning out to bow to her social acquisitions until I expected every moment to have to clutch her by the heels, the way of the Wagnerian was strait and thorny. But then, as Sonia said, "You come to Covent Garden to *see* people."

It was in seeing and being seen that we courted disaster. One night, as I was ordering coffee in the lounge, Crabtree attached himself to our party and accompanied us to our box. The next night I found him dining at Rutland Gate, and he asked me—before the soup plates were removed—whether I could squeeze him into a corner; he was prepared, if necessary, to stand. And no sooner had he secured a programme than he exclaimed:

"'Il Trovatore!' I love that! To-morrow night, too, by Jove——"

"Well, why . . ." Sonia began and looked at me.

"You'd better roll along here, Crabtree," I said.

He brought a heavy hand crashing on to my knee.

"Stout fellow!" he cried. "What about dinner? Will you come to me, or shall I come to you, or—or what?"

"Oh, you'd better all dine with us," suggested Lady Dainton tactfully, as he hesitated to fill in particulars of his invitation.

"Raney and I have got some men dining with us at the Club, I'm afraid," I improvised. And as we walked home I remarked, "We are beaten, my son."

"What a city to loot London is!" O'Rane murmured. The criticism, if not original, was at least true. I called it to mind whenever I found Crabtree feeding himself at his friends' expense, or Sonia accepting invitations from people she disliked rather than drop for an instant out of the race.

"I imagine we're becoming Americanized, Raney," I said one afternoon a few weeks later when he and I called on the Daintons to say good-bye before leaving London.

"The girls are," he answered. "They think men exist for the sole purpose of buying 'em sweets, taking them to theatres, running errands for them. Just listen." He crossed the room and drew up a chair by Sonia. "What have you been doing lately, Bambina?"

Sonia wrinkled her brow in sudden petulance.

"I wish you'd drop that silly name, David," she said.

"What have you been doing—Sonia?" he asked.

"Oh, heavens! What haven't I? Mr. Erckmann took me to a meet of the Four-in-Hand Club yesterday. I dined with Lord Summertown at the Berkeley. We went on to the Vaudeville, had supper at the Savoy, and then—and then—oh yes, then we danced with Hardrodt, the soda-water king. Why weren't you there, George?"

"Frankly, I haven't much use for Hardrodt," I said. "The only time I met him I thought he was a bit of an outsider."

Sonia spread out her hands with a movement of deprecation.

"But Society lives by its outsiders."

"A man oughtn't to get tight in other people's houses," I persisted.

"Well, it was his own house last night."

"Did he keep sober?" I asked.

"Well, there are sober men and sober men," she answered. "'Not drunk, but having drink taken.'"

O'Rane looked at her gravely for a moment, then he asked:

"Why d'you allow yourself to be seen in a house like that?"

"What's the harm?" Sonia demanded gaily. "He did us awfully well."

"You admit he's an outsider, yet you accept his hospitality. . . ."

"Oh, you little Oxford boys with your logic!" Sonia laughed. "Have a choc.? They're Lord Summertown's farewell present. You'll take care of him in America, won't you, David? He's such a love, I should never forgive you if you lost him. What are you going to do out there?"

At the sound of his own name Summertown joined us.

"I'm going to learn American," he assured us. "Say, this is my fi'ist visit to the U-nited States. Gee! I reckon this is a bully place. Pleased *to* meet you, Miss Dainton. I say, Raney, what's the proper answer to that?"

"No mere European has ever discovered. Get it in first and then clear out while they're still feeling for their guns."

"You're a fat lot of use," Summertown retorted. "Here am I going out to improve my mind. What's a 'cinch'? And this rotten American War of Independence I'm always up against—when'll it be over? I want to be a pukka Yank."

"You'll be more esteemed as you are," O'Rane answered. "Better let me do the talking."

"Oh, you'll only be taken for an Irish immigrant," returned Summertown.

There he was wide of the mark. There is a story that O'Rane, in shovel hat and clerical collar, bearded the night porter of his own college at two in the morning and gained permission to call on one of the chaplains in Meadow Buildings. I have seen him successfully assume an alien nationality in Montmartre, Seville and Leghorn; while the first draft of American Rhodes scholars, scattered though they be to the ends of the earth, may recall the inaugural address delivered in hearing of the scandalized Cæsars by an alleged attaché of the United States Embassy.

They may remember a slight, passionate figure with black hair and arresting eyes who urged them in the name of their great Republic to resist all interference with their liberty on the part of the University authorities and to lynch any black men they found lurking round Balliol or St. John's. Robert Hawke, of Texas and Hertford, six feet five and proportionately broad, may not yet have forgotten the night when the imposture was discovered: he alone may be able to explain why, after pursuing Raney down Holywell with a loaded revolver and running him to earth in Hell Passage, he tamely consented to breakfast next morning with the man he had sworn to slay. The Rhodes scholars were a fair mark for O'Rane whenever he had an outbreak. Creevey, of Melbourne and Trinity, still preserves the peremptory note that bade him call next morning on the Junior Proctor, Mr. D. O'Rane, though the House Mission has probably long ere this expended the five-shilling fine for non-attendance at the first University Sermon of the term. To add one digression to another, I have never understood how O'Rane survived four years at Oxford without being sent down.

The Covent Garden skirmish was my affair, and after summary defeat I retired into private life. O'Rane's moral lecture was no more successful than my diplomacy: the Americanization of women went on unchecked—if indeed the American girl be as Raney saw her, a social prostitute who would sell herself to the highest bidder and give as little as possible in return; I privately believe the breed to be indigenous to the wealthier strata of English society. He failed and retired to the other side of the Atlantic. Between the two skirmishes came the intervention of Loring House.

I was taking pot-luck there one night when Lady Amy asked me in an undertone how Raney's engagement was

progressing. I told her all I knew, and she broke a significant silence by observing :

" Oh, I just wanted to know."

It was *not* all she wanted to know, and I ventured to tell her so.

" Well, Sonia really is behaving rather extraordinarily," she went on. " I wonder her mother . . ."

" Lady Dainton accompanies her everywhere," I pointed out.

" Yes, either she doesn't see or she doesn't care."

" Probably she thinks there's no harm in it."

Lady Amy shook her head.

" This is my fourth season, George."

" And their first. I submit that they don't know how many people sit round the walls of a ballroom inventing scandal."

" Well, someone ought to tell her. You're a friend of the family."

" Not if I know it, Amy ! " I said. " This is not a man's job."

" I'd do it myself if I knew how to start."

" You've only to tell her there's safety in numbers," I suggested.

It is to be presumed my advice was followed quite literally, for the next time I dined at Rutland Gate the party had doubled in size, and no one got enough to drink. Sonia very dutifully granted dances to all the male guests and, so far as I could see, impartially encouraged all to make love to her. Certainly she discussed the possibility of platonic friendship with me at 10.45, when I had hardly finished my dinner ; and four hours later, when Valentine Arden was changing his second buttonhole, I observed the expression of weariness that settled on to his passionless, immobile features when rash new-comers sought to shake his precocious celibacy.

" When does a girl get over the awkward age ? " he demanded.

" At death," I hazarded, and he left me in disgust, because he clearly wanted to tell me the answer himself.

Thus to some extent Amy Loring succeeded where Raney and I had failed, but her ultimate defeat was more humiliating than ours. After the last War Fund meeting of the season I went upstairs to find a cup of tea and say good-bye to Sonia before starting out on my autumn campaign among

the electors of Wiltshire. Crabtree was with her, and in a jaded, end-of-season spirit they were discussing future arrangements and enumerating the houses they " had to " visit.

" When are you going to House of Steynes, George ? " Sonia asked.

I gave her the date, and we found we were invited for the same week.

" You're not selected, are you, Tony ? " she asked Crabtree.

" Well, I don't quite know how I'm fixed," he answered, without committing himself. " I'm due with the Fordyces for the Twelfth, and from there . . ."

He worked out a chain of houses running from the south-west to the north-east of Scotland. House of Steynes, of course, lay across his path ; the only question was whether he could fit in. . . .

" By Jove, yes ! " he exclaimed, with an air of one making an unexpected discovery. " A blank week ! I've a very good mind to ask old Loring if he can give me a bed ! It's a rotten business staying at an hotel, and if you're all going to be there . . ."

He finished his tea and drove to Curzon Street. Loring was at home, the case for charity was presented, and Crabtree carried the day. In an age of artificial politeness no other result was possible ; House of Steynes could accommodate half a regiment, and there had never been a breach or the opportunity of a breach.

" The dirty, greasy dog ! " Loring fumed when we met at dinner. And for want of a better description, " The dirty, greasy dog ! "

VI

I have never calculated the proportion of independent men outside the Navy, Army, Church and Stage who have neither stood as parliamentary candidates nor worked on behalf of a friend or neighbour. It must be almost negligible, and no useful purpose will be served by a description of my first canvass. It was conventional in every feature—from the underpaid rustics who believed their landlords could somehow see into the walls of a ballot-box to the Big and Little Loaf pamphlets and the Chinese Labour posters which the Liberal Publication Department rained down on me in return for ridiculously few shillings and pence. My speeches

were as conventional as the personalities exchanged with the Honourable Trevor Lawless, the sitting member, who invited me to dine, expressed the hope that the election would be conducted as among gentlemen and then uttered statements for which I had to make him apologize on the front page of "The Times."

The canvass lasted nearly a month, and I returned to Princes Gardens and my uncle with a sense that I had more than a sporting chance of carrying the seat. With all a young candidate's assured enthusiasm I gave Bertrand full résumés of all my speeches and underlined the telling points, till a more than usually unconcealed yawn reminded me that he too had addressed mass meetings and conducted door-to-door visitations.

"But where are the Ideals, George?" he demanded after my exposition of "The Case against Tariff Reform." "Where is your Imperial Federation, your Secular Solution, your new Poor Law, your Land Scheme, your Housing Reform? Have you outgrown that phase?"

"I can't say they went down very well," I answered. "The Food Taxes——"

My uncle threw back his head and laughed.

"Democracy! What crimes are committed in thy name!"

"The people aren't educated up to it," I returned unguardedly.

"So you stirred them with largely imaginary accounts of labour conditions on the Rand, you played on their fears of dearer food; and, if they return you, you'll blithely scrap the existing Constitution, interfere with the liberty of the subject in every conceivable way. George, George, you have much to learn of representative government."

The tone of my uncle's criticism nettled me—possibly because I felt it was justified.

"If you wait to get a lead from below," I said, "you'll wait all your life without attempting anything!"

Bertrand shook his head uncomprehendingly.

"This fury for Reform!" he exclaimed. "When you've outgrown the phase, George, you may perhaps recall my words of wisdom. I'm a democrat because I believe the folly of many is better than the corruption of few. Sometimes I ask my constituents to support me in advocating a change, sometimes they press a change on me; and, if I approve or can't argue them out of it, I push it on their behalf. The

rest of the time I'm content to see that democracy doesn't lose its privileges. I defend the existing order from Tory attacks. Peace—Economy—and personal liberty to do what you dam' please so long as you don't hinder another man from doing what he dam' pleases. I don't affect the modern craving for legislation; I've still to learn that it's wanted, and if it's wanted you must prove that it suits the genius of the race. And I hold that the English find salvation quickest and best if you leave 'em to 'emselves. Of course, that's unfashionable nowadays. I shall be a bit of a candid friend to our Government when we get back. But you and I are poles apart. With the recognition of the Unions and the extension of the Franchise the active work of Radicalism is done."

His easy, Pangloss tone exasperated me.

"And sweated Labour . . . ?" I began.

"Start your minimum wage, and it may pay a man to scrap low-grade labour and put in machines."

"Are you satisfied with our present haphazard Empire?"

"You're not going to cement it by a tariff or a high-falutin' proclamation," he answered. "When anyone *wants* closer union, when it's worth anyone's while, it'll be done. *You* want it. Good. Well, do a little missionizing round the Empire, then; don't go into the House to do it." He took out his cigar-case and threw it over to me. "Smoke one and don't look so dam' dejected, George. I've been in the House the devil of a long time, and every day I go there I'm more and more impressed with the extraordinary *little* that can be done there. I'm not being discouraging on purpose; I want to save you from a crushing disappointment. Shed a few of your illusions, get rid of the 'Thursday Essays' frame of mind—capital debating-society stuff and precious little more. If you'll remember that the government of men is the hardest thing in the world, that this country is a very old and illogical place, with a half-feudal, half-mercantile aristocracy still in effective occupation, and that the House of Commons is the clumsiest tool a revolutionary ever had to handle, you'll be some way on the road to political sanity. Don't merely think of ideal reforms and get hysterical when you can't bring 'em to birth with the aid of a one-clause Bill: face your difficulties squarely, see the utmost extent to which, with all your courage and perseverance, you can overcome them, and then never rest till you've secured up to that

limit. The one way sends you into the Cabinet; the other makes you the hero of a party of three in the Smoking-Room. Needless to say, you think I'm deliberately damping down your enthusiasm?"

"I think you're a bit jaundiced by twenty years of Tory rule," I said.

"Dear boy, I was through the '80 Parliament, and the '86 and the '92. If you want things done, you'd better go to Fleet Street. The House of Commons is being more and more ignored each day. Gladstone started it by his monster meetings; he could speak to six thousand electors instead of six hundred members. And the Press learned the lesson. A group of papers that get into every hand in the country, permeate every brain—that's worth a year of perorations and lobbying. But you'd better come along and see for yourself. There'll be an election in a few months now, so you'd better not waste too much time paying visits. Nobody's any idea what our majority will be like."

Between my first and second campaigns I paid but one visit—a week with the Lorings at House of Steynes. The Daintons were there before me, and Valentine Arden, my cousin Violet, Prendergast of the Foreign Office, Sally Farwell and her mother, Rupert Harley and the inevitable Crabtree arrived the same day. There was good shooting and tolerable golf, and in the evenings and on wet days we used to move the furniture and rugs out of the library and dance to Roger Dainton's heavy-footed working of the pianola. Early in life Loring had appreciated that the success of a house-party depended on compelling his female guests to breakfast in their rooms and allowing everyone to do what he liked for the rest of the day. We talked, shot, danced, played bridge, ate, drank, slept—and devised ingenious and bloodthirsty ways of speeding Crabtree on his way to Banff.

"And if he'd take that Dainton child with him," my cousin exclaimed on the evening of our arrival, "I don't think anybody would miss them. George, what's happened to her? She used to be such a nice little thing."

"She has been insufficiently slapped," I suggested. "I am now a serious student of social conditions; I have spent ten weeks in the East of London and ten months in the West. It is my considered opinion that wife-beating will only be stamped out when women are beaten regularly and severely before they become wives."

Violet's pretty blue eyes glanced across to the far end

of the hall where an ill-suppressed tittering rose from behind an oak settle.

"And Mr. Crabtree?" she asked.

"I have seen the dog-fanciers of Shadwell holding his like below the surface of a rain-butt for five minutes at a time. In Crabtree's case I should lengthen the period to avoid risks. Incidentally, what has Sonia been doing?"

She brushed the low-clustering curls from her forehead with an angry little hand.

"Have you ever seen a shop-girl with two men on the pier at Brighton?" she demanded.

"My education was skimped," I had to admit.

"Well, you can make up for it now," she said, as Loring appeared and claimed her for the first dance.

I began making up for it next morning when the Lorings and Violet were at Mass. Refusing to breakfast alone in her room, Sonia raided a silent but amicable bachelor party in the dining-room, engaged it in conversation and inquired its plans for the day. None of us was anxious to shoot on the morrow of our journey, and after considerable deliberation she decided to play golf with Prendergast. They started off at ten, and by one-thirty Prendergast had had his devotion sorely tried.

"I told her to take a jersey," he confided to me in the smoking-room. "She wouldn't. She went out in a north-east wind with a blouse you could see through, and when we got to the links I had to come back and find her a coat. We got on famously till we reached the third tee, then she said she was too hot and I must carry the damned thing because the caddie's hands were dirty. I gave her a stroke a hole and was dormy at the turn; then she must needs say she was tired and insist on coming home. At the club-house she discovered she was hungry and sent me in to forage. I brought her out sandwiches, cake, chocolate, and milk." He checked the list with emphatic fingers. "She looked at them and said they weren't nice and she could hang on till lunch-time. Making a fool of a fellow," he concluded indignantly.

I murmured suitable words of sympathy and imagined that he had now learned his lesson. At luncheon, however, Sonia sat next to him and, with her innocent brown eyes looking into his, asked him to describe his work at the Foreign Office. When we left the table he was enslaved a second time. As the wind had dropped and rain was beginning to

fall, she sent him to find a book she had lost; when he returned with it she was too sleepy to read and demanded bridge to keep her awake; no sooner had the table been set and three unwilling players dragged from their slumbers in the smoking-room than she decided the weather had cleared up sufficiently for her to take a walk.

"Anyone coming?" she asked at large.

Loring, Prendergast, Crabtree and I offered our services as escort—in that order and with a certain interval between the third and fourth.

"Well, run along and get ready," she ordered, "or the rain'll begin again. I shall go as I am."

When we returned with overcoats and thick boots she looked uncertainly at her thin shoes and inquired:

"Is it really wet outside? Perhaps I'd better change."

And change she did—every stitch of clothing she possessed, I imagine, for a full half-hour had passed before she descended in shooting-boots, Burberry and short skirt; and by that time tea was ready and the rain had set in for the night. Variations on the same theme were played daily under the eyes of Lady Loring, who was too placid to mind anything that did not affect her beloved Amy or Jim; under the eyes, too, of Lady Dainton, who, I believe, had hardly issued a command or rebuke to Sonia from the day of her birth. Crabtree and Prendergast openly kissed the rod, Loring good-humouredly regarded such treatment as being all in the day's work of a host; with the women I suppose Violet's criticism was expressive of the general feeling. I frankly derived a certain lazy amusement from watching Sonia playing the oldest game in the world; she seldom bothered me, and, while others ran errands, I was free to spend idle hours in the smoking-room with Valentine Arden, whose sex-philosophy taught him that, if a woman wanted him, she must first come and find him. Each day we elaborated a new and more masterly scheme for recalling Crabtree to town: each day we foundered on the same reef and forced the conversation at dinner in our attempt to discover his address in Lincoln's Inn and the name of his clerk.

It is perhaps humiliating to confess that his dislodgement, when it came, was not at our hands. I recall one afternoon when Prendergast fell from favour; Sonia forswore a walk with him and invited Crabtree to give his opinion of a new brassy she had just received from Edinburgh. They set out immediately after luncheon (in those days

Sonia did not smoke and could not understand how it could be necessary to anyone else); at tea-time she returned alone —rather white and subdued—and went straight to her room. Her mother, Lady Loring and Amy visited her in turn and reported that she was over-tired and had lain down with a headache. As we started tea, a telegram arrived for Crabtree, followed by Crabtree himself. Tearing open the envelope, he informed us with fine surprise that his clerk had summoned him back to chambers to advise on an important case; might he have a car, would Lady Loring excuse him . . . ? Valentine Arden, with an author's small-minded jealousy in matters of copyright, dropped and broke a plate in sheer vexation, though to his credit be it said that the anger was short-lived, and, when Loring himself strolled round to the garage to see that his orders had not been misunderstood, Valentine was filling a petrol tank as enthusiastically as I had offered to help in the packing and dispatch of our fellow-guest.

With her taste for good 'entrances,' Sonia appeared as the car turned out of sight down the drive. The headache was gone, and throughout dinner she was almost hilarious, though by the time we had finished our cigars she had retired to bed. Two hours later I met Amy coming out of her room: she beckoned me to a window-seat by the "Mary Queen of Scots" room, and we sat down.

"Thank goodness *that's* over!" she exclaimed, passing her hand over her eyes.

"Is Sonia upset?" I asked.

Amy shook her head and sighed.

"I can't make out," she answered. "They've—sort of parted friends. I think she's rather glad he proposed—and thoroughly frightened when it came to the point. George, does David fancy he's going to marry her?"

"I believe *he* thinks so."

"I'm not sure that I envy him. But, if he is, he'd better hurry up. Sonia doesn't let much grass grow under her feet. I really rather hope mother won't let her be asked here again."

"But as long as your Prendergasts and Crabtrees spread their faces out to be walked on——" I began.

"Well, don't let her do it here," Amy interrupted. "I don't want to see dear old Jim scalped."

"He's much too lazy," I said.

Amy raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"My dear, you're not very observant."

"I've been watching rather closely," I protested. "He's decently civil——"

"To her, yes. But d'you remember a certain Horse Show week when we were staying with the Hunter-Oakleighs in Dublin, and Jim and Violet——"

"But that's the ancientest of ancient history! Jim was hardly short-coated at the time."

"They kept it up a good while," she answered, with a toss of the head.

"Amy, you're a shameless match-maker. First of all Raney and Sonia, then Jim and Violet——"

"As long as it isn't the other way round, I don't mind. Sonia isn't even a Catholic."

"Neither Jim nor Sonia will marry for years yet," I said. "People *don't* nowadays. You have a much better time unmarried; there's an element of uncertainty and interest about you . . ."

"There's far too much uncertainty," said Amy, with a sigh. "Sometimes I have perfect nightmares about Jim. You see, he *is* worth a woman's while, and I have a horror that he'll make some hideous mistake and then be too proud to wriggle out of it. However, don't let's meet trouble half-way."

I left House of Steynes two days later and crossed to Ireland. On the writing-table of my library at Lake House I found a picture-postcard representing the Singer Building, with the question, "Any news? Raney." I sent a postcard with an indifferent photograph of the landing-stage at Kingstown, inscribed with the words, "No news. George Oakleigh." Then I said good-bye to the life I had been leading since my return to England. Bertrand wired in October that an election was imminent, and I spent the autumn in an Election fur coat and an Election car, tearing from end to end of my constituency and delivering speeches for which—as Gibbon might have said—the part-author of "Thursday Essays" might afterwards have blushed with shame. I have fought but two elections, and the memory of the cheap pledges and cheaper pleasantries, the misleading handbills and vile posters—distributed impartially by either side—give me no feeling of moral elation.

And in 1906 the contamination seemed the more unwelcome for being superfluous. There was room for high thinking and lofty ideals at a time when the country went mad in its lust to restore Liberalism to power. Heaven knows what programme I could not have put forward so long as it radically

reversed the measures and spirit of the Conservative administration!

Or so it seemed in the early weeks of the 1906 Session, when hundreds of new members pressed forward to take the Oath and sign the Roll of Parliament, each one as strong in the confidence of his electors, each one as resolved to bring in a new heaven and a new earth—and each one as innocent of parliamentary forms of procedure as myself.

CHAPTER IV

SONIA DAINTON

"Go back but a hundred generations in the lineage of the most delicate girl you know, and you will find a dozen murderers. You will find liars and cheats, lascivious sinners, women who have sold themselves, slaves, imbeciles, devotees, saints, men of fantastic courage, discreet and watchful persons, usurers, savages, criminals and kings, and every one of this miscellany, not simply fathering or mothering on the way to her, but teaching urgently and with every grade of intensity, views and habits for which they stand. Something of it all has come to her, albeit much may seem forgotten. In every human birth, with a new little variation, a fresh slight novelty of arrangement, the old issues rise again. Our ideas, even more than our blood, flow from multitudinous sources."

H. G. WELLS, "An Englishman Looks at the World"

I

"ENGLAND has had her Long Parliament and her Short Parliament. On my soul, George, I don't know that this won't deserve to be called the 'Mad Parliament.'"

The speaker was my uncle, the time a few weeks after the beginning of the 1906 Session, the place a corner-seat below the gangway. We had survived the oratorical flood of the debate on the Address and were settling down to work. The giant Liberal majority, "independent of the Irish," as we used to boast in those days, but discreetly respectful to the disturbingly large Labour contingent, was finding its sea-legs; new members no longer prefaced their exordia with a "Mister Chairman and Gentlemen," and the lies and counter-lies of the Election, the sectional mandates from the electors and the specific pledges to constituents were gradually ceasing to be rehearsed in public. We passed crushing votes of confidence in the Free Trade system, arranged the evacuation of the Rand by the Chinese coolies, ascertained that the parliamentary draughtsmen were wasting no time over our Education and

Licensing Bills,—and lay back with a yawn to luxuriate in our own strength, and dream of the new England we were calling into existence.

For a time our work was negative. After twenty years of misrule we had to cleanse the country before we could begin our inspired task, and in those early weeks I voted correctly and spent the rest of my day looking round me and attempting to memorize the new faces. The Treasury Bench needed no learning; I had met some of the Ministers in Princes Gardens and knew the rest by sight, but I gazed at it more than at any other part of the House—in a spirit of hero-worship, I suppose, on being brought into working partnership with men I had idealized for fifteen years.

In ability it was a great Ministry, and after nearly ten years I have much the same feeling for its leading members as before: the same love for 'C.-B.,' most human, diplomatic and forgiving of men; the same reverence for the aloof, austere Sir Edward Grey with his Bunyanesque Saxon speech and aura of Arthurian romance; the same admiration for the boundless intellectual efficiency of Mr. Haldane and Mr. Asquith; and the same delighted uncertainty in watching the volatile, lambent fire of Mr. Lloyd George's genius. In the delicate work of Cabinet-making, the deft fingers of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman hardly slipped, and to a Liberal Leaguer like myself the result was a brilliant compromise. The head and legs, the Prime Minister and the lesser Office-holders, were Radicals of the Dispersion; the body was made up of Liberal Imperialists who, by sheer weight of intellect and personal authority, might be expected to control the movements of the extremities.

Yet, when the history of the 1906 Parliament comes to be written, the one thing stranger than the capture of the Cabinet by the Liberal League will be the capture of the Liberal League by the unofficial members. The House was overwhelmingly Radical and Nonconformist: it closed its ears to the wider Imperialism, and in 'Liberal League' saw but 'Whig Party' writ large. The result was hardly fortunate. Rather than surrender principle or power, the Whigs went to work underground, systematically corrupting the Radical majority in the House in the brief intervals of misleading the Radical majority in the Cabinet. Perhaps it was invincible necessity that demanded it, perhaps the Whig section showed the higher statesmanship in committing Democracy to a course it might not have taken without blinkers. I say no

more than that it was unfortunate in its effect on the House and precarious as a policy on which life and death depended. Which Ministers knew what they were fighting for or against in the Big-and-Little-Navy struggle? Would the House have yawned so impatiently through the Army debates and the formation of the Expeditionary Force if it had known the Government's continental engagements? Was it safe to assume that a great pacific party would declare war within a few hours of learning the promises made in its name?

It was dangerous, but my purpose is not to arraign Ministers. Their double life is now only of interest to me as explaining in some measure the sterility of that monster majority at which I gazed in exultant wonder during my first session, explaining, too, the failure of that Mad Parliament which looked on life through the rose-tinted sunset haze of a "Back-to-the-Land" campaign and concentrated all political justice within the outer cover of a Plural Voting Bill. By counting heads, we were so powerful—and we did so little for all the Utopias we foreshadowed in our pulsing perorations.

"A Mad Parliament, George," my uncle repeated, "but a devilish funny one. We're made all ready to reverse the Tory measures of the last four or five years. Now, if you watch, you'll see the poor relations coming hat in hand to the mandarins."

I watched for some time, inside the House and out; watched and saw the Nationalists—hardly hat in hand—rejecting the Irish Councils Bill and calling for payment in Home Rule currency. I saw the Labour Party fed first with the Trades Disputes Bill, then with the provision for payment of members; and I saw the Welsh mollified with a promise of Disestablishment. It was to everybody's advantage that the Government should not be wound up till the preference shareholders had been paid, and as the last half-year's interest became due the commercial travellers of the Cabinet started on the road with social reform samples—old age pensions, land taxation, small holdings and insurance. The Radical Ministers were good salesmen and did a roaring trade; the country settled down to a riot of social legislation; the very board of Whig directors caught something of the infectious enthusiasm, and, as it was too late to talk of foreign debenture holders, the least they could do was to increase their outlay to attract new customers.

There was tragi-comedy in the spectacle, for the board and its travellers never worked in harmony, and neither

section of supporters was satisfied. There was no attempt at comprehensive, imaginative social reconstruction—nothing but successive sops to clamorous minorities. Of my Thursday Club programme—with its Poor Law and Housing Reforms, its Secular Education and Federal Parliament, above all with its determined attempts to solve the Wage Problem and free the industrial system from the scandal and crime of strikes and lock-outs, not one item was achieved. Not one item had a chance of being achieved when the contest with the Lords was postponed beyond the rejection of the first Liberal Bill. But the debts had not then been paid. Street hoardings still bore tattered remnants of fluttering election posters, the Liberals had been out of office for half a generation, and the Whig foreign policy was barely begun.

So the party shirked the election, its groups scrambled for favours from the Government, and Ministers talked social reform, universal brotherhood and a "naval holiday" to a House they were afraid to take into their confidence. The 1906 Parliament might have produced a social programme or a foreign policy with the backing its conditions necessitated. It did neither. No one troubled to educate new members or organize the party. It was chiefly, I think, the number of groups, the strangeness of their visions and their common failure to recognize the impossible in politics, that moved my uncle to speak of the Mad Parliament. I am not so vain as to think the "Thursday Programme" wrote the last word in political science: I do claim, however, that as a piece of co-ordinated, imaginative thinking it treated the State as a whole, not as a bundle of warring sections to be divided and ruled, bribed and silenced. It attempted to bring the machinery of government into line with twentieth-century requirements. It tried to carry out, at leisure and in a spirit of reason, the structural changes that will have to be hurriedly improvised after the war.

By the time I had learned the names and constituencies of two-thirds of the members I had begun to notice how individuals agglomerated in the Smoking-Room and lobbies. The only characteristic common to every group was that it imagined itself the apostle of an exclusive salvation. The "Thursday Party" was reproduced a dozen times over, and, in looking back sadly on the futility of all our empty dreams, I feel that the Whips' Office must be held responsible for wasting the greatest opportunity of reform since the French Revolution. So long as we voted obediently, nothing mattered.

We were never welded into a party, never educated politically; and the waste of enthusiasm was hardly less criminal than the waste of talent.

I can speak impersonally in this matter, for no one dreamed of thinking me fit for the most insignificant office—myself least of all; but there was no justification for ignoring great commercial organizers like Barrow, Trentley, Justman and half a dozen more—men whose ability had been proved time and again—and farming out under-secretaryships to fashionable barristers like Turkinson or scions of great houses like Cheely-Wickham. One of the first groups I distinguished was that of the middle-aged successful business men for whom no use could be found save as units in a division.

Another and a sadder was the largest in the House—the stalwarts, the 'sound party men.' Under present conditions no Government could live without them; they know it, and in that knowledge find two-thirds of their reward. The remainder comes by way of knighthoods—after a year or two of power it was impossible to walk through the lobby without being jostled by knights—occasionally by a Privy Councillorship and always by a sense of personal importance. How they loved to repeat what the Prime Minister had said to them—man to man! How infallible was the Liberal Ministry, whatever its inconsistencies! How treacherous their opponents! The Liberal rank and filer, I suppose, is no more stupid than his counterpart on the other side, but he is as depressing in conversation as might be expected of a man unoriginal in thought and uncritical in mind, whose supreme function is vehemently to propagate the imperfectly grasped ideas of others. I require no more loyal supporter than the Right Honourable Harry Marshall-James or the hundred men who are Marshall-James in everything but name; but I am not likely to find a man more pompous of manner and mediocre of mind.

And he is one of illimitably many, for the Ministry discouraged ability outside the Treasury Bench, finding distant appointments for the men it could not swallow at home. "No Army," as Jellaby, one of the Junior Whips, told me, "can be composed entirely of field-marshals." In his place I should have said the same thing: undoubtedly the same thought was felt, if never expressed, in the Nationalist party, so alien in spirit that I never knew the half of its members' names.

"I've sat opposite or alongside them many years," said

my uncle reflectively. "I've seen the hair of so many of them turn gradually whiter. Some of them are elderly men, George; if Home Rule doesn't come in their time . . . And there are still people who call them paid agitators; the Sinn Fein party still pretends they're prolonging the agony in order to keep their job. Ye gods! how sick of it all they must be! There are men on those benches—barristers and writers—who could have made the world their own. What d'you suppose they wouldn't give now to have their youth back—and their youth's opportunities? You may live to see the tragedy repeated with Labour."

He pointed with his finger to a group of three men high up on a back bench—Dillworth, Campion, and Tomlin. I had heard the first two in the debate on the Address, and the last I was to hear many times before I left the House. They represented the Socialist State, and for passion, logic and incorruptibility ran the Nationalists close. As the Session aged, nine-tenths of the new members were unconsciously affected by the moral atmosphere of the House; compromise dulled the fine edge of our convictions, our constant close proximity to the Opposition mellowed our spirit; and a recognition of personal traits, the utterance of feeble, obscure, friendly jokes induced the belief that our worst enemy was fool rather than knave. The *intransigeant* Socialists kept their souls untainted by compromise: for them there was no dealing with Liberal or Conservative, and, when Tomlin spoke on Labour questions, you could imagine a Socialist foot-rule in his hand by which every reform was to be measured.

I disapprove the Socialist State he expounded, I dispute his premises and charge him with possessing the same excessive logic which led primitive ascetics to inch-by-inch suicide or drove doctrinaires of the French Revolution to destroy church spires in the interests of Republican equality. But I admire his passion of soul and intensity of vision; I recognize that his group of idealogues at least appreciated that the perfect State presupposes an all-embracing social philosophy.

There are few more moving sights than a preacher without a congregation, or with one that is incapable of understanding. St. Francis of Assisi won warmer response from his birds than Campion or Dillworth from the 1906 Parliament. Their audience numbered too many barristers, and the Bar has never been famous for its imagination or sympathy. Socialism, as offered by Campion and accepted by say, Robert

Plumer, K.C., suggested the form that the Sermon on the Mount might assume in the hands of an efficient parliamentary draughtsman. The Socialists were not slow to appraise their critics, and I sometimes think a great part of the later industrial troubles rose from a belief that laws and agreements were framed by skilled hair-splitters for the confusion of trusting manual workers.

The belief was fostered by the Press and a generous use of the "lawyer-politician" catchword. I have never been associated with the law, but I had opportunities of studying my legal colleagues in bulk, and a sillier phrase never obsessed the mind of a considerable people. Granted that the Bar was of arid, unimaginative temper, granted that it invaded the House for what the House could give it, may not the same charge be brought against seven-tenths of the non-legal members? And pressmen and barristers alone seem to enjoy the faculty of assimilating huge masses of strange matter in short time.

The Bar in Parliament appeared at its worst, not in the Chamber but in the Smoking-Room. I remember my uncle taking me aside after my election and counselling me as though I were a younger brother going to school for the first time. I was to sit tight until I had learned the procedure of the House, and after that—well, any man of average intelligence who wore out his patience and his trousers for ten years would be in the Ministry at the end. I was to put parliament before everything else and shed any idea that I could write novels between divisions, or contribute to the Press, or live with one foot in the House and the other in Mayfair. I was to cultivate the personal touch and read Ronsard for the pleasure of quoting him to Mr. Wyndham. But first and last and all the while I was to avoid the Smoking-Room.

"It's the grave of young reputations, George," he told me one day when we were seated there in a corner consecrated immemorially to his private use. "You sit and talk about what you're going to do, you discuss your neighbours,—this comes well from me, I know, but I'm an old sinner with a wasted life, and you're still a boy,—you shuffle jobs and appointments everlastingly, and in the meantime Ministers never see you, you learn nothing and you're always a day late for your opportunities. Remember that there's never any warning in the House, George. You'll get a dozen chances of winning your spurs, but only by sitting, sitting, sitting in

your place when other people have gone away to dinner. Leave the Smoking-Room alone, my boy."

So for one session I followed his advice. After two hours in the "grave of young reputations" I returned to my corner seat, leaving a knot of barristers to cast lots for the vacant Harleyridge recordership, leaving my uncle, too, to watch the great movement of men. My sense of duty was so shortlived that I may be pardoned for dwelling on it and saying that the Smoking-Room is the most interesting place in the House. A year or two later, when I appreciated the wonderful mandarinesque inaccessibility of the Cabinet and saw how little the private member was wanted anywhere but in the division lobbies, I hurried away to places where at the least a man could smoke and talk.

The change was not ennobling but it gave infinitely more varied food for thought. I watched the social levelling-up of Radicalism and saw stern, unbending Nonconformists honoured and decorated for all the world like Tory supporters of the Establishment. At one time Baxter-Whittingham, looking strangely like a famished undertaker in his loose, half-clerical clothes, had criticized the Government as persistently as Campion or Dillworth: his mind stored with the memory of working-class conditions in Shadwell, his voice throbbing with indignation and pity, he had arraigned a Ministry that wasted days on the Address and hours on the obsolete circumlocutions of "Honourable and gallant members," "Mr. Speaker, I venture to say—and I do not think the most captious critic will contradict me . . .," while men starved and women trod the path of shame, while little children went barefoot and verminous.

The silent fortitude of the Treasury Bench under his attacks was a thing to mark and remember. "It amuses him and doesn't hurt us," said my friend Jellaby, the Whip. "So long as he *votes* . . ." And Baxter-Whittingham never divided the House against the Government. Once when the Feeding of School Children Bill was in Committee he became dangerous: the Treasury Bench was deserted, and he lavished fine irony on the Ministerial passion for reform. Free-lances and others who had entrusted their social consciences to Whittingham, or were nettled by the intolerable aloofness of Ministers, followed in the same strain, and an excited Whip drove me out of the tea-room and bade me hold myself in readiness for trouble.

The following day the smoking-room presented a strange

appearance. Seven members of the Cabinet and four lesser Ministers mingled with the common herd—like naughty schoolboys propitiating a ruffled master. They cracked jokes and slapped us on the back, bade us take pot-luck with them, and asked how things were looking in our constituencies. I lunched with a Secretary of State that day and, to redress the balance, kept my promise to dine with Sir Gerald Matley, the Wesleyan potter and Liberal knight. We were given a wonderful dinner, starting with caviare and ending with cigars like office-rulers, which we were urged to pocket, six at a time, to smoke on the way home. Flushed and rebellious, Philip drunk swore to move the adjournment unless he got a promise of warmer support for the School Children Bill. Philip sober was a shade less valiant. Matley and I, alone of that heroic cave, kept to our undertaking, and our fellow-braves avoided the House for a couple of days. The Treasury Bench smiled a little contemptuously as we proceeded to the Orders of the Day, but the lesson was not entirely thrown away. When the Minimum Wage Appeal Board was set up, Baxter-Whittingham (and who more fit?) was appointed Controller at a salary of £1250 a year, and Shadwell and the House of Commons knew him no more.

"Parliament before everything else," my uncle had said. With debates and committees, dinners and intrigues, great Liberal receptions and levees, I had time for nothing else. No schoolboy counted the days to the end of term more eagerly than I did as we came in sight of August.

II

As the session drew to a close I gave a dinner-party at the House to the Lorings, Daintons, Farwells and one or two more. Truth to tell, I gave many dinners in the early days when it was still a pleasure to leap up between courses for a division. I almost liked to be called away from the "Eclectic" by an urgent telephone summons, and the joy of being saluted by the police in Palace Yard, or asked whether anything was happening in the House, died hard. I was six-and-twenty at the time, and it amused me to be buttonholed by the inveterate log-rollers of the Lobby or pumped by pressmen as I emerged from a secret meeting of intrigue in one of the Committee Rooms.

Loring had dined informally with me on many occasions

—to examine the personnel of the Liberal party, he said, and classify those members who had stood for a bet or to improve their practice or acquire copy for their next novel. He became an assiduous attendant in the House of Lords as soon as we had any measures to send there, but in the early days he lived a butterfly life, and one of the conditions of my invitations was that he should give me news of that old world from which I was now cut off. Roger Dainton had lost his seat in the great landslide, and I had seen nothing of the family since the previous autumn. He was one of many, and so much had my uncle filled me with vicarious enthusiasm for political life, that I refused an invitation to Crowley Court in order to enter for the Parliamentary Golf Handicap, wherein Robert Plumer defeated me in the first round in comfortable time to return and argue a case before the Privy Council, while I dawdled on in contemplation of a game I dislike playing and loathe watching.

My dinner opened promisingly, as Lady Dainton was recognized by two Ministers on the way to the Harcourt Room and by a third as we took our seats. Summertown, I recollect, was in disgrace, as he had the previous week bade lasting farewell to his College in consequence of riding a motor-bicycle round the Quad. and half-way up the staircase of one of the Censors at six o'clock in the morning after the Bullingdon Ball. He had, however, won a pair of gloves from Sonia for his trouble. I contrived to separate him from his mother, and he underwent no worse punishment than hearing his future discussed at the top of three penetrating voices. Lady Marlyn assumed the world to be as deaf as herself, and I could see poor Sally Farwell blushing as her mother pierced and overcame the murmur of the surrounding tables. "A regular good-for-nothing scamp, Mr. Oakleigh. I want to send him abroad, but I wouldn't trust him alone. Do you think your nice friend Mr. O'Rane would care about the responsibility again? You know there was dreadful trouble with Jack over an Italian girl in New York."

I hastened to assure her that O'Rane would greedily accept the offer. I would myself have thrown up my seat and escorted Summertown round the world in person rather than have his indiscretions with the Italian girl shouted through the echoing dining-room.

"Has anyone seen anything of O'Rane?" I asked Sonia in the course of dinner.

"He was at Commem.," she answered. "Sam made up a

party with Lord Summertown and David and a few more."

"It must have been quite like old times," I said, recalling Sonia's first and my last appearance at a Commemoration Ball.

"We fought like cats," she replied. "Tony Crabtree——"

"You didn't tell me *he* was of the party," I interrupted. Possibly there was more in my tone than in the words used.

"Why not?" Sonia asked, her big brown eyes filled with simple wonder. "You surely aren't still thinking of that absurd affair in Scotland?"

"What absurd affair?" I asked.

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

"I didn't know it was a matter of public discussion," I said.

"But it was the sort of thing that might have happened to anyone," she protested. "Of course at first . . ." Her little white shoulders raised themselves almost imperceptibly. "But we've been meeting on and off all the season; we couldn't stand and glare, and it was much easier to be friends. We soon made it up, and he's been to stay with us in Hampshire. Well, I got Sam to ask him up for Commem., and David must needs fight with him about something. *I* didn't mind, I'm not Tony's keeper, but David was so full of righteous indignation that I found him very dull. There was a sort of 'it-hurts-me-more-than-it-does-you' reproachful look about him, so that in desperation I just asked him if he didn't love me any more."

"You're utterly soulless, Sonia," I observed, by way of gratifying her.

Her eyes shone with mischievous delight.

"His very words! Men are wonderfully unoriginal. I just leant forward and kissed him on his eyelids—it's all right!" she exclaimed; "he insists that we're morally engaged—and whenever I do that he simply crumples up. It's rude to look *quite* so surprised, George."

"And yet your people are quite respectable," I said thoughtfully.

She shook her head and sighed.

"You've become dreadfully proper and old-fashioned, George," she told me, "since you got into this musty old House. You're *almost* as bad as David, without the excuse of caring a snap of the fingers for me. He lectured me and lectured me, but when it was over he wanted to dash away and spend his life in a moorland cottage with me, sins and all."

"That temptation, at least, you had the fortitude to resist," I said.

She wrinkled her nose and pouted. "Me no likee. There are such millions of things I simply can't do without, and David can't give them me, and if he could he wouldn't. He is so serious, poor lamb! And it's always about the wrong things. After all, George, what *does* matter in life? It's frightfully serious to be ugly, or grow old, or not to know how to dress—I'm all right there at present, and perhaps I shan't mind when the time comes and I get all skinny and lined. It'll be frightfully serious if Lady Knightrider doesn't ask me up for the Northern Meeting, or if Daddy doesn't raise my allowance—I told you I was broke, didn't I? Well, I am. In the meantime——" She broke off and hummed two bars of a waltz. "Life *is* good, George."

"We were discussing Raney," I reminded her.

"Were we? I'd forgotten about him."

"It is an old habit of yours. What part does he play in your tragedy?"

"Tragedy?" she echoed, not altogether displeased at the choice of word.

"It'll be a tragedy before you've played it out," I told her.

She was quite thoughtful for a moment or two, and when she spoke again I could see her discretion obviously declining a challenge that her curiosity longed to take up.

"David's perfectly free to do whatever he likes," she answered, a shade combatively. "I'm not going to decide anything for the present; life's far too much fun, and we've got all eternity before us. *He*'s in no hurry either."

"I thought he was in treaty for that moorland cottage," I said.

"Oh, that was merely a passing brain-storm. I told him the life I was leading, and he thought it over and decided to let me have my fling—so considerate of him!—and when I'm tired of vanities, if neither of us has found anyone better and either of us has got any money, *v'là tout*!"

With an exquisite wave of the hand she dismissed the subject and invited me to admire her dress, which was more transparent than most but otherwise not remarkable.

"Why don't you both have the honesty to admit you've made a mistake?" I asked.

"It amuses him," said Sonia tolerantly.

"And you?"

She gazed across the room with her head on one side.

"And you, Sonia?" I repeated.

"I'll tell you some day," she promised, and with that the subject finally dropped.

I wrote that day to Oxford—knowing no other address—to ask O'Rane to stay with me in Ireland. After considerable delay and the dispatch of a reply-paid telegram I received an answer dated from Melton.

"MY DEAR GEORGE," it ran—and I preserve it as the only letter I ever received from the world's worst correspondent—"many thanks. Delighted to come. Villiers has gone under temporarily with rheumatic fever, contracted by sitting on wet grass to watch his house being defeated in the Championship; I am knocking the Under Sixth into shape in his absence. I have achieved considerable popularity with the boys, and Burgess would like to keep me in perpetuity. It's not bad fun. Some of the kids who fagged for me in Matheson's are now grown men, about five times the size of me. As I haven't got a degree yet, of course I'm not entitled to wear a gown, and the lads despise me accordingly. Burgess, seen at close quarters as a colleague, is even greater than I thought. I have gathered from him and the common-room some hideous stories of you and Jim. Blackmail will be the prop of my declining years.—Ever yours,

"D. O'R."

I had received a conditional promise from the Daintons, and to complete my party I invited the Lorings. Amy accepted, and Jim refused. Looking back at this time I remember that it was not easy to frame an invitation that he would not refuse. It was a weariness going to other people's houses, he told me, eating strange food, not being master of his own time. Assuming that I wanted to see him, why didn't I come to House of Steynes? Smilingly but resolutely he declined to come.

Where his personal comfort was concerned Loring could be wonderfully unadaptable. "I waste a fair portion of my life in the House," he used to argue. "Do let me enjoy the rest of the time in my own way." His mother and sister caught the refrain and abetted him. Indeed, a legend grew up that he was the hardest-worked member of either House and could therefore claim indulgences in the off hours when he was not struggling heroically against the latest Radical machination.

The old controversies are dead, but Loring's theory of the House of Lords is of hardier growth. Posing as the reader of Democracy's secret thoughts, he would leave House of Steynes amid rows of bowing flunkeys, motor to the station, where the stationmaster hastened to be obsequious, and step into his reserved carriage. With a great deal of bowing and smiling the guard would lock the door that his lordship might be undisturbed till he reached London. And at Euston a chauffeur and footman would meet him. "Yes, my lord"; "No, my lord"; "Very good, my lord." It would take another four men adequately to open the great doors of Loring House, but in time, and with more assistance where needed, he would be driven down to Westminster, there to display the knowledge of social conditions and public opinion acquired in his journeyings abroad.

So it was when the planets were yet young, so it will be when the earth grows cold, though the man who fled discomfited from Shadwell after ten days should perhaps refrain from criticism.

In what most men count the great things of life, Loring never abused his position; in the small, he became frankly unclubbable. I had known him long enough to laugh at the old-maidish fixed order of incompatibilities that he mistook for a well-regulated life. It was very conservative, very unadaptable, and he had an unanswerable reason for everything. You dined with him at the Elysée because Armand had the finest hand in London for a *homard au tartare*—the practice and the tribute continued for years after the great chef had bought himself an hotel in Boston and bade farewell to London. You dined at eight-fifteen because—well, because Loring always dined at eight-fifteen, and food at any other hour was supper or a meat tea. You hurried your dinner so as not to miss the star turn at the "Round House," which was timed for nine-twenty-five, and, when you had seen that, you had to leave—because Loring always left at that point, in turn because there was never anything worth seeing after ten. You then sat for half an hour—a dreadfully uncomfortable half-hour—at Hale's, where smoking was not allowed (few men smoked in 1630 when Martin Hale opened his tavern in Piccadilly at the fringe of "the town"): it would never have done, he would assure you, to arrive at your next destination before eleven; equally no man on earth could wish to stay later than two a.m.

It was impossible to wean him from his little rules, and

the world must follow his lead—or live elsewhere. (Which course was adopted, he hardly cared.) I fought to preserve my prejudices against his—and he beat me. At ten-ten I was left in my stall at the " Round House," and he was halfway to Hale's. And when he decided that he could not and would not meet women at breakfast, I scarcely hoped he would make an exception in favour of Lake House. If my mother and Beryl persisted in breakfasting with their guests —I can see the very shrug of his shoulders as though he had put his objections into words—it was really, *really* simpler for me to meet him in Scotland where there would be no hideous domestic surprises in store for anyone.

So my autumn party in 1906 brought me Amy but not her brother. " Tell George I hope you're all missing me," he wrote to her. I hastened to assure him that with my uncle, O'Rane, the Daintons, the Hunter-Oakleighs from Dublin and four or five more, his absence had not been remarked.

III

I always doubted the wisdom of including O'Rane in a house-party, for the Lake House estate offered little but its snipe-shooting, and he refused to shoot. There was, however, a library, a garden, some purple, green, brown and grey mountain scenery and—for anyone who cared to do so—the mountains themselves to climb. For the most part he paced up and down the terrace at the margin of the lake, gazing dreamily over its mirror-like surface to the tree-clad hills the other side. In the past twelve months he had lost much of his animation and had become curiously rapt and reflective. The change did not make him an easier guest to entertain. We have known each other these many years now and stayed together in a dozen different houses, yet I never quite get rid of the feeling that he is from another world and another century. Sometimes one or other of us would keep him corporeal company for a while : usually he was alone—thinking out the future. In the last days of July he had taken his First in Greats, and academic Oxford lay at his feet.

" What's the next stage, Raney ? " I asked him one evening when we were alone in the garden. " All Souls ? "

He shrugged his shoulders, linked arms with me and paced the lowest terrace by the lake's border. It was a night of

rare stillness, and the moon was reflected full and unwavering in the black water: behind us, fifty yards up the side of the mountain, blinding squares of yellow light broke up the dark face of the house; a chord was struck, and a girl's voice began to sing with an Irish intonation.

"What a lovely place the world would be if it weren't for the men and women in it!" he exclaimed.

"Even with them it's tolerable," I said.

I was deliciously tired after a long day's tramp; a hot bath, dinner and the placid night set me at peace with all men.

"For you, yes," he answered reflectively.

"And for a number of others," I said.

The voice above me grew low and died away. Someone began to play an air from "La Bohème."

"For anybody without imagination," he murmured. "You've been in the House for nearly a year now, George; d'you think the world's a happier place?"

"I'm afraid there's no such thing as statutory happiness, Raney."

A vision of Baxter-Whittingham floated before my eyes, and an echo of his phrases came back to my ears. O'Rane picked up a handful of gravel, seated himself on the parapet of the terrace and began tossing stones into the lake.

"I'm looking for inspiration, George," he said, after a pause. "Just now I'm at a loose end. I've been through Melton and the House, I've seen about a dozen different kinds of working-class life, and before I came to England I took part in the great primitive struggle for existence. Now, if I like, I suppose I can get a fellowship, go into one of the professions, lead a comfortable life. . . ." His voice rose a tone and quickened into excitement. "George, it won't *do*. We pretend the world's civilized, and yet every now and again some murderous war breaks out. We've been drinking champagne up there, and there are people dying of starvation. There are people dying of cancer and phthisis—and we haven't stopped it. There are young girls being turned into harlots hourly. Hunger, disease, death and the loss of a soul's purity. It won't do." He sighed, and a shadow of despair came over his dark eyes. "I talked to Jim Loring in the same strain a few weeks ago: he's waiting for the world to come back to a belief in God. Poor old Jim hasn't learned much mediaeval history! I talked to your uncle yesterday: he's a social Darwinian—these scourges are all

divinely appointed to keep us from getting degenerate. I talked to you this morning, and you virtually told me five years of Liberal Government would set it all right. They won't! It isn't the law that's wrong, it's the soul of man. You've had workhouses for two-thirds of a century, and people still starve. In half a dozen years we've seen war in South Africa and Manchuria. Men still seduce women; there's cruelty to children and animals that would make you sick if you heard a thousandth part of it; there are blind, hare-lipped babies being born to parents of tainted blood. . . . It won't do, George."

I seated myself on the parapet beside him and lit a cigarette.

"Will you tell me the remedy, Raney?" I asked.

He looked at me for a moment before answering.

"Would you act upon it if I did?"

"I'd like to hear it first," I said.

"To see how much it inconvenienced you." He laughed, and there was a bitterness in the smile on his thin lips that told forth his utter scorn of soul for the makeshift, worldly materialism for which I stood in his eyes. "It'll inconvenience us the devil of a lot, but that's what we're here for. We're supposed to have been educated. We've got to give a lead. The first duty of society is to make existence possible, the second is to make a decent thing of life. Gradually we're getting the first, but we're not in sight of the second." He looked out over the black, unmoving water and shook his head sadly. "We've got no social conscience, we've got no imagination to give us one. Look here, you'd think me a pretty fair swine if I took Sonia away for a week to an hotel, said good-bye at the end of it and packed her home?"

"It's not done," I admitted.

His clenched fist beat excitedly on the flat stone balustrade.

"Tom Dainton's got a flat in Chelsea and a woman living with him. Is that done?"

"I don't do it myself," I said. His information was not new to me: I had even met the girl, once when she was living with Tom, once with his predecessor.

"God in heaven! She's somebody's daughter, somebody's sister probably; there was a time when she was clean-minded . . . and that brute-beast salves his conscience by telling himself that somebody else corrupted her before he came along! I told him exactly what I thought of him."

I had a fair idea of O'Rane's capacity for invective.

His lip curled till his teeth gleamed white in the moonlight.

"Do you still meet?" I inquired.

"I'd cut him in his own house! It isn't that I set great store by marriage, I'm not in a position to do that. If he wants to be ultra-modern, let him live with her by all means—and introduce her to his people. He'd kill a man who treated his own sister like that. . . . Imagination! Imagination! That's the basis of the social conscience, George. If Beryl had consumption, you'd sell the shirt off your back to heal her. You'd do pretty well as much for a sister of mine. You'd write a cheque for a hundred pounds if I recommended a hard case to you. And because you don't hear, because you don't see the poor devils lying under your eyes . . ."

"Where's the damned thing to stop, Raney? There are people starving the world over."

"Thank God you recognize it! It hurts as much to starve in the Punjab as under the windows of Lake House."

"But I'm not interested in people I've never seen," I said, lighting another cigarette.

"You'd jump overboard to save a drowning man without waiting to be introduced. Human life's sacred, George: the value we attach to it is the one test of civilization I know."

"But how does one start? Take my own case and be as pointed as you like. An Irish landowner, Liberal member of Parliament, comfortable means, unmarried, without any particular desire to leave the world worse than I found it—what am I to do? Frankly, Raney, I've not got the temperament to turn vegetarian or go about in sandals. I'm part of a very conventional, stupid, artificial world; all my relations and friends are in the same galley. My soul's taken root. What am I to do?"

He picked up a second handful of gravel and jerked the stones thoughtfully into the shining water.

"D'you remember the boys in Æsop who did what I'm doing—flinging stones into a lake? It was all in fun, but they hit a frog, and the frog told them that what was fun for them was death for him. If you want an everyday test, you can ask yourself over every act you do or refrain from doing whether you're causing pain to a living creature—by word, deed, thought. That's the only standard worth having, and if everyone adopted it . . . As they will some day; we're growing slightly more humane. . . ."

We had had a record bag that day: I was in good form,

and Bertrand could not miss a bird. I mentioned this to O'Rane to recall him to our limitations.

"A hundred years ago you'd have watched two hapless cocks slashing each other to death," he retorted. "People were flogged within an inch of their lives. Witch-hunts were hardly out of fashion. Two thousand years ago malefactors were nailed to wooden crosses and left to die, gladiators were set to fight wild beasts. . . ." His voice trembled with exultant, fierce irony, and his dark eyes blazed in the setting of his white face. "Now we're grown so effete that we almost shudder when some upstanding son of Belgium takes a rhinoceros hide whip and lashes a Congo native till the smashed ribs burst through his flesh." His voice fell as suddenly as it had risen. "Have you ever set eyes on a newborn babe? It's a wonderful thing, so tiny and so perfect, with its little limbs and organs and the marvellous little nails on its toes and fingers. . . . I think of that beautiful, soft, warm, living creature cherished and fed to manhood, and then flung to the demons for them to torture. I see it torn in pieces by a shell or eaten up by disease. And in the old days we might have seen it stretched on a rack, or broken joint by joint with the wheel and boot. . . ." The sentence died away in a long shudder that shook his whole body. "Come back to the house, George," he cried, jumping down from the parapet. "I've travelled three thousand miles in the last five seconds, all the way to Greece and back, where the Turks used to put hot irons on the chests of their prisoners just to teach them not to be rebels. Ten years ago! Who says this is not the best of all possible worlds?"

I took his arm and walked up the stone steps that joined the three terraces. There was still a light in the drawing-room, and we found Sonia writing letters and smoking a cigarette. The accomplishment was new and precarious. She started as we came in through the window and hastily closed the blotting-book.

"Oh, it's only you!" she exclaimed with relief as she saw us. "I was simply dying for a cig., and I can't smoke in my room, or mother would smell it through the door." She opened the blotter and extracted a rather battered cigarette "I've been writing to a friend of yours, David," she went on teasingly. "Mr. Antony Crabtree."

"De gustibus non est disputandum," O'Rane answered, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You must translate, please."

"It amuses you and it doesn't hurt him," I suggested.

"Who? David?" She walked over to O'Rane's chair and sat down on the arm of it, bending over him and running her fingers through his fine, black hair. So Delilah may have wooed Samson to slumber, with the same practised touch, the same absence of amateurishness or spontaneity. "I'm very fond of Tony."

O'Rane looked at her with half-closed eyes.

"How old are you, Sonia?" he asked.

"I think you ought to remember. Twenty. And I'm never going to be any more."

'It's not so very old," he said reflectively.

"It'll be horrid to be twenty-one," she answered, with a pout. "I shall have to pay my own bills—and I'm frightfully in debt. It's such fun, too, to be quite irresponsible. Of course you were born old, David; if I lived to be a hundred I should never catch you up."

"Twenty," he repeated. "No, it's not so very old. In five years' time——"

"My dear, I shall be a quarter of a century old!" she exclaimed.

"You'll be tired of it all by then."

"I shall be dead or married," she answered gloomily.

"Not married. I shall come to you then—you'll have outgrown your present phase and I shall be a rich man. I shall come to you. . . ." He broke off and sat looking up into her eyes.

Sonia drew back her hand and returned his gaze steadily. A smile of mockery flickered for a moment round her lips.

"And then?" she demanded.

"I shall ask you to marry me."

"And if I . . . ?" she began.

He sat upright and caught her two wrists in his right hand.

"If you say 'no'? You won't; you can't! You'll want me by then, want someone you can depend on. And, if you don't, you'll have to take me just the same. You won't be able to say 'no.'"

His voice had grown low, and he spoke with clear deliberation. I once watched a neurotic woman being put to sleep by a hypnotist. O'Rane's low, determined tone reminded me of the doctor's suggestive insistence. "Now you are going to sleep. You are, oh! so tired. Your eyes are

so heavy. *So* heavy! *So* sleepy! . . ." Her voice in answering dropped to the same key.

"You think *anyone* could make me obey him? Try it, friend David!"

"Five years will make a difference. I haven't given many orders, Sonia, but they've always been obeyed. I haven't done very much—yet, but I've never failed to do what I wanted." Sonia tried to be defiant, but her eyes suddenly fell, and she slipped down from the arm of the chair and moved towards the door.

"Ah! you're an infant prodigy," she observed jauntily. "I must go to bed, though."

"Sonia, come back here!"

O'Rane had not raised his voice, but Sonia paused in her passage across the room. In her place I should have done the same.

"What d'you want?" she asked uneasily.

"Come back here."

Like a child being taught its first lesson in obedience, she hesitated, moved forward, paused and came on.

"What d'you want?" she repeated, drumming her fingers nervously on the arm of the chair.

O'Rane smiled.

"You may go to bed now," he answered.

With sudden petulance she stamped her foot.

"David, if you think it's funny to try and make a fool of me . . .! You're perfectly odious to-night!" I was moving forward to intervene as peacemaker, and Sonia seized the opportunity to shake me by the hand and wish me good night.

"You needn't pay overmuch attention to Raney," I said.

"Oh, I don't!" she answered airily, but her hand as it touched mine was curiously cold.

O'Rane walked over to the writing-table and returned with her letter.

"Now you see," he remarked enigmatically as he gave it her.

"See what?"

"It doesn't make me jealous to be told you're very fond of Crabtree," he answered. "Good-night, Sonia."

I closed the door behind her, poured out two whiskies and sodas and filled a pipe.

"You're extraordinarily infantile, Raney," I said.

"It was as well she should know."

"Mind you don't drive her into his arms," I said. "Next time she may accept him."

"Next time?"

For the moment I had forgotten that O'Rane had not been present at Crabtree's discomfiture the previous autumn at House of Steynes. When I remembered, I wished I had not introduced the subject.

"Oh! this is getting beyond a joke!" he exclaimed, when I had given him the irreducible minimum of information. "I've a good mind to drop a hint to Lady Dainton."

"My dear fellow, the intimacy is recognized and approved by her. You can't tell her anything she doesn't know."

He picked up his tumbler and sipped thoughtfully.

"I could tell her a number of things," he returned after a pause. "How Crabtree pumped me to find out what they were worth, whether Crowley was their own property and so forth. As cousin to an undischarged bankrupt he conceives himself to be conferring a favour on a family he once described in my hearing to Beaumorris as 'very decent middle-class people.' Fair spoil, in other words, for my Lord Beaumorris and his family. It would be very salutary for Lady Dainton to hear that."

"It will hardly increase your present inconsiderable popularity," I suggested.

He finished his drink and walked with me to the door.

"There's no harm in telling Sonia he's a cad," he insisted.

"If she cares for him, it won't shake her: if she doesn't, it'll make her very angry. I wish to God I hadn't told you, Raney. Promise me at least that you won't choose my house to do it in!"

"Oh, the whole thing may be a mare's nest," he answered easily. "I shan't act till I've something to act on. Have you been invited to Crowley Court this autumn?"

"I've been told to fix my own time," I replied.

"They've got a party on in November. I was thinking of going then if I'm not bear-leading Summertown round the world. Why shouldn't we go together? Brother Crabtree may be there with any luck."

"Brother Crabtree is sure to be there," I answered, as I lighted him to his room and turned back to my own.

IV

Five days later my guests were scattered to the four winds. Bertrand stayed behind until it was time to move on to the Hunter-Oakleighs in Dublin, and O'Rane was waiting to accompany me to House of Steynes. A great quiet descended on Lake House, and I recalled Valentine Arden's maxim that the charm of a house-party lies in the moment of its dispersal.

"You're not being quite so strenuous as usual, David," observed my uncle one morning after breakfast.

"I can't hurry the calendar, sir," Raney answered. "I must wait for November."

"All Souls?" I asked.

He nodded. "And then the Bar. And then the House."

The 1906 Parliament was distinguished by a little group of men who had cleared the board of honours at Oxford, blazed into fame at the Bar and entered the House as fashionable silks and rising politicians while still in the thirties. Their reputation preceded them from the time they were freshmen, and their career became the model for succeeding generations. I imagine that Simon, Hemmerde, and F. E. Smith were to the Oxford of their day what O'Rane was to the Oxford of mine—marked men with no conceivable limit to the heights they might attain.

"You think it's possible to reform the world from the House of Commons?" I asked.

O'Rane looked through the open window over the placid lake to the smoke-blue mountains beyond.

"You can only reform the world by reforming the men who compose it," he answered. "And you can't do that by Acts of Parliament. You've not found that out yet, George. I have."

"Then why are we to be honoured?" Bertrand inquired.

Raney turned round and faced into the room.

"There are some things the House alone can do, sir. Within the next ten years you're going to have labour troubles as near revolution as makes no odds. I've spied out the land, and there's an ugly temper abroad, And probably you'll have a European War. We're too rich, sir."

"There will be labour troubles every ten years," Bertrand answered with a yawn. "The young men who've never starved their way through a strike have to learn what their fathers learned."

"We're too rich internationally," O'Rane persisted. "We've got all the fair places of the earth, and the sansculottes of Europe will fight us for them, just as the sansculottes of England will fight for a bigger share of profits."

My uncle shook his head.

"The world's getting too democratic, David," he said. "Democracy doesn't fight democracy; no one has anything to gain. And we leave the fair places of the world open to the world. Anyone can come too."

He picked up his hat and walked through the window into the morning sunshine. O'Rane looked for a moment at the broad-shouldered back and massive head, then turned to me with a gesture of despair.

"When I get into the House, George," he said, "it'll be to fight your uncle. Years ago—the night after I left Melton—I told you in the garden at Crowley Court that we had given away our weakness before all Europe. There are not ten men in this country who understand Continental opinion. I called for ten years' reorganization of the Empire. Now it seems that every step we take to defend ourselves against attack makes Germany think we're preparing to attack her. Sooner or later there'll be a *casus belli*."

"Half a dozen years ago we were faced with an inevitable war with France," I reminded him. "Now we're the best of friends."

"There's been no Pan-French school since Sedan," he retorted. "I should be sorry to see England going down before the storm. With all its blemishes I think the civilization of this country is the finest in all the world." He stood opposite the window with the autumn sun shining on to his thin face, and as I looked there were tears in his great black eyes. "Any country," he went on tremulously, "that takes a steward from a Three-Funnel Liner and . . . and . . . and . . ."

His voice died away. I knocked out my pipe and began filling it again.

"Come out into the garden, Raney," I said, taking his arm.

He laughed and obeyed.

"Burgess, too, used to say I wasn't accountable for my actions," he remarked.

"A little of your madness would make better men of a number of us," I said.

He stopped short to drink in all the misty damp beauty

of the autumn morning, momentarily forgetful of me and of our conversation. Another moment and the mood was past.

"Oh! it's made, not born," he said. "If you'd seen Jews massacred before you were seven. . . . Poor dear Lady Dainton can't think what my father was about over my upbringing! She's quite right, I learned all the wrong things, met all the wrong people—and this is the result!"

At the end of the week we crossed to Scotland together, spent ten days with the Lorings and separated in Edinburgh. Towards the middle of October we met again in London, and, as I was now qualified to take my M.A., I seized the excuse for a visit to Oxford and motored O'Rane up in time for the first All Souls paper. There was an interval between the written work and the candidates' dinner, so we arranged to slip down for eight-and-forty hours to Crowley Court. "You will find some old friends here," Lady Dainton wrote. "Lord Loring, Mr. Arden and Lord Summertown are coming to-morrow, and Tony Crabtree is already with us. . . ."

"I told you so," I remarked to O'Rane as we left Princes Gardens and climbed into the car.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if we had to dislodge the fellow," he answered, as a man might speak of installing a new drainage system.

There was a curious similarity of purpose in our descent on Oxford. Each had a rather wearisome formality to go through, and the result in either case was equally certain. Candidates for the degree of M.A. paid fees to their college and the university chest, caught a hurried Latin formula, changed their gowns, tipped their scouts, bowed to the Vice-Chancellor and got rid of a red and black silk hood at the earliest possible opportunity. Candidates for All Souls Fellowships presented their credentials to the Warden, disposed of a stated number of papers in the Hall and paraded their table manners at dinner and in Common Room the following Sunday. The formality ended with an announcement in "The Times," and anyone who had not sufficiently cleared his friends' houses of undesirable guests was now at liberty to return and complete the eviction.

I took my M.A. as other and better men have taken it before and since.

Also like other men before and since, O'Rane was—not elected. It was the first time I had known him fail to carry out an undertaking he had set himself, and my faith in him

would have received a shock unless I had heard the full story. All he said as we got into the car at the "Randolph" was:

"I probably shan't go through with this show."

"Why the devil not?" I demanded.

At first he made no answer, but, as we slid away from the lights of Oxford and headed through Abingdon and the wet white mist of a November afternoon southward to the Berkshire Downs, he offered fragments of explanation. There were two fellowships and sixteen candidates, of whom three stood head and shoulders above their rivals: O'Rane with firsts in Mods. and Greats, the Ireland and Gaisford prizes and a Chancellor's medal; Oldham of Balliol with a second in Mods., a first in Greats and a first in Law; and Brent of the House who had taken Pass Mods., a first in History and the Stanhope Essay prize. There was *prima facie* a lion with no martyr.

"I walked down the High with old Brent," O'Rane told me. "He was rather down on his luck—man who's lived on scholarships since he could walk, not a bob in the world, and no guts to make a career for himself. With a fellowship he can go to the Bar; otherwise he'll moulder in the Civil Service."

"But, my dear Raney," I exclaimed, "the decision doesn't rest with you."

"No, but—I can do something for him," he said, with a smile. "You know my philosophy."

"Yes, but what about yourself?" I asked.

"In the words of Burgess, 'The Lord will provide.' I've made twenty-three pounds in ten days as a waiter in this country; in a Long Island Delicatessen store——"

"Are you going back there?'

"If need be. I've settled nothing—not even about this fellowship. I'm waiting for an omen, George. A lot depends on the next few hours; I must think things out. What are you pulling up for?"

"My near-side head light's gone out," I answered, as I scrambled past him into the road.

On my return O'Rane was standing with one foot braced against the steering-wheel and the other planted on the back of the driving-seat; he was gazing intently down the road we had just traversed. There was nothing coming up behind; he stood for a moment more in silence and then slipped back into his seat.

"It's too misty," he said, with the suggestion of a sigh in his voice.

"What were you looking at?" I asked.

"I was trying to see Oxford. The lights of Oxford. D'you remember 'Jude the Obscure'? It was here—any height round here—that he stood gazing at Oxford and wondering if he'd ever get there. God! Don't I know that man's heart! Ever since I was a tiny child. . . . And I remember my father, just when he was dying,—it was almost the last word on his lips—telling me where to go and what I was to do. . . ."

He paused abruptly and turned over old thoughts.

"Go on, Raney," I said.

"Hallo! Were you listening? I was only rambling."

"Go on rambling then—about your father."

He turned up the collar of his coat and sank lower into his seat.

"It was just the end; they carried him up from the Peiræus, and he rallied for one last flicker. 'I'm going now, Boy,' he whispered—smiling, though two-thirds of him were shot away. 'I've not made much of a thing of life; see if you can't do better. We've not a bad record as a family. Go back to England—Oxford.' He started coughing, and when it was over I thought he was dead. Suddenly he sat up and spoke very quickly. 'I'm really going now, Davie. Good-bye, Boy. Try to forgive me!'" Raney's voice had grown very husky. "Forgive him! The man was a god! Besides, I didn't understand till people started calling me Lord O'Rane, and then I went to a priest to find out. It was like rubbing in father's death. . . . And the priest explained—a bit, and said I should understand when I was older. And that was all—all I care to tell you anyway, old man. I didn't enjoy my first trip round the world. Perhaps if Summertown's invitation still holds good . . ."

He broke off and began to whistle reflectively between his teeth.

"What *are* you going to do, Raney?"

"Why bother? I've got five years to turn round in before Sonia's ready for me——"

"When you do marry her, I shall give you a very handsome present—I don't like betting on these things."

"I shall marry her, George," he answered, with assurance. "I've got five years to make money in—here or abroad—a thousand a year——"

"In five years?"

"Less. Three. Two. If I don't make it in two years, working twelve hours a day, I'll make it in three, working eighteen."

"I rather doubt——"

It was the one word that lashed him like a whip. His hand descended on my driving arm and gripped it till the car rocked from side to side.

"If—I—ever—doubted—anything——!" he whispered.

"Let go my arm!" I cried.

"Sorry!" He laughed and went back to his normal tone. "Dear old George! If I'd ever doubted, d'you think I could have stood going round with a guitar in Chinatown—handing basins on a liner? . . . Doubt!"

An hour later we turned in through the drive gates of Crowley Court.

V

As I slowed down opposite the door, it occurred to me to ask whether O'Rane had made his peace with Tom Dainton.

"No. And never shall," he grunted. "Fortunately he's not here, though. If he were——"

The sentence was cut short as the doors were flung open, and Crabtree, gorgeous in white waistcoat and pink carnation, advanced into the white glare of the headlights.

"Stout fellows!" he cried heartily. "Haven't seen you for ages, Raney——"

"How do you do, Crabtree?" O'Rane responded, in a tone that would have chilled a blast furnace.

"Come along in! Never mind about the car, George; one of the men'll take it round. How are the lads of Oxenford, what? How's the House? How's everything?"

The questions were so clearly rhetorical that I attempted no answer. Sir Roger came in sight, crossing the hall, and I hurried in to shake hands with him, reflecting that full two-thirds of my antagonism to Crabtree arose from his inveterate use of my Christian name.

"The ladies have gone up to dress, George," said Dainton. "We shall find everyone else in the billiard-room. If you'd care for a drink——"

He hurried on ahead, hardly giving me time to shed my coat and cap, for all the world like a trusted old family servant making me at home in his master's absence. The impression

was not altogether a capricious fancy: I remember a ball at Crowley Court where the stately wife of a newly honoured manufacturing chemist whispered loudly to her host, "Sir Zachary and Lady Smithe. *Smithe*, my man, not *Smith*, mind."

In the billiard-room we found Loring and Summertown perfunctorily practising fancy cannons, while Valentine Arden ostentatiously slumbered at full length on a divan. Tea was long past, dinner some way ahead; and, as Arden complained, he hadn't tasted a cocktail since leaving London.

"You may not know it, Raney," yawned Loring as Sir Roger closed the door behind us and hurried away to order whisky and soda, "but you've saved my life. Another ten minutes of Crabtree! It only shows the folly of staying in other people's houses. With the best intentions in the world they spring disquieting surprises on you. Really, after a certain episode not a thousand miles from—shall we say?—House of Steynes last autumn, I thought I should be safe in coming here. The rising generation beats me, and as for poor Valentine——"

Arden roused at sound of his own name.

"They offered one curried lobster for breakfast," he proclaimed, tremulous with indignation; "there were only two kinds of chutney, and no Bombay duck. One cannot eat curry without Bombay duck."

He relapsed into exhausted slumber, and Summertown seized upon O'Rane.

"Look here, young fellow, my lad," he said. "I'm properly in the soup. You remember the bilge my lady mother's been talking about my seeing more of the world . . . ?"

Arden stirred in his sleep and opened one eye.

"The desire of a mother that her son shall see rather more of the world," he observed, "not infrequently coincides with an ambition to see rather less of her son."

Summertown quelled the interruption at the end of a half-butt and continued to state his case.

"Well, when you seemed doubtful about coming, Crabtree butted in. He'd heard all ex's were to be paid. I shall be *dans le consommé*, as the French say, if you cry off."

O'Rane, who appeared to be tired and subdued, promised to think over the proposal.

"When do your rotten results come out?" persisted Summertown. "Time's getting on, you know. I want to be back in town by next season."

"I'll let you know to-night," said O'Rane, crossing the room and making a seat for himself at the end of Arden's divan.

I guessed then—what I afterwards found out for certain—that he was beginning to repent of his recent quixotism. The big, warm, comfortable house threw into striking relief the shanties and bleak skies that were likely to be his home and shelter for some years to come.

"Well, don't be a dirty dog," said Summertown, in conclusion. "If I get stuck with Crabtree . . . Steady!"

He picked up his cue and began knocking the balls about as the door opened, and Crabtree entered. A moment or two passed before we could try a fresh cast in conversation, and it is more than probable that the newcomer guessed we had been discussing him.

"Aren't you lads going to dress?" he inquired, as he straightened his tie before a mirror and glanced at his watch.

"Presently, presently," answered Loring, who was in fact already on his feet and only delayed with the perversity of a man who dislikes being ordered about. "You coming up, Valentine? There's only just time, if you're going to have a bath."

"One is going to be very late," said Arden sleepily. "It may cut dinner a bit short. One is bored with dinner. One hates having to talk when one is eating; and, if one doesn't talk, other people will. One is bored with other people."

"Have a drink?" said Summertown encouragingly, as he helped himself again. "With enough alcohol you can bear almost anything. I can't stand playing fivepence a hundred auction, but I did last night—thanks to the tranquillizing influence of '47 port. True, I cut the matchbox by an oversight, but that might have happened to anyone. And Lady Dainton told me I ought to wear glasses. Here you are, Valentine. Three times a day before meals or any other hour. Even our host brightened visibly last night. Another half glass, and there'd have been horrible revelations—second establishment in Brixton, undiscovered bank fraud—I think to-night I shall move round by him and keep the wine circulating."

"You talk too much, Summertown," said O'Rane, on whom the tone of the conversation was grating.

"So will old Dainton!" rejoined Summertown gleefully. "No, you're quite right, Raney. Dam' bad form to tighten a man up at his own table, specially if he's got a weak head.

You hear that, Crabtree? Drink fair all round and no doping."

"I'd drink two to one against Dainton," Crabtree answered valiantly.

"All through?" asked Summertown, not without a certain admiration. "Bet you a pony you don't."

"Done! Jim shall hold the stakes, George umpire. I remember once when I was staying with my cousin Beaumorris——"

Loring was standing with his back to the fire, yawning and occasionally reminding Arden that it was time to dress. At the mention of his name he strolled into the light and crossed to the door, only pausing to remark:

"It's just as well to remember whose house you're in, Crabtree. Time to dress, Summertown." And, as he entered the hall, "Don't drink whisky on an empty stomach, young man."

Summertown, whose leading characteristics throughout his short life were a cheerful immaturity and chronic instability of temperament, became immediately contrite. His rare moments of seriousness were marked by a pathetic desire to stand well in Loring's eyes.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry!" he exclaimed. "It won't happen again, Loring. I swear it won't."

Loring laughed and caught his arm.

O'Rane and I were the last to leave the billiard-room, and, as we came to the foot of the staircase, Sonia appeared in sight on the landing above. For the moment we were invisible to her, and she pattered lightly down the stairs, waving one hand to Crabtree who was standing astride the rug in front of the fire.

"Hope I haven't kept you waiting, Tony?" she called out.

Crabtree responded with some decorous conventionality, and in another second we came into the light and were face to face with Sonia.

"Hallo, children, where were you hiding?" she asked as we shook hands. "Have they elected you to your old fellowship, David?"

"I haven't finished yet," he answered. "I say, Sonia . . ."

He paused and looked almost anxiously at her. The firelight glowing across the hall struck sparks of gold out of her brown hair, and her arms and shoulders gleamed white through the transparent, blue gauze of her dress.

"Say on, MacDavid," she bade him.

"Summertown wants me to go abroad with him. I don't know whether to accept or not."

"He's asked me, too," Crabtree called out. "I wish you'd make up your great mind, Raney."

O'Rane kept his eyes fixed on the face in front of him.

"Which is it to be, Sonia?" he asked.

"My dear, *I* don't care," she answered. "Of course, it'll be more amusing for Lord Summertown if Tony goes. There's a compliment for you," she called out, blowing a kiss across the hall. Crabtree bowed with mock gravity. "*You're* getting dreadfully ponderous in your old age, David. On the other hand, I don't know if I can spare Tony. How long are you going to be away?"

"Six months if Crabtree goes. Three to five years if I do. It won't be with Summertown the whole time; I shall have business to attend to. I didn't know whether you——"

Sonia clasped her hands with a dramatic gesture of surprise.

"My *dear*! you *are* humble all of a sudden! I'm honoured! Have *I* any wishes . . .? Dear me!"

"Then I may take it you haven't?"

"It's for Lord Summertown to say," she answered impatiently. "*I* don't mind."

O'Rane nodded and began to walk up the stairs, while Sonia crossed the hall at a ragtime shuffle, humming a plantation song. As we reached the first landing, he remarked:

"I told you I was looking for an omen."

Before dressing he scribbled a note to Oxford, and, when we met in the drawing-room before dinner, I heard him tell Summertown that he would be ready to start by the end of the week.

In my uncle's phrase, women are the strangest of all the sexes, and I do not pretend to explain Sonia's frame of mind at this time. Perhaps O'Rane was right in thinking she must be allowed of her own accord to grow weary of the world that Crabtree and Summertown represented: perhaps she was piqued by his refusal to run errands for her: perhaps I am right in thinking she was at this time incapable of any deep emotion. It is all guesswork.

Crabtree took charge of the dinner that night in a hearty, efficient manner, though O'Rane and I suffered from the disability common to all late arrivals in a house-party: a mint of catchwords and private jokes had been coined before we came; it was impossible to understand without an explanation, and the explanation so often analysed the poor

little jest out of life. Moreover, I was sleepy after my long drive, and the elderly girl whom I took in—I always suspected Sonia's guests of being selected as foils—persisted in discussing the higher education of women. As Valentine Arden observed half-way through when my indefatigable neighbour trained her batteries on him: "If a woman is good-looking, education is superfluous; if she is not, it is inadequate." I was mortified to think how much I might have been spared if I had been able to frame that formula earlier in the evening.

When the ladies left us, I roused slightly with the effort of getting up and opening the door. Crabtree moved into the chair between Dainton and myself, and, leaning in front of us, whispered to Summertown:

"I've given him a stroke a hole all the way."

For a moment I did not follow the allusion, but, when Summertown shook his head and murmured "No takers," —still more, when Crabtree hurriedly finished his second glass of port and reached for the decanter—I appreciated that he was seriously measuring hardness of head with his host, as he had backed himself to do before dinner in the billiard-room.

"Don't be an ass, Crabtree," I whispered, as he filled Dainton's glass for the third time.

A humorous wink was my reward, and in elaborate dumb-show he informed me that, while his host had drunk no more than three glasses of champagne and two of port, he himself had achieved exactly double that figure.

"Just getting into my stride," he murmured, and, if I find few opportunities of praising Crabtree, let me do justice to his powers of consuming alcohol. Certain dining clubs of Oxford used to experiment on him, now trying to make an impression by sheer weight of metal, now cunningly seeking to sap his defences with injudicious mixtures. For all the success they achieved, the bottles might have been carried into the street and emptied down the nearest drain. The big round face never flushed, the sleek, black head never swam. Then, as now, the lustiest of his opponents dropped out of the race just as he was settling down.

At first no one else observed what was afoot. Loring and O'Rane were talking together at the other end of the room, and Summertown and Arden had drawn back their chairs till they were screened by my back. I alone noticed that Dainton had grown very silent, and, as Crabtree kept up a voluble monologue, every one else was free to listen or

talk as he chose. The first warning came with a tinkle of broken glass and a deep stain on the cloth.

"Clumsy of me!" exclaimed Dainton. "I hope I didn't splash you? Extraordinarily clumsy of me. No; no more, thanks. I can't think how I came to be so clumsy." Crabtree waved away the protest and began filling a fresh glass. "I don't deserve it after being so clumsy, you know."

A moment later coffee was brought in, and I saw Dainton taking several matches to a cigar that he had not cut. Faithful to the terms of his wager, Crabtree achieved a successful right and left with the liqueurs and brought down one kummel as the tray was handed me and another as it reached him. Also, he very considerately helped his host to a glass.

"Drop it, Crabtree," I said, as the footman passed out of hearing. "This is getting beyond a joke."

He winked even more humorously than before and pointed to the two glasses beside his plate. I saw Loring turn and whisper in O'Rane's ear, their eyes were fixed for a moment on Dainton's face, and then O'Rane called out:

"Have you got any matches down there, Crabtree? Shy 'em over, will you?"

A heavy silver match-box was tossed in a parabola through the air. Raney lit his cigar and cried:

"Coming over!"

This time no parabola was described. The path of the projectile was a straight line from O'Rane's upraised hand to the stem of Dainton's glass.

"An direction and perfect elevation," Arden remarked. The glass fell where it was struck, spreading a film of white liquid over the dessert-plate, and O'Rane sprang to his feet with profuse—and I have no doubt sincere—regret for spoiling an eighteenth-century Venetian set.

"Am I plagiarizing anyone if I call you a cad, Crabtree?" he inquired twenty minutes later, as they crossed the hall to the drawing-room.

"Damn your soul . . .!" began Crabtree, genuinely offended; but the door was reached before the theme could be developed.

There was a tell-tale spot of colour round O'Rane's cheek-bones, however, and Sonia with quick perception manœuvred Crabtree into a chair by her mother's side. She herself remained standing till the rest of us were seated and then beckoned to O'Rane to share a sofa with her by the other fire at the far end of the room.

"Look here, David," she began severely.

O'Rane was engrossed in his own reflections and began thinking aloud.

"He's not a white man, you know," he said musingly. "I beg your pardon, Sonia?"

She lay back disdainfully with her hands clasped behind her head.

"David, I've got an idea that you and Tony never meet without quarrelling. *Other* people get on with him. *I* get on with him. Well, if you think it's good form to go to other people's houses and pick quarrels with guests who are good enough for them——"

O'Rane shook his head.

"He's not. That's the whole trouble."

"I'm fairly particular in the people I care to have as friends, David," she answered, in a tone which even her companion recognized as dangerous.

"The Lord preserve you in that belief," he exclaimed ironically. "If you want my candid opinion——"

"I don't."

"Perhaps you're afraid to hear it?" he jeered.

Sonia shrugged her shoulders with an air of boredom.

"You may say what you like," she told him, "but perhaps you'll regret it afterwards."

"I'll risk that. Well, to use a word you English always fight shy of, the fellow's not a gentleman."

Sonia clenched her hands and bit her lip to keep control of herself.

"You dare to say that of a friend of mine?"

"That's the pity of it, Sonia," O'Rane returned easily. "You're too good to be contaminated with that kind of stuff. He hasn't the instincts of a gentleman."

From an early age most people had hastened to conciliate and agree with Sonia when she was angry. I know nothing more characteristic of O'Rane than his repetition of the insult. She collected herself and struck coolly at his most vulnerable part.

"Perhaps, from what I know of you, you're not in a position to be a very good judge," she suggested.

Eight years before when O'Rane was cast up on the shore at Melton, it is no exaggeration to say that such a remark would have brought the speaker within easy distance of being killed. Now he only went pale and sat very still until he could speak dispassionately.

" I shall be on the high seas in a week's time," he told her, " and we shan't meet again for some years. I've given you my parting advice——"

Sonia was worsted, but she would not admit defeat without a last struggle.

" And, when you come back, you will find us married," she answered in a level voice.

" I'll come back for your wedding ! " he laughed.

" I forget how long you said . . ."

" My child, you won't be married to Crabtree in three years."

" David, to-night before dinner——"

O'Rane waved his hand in deprecation.

" I don't disbelieve you ! Will you give me your blessing before I start ? I'm supposed to be superstitious, and as I'm beginning again from the bottom of the ladder—God ! it's nearly ten years since my last effort—Part friends, Sonia."

" I don't care if I never see you again ! " she answered passionately. " You simply think of new ways of trying to humiliate me——"

" Lord be praised there's still some one fond enough of you to try," he murmured half to himself.

Late that night O'Rane sat on the foot of my bed detailing his last interview. I told him things that nobody but he would need to be told—that he had only himself to thank for his dismissal, that a spoiled and petted semi-professional beauty was not a good medium for his unduly direct methods and that he could congratulate himself on driving Sonia three-fourths against her will into Crabtree's arms—in the very terms of the warning I had given him at Lake House.

" You see, I don't want to marry a professional beauty," he objected.

" Then take Sonia at her word and don't meet her again," I said.

" But that's only one side of her, the artificial side, the London hothouse side. Before all this, when she was a child of twelve and I lived in a misery of spirit that would drive some men to suicide. . . . In those days, Sonia—Bah ! she's ashamed of it now, but she showed me the whole of her brave, tender, generous soul—I said, and I say still, that there's hope of salvation for the damned if he comes before the Judgement Seat and boasts that once, even for a moment——"

His voice rose and grew rich with the familiar Irish rhetoric till I begged him to remember the slumbering household.

"There are so many Sonia Daintons," he mused, "but that's the one I always see. It's the one I shall see for the next three years." He uncurled his legs and slid down from the bed. "I sail next week, George. Dine with me on Thursday to say good-bye."

"No, you dine with me."

"I asked you first—my last favour on English soil: I'll dine the night I get back."

"That's a little vague," I complained. "You may be gone ten years."

He rose gracefully to the bait.

"Make it as definite as you like. This is nineteen six. Say nineteen ten. I shall be back in—May. First of May, let's call it. Shall we say the Club?"

"By all means. Will eight o'clock suit you? And what shall I order?"

"Oh, you know I eat anything. Are black ties allowed at the Eclectic? No, wait a bit, it'll be the beginning of the Season, and the House'll be sitting; you'll either be in morning dress or full regimentals. You please yourself, and I'll come in a short jacket. Good night."

"Good night, Raney, you old ass."

"I shall be there," he insisted, as he switched off the light.

Six days later the papers announced to all whom it might concern that Lord Summertown and Mr. D. O'Rane had left Tilbury for Bombay by the P. & O. "Multan."

CHAPTER V

LORING

"The nobles . . . have nearly ceased either to guide or misguide; . . . the Noble has changed his fighting sword into a court rapier; and now loyally attends his King as ministering satellite; divides the spoil, not now by violence and murder, but by soliciting and finesse. . . . For the rest, their privileges every way are now much curtailed. . . . Close-viewed, their industry and function is that of dressing gracefully and eating sumptuously. . . . Nevertheless, one has still partly a feeling with the lady Maréchale: 'Depend upon it, Sir, God thinks twice before damning a man of that quality.' These people, of old, surely had virtues, uses; or they could not have been there."—THOMAS CARLYLE, "The French Revolution."

I

SOMEWHERE in my library at Lake House there is a little volume of essays entitled "History Re-written." It is a collection of *jeux d'esprit* exhumed from a dozen reviews by an author whose imagination loved to annihilate a single historical fact and reconstruct the changed consequences. There is one picture of the Greeks flying in disorder before the triumphant Darius on the plain of Marathon, and the subjection of Europe to an eastern despotism; another of Julius Cæsar successfully defending himself against his would-be assassins; a third of Mahomet dying of starvation during the Hegira. I recall a study of Luther overwhelming the Vatican in argument, Columbus shipwrecked in mid-Atlantic, the Regiment of Flanders firing on the Paris mob, Napoleon leading the Grande Armée to luxurious winter quarters in Moscow.

Sometimes I wonder whether history would have had to be much re-written if the King of England and the German Emperor had been personally more cordial from 1901 to 1910; whether, too, destiny could have been cheated if Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had lived another five

years. "C.-B." laboured for peace, and his honesty was not called in question; there was always the certainty that democracy the world over would one day grow strong enough to forbid war; there was always the chance that this decisive strength would come before a military party could issue its mobilization orders.

I know I speak in a minority of one: a thousand pens have shown that war was pre-ordained: yet—I wonder if the writers guess how nearly it was avoided. When Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman resigned, there was no one of equal authority to carry on his work. For a space the unconvinced preached disarmament to the unbelieving, then impatiently girded themselves for war. The Japanese Alliance, the French Entente, the Russian *rapprochement* were good platform points for a German scaremonger. If we had continued working for peace and keeping free of continental engagements, I wonder whether our teaching would have had time to bear fruit. My uncle Bertrand thought so and, though my political beliefs are too unstable to matter, he converted me from a showy Liberal Imperialism to an old-fashioned peaceful insularity. The change came gradually. My allegiance to the party weakened when Bill after Bill was contemptuously rejected in the House of Lords, and our leaders fulminated and declined battle. Thereafter a certain uneasiness was occasioned by the vagaries of the Foreign Office. Ostensibly our French Entente was formed to facilitate the settlement of outstanding questions in North Africa; and, though we were told from the Treasury Bench that militarily we were still uncommitted, Lobby gossip had a dozen disquieting theories of new secret engagements. Bertrand used to get his knuckles rapped for indiscreet questions to the Foreign Secretary, but rebuffs from mandarins only increased his suspicion that the whole truth was being withheld from the House of Commons.

Growing distrust of a brilliant and exasperatingly Celestial Ministry determined the course of my later years in Parliament. O'Rane left England at the end of 1906, my constituents rejected me in the first election of 1910; in the intervening time I joined an advanced Radical group in advocating better international understandings and immediate war on the House of Lords. They were the three busiest years of my life, and, when my uncle set his peace organization to work, a day of sixteen hours was divided equally between

Fleet Street, the House, and the Central Disarmament Committee in Princes Gardens.

Of the outside world I saw even less than in my first session when I was a loyal party man; and, if there had been no Liberal Bills for Loring to wreck, I should have lost touch with all my former friends. As it was, he would ask me with exaggerated fear how much time I gave him to make peace with his Maker. I would expound the only possible solution of the House of Lords problem—(there were always six at any given time, all mutually destructive)—and under the shadow of the guillotine we would adjourn for dinner and inquire whether anything had been heard of Raney. It is almost superfluous to say that no letter was ever received from him, but Summertown cabled laconically at two-month intervals, and distorted messages reached us from Sally Farwell or Lady Marlyn. It was agreed that whichever first received news of the wanderers should immediately communicate with the other, and the formula —"Lord Loring's compliments, and will you dine with him to-night?"—nine times out of ten meant that the long-suffering Lady Marlyn had recently been handed a flimsy sheet with some such words as "All well Raney married to Dowager Queen of Siam leaving to-day for Java."

When I think of Loring at this time I always recall Burgess's parting advice on our last day at Melton. Few men who prophesied so freely could boast of making so few mistakes: he had predicted that there was no third course beyond a definite career such as the Diplomatic Service and a dilettante politico-social existence of drift such as Loring now pursued. It does not lie in my mouth to pass judgement, but I was sorry to see a man with ten times my ability dabbling in life as negligently as he did. His whole energy was devoted to recapturing the last enchantments of the Middle Ages: ecclesiastically, politically and socially he stood for a vanished order and, when his own generation declined to jump backward across the centuries, he shrugged his shoulders in good-humoured contempt and walked his road alone—obstinate, aloof and correct to the last button of his boot. In the Lords he led the wildest of the Back-woodsmen groups, in Society he fluttered with a swarm where all were called by the Christian name and each took pride in the large number of people he did not know.

Failure is so little honoured that there is something pathetic in the sight of a man refusing to be modernized.

At the same time, though my instincts are Bohemian, I am glad to think that at least one section of society refused to be bought up by the invaders who now assailed London with a handful of blank cheques. These years were the era of Adolf Erckmann and his retainers; their war-paint and war-cries, their ruthlessness and ferocity of attack led Loring to dub them "les Apaches," and for seven or eight years before the outbreak of war there was truceless fighting between the old order and the new. Before it was over, Loring was beaten. He kept his own house free of the invaders and occasionally raided their camp and rescued a prisoner. Summertown, for example, had been captured for a time and came near to swelling the number of Peerage and Stage romances. It is to Loring's sole credit that the indiscretion was scotched. But a few local successes could not be magnified into a general victory, and by 1914 London lay at the feet of Erckmann, Pennington, Mrs. Welman and a few other chiefs with their followers drawn from every quarter of England.

Erckmann's first purchase was Lord Pennington—who indeed was on sale for anyone who would give him five meals a day, excitement, noise, youth and not too intellectual conversation. Next came Mrs. Welman, whose spirit yet lived amid the dusts and draughts and dressing-rooms of that Avenue Theatre she had forsaken to marry her wealthy paralytic husband. Thereafter it was simply a question of capillary attraction. The titles glamoured the stage, the stage fascinated the titles, and Erckmann, if he did not attract, at least paid for all. It was a motley gathering with a sadly draggled reputation here and there: you would find one or two Americans, several Jews, a few Germans and an astonishing number of young-men-about-town getting rich without undue toil on the wizard Erckmann's advice. "You wand a good dime, hein?" he would say invitingly. "You gome with me, my vriend." And they came.

According to their lights, too, they had the best time in the world. Ever trooping together from limelight to limelight, you would find a row of them in the stalls for any first night: the Royal Box was always theirs for a costume ball, and visitors to a regatta would punt half a mile to see the splendour of their house-boat. Should you enter a restaurant, their presence would be betrayed by the free-and-easy relations existing between themselves and the waiters—whom they called by nicknames; and, were you a recluse, the "Tickler"

would portray the whole horde on Erckmann's lawn at Marlow, or you could sit by your fireside, the "Catch" open on your knees, envying them their presence in "Lord Pennington's house-party in Buckinghamshire."

I give them all credit for their powers of organization. A charity ball in their prehensile hands went with an undoubted swing, and no one who spent a week-end in their company could reasonably complain of dullness. I remember that the papers for some months were full of "Ragging in Country House" cases; there was the mock burglary at Pennington's place, Erckmann's launch tried to shoot Marlow Weir at three o'clock in the morning, and the unexplained fire in Mrs. Welman's Surrey cottage burned one of her maids to death. Some thought that they went perhaps a little too far in this last escapade, and for a time the Smart Set dropped out of the public gaze. Then the Dean of St. Pancras, struggling into the mantle of Savonarola, devoted a course of Advent sermons to anathematizing them on the curious ground that they were responsible for a falling birth-rate, and the discussion—with this decanal benediction on it—became brisk and general.

There were houses in London where I met them, and tables where I supped with voluble, fluffy little footlight favourites whose accent and choice of language were notably more literary at the beginning of the meal than at the end. Dozens of carmined lips used to ask whether I had seen their "show"; other dozens described their next engagements and the number of pounds a week they had just refused. I floundered by the hour in contemporary theatrical history and daringly discussed actor managers by their Christian names.

Loring had no taste for such adventures. To be an Apache was to be refused admission to his house. He complained of their vitality and confessed weakness in repartee when accosted as a "sport" or informed that he "must have a drink."

"We get at cross-purposes," he sighed, stretching himself to his full, handsome six foot three and smoothing his moustache. "The fault's mine, but there it is. I've arrived fainting at the end of a long journey because I've not got the buffet manner with barmaids."

As a fellow-member of the "Eclectic," I was on nodding terms with Erckmann, but to the end he and Loring never met. Perhaps a dozen other hosts and hostesses ranged

themselves on the side of old-fashioned prudery, including for a time Lady Dainton, who assured me that she did not know what Society was coming to. I was dining with her one evening towards the end of 1907 to meet the girl Tom had just engaged himself to marry.

"I mean, I would never dream of letting Sonia know such people, don't you know?" she told me.

"I share your view," I said, finding time to recall that in the Daintons' first London Season Sonia had habitually attended the meetings of the Four-in-Hand Club on Erckmann's box seat.

"You wait till I'm married, mother!" said Sonia, who had overheard the conversation.

"When's the great event coming off?" I asked.

"Oh, not at present," said Lady Dainton rather hurriedly. "I don't want two weddings in the family at the same time. Besides, Tony's only been at the Bar a short time. We must wait till his position's a little more established, don't you know?"

I agreed, as I always agree, with Lady Dainton. Yet as I walked home that night I murmured to myself some hackneyed lines from Robert Burns. If there was one thing more certain to my mind than another, it was that the ever-shrewd Antony Crabtree relied on the Daintons and the "desperate thing" of marriage to establish his position.

I saw and heard no more of the family until the autumn. One morning in October Loring rang me up with the news that Summertown was in London, dining that night at Hale's. I was invited to meet him and found that eleven months' travel had altogether failed to mature him. A spasmodic, sandy moustache hinted at increasing age, but in other respects he was the same freckled, snub-nosed embodiment of irresponsibility as ever. The same taste for local colour characterized him as when on his return from America he lisped of candy, cocktails, dollar-bills and the art of clubbing as practised by the New York police: he was now the completest Anglo-Indian I have ever met, and his conversation sparkled with sahibs and white men, the Rains and the Hot Weather, the Hills in general and half-sacred Simla in particular. Mr. Warren Hastings, looking sourly down from the wall of Hale's coffee-room, must have seen us as seated at an endless Tiffin—paid by means of Chits—where Saises, Khitmutgars and Ayahs entered and salaamed, and twenty-one gun salutes boomed faintly in the distance—as men have politely sat for years

round any returned traveller or student of Kipling's Indian stories.

"What have you done with Raney?" Loring asked as the Odyssey drew to its close.

"I left him in Paris," was the answer. "We were going on to Spain, but the guv'nor don't think he's a suitable companion for a simple, unspoiled lad like me. My own adored mother's choice, too, mark you."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Phew! What didn't?" Summertown leant back with his thumbs thrust importantly into the arm-holes of his waistcoat. "I suppose you fellows don't appreciate it's been touch and go for a European War? Nothing but the well-known family tact of the Marlyns——"

"Get to the point," Loring ordered him.

Summertown bowed his head to the reproof.

"We came back overland from Vladivostock to Moscow," he said, "and about that point Raney recollected that his foot was on his native heath and all that sort of thing. We sprang lightly out of the train, seized our grips and Baedekers, and sauntered round Russia and Poland, eventually bringing up at a spot called Hungary—where, by the way, there's a drink called Tokay . . . All right, but you do spoil a good story, you know. From Hungary it is, as they say, a mere step to Austria. So we stepped. Raney's a most astonishing fellow, you know," he explained, in a short digression. "He's lived in all these places and talks the lingo like a beastly native. However, to resume my absorbing narrative, the moon shone out one night and discovered us eating scrambled eggs at a cabaret called the 'Chat Noir,' which being interpreted is 'Black Cat'——"

"Thank you," I said.

"The fruits of travel," he answered, with a bow. "To us enters, as they say in the stage directions, a flat-nosed brute who craves the favour of a match. Raney gave him some chat in Hungarian—which for some dam' silly reason I could never understand is called Magyar—and in a moment they were thick as thieves. I didn't know what all the eloquence was about, but they kept dragging in a chap called Kossuth——"

"I think I've heard the name somewhere," said Loring.

Summertown looked at him with admiration.

"*I* thought it was one of the filthy waters they give you when you're doing a cure. Kossuth, yes. If you're one of

the heads you pronounce it Koshoot and spell it Metternich. Well, these lads spat Magyar at each other and clinked glasses till the band broke down and everybody was staring at our table. Then an Austrian officer in a dream of a grey cloak strolled up and made some offensive remark. Of course, in mere vulgar abuse, dear old Raney's a pretty tidy performer, and they did 'emselves proud. I heard the name O'Rane sandwiched in between the gutturals, and then the Austrian got home with some pretty phrase. Raney went white as the proverbial sheet, picked up his glove from the table and gave that officer the most God Almighty welt across the face that I've ever seen. There—was—the—*devil* of a scene! I thought you exchanged cards about this point and then nipped over the frontier, leaving the other chap and the seconds and doctors and grave-diggers to keep the appointment for you. Not a bit of it here! Every cursed Austrian in that place jumped up, yelling his damnedest; every dog of an Hungarian did the same. One of the orchestra was a Bohemian, and he broke his 'cello over an Hungarian's head, and there was an Italian behind the bar who walked into the Austrians with a cocktail shaker. I picked up a chair and shouted, 'Vive Kossuth!' never dreaming the poor chap had been dead for years, and then tables and sofas hurtled through the air till the police came in and killed anybody who hadn't been killed already—I'm free to admit I faded away as soon as I'd smashed the last lamp. I thought Raney 'd come, too, but he saw it out and was duly marched away with his flat-nosed friend through a perfect forest of drawn swords. It was about one o'clock in the morning, and I didn't think it was healthy to stay up any longer."

He paused to refresh his parched throat.

"Next day I went round to the Embassy," he continued, "and there I had the surprise of my life. While I was improving my mind in the East, that eminently respectable Councillor of Embassy, my father, had been shifted from Paris and sent to Vienna as Chargé d'Affaires. He was very glad to see me, of course, and all that sort of thing, but I couldn't help feeling I should have preferred to carry my little troubles to another man. I toned my story down a good bit, and after some agitated notes and interviews Raney was brought up for judgement with an armed escort. Most of him was in a sling, and the rest just hung down in strips from the bones. As soon as they started talking I found we'd fairly done it in the night before. Our flat-nosed

Hungarian friend was mixed up with a Secret Society and pretty consistently shadowed by the police. He and Raney had fraternized and exchanged cards, and apparently old O'Rane wasn't much of a popular favourite in Austria. He and Vive Kossuth had caused the Government all kinds of vexation which weren't forgotten though both of them were dead, and when the flat-nosed man drank to their pious memory and Raney held forth on Hungarian Independence, you can imagine the Austrian contingent was no end restive.

"The poor old Guv'nor had his work cut out to smooth things down. For about an hour he buttered 'em all up and apologized to everybody, swearing that Raney was tight—which was an absolute lie. There was a fine recommendation to mercy and an allusion to a father's feeling—lump in the throat, all that sort of thing—and then the Guv'nor closed down. I hoped it was all over, but the Austrian lads were out for blood—we had to pay for all the damage, and our friend the officer was trundled along in a wheeled chair to receive our apologies, and then the Minister of the Interior, or the Prefect of Police, or some bug like that, popped into another room with the Guv'nor and dictated terms for the future. *I* got off with a caution, but poor old Raney took it in the neck. They stripped him and measured him and took his finger-prints and photographed him about a dozen times. And in the afternoon an escort of soldiers frog's-marched us to the Bavarian frontier and took a tender farewell, with a plain statement in writing that, if ever Raney put one toe of either foot on an inch of his Imperial Majesty Franz Josef's territory from now till the end of time, he'd first of all be shot and then disembowelled and then confined in a fortress for the rest of his days. The Guv'nor don't fancy me for the Diplomatic; he says I want discipline, so the Army's going to try its hand on me." He shrugged his shoulders tolerantly. "I don't mind, it's all in the day's work, but I'd have you observe the kind of man my sainted mother sends me abroad with on the grounds that I should only get up to mischief if I went alone."

Of O'Rane's future movements Summertown could tell us nothing beyond the fact that he was shortly starting for Mexico, and that letters to his bank would, in due course, be forwarded.

"I shall write to him to-night," said Loring, as we walked up St. James's Street. Summertown had heard that roulette

was being played illicitly somewhere in Chelsea and was anxious to check the accuracy of the report.

"At this hour?" I asked, glancing at my watch. It was past one o'clock.

"I can do it in three lines," he answered. "It's about his friend Crabtree. Have you heard?"

"I can believe anything of him," I said, as I resigned myself to listen.

"Then you *haven't* heard. Well, the engagement's off. I met your cousin Violet at lunch to-day, and she had it from Lady Dainton. No reason given."

"Either of us can supply it," I said.

Loring made no comment.

"Sonia can do better than that," he said, after we had walked for some time in silence.

"So, possibly, can Crabtree," I suggested. "In her present state——"

"My dear George, she's still a child," he answered, with some warmth.

"There are children and children." I had neither forgiven nor forgotten her behaviour to O'Rane for a year or two.

"I don't think the man who marries Sonia is at all to be pitied," Loring said rather aggressively.

The words may have meant that such a man was to be envied—or equally that he took the risk with his eyes open. But we were at the corner of Half Moon Street, and Loring had waved good night and was walking towards Curzon Street before I was ready to ask him.

II

I look back on my life between 1907 and 1910 as three years' hard labour. The sentence began to run about a week after Summertown's return from the Continent, and it was only when he had been coaxed and pushed into a commission in the Third Grenadier Guards and I was dining with the King's Guard in St. James's Palace, six months later, that I heard news of O'Rane's strangely devious progress to the New World.

Devious, and yet perhaps not strange. He went by way of British East Africa, though what he did and how long he remained there, no man has discovered. The documentary

evidence ended with a two-line postcard from Mombasa, and anyone could interpret it as he pleased. Summertown's explanations grew more and more picturesque as dinner went on. O'Rane, he assured me, was a Great White Rajah holding sway from the Lakes to the Sudan and from the Desert to the now empty throne of Zanzibar; later, he had "gone black" and was living patriarchally in a kraal with scores of native wives and one immaculate silk hat between himself and unashamed nudity; later still, he had proclaimed himself Mahdi, and was leading frenzied hordes of Dervishes to the recapture of Khartoum. Raney himself told me afterwards that he was at one time bar-tender in the Nairobi Club and the rest of the while turning his hand, not altogether without success, to anything in heaven above or the waters beneath that had money in it. When he left Africa I have no idea, but the next time I heard of him he had unquestionably reached Mexico.

In the meantime I was wearily serving my sentence in London. I have mentioned the guerrilla warfare carried on by Bertrand against the Foreign Office from the time of the Franco-British *entente*. Secret treaties or understandings were new and amazingly distasteful to the Radical wing, the Lobby rumours only increased the general uneasiness, and something of a crisis was reached when the undefined alliance was joined by Russia. We fire-eaters had lavished invective on the Czar's Government at the time of "Red Sunday," and a *fainéant* Duma hardly availed to drive Father Gapon and the litter of dead in the Petersburg streets from our memory. If, of course, one country after another was to be drawn into the *entente*, well and good: there could be no need for so much bated breath and mystery. If, on the other hand, we were dividing Europe into two groups,—at best for a competition in armaments, at worst for a trial of strength,—then the men and women whose lives were handed out as stakes had the right to know the gamble their rulers were meditating.

In this connexion I make free recantation of one heresy: I no longer desire open diplomacy. Had it obtained for the last generation, war might have been postponed; but, if war was as consistently intended by Germany as I am assured on all hands, it would only have been postponed till a less formidable alliance opposed her. To the other half of my creed I remain loyal, though my loyalty be tinged with despair. Now, as then, I look forward to an era of universal arbitration, a *pro rata* reduction of armaments, leading in time to

the abolition of national armies and navies and the establishment of a United States of the world with federal control of the world's constabulary. The ideal will not materialize to-day or to-morrow, but—as O'Rane was fond of saying—slavery and torture died hard, the rule of law between individuals did not come in a night.

Bertrand's motives in launching his propaganda I am not competent to judge. Perhaps his attitude of eternal scepticism was beginning to pall; perhaps he was as alarmed as he pretended to be—and there is little doubt that for half a dozen years before the war there was a latent diplomatic crisis whenever the harvest had been gathered in and the armies of the Continent were mobilized for autumn manœuvres; certainly a personal animus towards the Foreign Office, a resentment for the Government's lofty practice of driving the Commons in blinkers provided a stimulus to his activity. And for all the routine and drudgery, there was excitement and a great novelty in the campaign; *l'appétit vient en mangeant*, and to some extent we succumbed to the enthusiasm we tried to inspire in others.

Princes Gardens saw the birth of this, as of half a hundred similar movements. We christened our association the "Disarmament League," floated a weekly paper with the evangelic title of "Peace," organized an army of itinerant lecturers, appointed corresponding members in every quarter of the globe, affiliated ourselves to any foreign body that would have us, and arranged broad-minded visits of inspection to the lands of sympathizers and suspects.

The work was enormous. Nothing was too great or too small for our attention, and Bertrand had all a great commander's capacity for delegating work to others. As editor of "Peace" he would sketch out a few general ideas, leave me to turn up references and fill in details, and on Thursday, as we were going to Press, stroll round to the draughty, gas-lit office in Bouverie Street with luminous and urgent suggestions for altering the tone of the leading articles or including lengthy contributions from his own pen in an already overset paper.

I imagine there is no man born of woman who does not believe himself qualified to found and run an important daily, weekly or monthly paper. We were no exception, and my uncle's self-confidence was fortified by hazy and idealistic memories of the Fleet Street he had served half a century before. We had the saving prudence to employ one or two

trained journalists and a Scotch sub-editor of infinite patience to guide—but never thwart—our amateur inspiration. In time we settled down to conventional newspaper tradition, moderated our transports and eliminated from the columns of "Peace" the traces of our first fine careless rapture. In time our patient M'Clellan was promoted to the position of business manager, and in his capable hands the advertisement revenue leapt and bounded until, by the end of 1908, our weekly loss on the production of the paper sank to the negligible figure of sixty pounds. In time, too, Bertrand and I found the spadework distasteful, and from the beginning of 1909 the professional journalists did more and the inspired amateurs considerably less. We no longer said that nothing was too great or too small for our attention. . . .

Of the effects of our noisy dive into journalism I must leave others to speak; the time actually spent in "Peace" office, "the great movement of men" in the purlieus of Fleet Street, I have never had occasion to regret. The project was kept as secret as the sailing orders of the "Hispaniola" in "Treasure Island"; and the out-of-work gutterscribes knew as much of our intentions as Flint's scattered pirates on the quayside of Bristol. Mayhew waylaid me in the Club, stammering with excited suggestions.

"I'm just off to Budapest as special correspondent for the 'Wicked World,' he told me. "If you'll make it worth my while to stay—I don't mind telling you there's not much you can teach me about running a paper. . . ."

And he sketched the lines of the ideal new weekly, abolishing our title, suppressing our propaganda and limning forth a hybrid which was to pay its way by white mail and the ventilation of grievances We were never to threaten the disclosure of ugly indiscretions but to ask our own price for baseless panegyric. "How much will you give us to say this about you?" was to be our formula, and, when an underhousemaid was discharged for theft or a clergyman refused to celebrate marriage with a deceased wife's sister, the aggrieved party was urged to "write to the Watchman about it."

Finding no common ground between us, Mayhew hurried away to Budapest with an omniscient headshake of misgiving. His place on my doorstep was promptly taken by one after another of Sir John Woburn's contract-expired young men. In those days the Press Combine was descending on journalism with the sideways glide of the octopus. Newspapers throughout England came one by one within

reach of the waving tentacles: stolid, old-fashioned thunderers were silenced and flung into the street, while the young men of promise had their salaries trebled for three years until their brains were picked and themselves could be tossed aside like a sucked orange. They came to me boasting of the Sensations they had effected—the "Lamplighter" treasure-hunt, the "Cottage and Castle" campaign in favour of sterilized milk, the "Echo" carnation-growing competition. One and all would have made as *épatant* a sensation of universal disarmament—or, for the matter of that, bimetallism, Esperanto, female suffrage or food reform—but a narrow Oxford fastidiousness, "a toy of soul, a titillating thing," set me shivering at sight of their newsbills and head-lines. For better or worse we had to get on without them.

Sir John Woburn himself I never met—and am the first to regret the loss. A man who rose from nothing to a baronetcy and the controlling interest in the august "London and Westminster Chronicle" is probably worth meeting; a man who cornered public opinion with his Press Combine was no ordinary man; and to drug the sense of a nation, to render an impassive people neurotic, to debauch the mind of a generation was no ordinary task. But, if I never met Woburn, I came once or twice in contact with Gerald Harness, his principal galvanizer and the one man who survived his chief's successive 'witch-hunts for incompetents,' as they were called, in the ranks of the Press Combine.

The career of Harness was without parallel in English life; under Woburn's direction he edited the "Morning Bulletin" and the "Evening Dispatch"; in the office of the second he unravelled—Penelope fashion—the web he had woven overnight in the office of the first. His was an amazingly effective dual personality: in the "Bulletin" he was a Jingo, a Tariff Reformer, a Brewers' Champion, a House of Lords man and an Ulster stalwart; in the "Dispatch" a Little Englander, Free-Trader, Licensing Bill supporter, House of Commons man and Home Ruler. The war, which washed away most things, spent its violence in vain on his impervious figure; he still fought for conscription by night and the voluntary system by day.

"A newspaper," he told me when "Peace" was almost paying its way and might advantageously be acquired by the Combine, "a newspaper must give its readers what they want. And an association of newspapers must cater for all kinds of readers. That's the ABC of commercial journalism."

"I suppose it is," I said. It would have been irrelevant and in questionable taste to discuss a journalism that was not primarily commercial.

After Mayhew the scrappings of the Press Combine; after them the real Grub Street that I believed to be long dead. On the Monday after our first issue, Bouverie Street looked like the Out-Patients' entrance to a hospital. Bluff, red-faced men with husky voices swept me off my feet with their eloquence and were sent to report by-elections in the provinces—which in two cases I found them doing with a wealth of local colour in the upstairs room of the "White Friars' Tavern" when I hurried in there for a late luncheon; quick-eyed lobby correspondents, with a telling "Man to man! Put your cards on the table!" manner, reconstructed the inner counsels of the Cabinet with the accuracy of forecast which staggered and continues to stagger me. And there were faded women, no longer young, with shabby boots and carefully mended gloves, who brought me sentimental and curiously invertebrate "middle" articles—and seemed pathetically unsurprised by the rejection of their dog's-eared manuscripts.

M'Clellan, a pressman first and a man some time afterwards, looked with lofty contempt on my gullibility and softness of heart. It was not long, I must admit, before I acquired something of his own hardness: when Valentine Arden rang me up to say, "One was wondering whether you would lunch with one at the Carlton to-day?" I asked brutally whether the invitation meant that he had a new novel waiting to be launched. And, when casual friends wandered in and were struck with the beauty of some new *édition de luxe*, I no longer harkened to their "I say, old man, don't you think you could give *me* some reviewing to do?" Publishers at one time embarrassed me by threatening to withdraw their advertisements in consequence of an unfavourable notice, but M'Clellan shook his head knowingly and reassured me.

"Mr. Oakleigh," he would say, "ye've no call to mind yon fulish buddy. He kens well—if you don't—that good reviews never yet sold a bad book, nor bad reviews killed a good one, neither."

The journalistic side of our work was the most interesting, and I was sorry to drop more and more out of it as my uncle's foreign propaganda developed. One or other had to be sacrificed, however, and Bertrand could not run the Central Disarmament Committee single-handed. One of the chief bedrooms at Princes Gardens was turned into an office and

there we installed a paid secretary, who, we decided, must be Swiss, as his German was too bad for anyone but a Frenchman, and his French too bad for anyone but a German. His non-committal name was Ruhler, his function to conduct long ceremonial correspondence with The Hague, the Internationale, Mr. Secretary Judd of the United States of America, and a host of less ornate persons and bodies throughout the world.

No sooner was M'Clellan in charge of "Peace" office and Ruhler of the Central Committee than my uncle and I took the road. I shall say little of our lecturing tours for two reasons: first, they exactly resembled every other organization conducted for similar purposes, be it the 1909 Budget League or the earlier Anti-Licensing Bill Crusade; secondly, there can be hardly a man or woman of full age in England this day who did not either attend one of our meetings or read reports of our oratorical flights in the daily press. The British Isles were divided into suitable areas and submerged with earnest speakers. Members of Parliament, Liberal candidates, Nonconformist pastors and unspecialized publicists with a taste for improving their platform style at someone else's expense swarmed in answer to our call.

The money poured in as liberally as the men. Quakers from principle, international bankers from interest, and a large, unorganized non-party group of pacificists, because we made their flesh creep, pressed forward, cheque in hand. I recall that one of our largest donations came from Sir Adolf Erckmann, and in the early months of the war we were bitterly criticized for accepting money from a Jew of German birth for the propagation of doctrines calculated to weaken the national power of resistance. I reply that we aimed at weakening in equal measure the capacity of all nations for mutual destruction; and in justice to Erckmann, whom I have little cause to love, he was neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, but an international banker with everything to lose by war.

Hard on this criticism followed the question propounded in the late summer of 1914 by a hundred papers and a hundred thousand tongues, what—if anything—the Disarmament League had achieved for all its pamphlets, its speeches and its international propaganda. Well, I think we killed the Chauvinism that plunged this country in the South African War; the criminal Teutonic doctrine that war is a fine thing in itself and the necessary purging of a nation's fatty degeneration found no audience in these islands; we won respect for

The Hague Tribunal, and can claim some credit for the Taft Arbitration Treaty with the United States. Perhaps, too, we postponed war when a more bellicose people might have plunged blood-thirstily into the Balkan embroglio. That we impaired the national power of resistance by opposing Lord Roberts' national service propaganda, I resolutely deny. The Haldane Army Reorganization rightly contemplated a naval screen behind which an army of any size could be built up. I for one never committed the illogicality of trying to reduce the Government's ship-building programme without proportional reduction on the part of other countries. Whether I should have embarked on the peace propaganda if the Government had told me its foreign obligations of honour, is another question.

Of course, if anyone asks me to explain away the present fact of war, I must ask in my turn whether a law against duelling had abolished the present fact of assault or isolated murder. Our League had a life of some seven years, the Internationale perhaps six times as long ; both these organizations were as powerless to prevent war as two thousand years of Christian teaching.

But my present task is to describe and not to defend or speculate. If I have dealt at some length with the activities of the League, my excuse must be that it monopolized so much of my time between 1908 and 1910. When the paper and the correspondence bureau and the lecturing tours had been organized and set on their feet to stand alone, we were engaged in promoting a better understanding with the principal powers on the Continent. In 1909 my uncle arranged for an extended tour to be undertaken through the principal towns of France, Germany, Austria, Italy and Russia by representatives of the principal newspapers in the kingdom : on their return at the end of six months, he sent them to the United States, Canada and certain of the South American Republics. In the meantime, a return visit was paid by a hundred and fifty continental journalists, and my uncle and I escorted them round London, introduced them to some of the chief manufacturing centres, divided them into groups of ten and billeted them on sympathetic country houses, with results that were occasionally embarrassing and had not a few of those unrehearsed effects which constitute sometimes the success, sometimes the disaster, but always the comic element in such campaigns of strenuous goodwill.

The return visit of the journalists was followed by a

mission of British Trades-Unionists to the Continent; we received a deputation representing Continental Labour in our turn. The Bar went next, and then a Committee of the House of Commons, then a sprinkling of the British Medical Association, and lastly a number of Church of England clergy and Free Church ministers. When I say that each visit called forth a return visit, and that Bertrand and I bore the brunt of entertaining and shepherding our visitors; when I add that my uncle was a member of the House the whole time (and an assiduous attendant), while I kept him company till my defeat in the first election of 1910, it is not wonderful that we both tended to drop out of London social life and to lose touch with all but our most intimate friends and relations.

It was not until the autumn of 1909 that I could find time to spend a fortnight with Loring at House of Steynes. I remember him telling me that the Daintons would be of the party, but it was so long since I had seen them that I had no idea even whether they had spent the intervening time in England. Sonia's engagement was broken off late in 1907, and almost her first appearance in public after the rupture was when we met in Scotland two years later. I gather that Loring, who was lazily attracted by her, paid several visits to Crowley Court, but he and I played Box and Cox so far as London was concerned. When I came back for the opening of Parliament, he moved unobtrusively away to the Riviera, only returning in the height of the season when my hands were full of foreign visitors and my mouth of polyglot civilities and explanations. We no longer met to exchange news of O'Rane, because there was no news to exchange. After his single postcard to Summertown from Mombasa, the silence of the grave descended upon him, and nothing but my conviction of his material indestructibility kept me from fearing that he might in very truth be dead.

And then without warning I was called upon to fulfil my part of the old covenant. On a summer night in 1909 an invitation sang its way over the wires from Knightsbridge to Curzon Street.

"My compliments to Lord Loring, and, if he will dine with me to-night at the Eclectic, I can give him news of Mr. O'Rane."

III

"If you tell me the little man's been writing to you," were Loring's first words, "I'm afraid I shan't believe you."

I helped him to take his coat off and led the way into the dining-room.

"I wouldn't insult your intelligence with such a story," I answered. "It was infinitely more Raneyesque."

"Well, where is he and what's he doing?"

"Where did he *say* he was going? What did he *say* he would do?" I asked in turn. "My dear Jim, Raney's one of those people whose dreams come true. He told us he was going to Mexico, and he's gone to Mexico; he told us he was going to make money, and I gather he's making the devil of a lot."

"When's he coming home?" Loring asked.

I was about to admit ignorance when an old recollection stirred in my brain and I completed the history.

"He *told* me he would dine with me in this room on the first of May next year. He *will* dine—at that time—in this place."

Loring helped himself to plovers' eggs and began slowly to remove the shells.

"The little man's born out of time, you know," he said, with a laugh. "He belongs to the spacious days of Elizabeth. I'm glad he's in luck. God knows, if ever a man deserved it, if ever there was poetic justice for real pluck . . ." he left the sentence eloquently unfinished. "Drive ahead, George."

"In time," I said, "and at a price."

Nearly four years in the House of Commons had made me quite shameless in the matter of log-rolling. I held Loring to ransom and refused to utter another word about O'Rane until he had promised to let me descend on House of Steynes with a party of ten French journalists who were arriving in England in two months' time and had to be shown every side of English social life. It was a preposterous request for me to make, and Loring very properly refused it—not once but several times. Only at the end of a long and—if I may say so—well chosen dinner, when I declined even to mention O'Rane's name, did he show a willingness to compromise.

"Have it your own way!" he exclaimed impatiently. "I shan't be there, though."

"My dear Jim, unless you're there from start to finish——"

"This is sheer blackmail!" he cried.

"As you will," I answered, folding my arms obstinately.

"You're a dirty dog, George," he answered, with slow scorn. "I suppose I shall have to promise, though."

Before telling my tale, I had to explain how it had reached me. The previous evening had been devoted to one of many all-night sittings on the interminable 1909 Budget. I walked home between five and six o'clock in the morning, as the returning market-carts rumbled sleepily westward along Knightsbridge, and belated revellers in vivid dresses and with tired, white faces flashed by in taxis and private cars. My head was aching, my lungs seemed charged with the poisoned air of the House, and I was chilled to the marrow of my bones; cursing a factious Opposition, I had reached the door of my uncle's house in Princes Gardens and was fumbling for my latch-key, when I noticed a man sitting on the steps with his head on his knees and his hands clasped round his legs. He awoke as I tried to squeeze by him, rubbed his eyes, yawned, gazed round him, and then scrambled stiffly to his feet.

"Maybe you're Mr. George Oakleigh?" he asked, with an American intonation almost too strong to be natural. And then, when I bowed in assent, "Gee, but it's cold waiting. D'ye think I could come in for a piece? I've been sitting here since ten last night."

My first desire was for a hot bath, my second for bed. Both points were clearly propounded to the American.

"Guess that'll keep," he answered easily. "I've a message from your friend David O'Rane." He felt in his pocket and produced a card with the name "James Morris," and some address that I have forgotten in Mexico City. On the back was pencilled, "Please give bearer any assistance he may require. D. O'R."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Morris?" I asked unenthusiastically, fingering the card and then glancing at my watch.

"A warm room and something to eat," he answered, with a shiver. "My name's not Morris, by the way, but it'll serve. And I'm not a native of Mexico, but *that'll* serve. My folk come from this side of the water, but they're not proud of me for some reason. By the same token, I shan't keep you long from your bath. I'm known in Knightsbridge.

'Late to bed and early to rise, Is the rule for Knightsbridge, *if* you're wise.' All right, I'm not jagged."

Mr. Morris's manner was so unprepossessing that nothing but my regard for O'Rane would have induced me to admit him to the house at this—or any—hour. In appearance, the man was of medium size with powerful hands and thin, riding legs. His hair and skin were fair, his eyes grey, and his features regular though weak. All pretension to good looks, however, was ruined by his expression, which was an unattractive blend of cunning and effrontery. His lower lip shot out at the end of a sentence, as though to conceal the weak line of his chin : deep furrows from nose to mouth formed themselves into a perpetual sneer : the pale eyes were half hidden under their insolent, drooping lids. And with it all there was something pitiful about the man : he was so young, not more than two and twenty ; the recklessness was so crude, the frailty of character so patent. He seemed like a highly strung child who had been bullied into obstinacy and violence by an unsympathetic nurse. And that, I believe, was in fact one part of his history.

"Come in, Mr. Morris," I said, opening the door. "I shall be glad to hear any news of O'Rane and to do anything I can for a friend of his."

"A name to conjure with, seemingly," said Morris, with a malicious smile.

"O'Rane's ?"

"I reckon so. You'll admit you didn't precisely freeze on to me at first sight. However, no ill feeling."

"It was an unusual hour for a call," I replied.

"And I looked an unusual sort of a customer, eh ? Well, never mind. What's this ? Cheese ? I can do with some of that. No whisky ! I don't use spirits nowadays, not since I met O'Rane."

We sat in silence while he munched bread and cheese, contentedly glancing round the room at the pictures or, when he thought I was not looking, letting his eyes rest on me. The curtains were still drawn, and the yellow light from the chandelier, feeble by contrast with the cold, diamond clarity of the dawn outside, lent an added element of the fantastic to our meeting. I lit a cigar, settled wearily into my chair and told him not to hurry himself.

"Well, start at the beginning," he said at length, "I met him eighteen months ago in Tomlinson's Saloon, Acacia Avenue, Mexico City. He hadn't been in the country more

than a few days—landed with five thousand dollars he'd made out Africa way and was looking for likely oil propositions. I was with the Central Syndicate in those days. No need to ask why I was in the accursed country at all, or what I was doing. The Syndicate made me cashier in their innocence of heart, and, though I wasn't overpaid, their book-keeping left loopholes for a man of enterprise. I used those loopholes some. By the time I met O'Rane, the Syndicate had lent me 4000 dollars—more'n eight hundred pounds—without knowing it. We weren't in sight of an audit, I'd got months to doctor the entries, it was roses all the way." Truculently he thrust forward his lower lip, every inch of him the bragging schoolboy. "Then—I had ninety minutes' warning—the Syndicate started in for amalgamation with the Southern Combine, the accountants rolled up for the valuation—and I thought Mexico City wasn't good for my health."

He paused dramatically, finished his soda water and put down the empty glass.

"That's when I met O'Rane," he went on. "There wasn't much packing or leave-taking to get through. I booked express for New Orleans and turned into Tomlinson's till it was time to get under way for the depot. That's where they took me—I was a fool to run before evening, it was bound to arouse suspicion. I'd been talking to O'Rane a matter of half an hour—oil prospects and such like—when I felt a hand on my shoulder and a shiver down my spine."

He paused again and helped himself to a cigar.

"To this day I don't know why he did it," he resumed, "but I'd not been four and twenty hours in my cell when they told me there was a visitor wanting to speak with me.

"'Tell him I'm only at home on the sixth Friday of the month,' I said.

"*I* didn't want any durned visitors. He came in, though —leastways he came to the door and peeked through the grille.

"'Morning,' says he, 'you remember we met in Tomlinson's yesterday. My name's O'Rane.'

"'I've not got a card,' says I, 'but you'll find full particulars in the book upstairs.'

"I wasn't out to be civil and I thought he'd taken the hint and cleared. He was still at the grille, though, next time I looked up.

"'Which college were you?' he asks after a bit—for all

the world as if we were still drinking cocktails in Tomlinson's. College! If he'd asked my views on Bacon and Shakespeare . . .

"'What the hell's that to you?' I blazed out.

"'It was Merton or Corpus, but I can't remember which,' he says.

"I didn't say anything to that.

"'I was at the House,' he went on. 'I wanted to see if I couldn't give you a lift up. What's the amount in dispute?'

"'Four thousand,' I answered and heard him whistle.

"'Pounds?' he asks.

"'No such luck,' I said. 'Dollars.' I mean, to be lagged for that . . .

"Believe me or not, that man O'Rane sighed with relief.

"'I can manage that,' he said. 'So long.'

"Next morning they let me out. There may have been more surprised men in Mexico City, but, if there were, I didn't meet 'em. How he squared the Syndicate and the officials and the whole durned Criminal Code of Mexico, I don't know. I didn't ask. I had a bath and a shave at his hotel, then he gave me breakfast, then a cigar, and then we put up our feet and talked.

"'You'd better quit Mexico City for a piece,' he began.

"I nodded. The same great thought had occurred to me.

"'I'm out for oil,' he went on, 'd'you care to come?'

"'D'you care about having me?' I suggested.

"'I shouldn't have asked you if I didn't,' he says.

"'I'd look for oil in hell for you,' I said.

"We shook on that.

"'We shall rough it some,' he warned me. 'Better hear the terms first. Item one: I'll never ask you to do a thing I won't do myself.'

"'Done!' I said.

"'Then that's about all,' says he, taking his feet off the table and looking at his watch. 'Half profits for each, and I'm to say when the proposition's worked out.'"

Mr. James Morris, as he chose to call himself, late of Merton (or Corpus Christi) College, Oxford, knocked the ash off his cigar and looked round the library.

"You've not got such a thing as a large scale map of Mexico, have you?" he asked. "Well, it doesn't matter. I guess the places would mostly be only names to you. We

started West—Gonsalo way—and we worked some. Living Springs was our first success, and we let the Southern Combine have an option on that so as we could buy plant for the St. Esmond concession, and six months' working of St. Esmond gave us capital to buy out the Gonsalo Development Syndicate and round off our holding. Since then we've struck oil at Pica, Melango and Long Valley."

He paused considerately to let the unfamiliar names sink into my memory.

"In eighteen months we've never looked back," he went on, with rising enthusiasm. "Every dollar we made went back to the business—barring what we needed to live on, and that was mostly bread, meat and tobacco, with an occasional new pair of boots or breeches to keep us decent. And then three months ago we started prospecting in new territory —I can't tell you where it is, 'cos we're still negotiating. I found the oil, and O'Rane did the rest. *He* thinks it's the richest thing we've ever struck and he's going to collar the proposition. The territory's about the size of Scotland, and the concession will run to anything between one and two million dollars."

He pulled an envelope from his pocket and scribbled some figures on the back.

"We're selling our shirts to get it," he told me. "O'Rane never borrows money, but he's sent me over here to float a company to buy everything we've found or made in the last year and a half. He couldn't come himself: the sweepings of God's universe that we call our labour would be drunk by ten and knifing each other by ten-thirty without him to get a cinch on 'em. If I bring it off, we shall have enough for the concession. Maybe it won't pan out as rich as we hope, and then we start again at the bottom. That's the sort of risk he loves taking. That's—that's just O'Rane. Maybe he's right, and there's oil enough to flood Sahara. Put the concession at a million dollars and the average yield at ten per cent on your capital. A hundred thousand dollars per annum—gross. Take half of that away for working expenses —fifty thousand, net. Half profits on that, twenty-five thousand dollars a year—£5000 for each of us.

"O'Rane says he'll be satisfied with that. When we touch total net profit of fifty thousand dollars, he'll sell out or turn the proposition over to a company. Then he'll come back to England and go into Parliament and cut a dash. And I—well, I'll have to say good-bye to him, I guess."

He stopped abruptly as though there were much more that he would have liked to say. We sat smoking in silence for a few moments. Morris's raw, ill-regulated susceptibilities had made him an easy victim to Raney's personality: perhaps he was already wondering what to do when the strange partnership dissolved, and Raney returned alone—perhaps he recognized his own inability to continue the work single-handed when the inspiration and driving force were removed: perhaps, as his eyes glanced out on the silence and desolation of Knightsbridge, he was weighing the possibility of starting afresh and making a new home for himself in a Western capital.

For myself, I had no other thought than that I should have liked a man to speak of me as Morris had spoken of O'Rane. I should have welcomed a little of his humanity, his singleness of heart and his unshakable faith in himself. While he worked in shirt and trousers or ventured his last hundreds on an admitted scamp or staked everything he had won on the chance of greater winnings, I was sitting tired and chilled by my late hours at the House, ruling Morris out from my list of desirable acquaintances on the ground that I disliked his manner and appearance, possibly even wondering if he were to be trusted to put down the silver cigar cutter before he left. . . .

"Is there anything I can do for you, Morris?" I asked, with a sudden shock of penitence at my own insular prejudice.

He noticed that I had dropped the 'Mister' and seemed gratified.

"Guess not, thanks," he answered, yawning and stretching himself. "I've got the proposition pretty nigh fixed. I'll take any message you like to send O'Rane. He sent love to everybody and would like to hear from you. There's not much time or accommodation for writing out there. Our first camp was two blankets, a packing case and a banjo. When I went down with fever he gave me ragtime back-numbers and stories from the 'Earthly Paradise.' The man could make his pile doing memory stunts at a dime show. God! if I hadn't been so weak I could have laughed some. William Morris in Central America, in a bell tent bunged up with oil samples and quinine bottles." He glanced round the room at the shining mahogany furniture, and his toe tested the thickness of the carpet. "Well, good-bye," he said. "I'm pleased to have met you."

As he stood with outstretched hand, there was little

enough of the American about him for all his laboured trans-atlanticisms.

"Are you and he all alone?" I asked.

"God! no. Not now. We've got the off-scourings of every nation and most of the saloons of Mexico City working for us. They're a dandy lot, but it's pretty to see O'Rane handling them. If ever you lose your faith in human nature, come and see him licking half-castes and Gringoes into shape. They'd string up old man Diaz and make O'Rane president for the asking. Well, I must be going."

"Look here," I said, as we shook hands again, "you must come and dine with me——"

He stopped me with a shake of the head.

"Thanks, I don't show up in the West End by day. I spend my mornings down town—Mincing Lane way—and then I retire up stage. 'Sides, I'm due to sail on Friday if I can get fixed by then."

I walked with him to the front door and watched him appreciatively sniffing the early morning air.

"Good old London!" he exclaimed, and then with a return of his former sneering arrogance, "D'you ever see X—— ?"

The name he mentioned was borne by a well-known Permanent Under-Secretary in one of the Government offices. He was a regular visitor at my uncle's house.

"And his wife?" Morris pursued. "Well, next time you run across her, just tell her that all's well in the New World. Good-bye."

. . . . . .

When I had finished my story, Loring threw away the stump of his cigar and stretched himself.

"As I told you earlier in the evening," he observed, "the little man has been born about three centuries too late."

IV

I always regarded Loring as the possessor of one sterling quality. Selfish he might be, or indolent, or inconsiderate, an old maid in his fussy little rules of everyday existence and an incurable romantic in his attitude to the life of the twentieth century. With it all he was a man of his word. Under blackmail he had pledged himself to entertain my French journalists, and when the time came for fulfilling the

pledge he smiled welcome on them in the hall of House of Steynes.

Indeed, so admirable was his manner that I retired unreluctantly from competition. Raney's messenger, the self-styled 'James Morris,' had called on me in June; the evangelists of Universal Brotherhood arrived in July, and for more sweltering weeks than I like to count, mine was the privilege of giving them tea and speeches on the Terrace, escorting them in unsuitable clothes to Goodwood and more speeches and misinforming them on subjects of historical interest in Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's—a course which afforded them opportunity of correcting me in further speeches, to the sluggish perplexity of the vergers.

In August, the hoarse, limp mass of us repaired to Euston and House of Steynes. Old Lady Loring was, perhaps fortunately, with Amy at Baden-Baden, though four days can be interminably long even in a bachelor party. Our host, however, put his heart into the work; with a grim thoroughness we visited Holyrood and Arthur's Seat, the Highlands and Islands and dismissed our guests fraternally with the clang of Clyde hammers resounding in their ears and an obstinate conviction that they had enjoyed themselves.

"And now," said Loring to my uncle as we walked out of the Waverley Station, "now for an All-British holiday. You can stay another week, sir? No women till my mother comes back—I thought that would appeal to you. You, George? Then the only thing to do is to find a telegraph office and invite everybody we can think of."

Two days later, by persuasion on our part and perjury on theirs, we had snatched a dozen men from the same number of protesting hostesses. Tom Dainton was on his honeymoon—surely the least romantic of its kind for anyone who knew Tom or could imagine an ox-eyed wife yet more silent than himself!—but Sam came up to say good-bye before sailing for India with his regiment, and we had the luck to catch Mayhew on leave from Budapest. Summertown escaped the vigilance of his Colonel for half the time, and Arden telegraphed at some expense: "One resents these short notices but if one can be assured that the Waterloo brandy is not yet finished one may perhaps sacrifice oneself for one's friends but one cannot allow one's acceptance to be taken as establishing a precedent."

The party was a rare antidote for anyone suffering from too much House of Commons and general propaganda. We

bathed and lay about in long chairs and bathed again and enjoyed the delicious, lazy conversation wherein the speakers fall half asleep between the drawling sentences, and nobody makes epigrams or debating points, and nothing matters. Valentine Arden, exquisite, precious and inscrutable as ever, would unbend from time to time and speak as though he no longer feared a charge of enthusiasm. His books were attracting considerable attention with their sparkle and passionless satire, and his talk left the impression on my mind that for all his youth the satire was not wholly cheap effect.

He analysed contemporary literature with the eyes of a man whose profession is to study technique, emphasizing the essentially derivative character of modern writing with its sex psychology borrowed from France, its Pottery School and Dartmoor School imitating Hardy, its intensive vision applied by the admirers of James. His final judgement was depressing, for there was nothing new except Wells and Conrad and little that was good. We were too much obsessed by our environment to produce or care for great books. Nothing was worth achieving or describing, unless it were an invitation to dine with royalty or a treatise on sexual pathology.

The childlike preoccupation of grown men and women in the infinite littleness of social life was an irresistible mark for the satire of a man whose deliberate and effective pose was to exaggerate the fastidious artificiality of his generation. Valentine Arden had a courageous and altogether scornful soul. I have seen him enter the Ritz, thin and white as an Aubrey Beardsley pierrot, in a black cloak lined with heliotrope silk. I have watched strong-minded young women humbling themselves before him because they knew his indifference to their charms, and I have marked the haughtiest of nervous hostesses exerting themselves to secure his comfort. In his early days no man of my time was so successful in getting taken at his own valuation. Later, when his position was assured, half London was civil in the expectation of appearing in his next book ; the other half in hopes of being left out.

Mayhew's riotous fancy was little subdued by twelve months in a foreign capital devoted to special correspondence by day and the study of Austro-Hungary's myriad tongues by night. He was hardly less omniscient than in the old Fleet Street days when he dined with me at the Eclectic and prefaced preposterous stories with " The Prime Minister said to me in the Lobby only this afternoon, ' My dear Mayhew,

I don't want this to go any further, but . . . ' " I remember the late absorption of Bosnia and Herzegovina left him tolerably sagacious.

" I don't think people in this country realize what a near thing it was," he said, with a grave shake of the head. " It's a diplomatic triumph for the old Emperor, but he'd better not try to repeat it. Russia's got a long memory. At present she's recovering slowly from the Japanese War and wasn't equal to taking on Austria and Germany at the same time. Devil of it is, you never know where the thing'll stop. Russia brings in France, France may bring us in. . . . It's a great pity someone can't hold the Balkans under the sea for five minutes."

I have a fairly long memory, and five years later I quoted Mayhew's words to him. He was honest enough to say that he had forgotten them and that the two Balkan wars had converted him to my own belief that a European war was too big a thing for any power to begin.

House of Steynes was an asylum from the House of Commons, but we could not keep altogether free from politics. No one who remembers the 1909 Session will be surprised. I believe my record for divisions under the famous Budget was equalled by two men and beaten by three. It was the great fight of our time. I had been getting a bad name with the Whips, and observant eyes on the opposite side were already marking me down a possible renegade. That wicked old wire-puller, the Duchess of Ross, on ten minutes' acquaintance at a Foreign Office reception invited me to stay at Herrig Castle to complete the conversion. I would have accepted in a spirit of adventure had it not been for the Budget; but any man with one drop of Radical blood in his veins felt, as I did, that Democracy was fighting for its life.

I shall not revive the old battle that we fought in the House and refought with Loring. I only allude to it because of the change that controversy wrought in his life, a change he was already beginning resignedly to contemplate.

" There is good in all things, even your Budget," he told my uncle ironically. " One irresponsible, hereditary legislator will be able to retire with dignity."

" Our whole democratic development for fifty years is based on the financial monopoly of the Commons," Bertrand answered.

To my mind the saddest effect of political life is the

ease with which even considerable intellects come to live by catch-phrases.

"That's little recommendation in my eyes, sir," Loring answered. "Come! Come! Let's die fighting! If we let this through—to the tune of the Land Song—there's nothing you won't be able to pass as a Money Bill. And there's always the chance that the country may support us."

"And you'd make every future Budget fight for its life like this one—against an irresponsible House?"

Not lightly did my uncle forget his all-night sittings and endless perambulations through the lobbies.

"If you choose to call us irresponsible," said Loring, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I submit there's still room for a long view, a patience, an aloofness from the heated quarrel of the moment. Tradition should be represented, sir, —as it's represented by college Fellows or Benchers——"

"The two most reactionary, uncontrolled, mediaeval-minded bodies you could have chosen," my uncle commented in one hurried breath.

"And aren't you proud of them both, sir?" Loring flashed back. "As they were and are and always will be? Aren't you proud to be a T.C.D. man and a member of the Inner Temple?"

"No!" said Bertrand contemptuously.

"Your hand on your heart, sir?" Loring persisted.

My uncle laughed and made no reply.

When the Budget went to the Lords, Loring voted for its rejection. When the Parliament Bill was presented, he continued his opposition; not even the threat of five hundred new creations shook his consistency. I sometimes think his whole life was symbolized by his struggle in the dwindling ranks of the "Die Hards." His last words—"This is the appeal I make to your Lordships. It is unlikely that I shall have the honour again to address your Lordships' House . . ." —were characteristic of his refusal to compromise with modernity. When the Parliament Bill secured its final reading, Loring left the House of Lords for ever.

After the rest of the party was dispersed I stayed on for a couple of days until Lady Loring and Amy arrived. One of the two days was Loring's birthday, and I found him in a state of altogether ridiculous depression when we met after breakfast.

"Twenty-nine!" he exclaimed in acknowledgment of my good wishes. "It's the devil of an age, George."

"Not for a confirmed pessimist," I said. "Every hour brings release nearer."

"I shall have to get married, you know," he observed reflectively.

"As one goes *misère* in Nap?" I inquired.

He was really thinking aloud and quite properly ignored my question.

"I suppose it's the right thing to do," he said. "The Cardinal's my heir at present, and after him there's no one to succeed. George, it must be a damned uncomfortable state, in spite of the novelists. Think of having a woman always living with you——"

"According to the modern novelists," I said, "they always live with someone else."

"Well, even that seems uncomfortable."

"For you or the other man? It depends on the wife, and in any case I don't know that you need consider him except on broad humanitarian principles. Jim, if I may advise you, don't be glamoured by the idea of being faithful to one woman all your life. You have formed certain habits——"

"My dear George, don't rub it in! I don't *envy* the woman who marries me. But I'm not likely to grow more domesticated by remaining a bachelor."

"Have you anyone in mind?" I asked, as I poured myself out a cup of tea.

"Several," he answered vaguely.

"Then why not leave it at that?" I suggested.

When Amy arrived the following day I found her alone in the morning-room and asked whether she was responsible for turning her brother's thoughts into this channel. For answer she frowned slightly and brushed the curls away from her forehead.

"In other words, you don't approve of her?" I said.

"I approve of anyone Jim marries," she replied, with a touch of loyal defiance. "That doesn't mean I shan't do all I can to prevent a great mistake being made."

'It would simplify things enormously," I observed, "if I knew who was being discussed."

"There are two of them. You must learn to use your eyes, George."

"But till a fortnight ago I hadn't seen Jim for years."

"Well, if you stay here another fortnight—— You're not really going to-morrow, are you?"

"I'll stay a week to save Jim from bigamy," I said.

"Oh, it isn't that." She walked over to the writing-table and came back with a sheet of paper containing the names of the following day's party. "He wants to marry one of them, and I want him to marry the other."

I glanced at the list, and "Miss Hunter-Oakleigh" caught my eye.

"Violet's one," I said. Then I observed another name and handed the sheet back to Amy. "Thanks. I *have* seen indications."

Amy fretted the paper with her fingers.

"I haven't a word against Sonia," she said. "If Jim marries her, I—all of us, mother and I and everybody—shall try to make a success of it." She stopped, and shook her head with misgiving. "I'm sure it's a mistake, though. She's got very little heart, and Jim's nothing like brutal enough to keep her in order. And I'm afraid he'll find she's got nothing but her looks. That's what's attracted him. Violet's pretty enough, Heaven knows, but Sonia——" She shrugged her shoulders helplessly. "I can understand any man being mad about her. And she knows it and *expects* men to go mad about her. I don't think she'll be content with one man's devotion. Someone will come along. . . . George, I hate to talk like this, but a lioness and her cub aren't in it with me where Jim's concerned. He and mother are all I've got in the world, and if anyone came along and spoiled his life . . . I should be quite capable of murder."

"Who invited Violet?" I asked. Before leaving London I had dined with her and her young brother. She had said nothing about coming to Scotland.

"I did," Amy answered. "I wrote to her from Baden-Baden."

"I suppose she *would* marry Jim?"

"That's one of the questions you mustn't put to a woman," Amy answered, with a laugh.

The following day brought Violet and the Daintons, as well as a number of other people in whom I was not so immediately interested.

There was a certain want of ease about our meeting, for I fancy Sir Roger was as frightened of his host as I was of Lady Dainton. The two of us withdrew without prearrangement to the smoking-room and exchanged quiet confidences till it was time to dress for dinner. I sat next to Sonia at that meal and was sensible of an agreeable change in her manner. We had not met since her rupture with Crabtree.

and I imagine that two years' retirement had given her leisure for salutary reflection. She was subdued and polite to people older than herself—cordial even to members of her own sex; and so little attention had she received in her exile that she was gracious to quite inconsequential men whose function in the old days would have been to hover deferentially around her, awaiting orders.

"I'm so glad it's you and not a stranger," she was good enough to tell me as we went in. "How is everybody and what have you all been doing?"

I dealt with the comprehensive question through three courses, and at the end she asked with a momentary heightening of colour whether I had heard anything of O'Rane.

"I'm glad he's doing well," she remarked indifferently, when I had sketched his career from the Imperial Hapsburg cells by way of Mombasa to Mexico. "George, I suppose you thought I treated him very badly?"

"Even if I thought so, I shouldn't say so," I answered. "I imagine there are easier and more restful things in life than to be loved by Raney. Not that his devotion has aged you noticeably."

"My dear, I'm twenty-two!" She studied her own reflection in the silver plate before her. "When you see him, tell him to shed a tear over my remains," she went on mournfully.

"He's twenty-six himself," I said. "And Jim and I are twenty-nine, which is far more important, though I may say I now look on thirty without a tremor."

"Oh, age doesn't matter for a man," she answered, with a touch of impatience. "You've got work to do. When you're simply waiting for someone to take compassion on you . . ."

"There is still hope even at twenty-two," I said.

"But when twenty-two becomes twenty-three, and then twenty-four, and then twenty-five. . . . It's rot being a girl, George!" she exclaimed, with something of the old fire in her brown eyes. "I always think—I'm not a Suffragette, of course!—I always think if we could look forward to any kind of career——"

"But there are scores," I said.

"Not for—for *us*," she answered. "Talk to mother about it. Girls like Amy or Violet or me, you understand."

Lady Dainton was sitting on my left, and when opportunity offered I opened with a platitude on the economic position of woman. It took her a moment to get her bearings, for she

and Loring had been discussing the misdeeds of the Apaches. A very pretty quarrel in their ranks had been extensively reported for some months, starting from the night when Erckmann charged Crabtree's vaunted cousin, Lord Beaumorris, with cheating at baccarat. Beaumorris, whose bankruptcy discharge had been suspended in consequence of a technicality concerned with undisclosed assets, had frankly joined the Apaches for what he could make out of them. Erckmann felt that rules must be observed even in baccarat, even as played by Beaumorris. "Ve vos all chentelmens here, yes, no," as Summertown, who had witnessed the scene, informed me.

Not content with the verbal charge, Erckmann laid indiscreet pen to paper and was in immediate receipt of a writ for libel. The jury disagreed, and Beaumorris, venting his feelings in the Press, took occasion to call Erckmann an Illicit Diamond Buyer. Proceedings were promptly taken for criminal libel aggravated by attempted blackmail. The jury again disagreed, and, though both Erckmann and Beaumorris now left the court with equally tarnished records, nothing would satisfy Beaumorris but an action for malicious prosecution.

It required the time of one judge sitting six days a week to keep abreast of Apache litigation. As a taxpayer, I sometimes wondered whether either reputation was worth five thousand pounds a year of public money.

"The position of women?" Lady Dainton repeated in answer to my question. "It depends so much on the woman, don't you think? If a girl's young and pretty and has a little money and goes about in Society, don't you know? she usually makes a good match." Her eyes looked past me for a moment and rested on Sonia. "As for the others . . ."

I really forget what their fate was to be. No doubt their prospects, too, depended on the possession of a determined mother. Evil associations corrupt good manners, and I heard Lady Dainton issue herself an invitation at Loring's expense in a way Crabtree himself could not have bettered. We were discussing plans for the winter, and Loring mentioned the possibility of taking his yacht for a three or four months' cruise in the Mediterranean. I was invited, but had to refuse, because a general election was impending; Lady Dainton invited herself and Sonia, leaving Sir Roger behind to recapture the Melton seat; despite the superhuman

efforts of Amy Loring, my cousin Violet was not approached.

"That absolutely decides it," Amy said ruefully. "I shan't give in. I shall go too and do everything in my power to stop it, but I'm afraid he's caught."

"'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,'" I announced, in my more banal manner.

V

I had occasion to envy Loring and the passengers of the "White Seal" during the next few months. A second winter election, the false enthusiasm and cheap victories of the platform, the endless canvass and cold wet nights and days as my car splashed through the crumbling lanes of Wiltshire —all would have been a heavy price to pay even had I been returned. But the shrewd voters of the Cranborne Division were not a second time to be gulled—at least by me. There was a clear House of Lords issue: my old opponent, the Honourable Trevor Lawless, fought on the anti-Home-Rule 'ticket,' I once again on the sanctity of Free Trade reinforced by Land Reform. He was elected by a twelve-hundred majority, and I, in an interview with the spirituous, rain-soaked reporter of the "Cranborne Progressive and East Wilts Liberal Gazette," claimed a moral victory for the House of Commons control of finance.

To anyone who knew the 1906 Parliament when there was not room on the Government side for all the ministerialists, the first 1910 election was profoundly depressing. My uncle's majority was brought down to forty-seven, and many a Unionist, returned like Sir Roger Dainton after four years' absence, could say that the country was perceptibly returning to its senses.

"There's no victory without its casualty list," I replied to my friend Jellaby, the Whip, when he telegraphed a message of sympathy. There seemed nothing amiss with the sentiment, and I consoled myself with the prospect of wintering at San Remo with my mother.

"Can give you another seat to fight," Jellaby wired back, as my packing came to an end, and I ordered myself a place in the *train-de-luxe*.

"Must resist casualty habit," I returned, and abandoned England for two months.

April was well advanced by the time I came back to Princes Gardens. When the bitterness of defeat is past, I know few sensations sweeter than that of not being in the House of Commons. It was irritating at first to be debarred from the smoking-room, but, as master of my own time, with no more interrupted dinners, no autumn sessions and no deputations to Ministers, I wondered what frenzy of enthusiasm could have made me for four years the slave of an urbane but vigilant young man like Jellaby, whose one duty in life was to lay me by the heels if I tried to leave the House unpaired.

"I said you'd outgrow the phase," my uncle commented one morning at breakfast. His daily post-bag brought him hundreds of letters; mine, since I had parted from Westminster, a couple of dozen at the outside.

"I may stand again if I can arrange always to winter on the Mediterranean," I said, "or if I can get returned unopposed. London in March and the Great Movement of Men in the Cranborne Division don't appeal to me, Bertrand, as they once did."

"What are you going to do with yourself?" he asked.

"Enjoy life," I answered appreciatively. "Read books again, dine at the Club a bit, run over to Normandy in the summer, see my friends . . . By the way, the Lorings are back. He wants me to lunch with him to-day."

The note of invitation had piqued my curiosity. With his instinctive fear of giving himself away Loring had written no more than: "Lunch 2 p.m. here. Help me with heavy case of conscience." I sent an acceptance by telephone, sat half the morning in the Park watching the passers-by and in due course made my way to Curzon Street. The air was redolent of spring, and in its fire the whole world seemed to have flung its winter garment. Light dresses fluttered in the warm breeze, everything was new and clean and young; the very cart-horses welcomed the advent of May with shining harness and gay ribbons.

"You don't look as if your conscience were troubling you," I said to Loring when luncheon was over, and we were sitting alone over our coffee and cigars. He had come back with a clear eye and bronzed cheek, radiant with health and good spirits. "Did you have a good time?"

"Wonderful!" His enthusiasm was rare and strange. "Incredibly wonderful!"

"I forget who was there," I said.

"Oh, a mob of people. The only ones that mattered were Lady Dainton——"

"Who petrifies me," I interrupted.

"And Sonia."

He paused. I knocked the ash from my cigar and said nothing.

"George, Sonia and I are engaged."

I still said nothing.

"For God's sake take *some* notice!" he exclaimed.

"Is this your case of conscience?" I asked. "You want to get out of it?"

Loring clasped his forehead with both hands in utter despair.

"And you used to be quite intelligent!" he groaned. "I'm serious, George. Sonia's promised to marry me; Lady Dainton's good enough to make no objection——"

"She wouldn't," I murmured.

"... My mother and Amy are simply in love with her...."

Mentally I congratulated Lady Amy on her loyalty.

"And now you want my blessing?" I hazarded. "Well, best of luck to you, Jim."

"Thanks, old man. I want more than that, though. Something that Amy said made me think that little Raney had once been rather in love with Sonia. You know him better than I do: what does it amount to? Whenever *I've* seen them together, they were fighting like cats."

"Amy was referring to something that happened a good time ago," I answered. In retrospect I am still struck with the diplomacy of my words.

"Oh, it's ancient history?" Loring looked relieved. "I was afraid—I mean, short of giving up Sonia, there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do to avoid hurting the little man's feelings."

"If you'd care for me to write," I began, in off-hand fashion.

"That's what I was going to ask you to do. George, you've never been in love..."

"For some unaccountable reason, all newly engaged men pay their bachelor friends that compliment," I said.

"Well, you haven't, or you wouldn't be so damned cold-blooded about it. Honestly, until last night I didn't know what happiness was——"

"This is all rather *vieux jeu*," I objected.

"It was just as we got into the Channel." The expression in his eyes had grown dreamy and distant. "We were on deck, she and I——"

"I will *not* submit to this, Jim!" I said.

He laughed as a drunken man laughs.

"If you won't, somebody else will have to," he said. "I'm—I'm simply bursting with it. For sheer dullness—on my soul, George, I'll never ask you to lunch with me again, in this world or the next."

'The veiled compliment is wasted on you," I said.

As I walked home, I took stock of the position. Granted that I had been dull, I was no actor and could affect little rapture at the prospect of losing my best friend, however deep his momentary intoxication. And every word that Amy had said to me at House of Steynes the previous summer stood as true as when she spoke it, and I added my endorsement. Sonia had been as entirely charming on that occasion as she had been exasperating in the same place some years earlier when Crabtree first proposed to her. If I have suggested corporal punishment for her, it must be remembered that bachelors are sometimes lacking in the finer chivalry; but which Sonia Jim was marrying remained, I felt, to be seen. There would, indeed, be discoveries on both sides, for Loring at nine-and-twenty had his share of angularity.

And I was not easy in my mind about the way O'Rane would take the news. It is true I had never regarded his attachment very seriously from the time when the undergraduate of twenty became engaged to the temporary debutante of sixteen; true also that three and a half years abroad had probably made a very different man of him. At the same time, I recalled his passionate outburst on the lawn at Crowley Court when Lady Dainton declined to recognize the engagement; and it did not need a man who knew him as well as I did to appreciate his curious tenacity of character. I came to feel that the news would hit him hard.

My letter of explanation was not easy to write. I roughed out one draft and tore it up; then a second, then a third. Bertrand put his head in at my door to say he was dining at the House, and I hurriedly changed my clothes and drove down to the Club. There I made a fourth attempt as unsatisfactory as the first three, thrust it impatiently into my pocket, and walked into the hall to read the latest telegrams.

"You said eight o'clock. I'm before my time, but I'll wait out in St. James's Street if you like."

I spun round at the touch of fingers on my shoulders. Only one voice in the world held as much music in it—low and vibrant, setting my nerves a-tingle.

"You are as dramatic as ever, Raney," I said.

"Shall I go and wait outside? You might answer my question."

"And in other respects you don't seem to have changed." I looked him up and down and turned him to the light. His fingers as he shook hands were as hard and strong as steel cable; he was slender and wiry as a greyhound, with the big eyes, smooth features and bodily grace of a girl.

"You're trained down pretty fine," I said. "And your hair's as untidy as ever—my dear fellow! don't touch it! It's one of your charms. You have also reverted to a hybrid twang reminiscent of twelve years ago in a certain great public school——"

He handed his hat and coat to a page-boy and pointed to the dining-room door.

"I've had nothing to eat since breakfast, George."

"Two Hoola-Hoolas, please," I called out to a waiter. "In the strangers' room. Raney, it's the devil of a long time since I saw you last."

"Did you expect me?" he demanded, with a child's eagerness to find out whether his little piece of theatricality had succeeded.

"The very cart-horses of London expected you," I said. "I observed them with ribbons on their tails as I went to lunch with one Loring. 'It is the first of May,' I said. I suppose you'd like me to order you some dinner."

"Then you didn't really think I should turn up?" he asked, glancing up from the bill of fare I had handed him.

"Not wanting to eat two dinners in one night, I forbore to order anything until I'd seen whether you were alive."

His deep-set black eyes became charged with laughter.

"Alive!" he exclaimed. "I'm not twenty-seven yet, George, and I've done all my work in life. I've made all kinds of money. *I* could eat two dinners every night if I wanted to. I can start seriously now; I'm the equal of you or Jim or anyone. Not literally, of course; he'd call me a pauper. It's a matter of degree, but I shall never again be handicapped by not having money." The waiter arrived with the cocktails: O'Rane raised his glass and bowed: "Say you're glad to see me, old man."

"I don't think the point was ever seriously challenged,"

I said. "Continued prosperity! I don't use the word luck with you."

As we sat down to dinner his eyes were brimming with tears.

Some day I should like to write a series of books about O'Rane. I should not mind if they were little read, I should not mind if they were read and disbelieved; they will never come from his pen, and, as he confided more in me than in anyone else, I feel a responsibility to the half-dozen of his friends who may survive the war. Midnight was long past before the tale of his adventures was done—the selected tale of such adventures as he thought would interest me.

"And now?" I asked, as the smoking-room waiter came in and looked pointedly at the clock.

> "Ah God! one sniff of England—
> To greet our flesh and blood—
> To hear the hansoms slurring
> Once more through London mud!"

He walked to the window and gazed down on the stream of cars, their dark paint gleaming in the lamplight as they glided down Pall Mall from the Carlton and hummed richly up St. James's Street or disappeared into the silence of the Park.

"I'm going to have a long night in a real bed," he announced, "as distinct from either a berth or bare boards in a tent——"

"I can give you all that in Princes Gardens," I interrupted.

"Later, old man, if I may. I've sent my baggage to the Charing Cross Hotel. To-morrow I shall call on Loring, see who else is in town——"

His words brought me face to face with the problem I had been shirking all the evening.

"I wrote you a letter to-night before dinner," I said as we walked down to the hall. "I'll post it so that it reaches you to-morrow morning. Raney, I'm afraid you won't care much about the contents."

He raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Why not give it me now?" he asked.

"You may prefer to digest it alone," I said.

He held out his hand with a determined little smile.

"I'll take it home and read it," he promised. "I can't sleep with unknown perils hanging over me."

I gave him the letter, and we parted on the understanding that he was to call round in Princes Gardens as soon as he was sufficiently rested.

I have no idea how he slept that night. Next morning there was no sign of him, and in the afternoon when I went to make inquiries at the Charing Cross Hotel I was handed a pencil note scrawled on the back of my own envelope to him.

"My apologies to your uncle. Just off to Flushing to complete my rest cure."

When I met Sonia and Loring at dinner the following night, I told them that I had caught a glimpse of O'Rane on his way through London from Mexico to the Continent. They were politely interested.

VI

I have reached an age when some four-fifths of my contemporaries are married. It is a melancholy exercise familiar to all bachelors to count the number of friendships that have closed on one side with a silver cigarette-box and on the other with an invitation to dinner in a very new house. "I want you and my wife to be great friends," Benedict has written. Usually I have wondered what he could see in his commonplace partner, and always the little woman has marvelled that Benedict and I have any bond of union. Sometimes I can see him growing wistful in recollection of old times—and this makes her jealous; sometimes marriage obliterates the past, and we both decide, without a word exchanged, to leave our friendship in its grave. The little dinners end early—and yet seem strangely long. We meet perhaps once a year after that, and I affect interest in curiously raw babies; but the Benedicts, man and wife, as a rule become too much absorbed in their family to care for interlopers. Sometimes I give a christening present and make rash promises by the font; and then nothing happens until half a generation later my godchildren present themselves for confirmation. . . .

In one or two instances the intimacy has endured by my keeping out of the way in the early years. Anyone who knew Loring or Sonia at all could guess that they would require time and infinite patience to arrive at a *modus vivendi*; and I knew both so well that I felt sure they wanted no

spectators. Two days after the engagement I invited them to dine with me at the Ritz; four months later Lake House was thrown open to them if they cared to come. My services were at their disposal, but I could see from our first meeting that there was no easy time before them. The pace was too hot, and they both had too much mettle. I recall that my excellently served dinner was of the gloomiest, though the Ritz was newly opened and still amusing at this time. Loring would gaze raptly at Sonia, his soup-spoon half-way to his lips, Sonia for no visible reason would touch his hand, and they would both smile mysteriously. Not till dinner was over, and we were seated in the lounge with our coffee, could I rouse them from their dream.

"The great event?" Loring echoed, when I asked if any date had been fixed. "There you rather have me."

"In about three years," murmured Sonia, with a note of discontent in her voice.

"What are you waiting for?" I asked as I offered him a cigar.

He accepted it and then replaced it in the box, saying he would prefer a cigarette. So many cheap jokes are made at the expense of the newly engaged that I refrained from comment when a confirmed cigar-smoker reformed and wasted his time on cigarettes. The reason was never a moment in doubt, for he was rewarded with a smile as the cigar was returned.

"We neither of us want a long engagement," he explained, and then to Sonia, "Do we, darling?"

"There's no point in it," answered Sonia, whose experience was discouraging to procrastination.

"Well, this is May," Loring reckoned. "Lady Dainton won't have a May marriage. June? The only thing is, there's such a devil of a lot——"

"Jim!"

Loring laughed.

"Sorry! There's *such* a lot to do first. The place at Chepstow's in a fearful state; I must put electric light in the Dower House before my mother can move in. As for the barrack in Roscommon——"

"But we can't live in more than one place at a time," Sonia objected.

"I only want to make them fit for you, darling," he protested.

"I should have thought your agent——" sighed Sonia;

then, turning ruefully to me, "and of course I've got to be sent out on approval for everyone to find fault with——"

Loring pressed her hand reassuringly. "Don't you worry about *that*," he begged.

"But it's you I want to marry, dear!" she answered, putting her face close to his and looking into his eyes.

"It's always done," Loring protested weakly. "We don't want to give offence, do we, sweetheart? And it's only three or four houses——"

Sonia shook her head, unconvinced by his understatement. To be related to half the Catholic families in England has its drawbacks, and it was not easy to shorten the list of unavoidable visits. From Yorkshire and the Fleming-Althorps they would have to go on to the Wrefords of Wreford Abbey, and once in Northumberland there was no excuse for not visiting the Knightriders in Inverness—Lady Knightrider and Lady Loring were sisters—and from Scotland to Ireland and Ireland back to Wales. . . . It was a formidable tour, and I began to regard Sonia's estimate of three years as not unreasonable. On the principle that one more or less made little difference, Lake House was included in the itinerary *en route* for the Hunter-Oakleighs in Dublin. A woman might say that Sonia was not reluctant to drive in triumph to my cousin's door; as a man I have no hesitation in saying that Loring and Violet had been such good friends in the past that he was not in the least anxious to meet her for the present.

Sonia suddenly laid her hand caressingly on his arm.

"Jim dear," she pleaded, "why can't we be married at once—quite quietly—and then stay with all these people afterwards?"

"I promised your mother we'd have the wedding at the Oratory," he reminded her.

"Yes, but we needn't invite anyone."

"They'll be awfully hurt if they're not asked."

"Oh! what nonsense!" she exclaimed. "Who is there? George, will you be offended if you're not invited?"

"It would be the truest kindness," I said. By old-fashioned standards her anxiety to get married was hardly decent, but Sonia paid scanty respect to old-fashioned standards.

"What did I tell you, Jim?" she cried triumphantly. "You go to mother and tell her it's all fixed for the first of June and nobody's to be invited."

Two days later I met Lady Dainton at luncheon and asked her what had been decided.

"It'll be some time in June or July," she told me, adding with emphasis, "at the Oratory, as we arranged at first. Jim had an absurd idea of not inviting anyone. So like a man, don't you know? making a hole-and-corner business. Anyone in his position, don't you know?—it's expected of them."

So it was decreed that fitting publicity should be given to the ceremony, but the date was not to be either in June or July. On the sixth of May King Edward died, and England was plunged into mourning.

When the funeral was over, I discussed with Bertrand the desirability of spending the summer in Ireland. The House of Commons had no longer a claim on me, and there would be no London Season. He was strongly opposed to the idea, however, and urged me to stay in town and try to make capital out of the sobered state of the public mind. A eulogistic Press was for ever talking of the late King's diplomacy and peaceful arts; my uncle wished to test the sincerity of the panegyrists and encourage the Government to make some offer of proportional disarmament.

So for three summer months I went back to Bouverie Street and the Committee Room in Princes Gardens. The results of our renewed campaign are a matter of common knowledge: representations were made to Germany, a tortuous diplomatic debate was carried on and a year later, before any conclusion could be reached, the gunboat "Panther" steamed south to Agadir. There were wild stories of a German plan to occupy Northern France, wilder projects of landing British troops on the Belgian coast; a Mansion House speech less euphuistic and platitudinous than most, gossip at the Eclectic Club about an ultimatum.

Bertrand was silent and uncommunicative in these days, but, as the menace of war withdrew, I could see him deriving philosophic satisfaction from the crisis.

"That's twice in three years, George," he observed one night when I was dining with him at the Club. "*Is* modern war too big a thing? *Are* they all afraid to start it? You remember when Bosnia and Herzegovina were grabbed in 1908? Russia threatened Austria, Germany threatened Russia—and Russia backed down. Diplomacy's like poker, you know, the hands are not played. The same thing's happened now; we've threatened Germany, and she's counted

her army corps and battleships and decided she isn't strong enough. Well, George, if the cards are never to be played, why should sane governments go on raising each other? Four aces bear the same relation to two as two to one—why can't we stop this ruinous armament race?"

But the Agadir incident was still a year ahead of us when O'Rane returned from the Continent at the end of July and stayed behind for a last cigar at the end of a Thursday dinner.

"I've been a Breslau merchant the last few months, sir," he told us when my uncle asked for news. "I've been eating, drinking, smoking German——"

"You'll end your days in a fortress, Raney," I observed.

"I think not. That paper of yours, 'Peace,' has a large circulation. All the politicians and most of the Army read it."

"This is fame," I said to Bertrand.

"They regard it as the swan-song of the effete British," said O'Rane. "The merchants and journalists and so on are with you because Germany's so hard-up with all her insane preparations that a tax on capital may come any day. The German government's different: it thinks you're either not equal to the strain or else you're hypnotizing them to drop their weapons before you strike. The German's an odd creature, sir; he thinks everyone's like himself without any of his virtues. King Edward and Grey have made something of a ring-fence round Germany; if Bismarck and the old Emperor had done the same thing, they'd be declaring war now. *Ergo*, we're going to declare war. I'm afraid it will come, sir. I've brought you back some books on Pan-Germanism by a miscreant called Bernhardi: the Bernhardi temperament can only be destroyed by an unsuccessful war or a revolution or State bankruptcy. So far as I can see, our job for the next few years will be to wake up this country and make it prepared for all emergencies."

"How'd you set about it?" I asked.

"I'm going to wander round England and see what people are saying. I'm out of touch with politics here, but some years ago I prophesied a revolution in this peaceful land and I want to see if the temper of the working classes is different from what it was in the old days when I was a manual labourer here. Will you be in Ireland later on, George? I should like to come and see you if I may."

"Fix your own time," I said. "I've got a half-promise from Loring and Sonia, but nothing's decided."

He thought over my words for a few moments and then got up to go.

"After all," he said, as I helped him into his coat, "if they don't mind meeting me, I oughtn't to mind meeting them."

For three months I had had a certain want of sympathy on my conscience.

"Raney!" I began, and then stopped.

"Don't trouble, old man," he answered, reading my thoughts. "That book's closed—for the present, at least. They're not married yet, either."

"Good night, Raney," I said, shaking hands.

He laughed a little sardonically and ran down the steps into the night.

At the beginning of September I received a wire from O'Rane to say that he would be with me on the tenth. Two days later Loring telegraphed from Fishguard Harbour that he and Sonia were actually on their way to Ireland. I should not have deliberately timed their visits to coincide, but Loring's arrangements had been so unsettled that at his request I made my own independently. Twice during August Sonia had fixed a date, twice Loring had written with contrite apology to cancel it and suggest another. It was all his fault, circumstances over which he had no control. . . . The excuses ran so smoothly that even my mother, most charitable and unsuspicious of women, became convinced that it was not his fault.

I had no one staying with me when they arrived, white and tired after their journey, and Sonia sighed with relief when my mother told her so the first night.

"I'm worn out with trying to keep new people distinct," she said. "As for Jim, his hair's falling out under the strain."

He had shaved off his moustache—as I advised him to do five years before—but otherwise seemed unchanged save for a tired look about the eyes and a slightly subdued manner of speaking.

"Mr. O'Rane's coming the day after to-morrow," said my sister. "It won't be so quiet when he's here."

Sonia made no comment and plunged into a description of the houses they had visited during the last three months.

"Jim's uncle, Lord Deningham, is the next," she said. "Down in Clare. All the clan's being gathered to receive us, and I'm simply petrified at the thought of it. They'll all hate me——"

"Darling!" Jim interposed.

"They will," she repeated obstinately. "That's next Wednesday. Can you stand us for five days, Mrs. Oakleigh?"

"As long as you can stop," said my mother.

When the ladies had left us after dinner I congratulated Loring on the absence of his moustache.

"Sonia didn't like it," he explained. "Port? By all means. I'm as tired as a dog. It's gone off thundering well, and they all loved her, as I knew they would. All the same, a long engagement's a strain."

"It isn't the long engagement," I said. "It's being in love. When you're safely married and don't have to sprinkle 'darlings' like a pepper-pot and can take the best chair and be snappy at breakfast——"

"Oh, you bachelors!" he interrupted, with a laugh. "A long engagement has its points, though." Quite frequently it prevents marriage, but I saw no object in putting this view before him. "We've been rubbing off the corners, weeding out undesirable friends—— Oh, you're safe, but Sonia rather bars Val Arden, and young Summertown is developing into too much of an Apache for my taste. We're shaking down."

"And how soon will you both be purged of all your sins?" I asked.

He did not hear the question and sat staring thoughtfully at the decanter.

"I'm afraid she finds the religious part rather hard to pick up," he said. "She *will* call all Catholics 'Papists.' *I* don't mind, but some of my people . . . And when she first met the Cardinal, she insisted on shaking his hand. Of course, it's a very small point; you mustn't think I'm finding fault with her. How did you think she was looking?"

"Very well," I said. "The new pearl-collar suits her."

"It isn't new," he corrected me. "We've had it in the family for some time." His voice became confidential and his manner eager, as with a man mutely asking for sympathy. "Absolutely between ourselves, George, there was rather a row about it. I got the bank to send all our stuff down to House of Steynes, and she insisted on wearing some of it. My poor mother was fearfully shocked—and said she oughtn't to have touched it till she was married. Once again, it's a very small point."

His vigorously defensive tone, adopted to answer criti-

cisms I had not made, led me to think there had been numerous small points for arbitration and diplomacy—as when Sonia wished to modernize the 'Mary Queen of Scots' room at Steynes that had been untouched since the young queen slept there in the second year of her reign.

"You'll shake down," I agreed encouragingly when he made me throw away a half-smoked cigar because the people in the drawing-room would be wondering what had happened to us.

"Oh Lord, yes!" he answered cheerfully over his shoulder as he pulled up a chair and began to talk to my mother.

Sonia was standing by the window looking out over the lake. Presently she walked out on to the terrace and called to Loring to join her. For a few minutes I watched them standing on the lowest terrace in earnest conversation, then they returned to the house and Sonia asked to be allowed to go to bed.

"Tell me when you'd like to turn in yourself," I said to Loring when we were alone in the smoking-room for a last drink.

He walked up and down restlessly, glancing at the pictures and books, and finally coming to anchor opposite my chair.

"Did Beryl say you were expecting Raney here?" he asked, sipping his whisky and soda and staring rather hard at the floor.

"The day after to-morrow," I said.

"The deuce you are!" He put down his tumbler and resumed his restless walk. "This is devilish awkward, George. Not to put too fine a point on it, Sonia refuses to meet him."

"What's the trouble?" I asked. It would be interesting to hear her reasons as expressed to Loring.

He tramped up and down until I pushed a chair in his way and made him sit down.

"Women are beyond me," he complained. "*I* don't know the rights of the case, but she says he was very insulting to her."

"But when was all this?" I asked. "I didn't know she'd seen him."

"Oh, it was years ago—down at Crowley—before he went abroad. Raney's got a very sharp tongue and keeps no sort of check on it, you know."

"Yes, I don't defend what he said on that occasion," I put in.

Loring looked at me in surprise.

"You knew about it?"

"I was in the room," I said, "and anything I didn't hear he came and told me in my bedroom that night."

"Well, what the devil did he say?" he demanded indignantly.

"It's ancient history now, Jim."

"Sonia's kept it pretty fresh in her mind," he retorted.

I might have recalled to them both a dinner-table scene at House of Steynes thirteen months before when Sonia inquired how Raney was getting on in Mexico and expressed a more than friendly desire to see him on his return. That was, of course, before the engagement to Loring.

"What d'you suggest?" I contented myself with asking.

"*I* think we'd better clear out," he answered, with emphasis on the pronoun.

"To the Deninghams?"

"They can't take us till Wednesday. Sonia talks about going to an hotel, but that's out of the question. I'd better take her back to London——"

"And cut the Deninghams?"

"Oh, I can't do that. He's my mother's only brother, you know."

"Do I understand you're proposing to take her from Kerry to London and back again from London to Clare in five, four days?" He was silent. "What does *she* say, Jim?"

"Refuses point-blank," he answered despairingly.

I walked over to the writing-table and took out a telegraph form.

"The simplest thing is to put Raney off for the present," I said.

He made no answer, but, when my tea was brought me next morning, there was a pencilled note lying on the tray. "Thanks, old man.—L."

It was a clear victory for Sonia, but she was sufficiently shame-faced for the remainder of the visit to make me think she was getting little pleasure out of her triumph. From time to time my mother asked me why they did not advance the date of the wedding, but, according to Sonia, a mischievous fairy seemed to be playing tricks with the calendar. For a marriage in Advent Jim would require dispensation; Lady Loring always had to spend the early months of the year abroad; "and his old Pope would excommunicate him,"

Sonia told me, "if he tried to have the wedding in Lent. And then it would be May, and then some other Royalty would go and die. . . ."

Until my conversation with her I had in my ignorance never appreciated how strongly the position of the celibate was entrenched.

O'Rane arrived at the end of the following week and asked whether Jim and Sonia were still with me.

"So that was the reason of your wire," he observed, when I told him they had left on the Wednesday. "Which was it?" I asked him whether he had had a good crossing. "Oh, well, I know it wasn't Jim," he said. "'Nous devons adorer Dieu, mon fils, mais c'est un grand mystère de sa providence qu'il ait créé la femme.'"

"Perhaps Jim is thinking that at this moment," I said, and the subject was dropped.

O'Rane's visit gave me my first opportunity of following up the Mexican adventure from the point at which "Mr. James Morris" had left it. The company, I found, had been launched successfully, if not quite at Morris's optimistic valuation; the mysterious new concession—"about the size of Scotland"—was promising well, though the working expenses were unexpectedly heavy. I gathered that the partnership was drawing a profit of 15,000 dollars a year, or, in English money, about fifteen hundred pounds for each partner.

"But that's all in Morris's hands," said O'Rane. "I've cut my connexion and I'm going into English politics. All the time since I met you I've been wandering about, listening and watching. This country is disgustingly rich, George, demoralized by it—from the Government that flings millions about in fancy social reforms to the mill-hand who wastes shillings a week on cinematograph shows and roller-skating rinks. Utterly demoralized! Nobody cares for anything but extravagant pleasure; they're not even interested in the House of Lords fight. And the more that's spent on top the more they want to spend below. That revolution's coming all right."

"I shall believe in it when I see it," I said.

At the end of a week he left me, as ever, without a hint where he was going or what he proposed to do. I stayed at Lake House till the second election of 1910, when Bertrand telegraphed to me to come and help him. Loring dined with me at the Club one night when the election was over, and

suggested that I should accompany his mother, sister, the Daintons and himself to the South of France. The invitation was half-hearted, and I felt I had better wait until the process of rubbing off the corners was nearer completion. They left in January and returned in the first week of March. I was apprised of their presence in London by a special messenger, who pursued me, note in hand, from Princes Gardens to the House, where I had been dining with my uncle, and from the House to the Eclectic Club.

The note was in Loring's writing and begged me to come at once to Curzon Street.

"I suppose they've fixed the date at last," I said to Bertrand as he dropped me on his way home. "Now I shall be stuck with the privilege of being best man."

VII

It was after midnight when I arrived at Loring House. Jim was in the library, walking restlessly up and down and filling the fireplace with half-smoked cigarettes. He was in evening dress, and an overcoat and silk hat lay on the arm of a sofa.

"Come in!" he exclaimed, without interrupting his caged-lion walk. "Sorry to drag you out at this time of night. Have a drink. Have something to smoke. Sit down, won't you?"

He spoke in short, staccato sentences, waving a hand vaguely in the direction of the tantalus and cigars. The intensity of his manner was infectious: I pulled up a chair and settled myself to listen.

"*Now* then——" I began, as the door closed.

"It's . . . it's come, George!" he stammered. "I'm up to my neck, and you're the only man who can pull me out."

"Drive ahead!" I said.

"Sonia's broken it off!"

It would be affectation for me to pretend I was as much surprised as Loring expected me to be. The engagement had, in my eyes, been singularly unsuitable from the first, and one or both seemed destined to lead a life of misery; but I half thought that both parties would go through with the marriage out of pride or obstinacy. Loring was as much in love with Sonia as Sonia's mother was in love with his position.

Seemingly I had underestimated the havoc wrought in the girl's nerves by her years of crude excitement.

"Tell me as much as you think fit," I said. "I'll do anything I can."

He thought for a moment, as if uncertain where to start.

"It's my fault," he began. "I can see that now. We oughtn't to have made the engagement so long—neither of us could stand the strain. I hurried things on as much as I could, but Sonia . . . I don't know, she must have wondered where it was all leading to. I rather sickened her, I'm afraid. You see, I don't *know* much about women. . . . I've met any number, of course, but I haven't had many intimate women friends. They never interested me much till I got engaged to her. Consequently I've never appreciated their likes and dislikes. Case in point, Sonia told me last week that she'd scream if I called her 'darling' again. Now I should have thought . . . Well, anyway, it seemed quite harmless and natural to me. . . . A small point, but it just shows you what a lot of knowing women take. . . . Got a cigarette on you?"

I threw him my case.

"What was the *casus belli*?" I asked, but for the moment he would not be drawn from his generalizations.

"I think it was partly physical too," he went on. "I tired the poor child out—rushing round and seeing people. She couldn't stand the strain. And she saw too much of me. . . . I was always there, dogging her steps. . . . She couldn't get away from me. This last visit to the Riviera was a hopeless mistake from every point of view."

He flung away the cigarette he had just lighted. We seemed to be getting gradually nearer something tangible, and, as he gazed bewilderedly round to see where he had put my case, I asked, "What happened out there?"

"Nothing," he answered. "It was to-night. We got back this afternoon and all went for a farewell dinner to Brown's Hotel. The Daintons are stopping there. Sonia was very quiet all through dinner and, when my mother and Amy went home and we were left alone to say good-night, she said she'd got something to tell me. I waited, she hummed and hawed a bit and then asked me what the rule in our Church was about the children of mixed marriages. I told her they had to be brought up as Catholics.

"'And what happens if I object?' she asked.

"I told her I couldn't get a dispensation for the marriage

at all unless she gave me an undertaking to this effect." He paused in pathetic bewilderment. "I can't understand her raising the question at all at this time of day; I explained the whole position to her before we became engaged, and she didn't object then.

"'Well,' she said, 'I can't consent to have my children brought up in a different faith.'"

Loring passed his hands over his eyes and dropped limply into a chair.

"That was rather a facer for me, George," he went on. "Either we had to marry without the dispensation—and that meant excommunication for me—or we couldn't get married at all. I thought it over very carefully. I'm a precious bad Catholic. . . . I mean, I've been brought up in the Church, and we all of us always *have* been Catholics, but I don't believe half the doctrines and I don't go to Mass once in a blue moon. I call myself one, just as you call yourself a member of the Church of England. We're probably both of us 'Nothingarians,' only we don't recant or make a fuss about it. . . . I began to wonder if I could tell 'em to excommunicate me and be damned. It would mean an awful wrench. My mother takes it all very seriously, and we English Catholic families all hang together rather, and I'm a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, and all that sort of thing. I tell you, I didn't half like doing it, but it seemed the only thing, and eventually I told Sonia I'd lump the dispensation and risk the consequences."

He paused and lit another cigarette.

"I thought that would have ended the trouble," he went on, with a sigh. "It seemed to be only the beginning. She was awfully good about it at first and said she couldn't make discord between my family and myself. I told her I was very fond of my mother, but that I was fonder of her than of anybody in the world. Then . . . I don't know, I couldn't follow her . . . she started on another tack altogether and said I should always be a Catholic at heart and that I should try to go back to the Church and take the children with me. . . . These damned unborn children . . . ! I told her—as much as I could cram into three sentences—what my whole attitude towards religion boiled down to. And then the row started! We both of us talked together, and neither of us listened to the other or finished our arguments, and at the end of half an hour Sonia began to cry, and I felt a perfect brute, and it ended with her sending me

away and saying she could never marry a man who didn't believe in God."

Loring mopped his forehead.

"I feel absolutely done in," he murmured.

I mixed him a generous whisky and soda and asked what he wanted done. His face was haggard, and for a big man he seemed suddenly dried up and shrivelled.

"You must go round and talk to her," he said. "You've known her since she was a kid. Explain that I didn't mean what I said, apologize for me——"

I shook my head.

"It'll do no good," I said. "You're not to blame."

"But my dear fellow——!" he began excitedly, as though I had paid no attention to what he had told me.

"Look it in the face, Jim," I said, shaking my head again. "She's tired of you."

He picked up his tumbler and then put it down untasted.

"I don't believe it," he answered with sublime simplicity.

"You've got to."

"But—but—but," he stammered. "We've never had a shadow of a disagreement until to-night."

"You didn't see it and you always gave way and smoothed things over."

"There never *was* anything to smooth over. Till this infernal religious question started——"

"It was religion to-day, it'll be the colour of your eyes or the shape of your nose to-morrow."

Loring stared at me as though suspicious of an ill-timed humour.

"You're wrong, George, absolutely wrong. I *know* you're wrong."

I shrugged my shoulders and left it at that.

"I'll do whatever you think best," I said.

"I knew you would!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Well, I've told you. You must go round to-morrow morning——"

"And if she refuses to see me?"

"She won't!"

"*If*," I persisted.

Loring jumped up excitedly.

"My dear chap, she simply mustn't break off the engagement! Leave me out of it, tell her only to consider her own position." He paused in fresh embarrassment. "You remember the trouble over that swine Crabtree?" he went on diffidently. "We can't have a repetition of that! You

know as well as I do, a girl who's always breaking off engagements . . . Get her to look at it from that point of view!"

I rose up and dusted the ash from my shirt-front.

"She's tired of you," I repeated, with all the brutal directness I could put into my tone.

"Well—and if she is?" The tone no less than the words hinted that he might be beginning to share my opinion.

"You want the engagement renewed on those terms?"

"I don't want the Crabtree business over again," he answered, fencing with my question.

"I'll call on her to-morrow," I said, "unless you ring me up before ten."

At eleven next morning I called at Brown's Hotel. The porter who sent up my name brought back word that Miss Dainton regretted she was unable to see me. On receipt of my report Loring sent round a letter by the hand of one of his footmen. Lady Dainton drove to Curzon Street between twelve and one and was closeted with Loring for half an hour. What took place at the interview I have never inquired. Loring came into the library at the end of it with a sheet of notepaper in his hand. His face was white, and there were dark rings under his eyes.

"Get this into the papers for me, will you?" he said dispassionately. "It's no good, she's immovable. I'm going away for a bit. We'd better not run the risk of meeting for the present. I'm starting at once, by the way, so I'm not likely to see you again before I go. I'm more grateful than I can say for all you've done. Good-bye."

As I drove down to Printing House Square I glanced at the sheet of paper. "The marriage arranged between the Marquess Loring and Miss Sonia Dainton," it ran, "will not take place."

That night I had some difficulty in getting to sleep. The "Maxims" of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld lay on the table by my bed, and I opened the book at random.

"It is commonly the Fault of People in Love," wrote that polished cynic, "that they are not sensible when they cease to be beloved."

CHAPTER VI

THE YEARS OF CARNIVAL

" If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
Wild tongues that have not thee in awe—
Such boasting as the Gentiles use
Or lesser breeds without the Law—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget ! "
RUDYARD KIPLING, " Recessional "

I

LE Roy est mort ; vive le Roy !

King Edward was mourned a twelvemonth, and in the spring of the following year all sorts and conditions of men gathered to do honour to his successor. Before the first hammer beat on the first Coronation stand, the invasion of London had begun : from Channel to Tweed ran a whisper of social schemings—a daughter's presentation, a ball, a house in town for the Season. Our solid, self-conscious race, never gay for gaiety's sake, reached out and grasped the excuse for innocent dissipation. The last five years had been so charged with political acrimony, the world had worked itself into so great a passion over Budgets and Second Chambers. Three months' respite was a prospect alluring to the straitest Puritan.

My uncle Bertrand had hoped that a year of mourning might tempt his countrymen to regard politics as a serious study rather than a pretext for vulgar abuse. Seldom have I watched the death of a vainer hope, for the world flung off its black clothes and prepared for carnival. Apaches plotted new raids, strange-tongued provincials rubbed shoulders with American tourists, Colonial Prime Ministers jostled you in the streets or appropriated your favourite table at the restaurants.

For a time I sought refuge in the Club—and found it was no refuge. Members were balloting for seats to view the procession or discussing Adolf Erckmann's prospects in the Coronation Honours List. Erckmann himself was very prominent, and the capture of London, which he largely effected in the next three or four years, started with his acquisition of a title. Perhaps he tried to capture the Eclectic Club—I certainly remember being asked to blackball three of his candidates. If so, he failed; the most mediaeval club in the world was strong to resist the most modern social impresario. And this I regard with satisfaction when I consider, in moments of sombre retrospection, how the tone of England has become modernized in the last half generation. Sir John Woburn and the Press Combine modernized journalism; Vandale, Bendix and Trosser modernized the House of Commons, as anyone will agree who recalls the three scandals associated with their names—squalid, financial scandals, lacking the scale and dignity of Central American corruption; and Erckmann modernized London Society. It was a brilliant, gaudy thing when he left it, yet I almost preferred the old state when the loudest voice and longest purse did not necessarily go the furthest.

From time to time I saw something of his conquering march. My mother and sister came over for the Coronation, and we suffered the Season patiently. Of course we gave a ball; equally, 'of course,' it was at the Ritz, for the Ritz at this time was an article of faith. If a hostess wanted men, she must entertain there; if a man wanted supper, he must secure an invitation by hook or by crook—or else walk in without it.

"Otherwise you get no food," as my barbarian young cousin, Greville Hunter-Oakleigh, confessed to me one night at the Monagasc Minister's ball in Grosvenor Gardens. He had danced dutifully with "all the right people," and was now going on with Violet, Summertown and two brother officers in search of supper. Greville and Violet had been invited; Summertown issued invitations to the others on the principle that hostesses were always glad of a few extra men.

"You're so damned William-and-Maryish," he complained, when I refused to come without a card. "If you won't, you won't, but they're frightfully rich and they'll do you awfully well. So long. We shall be back in a couple of hours."

He hurried away, and I set myself to protect my sister Beryl from Lady Ullswater, who was marking her down as a

new-comer and angling for the privilege of chaperoning her. Before our ball took place I had an offer of the whole Brigade from John Ashwell, but we thought it would be amusing to make our own arrangements. A number of people strayed in without being asked, but this was in some sense balanced by our being able to refuse invitations to a host of Erckmann's protégés.

Erckmann himself—Sir Adolf, as he became—we were compelled to invite out of compliment to Lady Dainton. For some time her husband had been observable at the Eclectic Club, lunching with Erckmann and consuming an amount of champagne and Corona cigars that argued business discussion. There followed an issue of new companies with the name of Sir Roger Dainton, Bart., M.P., on the prospectus; later I met Erckmann at dinner in Rutland Gate; later still the Daintons took a moor. It was one of those rare business associations in which everyone secured what he wanted. I myself, a mere private in a stage army, was invited to join a party for Ober-Ammergau, and, if I declined to witness a Passion Play in Erckmann's company, my refusal was prompted less by social prejudice than by superstitious scruple.

At first I was mildly surprised to find the Daintons so much in public so soon after Sonia's engagement had been broken off; but the longer I lived in London the more people I found skirmishing to get away from other people and on one occasion in Coronation week, I remember seeing Loring, Crabtree, O'Rane and Sonia under the same roof. In practice, however, they kept apart without undue contrivance. Crabtree became engaged at this time to Mrs. Pauncefote, widow of the Staffordshire brewer and a woman some eleven years his senior; he was now in a position to woo the electors of the Brinton Division, and little was seen of him in London. O'Rane, on the rare occasions when I met him hurrying to or from the Continent, diving into the Conservative Central Office or disappearing into the industrial north, maintained an attitude of mystery and would tell me nothing of his movements. He was incessantly restless and as self-absorbed as ever, but the lines of his old, clear-cut scheme of life had lost something of their sharpness. His breach with the past seemed almost complete, marked in black and white—or so I fancied—by a letter I had given him to read twelve months before at the Charing Cross Hotel. At the end of the season he and Sonia met at the Embassy Ball; they bowed and passed on. Then his eyes sought mine as though wondering

what were my thoughts. I made some comment on her dress; he made no answering comment at all.

As for Loring, I hardly saw him from the spring of 1911, when he hurried abroad, to the spring of 1914, when he returned. As a matter of form he came back for the Coronation, but did not stay an hour more than was necessary. Summertown, never a veracious chronicler, worked up a picturesque story of the yacht moored by Hungerford Bridge, and its owner changing out of his robes as he drove down the Embankment and dropping his coronet into the river in his haste to get away from England. I have but a confused idea where he went during those three years, and the question is immaterial. The important thing is that he was absent from London at a time when London was almost oppressively full of Sonia Dainton.

She was on the defensive when first we met, as though expecting me to blame her for the broken engagement. When, as was natural, I said nothing, she developed a curious recklessness and gave me to understand that whosesoever the fault, she did not care a snap of the fingers for the consequences. It was partly pose, I think, and partly a very modern refusal to allow her feelings to be stirred below the surface, partly also the manner and spirit of her surroundings. I always fancy I saw a change in her from the day when Lady Dainton relaxed her social severity and opened her doors to Erckmann and his *cortège*. With her catchwords, her volubility and over-ready laugh, something of hysteria seemed to have crept into her life. Whatever the entertainment, she was among the first to arrive and the last to go, dancing hard, supping heartily, talking incessantly, laughing gustily and smoking with fine abandon. Hourly new excitement, prostration, forgetfulness—that seemed the formula.

"What happens on Sundays, Sonia?" I once asked her, when we met for supper and a discussion of our day's work.

"I take laudanum," was the answer.

It was true in spirit; it may even have been true in fact. I was often reminded of a chorus girl I once saw in undergraduate days at a Covent Garden Ball, whirling through the night—like Sonia—from one till three, and at four o'clock lying asleep in a box with her cheek on her arm, oblivious and—I hope—happy; in any case too weary to dream what the future might hold. Looking back on the four years of carnival that ended with the war, I seem to find in Sonia the embodiment of the age's spirit.

"You know how that sort of thing ends, I suppose?" I took occasion to ask.

"Oh, don't be heavy, George!" she exclaimed impatiently. "We can only die once."

"To some extent we can postpone the date," I suggested.

"Who wants to? A short life and a merry one. This *is* a dull show, you know. How do *you* come to be here?"

"My name was gleaned from an obsolete work of reference," I said, producing a card with 'M.P.' on it. "And you?"

"Oh, I wasn't selected at all. Fatty Webster smuggled me in." She dropped her voice confidentially. "George, this is a deadly secret. Mrs. Marsden, who's responsible for this—this funeral, told mother she wanted to break down the exclusiveness of London Society——"

"Many taunts have been hurled at that indeterminate class," I observed. "No one ever called it exclusive before."

"It's exclusive if you're from Yorkshire, like her, with a perfectly poisonous taste in dress. Well, all the girls come from Highgate Ponds—Lord Summertown told me so——"

"He ought to know," I said.

"And all the men from Turnham Green. You know, where the buses come from. Fatty Webster heard what it was going to be like, so he and Sam and Lord Summertown went off to Fatty's rooms in Albemarle Street; they've changed into corduroys and red handkerchiefs, and they're pulling up Piccadilly in solid chunks with pickaxes. It's the greatest fun in life. I went to see them half an hour ago. They've got lanterns and ropes and things, and they're doing frightful damage. And the best of it is that it's pouring with rain and none of the cars can get to either door."

"As a law-abiding citizen, I think it's my duty to warn the police," I said.

"Oh, you mustn't! You'll get Sam into a frightful row."

"That I don't mind if Webster spends a night in the cells. Sonia, he's a dreadful young man. Where did you find him?"

"He's a friend of Sir Adolf's. He's rather a sport, really, and enormously rich."

"He was richer a week ago."

"You mean before the breach of promise case? I suppose so. Honestly, if Fatty proposed to me, I should slap his face, but if he had the presumption to back out of it —my word!"

"He's too much like the domestic pig," I objected.

"Oh, he's quite harmless and very useful. He cadged me an invitation for the Embassy Ball. Are you going?"

"I've been invited," I said.

There the subject dropped, for I had promised to go with O'Rane and was not sure how he would take the news that Sonia also was to be present. Still in the enigmatic mood, he shrugged his shoulders and informed me that his acceptance had gone forth, and he proposed to abide by it. I raised no further objection as the ball promised to be amusing. It was a limited liability entertainment, floated by a number of diplomatic underlings, and, as some difficulty was experienced in securing invitations, there was an orgy of subterfuge, intrigue and bribery on the part of aspirants. One of the Russian attachés confided to me that he could have lunched and dined in four different places every day after the announcement was made in the Press and stayed in six several houses for Goodwood. There was considerable overlapping, and, if some received no invitations, others received many. O'Rane, who had known more Ambassadors before he was five than most men meet in a lifetime, had cards sent him from three Embassies and four Legations. It is perhaps superfluous to mention that of these the Austrian was not one.

If there be any justification for such a ball, it surely lies in a certain brilliancy of stage-management. The Embassy Ball was well stage-managed. As we drove into its neighbourhood, a double line of cars was stretching from end to end of Brook Street, with one tail bending down Park Lane to Hamilton Place and the other forking and losing itself in Hanover Square. The pavements outside Claridge's were thronged with eager, curious spectators, their lean faces white in the blinding glare of strong head-lights. Excited whispers and an occasional half-timid cheer greeted the appearance of figures familiar in politics or on the Turf. It was the night of the Westmorland House reception, and uniforms, medals and orders flashed in brave rivalry with the aigrettes and blue-white, shimmering diamonds of the women. A warm fragrance of blending perfumes floated through the open portals into the courtyard, and with the

slamming of doors, the swish of skirts and the clear high babble of voices came mingling the distant wail of the violins and the dreamy, half-heard cadence of a waltz.

"After the railway strike this is rather refreshing," I said to O'Rane, as we advanced inch by inch towards the doorway where Count Ristori, the doyen of the *Corps Diplomatique*, was receiving on behalf of his colleagues.

"And instructive," he added.

"Your revolution hasn't come off yet, Raney," I said, in the intervals of catching the eyes of the Daintons and bowing to them.

"Nor my war. Perhaps they'll balance each other and leave us to enjoy—this kind of thing. You know how it ended? Men's demands granted, owners given a free hand to recoup themselves by raising freights. D'you know *why* it ended?"

"It had got beyond a joke," I said.

The Daintons had been compelled to cancel a week-end party at Crowley Court owing to the impossibility of assembling their guests.

O'Rane laid his hand confidentially on my shoulder.

"I'm told," he said,—"all my information comes from this Embassy crowd,—I'm told Germany was preparing to strike at France and collar the whole country north of a line to Cherbourg. We couldn't have stood that. But if we'd declared war with the strike on—whew! you couldn't have transported man or gun."

"A pretty story," I commented. "I don't believe it. Do you?"

"Oh, what does it matter what I believe? You think I'm revolution-mad. The threat of war ended the strike, the end of the strike postponed the war. *Vive la bagatelle!*" He gripped my arm and his voice quickened and rose till our neighbours turned round and smiled in amused surprise. "George, I wonder if it was like this in the last days of the Ancien Régime—a year before the Revolution and six before Napoleon. Marie Antoinette and Count Fersen the first couple, the Court following in beautiful brocaded dresses, with patches and powdered hair, and blue and silver and rose-red coats, and lace cuffs and silk stockings and buckled shoes. Such manners! And such corruption of soul! Peaceful, secure, unheeding. And outside the Palace a line of gilt coaches. And running under the horses' heads for a glimpse of the clothes and jewels—the *tiers état*." He smiled

ironically and shrugged his shoulders. "'*En effet, ils sont des hommes.*' Was it like this?"

"It was like this again ten years after the Revolution and ten days after Waterloo—when corruption ought to have been purged out of the world."

"But will nothing make these people see the *tiers état* at their door?"

"I saw them myself. What is one to do?"

"*Mon dieu!*"

"That's no answer, Raney," I said.

"The answer was given you nearly two thousand years ago."

A moment later we were bowing over the hand of Count Ristori. Then the queue behind us pressed forward, and we were separated. Several hours elapsed before we met again, though he was rarely out of my sight. Indeed, I followed his movements rather closely and made a discovery. Sonia gave me a dance, and when it was over we sat and watched the scene from two chairs by an open window. There was a formality and decorum about the ball that evidently rather irked her: and from her tone of somewhat pert disparagement I gathered that she did not know many of the people present.

"David's all over the Ambassadors," she remarked, with her eyes on a corner where he was standing with three or four be-ribboned Secretaries.

"That's old Dracopoli," I told her. "He was in command when Raney's father was wounded. The fat little man with the high cheek-bones used to be Russian Minister of Finance."

"I had no idea he was so famous," she drawled, with easy contempt.

"I'm inclined to think Raney's a bigger man than either of us gave him credit for," I said.

And that was my discovery. It cleared my mind of a patronizing friendliness dating from the time when I was a monitor and he a fag at Melton. I always recognized his mental abilities no less than the endurance which had kept him for a dozen years from starving. But he talked so much like any other brilliant Irish boy, he was so exuberant and unstable, that it was the convention not to take him seriously. That night—and under my eyes—he seemed to be coming into his kingdom. It was almost his first public appearance in England since boyhood, and, as old scandals slipped into oblivion, the friends of his father claimed acquaintance as

my uncle had done six years before. There are few men who have before their twenty-sixth birthday made all the money they will ever need, few who have travelled in so many countries of the world and met so many people. That was all that the Claridge ball-room knew, but I had lived in close communion with him for several years and could have written many a supplementary chapter.

"He's clever," Sonia admitted, "but he's frightfully selfish."

"Have you met his partner—a man called Morris?" I asked. "He's the man to discuss Raney's shortcomings with you."

"I don't want to discuss them with anyone. I *know*. He's absolutely wrapped up in himself and his precious dreams. George, for some years he and I . . ."

"I know," I interrupted. "Once when you dined with me at the House, you promised some day to tell me why you didn't end your ridiculous boy-and-girl engagement."

Sonia put her head on one side and pouted.

"To be quite honest," she said, "I was secretly rather afraid of him."

"But he's the gentlest man on earth, and the most courteous."

"If you do what he wants; otherwise—if you wear green when he'd like you to wear brown——!"

"But all this is hardly a reason for *refusing* to break off the engagement."

"I was afraid of him," she repeated.

I know Sonia well enough to say in five cases out of twenty when she is speaking the truth. This was one.

"Afraid of *Raney*?" I cried. "Are you afraid of him now?"

"I've not seen him to speak to for years. Until to-night—and then we only bowed——"

"If you want to see him again, you've only to tell him so."

She threw her head up with a rare expression of scorn.

"How kind!" she exclaimed. "But he's far too lifty to know me now, even if I was in the habit——"

"Then I shall never know whether you're still afraid of him," I said. "He'll not come till he's sent for—sent for and told he's wanted——"

"Is this a message?" she demanded.

"A reminder," I answered. "Forgive me, but you have not been discussed by us since he came back from the Con-

tinent a year ago. I am recalling something I think he told you over at Lake House before he went to Mexico."

"Oh, the Butterfly Life Sermon? He gave me five years to outgrow it, didn't he? Tell him—No." The first bars of a waltz were starting, and the two ball-rooms began to fill. A corpulent, red young man—I knew him by sight as young Webster—walked sheepishly to our window and stood in front of us. Sonia looked round the crowded room with eager, bright eyes, pulled the straps of her dress higher on to the shoulders and rose to her feet. "I'll leave you to make up the message," she told me; and to her partner, "Come, Fatty. Let's take the floor before the mob gets in."

In the still empty room they executed a wonderful stage-dance of dips and runs and eccentric twinings. As O'Rane joined me by the open window, I felt there was no need to give him any message.

"Supper or bed?" I asked him as I glanced at my watch.

"Not bed!" he answered, with a touch of the old exultant joy in existence that I had not seen since his early days at Oxford. "I'm having the time of my life, George. I'm dam' good at this sort of thing. First of all I danced with Amy Loring and didn't tear her dress. Then I found a Conservative Whip——"

"Are you really standing?"

"Don't interrupt! I invited Lady Dainton to have supper twice, and she accepted both times. I asked perfect strangers to dance with me on the ground that I'd met their brothers in Hong-Kong. I cadged cigarettes from other perfect strangers, and I carried out a First Secretary's wife in a fainting condition."

"You take a very frivolous view of life," I observed, as I ordered some poached eggs and beer.

"It's all right. I shan't come here again," he answered.

"But I thought you were enjoying yourself?"

He drummed on the table with his fingers and smiled round the room.

"So I am," he said. "If you'd ever been as poor as a rat, you'd know what it feels like to have money to burn!" His black eyes suddenly shone with anger, and his fingers ceased their idle drumming. "If you'd ever had your birth flung in your teeth——"

"Don't you ever forget anything, Raney?" I asked in his sudden, fierce pause.

"Nothing, old man. Not a line of a book I've ever read

nor the letter of a word a man's ever said to me. I—I've been taken on my merits here to-night. I don't want to forget anything. After all, if you forget what it's like to go through one or two circles of Hell, you haven't much pity for the souls that are still suffering there."

"What *are* you going to do?" I asked.

"Follow my destiny," he answered, with his black eyes gazing into the distance.

"So you told me some years ago when the Daintons gave their first ball at the Empire Hotel."

"And haven't I kept my word? I've been finding the means, and you know the twin obsessions of my mind."

"War and a revolution?"

He nodded, and looked round the supper-room.

"There's a lot worth saving, George; it's the greatest country in the world. But there's a lot to be rooted out. People won't recognize that civilization can never be stationary." He waved his hand rhythmically in time with the music. "Backwards or forwards. Backward or forwards. And coming here after some years abroad, everything I see makes me think we're sliding backwards."

II

Though O'Rane gave me no more than a couple of veiled hints, he was at this time in train to be adopted as a Conservative candidate. There was a certain irony in the son of the last Lord O'Rane standing in such an interest, but the House of Commons has little use for non-party men, and he was now more closely connected with the National Service and Navy Leagues than with any Liberal organization.

The irony would have been completer if the swift changes of politics had not delayed his election. It was not till the early spring of 1914 that he took his seat, and his place by this time was on the Ministerial side. The *volte-face* sounds more abrupt than it really was if it be remembered that he never had more than one object in view at a time. Political gossip in the days of the Agadir incident said that part of the Cabinet was ready for war while another part asserted that our warlike preparations were inadequate. From that moment O'Rane's mind was set on seeing the country put into such training that it would not be found wanting if a similar crisis arose in the future.

When he finally went to the electors of Yateley, the focus of public interest had changed. The surface of diplomacy was unruffled; the Tripoli Campaign and the two Balkan wars had dragged to an end without involving any of the Great Powers, and my uncle's confidence rose from strength to strength at the confirmation of his favourite doctrine that modern war was too vast and complex for a first class power to undertake.

On the other hand, the condition of England was a matter for considerable searching of heart. A spirit of unrest and lawlessness, a neurotic state not to be dissociated from the hectic, long-drawn Carnival that continued from month to month and year to year, may be traced from the summer of the Coronation. It is too early to probe the cause or say how far the staggering ostentation of the wealthy fomented the sullen disaffection of the poor. It is as yet impossible to weigh the merits in any one of the hysterical controversies of the times. Looking back on those four years, I recall the House of Lords dispute and a light reference to blood flowing under Westminster Bridge, railway and coal strikes characterized by equally light breach of agreements, a campaign in favour of female suffrage marked by violence to person and destruction to property, and finally a wrangle over a Home Rule Bill that spread far beyond the walls of Westminster and ended in the raising and training of illegal volunteer armies in Ireland. Such a record in an ostensibly law-abiding country gives matter for reflection. Sometimes I think the cause may be found in the sudden industrial recovery after ten years' depression following the South African War. The new money was spent in so much riotous living, and from end to end there settled on the country a mood of fretful, crapulous irritation. 'An unpopular law? Disregard it!' That seemed the rule of life with a people that had no object but successive pleasure and excitement and was fast becoming a law unto itself.

When, therefore, O'Rane went to Yateley, he went in protest against the action of certain officers at the Curragh, who, holding the King's Commission and with some few years of discipline behind them, let it be known that in the event of certain orders being given they did not propose to obey them. Then, if ever, the country was near revolution; I still recall the astonishment and indignation of Radicalism and Labour. On the single question of Parliamentary control of the Army, O'Rane was returned for a constituency that had almost

forgotten the sensation of being represented by anyone but a Conservative.

The reason why two and a half years elapsed between our conversation at the Embassy Ball and his election in 1914 has been a secret in the keeping of a few. I see no object in preserving the mystery any longer. In the summer of 1912 Mayhew came home for his annual leave and dining with us one night in Princes Gardens he mentioned that Budapest gossip was growing excited over the possibility of a disturbance in the Balkans. It was a Bourse rumour, and the Czar of Bulgaria was credited with having operated the markets in such a way that a war of any kind would leave him a considerably richer man. I asked O'Rane for confirmation, and he informed me carelessly that some of his diplomatic friends were expecting trouble.

A few weeks later Mayhew invited me to dine and bring O'Rane. We had a small party in Princes Gardens that night, so I told him to join us and sent a note to Raney's flat. Mayhew duly arrived, but I heard nothing of O'Rane.

"War's quite certain," I was told, when we were left to ourselves. "I'm working to get sent out as correspondent for the 'Wicked World' and I wondered if you or Raney would care to come too. You'll get fine copy for that paper of yours, and as he knows that part of the world and speaks the language——"

"It's a pity he couldn't come to-night," I said. "Frankly, Mayhew, I don't see myself as a war correspondent. I don't know how it's done——"

"Everything must have a beginning," he urged. "I don't either."

"But I've not got the physical strength to go campaigning. I should crack up."

"You'll miss a lot if you don't come. You know, a series of articles for 'Peace' on the 'Horrors of Modern War' . . ."

It was at that point that my uncle, who had been half-listening to our conversation, dropped into a chair by Mayhew's side.

"A very good idea," he observed. "Don't be idle, George. It'll be a valuable experience."

Between them they bore down my opposition, and, while Mayhew secured my passport and subjected it to innumerable consular *visas*, Bertrand ordered my kit by telephone and reserved me the unoccupied half of a compartment on the *wagon-lits* as far as the Bulgarian frontier.

On what followed I prefer not to dwell. We were treated with every mark of courtesy by the Bulgarian General Staff and—locked in an hotel in Sofia with a military guard at the door till the war was over. Mayhew is ordinarily a charming companion, as were no doubt the two or three dozen other war correspondents who shared our fate, but I grew to loathe his presence almost as bitterly as he came to loathe mine. I am told that Sofia is an interesting city, though I had no opportunity of examining it; I am told, too, that our hotel was the best, though I had no standard of comparison whereby to judge it. Happiness came to me for the first time when I mounted the gangway of an Austrian-Lloyd boat at Salonica and coasted unhurriedly round Greece and Dalmatia to Trieste. Our fellow-passengers included specimens of every race in the Levant and one or two outside it. The first night on board a Greek officer wrapped his uniform round a lump of coal and dropped it over the side.

"I can't stand the risk of being recognized," he told me. "You see, we were all forbidden by proclamation to depart from strict neutrality."

"And yet, my dear Raney," I said, as I lit a cigar and walked arm in arm with him along the deck, "you are the man who chastises us for our want of discipline."

"I felt I owed myself a smack at Turkey," he answered, gazing over the sapphire-blue Ægean to the vanishing coast-line of Greece. "It must be kept quiet or you'll get me into rather serious trouble."

And from that day to this I have never asked or answered where O'Rane went when he left London in the late summer of 1912 and stayed away till the winter of the following year. It is now too late to harm him by putting the facts on paper.

Mayhew left us at Trieste and went by way of Vienna to Budapest. O'Rane and I returned to England, and two days after our arrival in town I invited him to dine with me. His man told me by telephone that he had sailed that morning for Mexico, and I gathered was trying to realize his property before the smouldering disorder there burst into a flame of civil war. He was absent from England all the summer of 1913, and, when he returned, it was in company of the so-called James Morris, and the Mexican oil venture was at an end. I never learned the terms on which they had sold out, but there was a heavy sacrifice. O'Rane, with characteristic optimism, expressed satisfaction at getting anything at all and sent Morris to Galicia and northern Italy to sink his

experience and the proceeds of the sale in fresh oil speculations. In the late autumn they set up a joint establishment in Gray's Inn, selected, after due deliberation, as the place where an American citizen who had broken off diplomatic relations with his family was least likely to be molested.

After the weariness of my imprisonment in Sofia I felt entitled to spend the summer of 1913 in seeking relaxation. With O'Rane and Loring abroad I fell back for companionship on my cousin, Alan Hunter-Oakleigh. He was home from India on leave, and, as nothing would induce him to bury himself in Dublin, the family came over and took a flat in town—to the mortification of his wild young brother Greville, who held the not uncommon view that a man should not belong to the same club as his father or inhabit the same capital as his mother. Violet came protesting, as the conventional delights of the Season were beginning to pall on her, and the only member of the family who extracted profit from the change of home was the youngest brother, Laurence, who could now spend his Leave-out days from Melton in an orgy of dissipation for which one or other of his relations was privileged to pay.

I always count myself an Irishman until fate flings me into the arms of my cousins. Then I grow conscious of respectability, middle age and the solid seriousness of the Anglo-Saxon. A day with one of them was an adventure; a night with more than one almost invariably a catastrophe. For the early weeks of the season I shepherded Alan through half a hundred crowded and entirely blameless British drawing-rooms; we dined in all the approved restaurants and saw the same revue and musical comedy under a score of different names. Then he grew restless.

"This is too much like Government House," he complained of an Ascot Week ball at Bodmin Lodge with Royalty present. "I want a holiday from knee-breeches and twenty-one gun salutes. Low Life, George! Have you no Low Life to show me?"

I referred the question to Summertown, who was wandering about with a cigarette drooping from his lips and an anxious eye on the time.

"Wait just ten minutes," he begged us. "Greville and Fatty Webster have gone off to cut the electric-light wires."

"But why?" I asked.

"To cheer these lads up a bit," he answered, pointing a disgusted finger at the stiff, formal ballroom.

"Then I propose to leave at once," I said, making for the staircase.

"Oh, you'd better stay," he called after me. "Why, for all you know, you may get your pocket picked by a third-class royalty. Not everyone can say that, you know, and some of to-night's lot look proper Welshers. Just as you like, though, and, if you'd really rather go, I'll give you a scrambled egg at the 'Coq d'Or.'"

My cousin brightened visibly at the suggestion, and the three of us drove to a silent, ill-lit street off Soho Square. An impressive commissionaire admitted us to a small oak-panelled hall with a cloakroom on one side and a new mahogany counter on the other. A Visitors' Book lay open, and Summertown gravely inscribed in it the names of J. Boswell, Auchinleck; S. Johnson, Lichfield; and R. B. Sheridan, London. We descended to a glaring white and gold room, as new as everything else, with tables round the wall, a negro orchestra at one end and in the middle an open space for dancing. Replace the negroes with Hungarians, and the room was an exact replica of any cabaret in Budapest or Vienna.

As cicerone, Summertown enjoyed himself. By dint of addressing the waiters as 'Gerald,' the ladies as 'Billy' and demanding 'my usual table,' he secured us kidney omelettes, sweet champagne and the company of two lightly clad and strangely scented young women, whose serious occupation in life was twice daily to shuffle on to the Round House stage by way of a platform through the stalls, to the refrain of "Have you seen my rag-time ra-ags?" A swarthy Creole hovered within call and was urged to complete the party.

"*Je suis femme mariée, m'sieur,*" she sighed, shaking her head.

"That's all right, old thing," Summertown reassured her. "We're all married—more or less—and we're only young once. Waitero! Uno chairo immediato damquick, what what! Well, lads, this is the 'Coq d'Or.' What about it?"

"It is an impressive scene," I replied.

The room was half empty when we arrived, but filled rapidly during the next hour. I observed Sir Adolf Erckmann presiding over a large party and saw numerous rather elderly young men whose lined faces and watchful eyes were familiar to me from music-hall promenades. A handful of professionals executed the Tango and Maxixe with much of the suggestiveness of which those dances are capable, but it

was only when the twanging banjos changed to rag-time that the majority of our neighbours sheepishly unbent and put forth an assumption of *joie de vivre.*

"This is It," cried Summertown, jumping up excitedly with arched back and hunched shoulders. "Come on, Billy!"

In a moment they were locked in each other's arms, swaying slowly and shuffling down the length of the blazing gold and white room. The Creole proposed that she and Alan should follow Summertown's example, and, when he excused himself, made successful overtures to the other Round House lady whom we had been privileged to entertain.

"The metropolis *is* waking up," commented Alan as he watched the scene.

Elderly women were being navigated by anxious young men, elderly men pranced conscientiously with shrill young girls, whom they seemed to envelop in waves of shirt front and human flesh. Three rather intoxicated boys, with their hats on, gravely linked hands and circled unsteadily to a hiccoughed refrain of 'Nuts in May'; girls danced with girls, and a thin, long-haired man performed a *pas seul* with the aid of a banjo purloined from a member of the orchestra who had withdrawn in search of refreshment.

"There's been rather a boom in night-clubs lately," I explained. "People were tired of being turned out of the restaurants at half-past twelve."

"Do ladies come here?"

"You see them," I said.

Alan wrinkled his nose and turned his eyes to Sir Adolf Erckmann, who was dancing with a girl of about sixteen. Her little face with its powdered nose and painted lips was squeezed against his chest, one great arm twined round her waist and gripped her body to his own, the other circled her neck and rested ponderously on her left shoulder. Bald and scarlet from collar to scalp, Sir Adolf drooped top-heavily over her head; a cigar extended jauntily from the upper tangles of his beard, and a pair of rimless eyeglasses flapped at the end of their cord against the bare back of his partner.

"And who is our friend who has been through hell with his hat off?" Alan inquired.

I told him.

"They do these things better in Port Said," he observed.

Our evening was not hilariously amusing, and I am afraid Summertown must have caught us yawning and consulting our watches. Certainly he was as prompt with apologies

as we with speeches of reassurance, and we reached Oxford Street and a cab rank in so great an odour of amity that Alan and I found ourselves pledged to dine with him and be introduced to every night-club of which he was a member.

And on four several occasions we repeated the desolating experience. By the end of a month I could pose as an authority and recognize the subtile differences that distinguished one from another. At the 'Azalea,' for example, the hall was oblong; at the 'Long Acre' there was a Hungarian orchestra; and the conventional white and gold of the others gave place to white and green at the 'Blue Moon.' For all their variety, however, there came a day when Alan and I decided that we would not eat another kidney omelette, nor drink another glass of sweet champagne, nor watch the gyrations of another free-list chorus girl.

"But you simply *must* come to the 'Cordon Bleu,'" cried Summertown, when I broke the news as we dined and played shove-ha'penny with the King's Guard in St. James's Palace. In his eyes we figured as two middle-aged converts who were showing a disposition to recant. "It's the cheeriest spot of all; you'll have no end of a time there."

"Why didn't you take us there before?" I asked, with resentful memory of my late endurance.

"The police were expected to raid it," he explained. "It's all right, that's blown over. I'll take you on Tuesday."

Rather than wound his feelings, we passed our word. The 'Cordon Bleu' was the epitome of all the others, and with Erckmann, Lord Pennington, Mrs. Welman and a train of little pink and white girls in short tight skirts, seemed to be weighted with more than a fair share of Apaches. Wearily we seated ourselves at one of the little tables and watched the party swelling. It was eighteen strong when we entered, with nine men who made a business-like supper and nine women who smoked endless cigarettes, talked in penetrating tones and called each other by unflattering nicknames. As a new couple came in, one of the girls jumped up to make way and began to dance. I was too short-sighted to recognize her at first, but, as she came nearer, our eyes met for a moment, and I bowed. Not very skilfully she pretended not to see me, but by ill-luck the music stopped a few minutes later when she was opposite our table.

"Miss Dainton and Fatty Webster of all people!" cried Summertown.

Sonia turned slowly and surveyed the group.

"George! And Captain Hunter-Oakleigh!" she exclaimed, with a fine start of surprise. "And Lord Summertown! I say, you *are* going it! I thought you were much too heavy for a night-club, George!"

"My cousin wanted to see Low Life," I explained, as I brought up a chair.

"But *this* isn't low! All the best people come here. Has anybody got a cig.?"

Alan offered her his case, and she leant back with her hands clasped behind her head and her eyes half closed, inhaling the smoke and languidly blowing it out through her nose. For the "Cordon Bleu" her costume was admirably chosen—a tight-fitting dove-grey skirt slashed open to the knee on one side and revealing transparent stockings and satin shoes laced criss-cross up the shin; the waist was high, and at the waist the dress stopped short, leaving arms and back bare to the shoulder blades; she wore no gloves, and the remains of a grey net scarf protruded from her partner's tail-pocket. Out of the Russian ballet I hardly remember seeing a girl more sparingly attired.

Webster was in his customary condition of silence and sticky heat. I sometimes wonder how a man whose utterance was restricted to four words at a time could have been involved in an action for breach of promise, yet there has never been any doubt that he paid substantial compensation. Apoplectically he grunted "Thanks," when Summertown plied him with champagne, and sat thoughtfully drinking until Sonja expressed a wish to go on dancing. Without having spent an unduly vicious youth I knew by a certain glaze over Webster's eyes that he would be imprudent to undertake sudden violent exercise. At Sonia's bidding, however, he clutched the table and rose with an effort to his feet. Only when he continued to stand there rocking gently from side to side did she turn a rather scared face to me with the words:

"Fatty's tired. Come and dance, George. It's a waltz; you can manage that."

Lest a worse thing befell her, I threw myself into the breach and waltzed to a couple of unoccupied chairs at the far end of the room.

"Are you going to be a sport, George?" she inquired a little uncertainly as we sat down.

"What exactly does that mean?" I asked.

She looked at me with her head on one side.

"I shan't be popular if you tell mother you've seen me here," she explained.

"But you said all the best people came here," I reminded her. "Where are you supposed to be—officially?"

"Surrey House. I'm going back there in a minute. It was frightfully dull, but we did our best until Mrs. Wemley—it's her ball, you know—had the cheek to come up and say she didn't like to see the one-step done. That put the lid on! These old frumps will be going back to lancers and barn-dances next. Fatty and I wandered out to smoke a cig. when a taxi drifted providentially by and brought us here."

I got up and looked at my watch.

"And now I'm going to take you back there," I said.

"I must wait till Fatty's sobered down a bit," she answered, looking across the room at her somnolent partner. "If the worst comes to the worst, I can always say that Sir Adolf invited me."

"You're coming now," I said. "It's the price of my silence."

She lay comfortably back in her chair with her legs crossed, swinging one foot.

"Rot! You wouldn't be such a sneak," she began.

"*Now*, Sonia," I repeated.

She looked at me, shrugged her shoulders and walked up the stairs in silence. I scribbled a note to Alan, put her in a taxi and drove to Surrey House.

"I suppose you're not in the mood for good advice?" I asked, as we drove along Oxford Street.

"No-p," she answered shortly, and I held my peace. Curiosity, however, got the better of her, and she inquired whether I imagined she was not capable of looking after herself.

"I was wondering whether you appreciated what kind of woman frequents a place like the 'Cordon Bleu'?" I said.

"My dear George, I wasn't born yesterday," she answered.

"But if you dress in the same way, go to the same places, sup with the same men——"

"The difference is that I know where to stop, George."

"That knowledge is not common with your sex. In any case, the people who see you there——"

"Oh, *damn* public opinion!" she interrupted irritably. "People who know me know I'm all right; people who don't know me don't matter. And that's that."

"And here's Surrey House," I said, as the taxi slowed down. "I haven't been invited, so I won't come in. If I were you, I should avoid men who don't know when they've drunk as much as is good for them."

"Good night, grandpapa!" she answered, as she ran up the steps and disappeared inside the house.

III

The autumn and winter of 1913 I divided between Ireland and the Riviera. When I came back to London the following spring, Amy Loring told me that her brother had returned. Ostensibly his yacht had to be fitted with new engines, and while in England he was taking the opportunity of attending to a little business. At the time of our conversation he was at House of Steynes, and, as soon as the tour of inspection was over, there would be nothing to keep him.

"Do see if you can't knock some sense into him," Amy begged me despairingly. "It's perfectly ridiculous his wandering about all over the world like this. Mother feels it frightfully."

"What is he like now?" I asked.

She brushed back the curls from her forehead and made a gesture of impatience.

"*I* don't know. He's horribly ironical. Nothing in life is worth doing, according to him. He smiles politely and sneers politely. . . . And all the time, you know, I'm sure he's as lonely and melancholy as can be. That engagement was an awful business, George. He was very much in love with her——"

"And she treated him abominably," I said, lighting a cigarette.

"Yes, I think she did," Amy answered deliberately. "It wasn't his fault. Of course, it's not every woman who could marry him, he's—*difficile*; but the way he behaved to her was perfectly angelic. Now he's lost faith in everything. . . . If only some girl would be really nice to him. . . . Do see if you can do anything for him; he's bored to the verge of distraction, being by himself all this time."

I promised to do what I could, and on the night of his return to London we dined together. It was the last evening of the Melton holidays, and I had organized a small theatre party for my cousin Laurence,—Violet and Amy were with

us,—and, as the ordering of the arrangements was in Laurence's youthful but self-confident hands, we sat in the deafening neighbourhood of a powerful coon band and dined incongruously off unlimited *hors d'œuvres*, a Nesselrode ice-pudding and—so far as I can remember—nothing else. Still at his order we drank sparkling Burgundy, variously described by him as a 'pretty tipple' and by Loring as 'warm knife-wash.' We spent the evening in a theatre where we were forbidden to smoke and supped off Strasbourg pie and iced cider-cup in a restaurant where two persistent dancers whirled their bewildering way in and out of the tables.

"A pretty useful evening," said my cousin, as we dispatched him to bed; and I had not the heart to undeceive him.

"Remember me to Burgess, Laurie," said Loring, and turning to Violet, "I wonder if you keep a little brandy in this flat? My digestion is not what it once was."

Life is a tangle of incongruities, and at one o'clock in the morning, in a St. James's Court flat, with Mrs. Hunter-Oakleigh sleeping on one side of us and Laurence on another, we formally welcomed Loring back to London over a supplementary meal of bread, cheese and liqueur brandy. Warming to the work, we summoned O'Rane by telephone from Gray's Inn. It was half-past three, and dawn was lighting up the sky, when Amy broke up the party by demanding to be taken home to bed.

"And now you're back in England, you're going to stay here?" Violet inquired, as she and Loring shook hands.

"I can't get away for a bit," was the answer. "What with this engine——"

"Will you stay long enough to make your apologies?" she asked, looking at him through narrowed lids.

"But what have I done?" he inquired anxiously.

"A halfpenny postcard—any time—just to show you were still alive——"

"But I didn't write to anyone——" he protested.

Violet laughed and turned to the door. In the subdued yellow light her grave beauty was very attractive. Though she smiled still, her eyes were wistful, and I chose to fancy she had not outgrown her old affection so quickly as Loring.

"My dear, I'm not jealous!" she said. "As a mark of friendship, though——"

"Violet, I'm frightfully sorry!" he exclaimed, taking an eager step towards her. "Will that do?"

"Are you going off again?"

"I shall stay as long as there's anything to stay for."

The direct and obvious route from St. James's Court either to Princes Gardens or Gray's Inn is perhaps not by Curzon Street, but it was so long since we had been together that O'Rane and I sat talking in the library of Loring House until there was barely time for a Turkish bath before breakfast. The Yateley seat was vacant, and Raney proposed to begin his canvass in two days' time. He was full of rhetoric and indignation on the condition of Ireland and rehearsed his election speeches at some length.

"It's as bad as you like," Loring interrupted, "but it won't come to anything."

"Are you in the Special Reserve?" O'Rane asked suddenly.

"I believe I've got an honorary rank of some kind as a Lord Lieutenant," answered Loring, "but I'm not on the active list. What's the Special Reserve been doing?"

"I hear they received secret preparatory mobilization orders in March," said O'Rane. "It's not supposed to be known, but one of the military attachés told me. This is April. What's it all about?"

"The Government won't mobilize the Regular Army for a row of this kind," said Loring contemptuously.

"Well, what are they doing it for, then?"

But O'Rane's question went unanswered for another four months.

Loring accompanied me to the Turkish Baths, and we lay on adjoining couches sipping coffee and lazily discussing what had taken place during his absence from England. If ever a man was bored and dissatisfied, that man was Loring. A certain pride kept him away from the House of Lords, he had neither the age nor the energy to qualify him for a Governorship and was yet too old and substantial in mind to be amused by a purely social life.

"Old Burgess was right, you know, George," he yawned. "I've had a damned wasted existence. And the Lord knows how it will end. What *is* there to do?"

"I should spend a few weeks in town," I suggested. "You've probably had enough of your own company."

"God! Yes! Only London, you know. . . . D'you see much of the Daintons? You can speak quite freely. After all I was engaged to her for nearly a year, and it's been broken off for three."

I finished my coffee rather deliberately and lit a fresh cigarette.

"She has not improved, Jim," I said.

He lay back and stared at the ceiling.

"I used to think . . . You know, George, I've got to an age when I *ought* to marry."

"So has she," I observed, tucking my towels round me and beginning to brush my hair. "I am coming round to Bertrand's view that an unmarried woman of five-and-twenty is a public danger, particularly when husband-hunting is conducted with its present healthy absence of restraint. The spinster is not so much an object of pity as an offence against nature, and Nature punishes any liberty you take with her. In the old days we had our convents where superfluous women could retire with dignity. That at least whited the outside of the sepulchre. The present London Season is a pathological study. You'll see for yourself."

He rose slowly from the bed and began to get into his clothes.

"I don't think I shall be much in town if I'm going to run into the Daintons everywhere," he answered.

Only three days later I was able to tell him that this last danger had been removed. Bertrand and I had arranged to hear "Parsifal" at Covent Garden, and, as his box was large he offered a seat to Violet—the one woman of his family whom he treated with paternal kindness. There was still room for another, and I invited Loring to join us. Nothing is more repugnant to my taste than to interfere with the destinies of others, but when Amy petitioned me in person I could not decently refuse.

"He can't tell one note from another," I expostulated, "and the thing starts at five. He'll be reduced to tears."

"If he doesn't want to come, he needn't accept," she answered. "All I ask you to do is to give him the invitation."

"Well, will *you* invite him—from me?"

"No, I want you to send him a note. The time, and where to meet, and the arrangements for dinner—and who's to be there."

Without further protest I sat down and wrote as I was bid.

"Tell him not to talk through the Good Friday music," I begged.

"I shan't tell him anything," said Amy. "I don't know anything about the plan; it's just a thought that's casually occurred to *you*——"

"I knew I should have the blame put on me," I answered resignedly.

When the night arrived there was little blame to apportion, and Loring thanked me effusively for my invitation. Between the acts we dined at the Savoy and were returning to our box when I caught sight of Sonia waiting for her party in the hall. Fortunately the others had gone on ahead before our eyes met.

"I haven't seen you for an age," she began pleasantly, in apparent forgetfulness of a peevish meeting at the 'Cordon Bleu' the previous summer.

"Are you up for the season?" I asked.

"No, I'm going abroad next week. Sir Adolf's getting up a motor tour through France and Italy, ending up at Bayreuth in time for the Festival. Lord Pennington, Mrs. Welman, Sir Adolf, his sister,—the Baroness, you know,—Fatty Webster and me. I'm with Fatty to-night."

"Are your people in town?" I asked, as I prepared to follow my party. Webster is a man I do not go out of my way to meet.

"Father is, but mother's tired of London, so I'm staying with Mrs. Ilkley. She's a model chaperon and all that sort of thing, but she *will* live out in the Cromwell Road. It's a fearful bore."

"A most respectable quarter," I commented.

"It's a rotten hole when you've got an hour and a half to dine and dress and get back here in," she grumbled. "I didn't try. I just changed in Fatty's flat; that's why he's late. The poor soul's only got one bedroom, so I monopolized it while he was gorging. By the way, that's not necessarily for publication, as they say."

"Why on earth did you tell me?" I asked, with the mild exasperation of a man who resents youthful attempts to shock his sense of propriety.

"I thought you wanted cheering up," Sonia answered airily. "You're so mid-Victorian."

"You're getting too old for this eternal *ingénue* business, Sonia," I said. "And yet not old enough to avoid coming a very complete cropper. Don't say I didn't warn you."

When I got back to the box, Loring was raking the stalls with his opera-glass. As Sonia and Webster came in, he gave a slight start and sat far back in his chair. No one else noticed the movement, but I had time to scribble, "She is going abroad immediately," on my programme and hand it to

him before the lights were lowered. At supper he announced without preface that he proposed to spend at least part of the Season in London.

With the detachment of one who has never taken even social dissipation with the seriousness it deserves, it flatters my sanity to describe the condition of England in these years as essentially neurotic. In retrospect I see stimulus succeeding stimulus, from the Coronation year—when all expected a dull reaction after the gaiety of King Edward's reign—to 1912, when an overexcited world feared a reaction after the Coronation year. This dread of anticlimax caused the carnival of 1912 to be eclipsed in the following spring, and, when Loring invited me to assist him in "one last fling before we settle down," we found that 1914—with its private balls and public masquerades, its Tango Teas and *Soupers Dansants*, its horseplay and occasional tragedies—was bidding fair to beat the records of its predecessors.

For three and a half months we seemed hardly to be out of our dress-clothes. Valentine Arden, as usual, let his flat and took a suite at the Ritz, from which he descended nightly at the invitation of a seemingly inexhaustible stream of people with sufficient money to spend fifteen hundred pounds on a single night's entertaining. Nightly there came the same horde of pleasure-seekers, some of them girls I had been meeting regularly for ten years, at first sight no nearer to any settled purpose in life. I think it is not altogether the fancy of an ageing and jaundiced eye to see a strain of vulgarity spreading over Society at this time; for, though Erckmann chanced to be abroad, his flashy followers had established their footing and remained behind to prove that money can open every door. Lady Isobel Mayre, daughter of the Minister of Fine Arts, gave them an entrée to Ministerial society; the poverty of Lord Roehampton enabled them to add a Marquess's scalp to their belt, and the old distinction between smartness and respectability broke down. The prohibited dances and fashions of one year struggled to become the next year's vogue. To be inconspicuous was to be *démodé*.

"The fact is, we're too old to stay the course," Loring said regretfully at supper one morning towards the end of June. "George, let me remind you that you and I are as near thirty-five as makes no odds. Amy, you're thirty. Violet, you're—well, you look about nineteen."

"Add ten to it," Violet suggested.

"We're all too old; we must give it up. You're all coming

to Hurlingham with me next week, aren't you? And then we'll ring down the curtain and say good-bye to London."

"One must live somewhere," I said, with an uneasy feeling that his new way of life might involve my spending the greater part of the year in County Kerry.

Loring lit a cigarette and gazed with disfavour round the garish room.

"Either I shall marry," he said, "or else go and live abroad."

IV

The Hurlingham Ball at the beginning of July 1914 was the last of its kind I ever attended—probably the last I shall ever attend. We went a party of eight, as Loring wanted to offer O'Rane a complimentary dinner after his election at Yateley, and Mayhew conveniently arrived in London for his summer leave as the tickets were being ordered. To an outsider we must have presented a curious study in contrasts. Amy Loring had confided to me her certainty that her brother would propose to Violet before the evening was out, and four of us were therefore in a state of watchful anxiety. Of the other four, the two girls spent their time affecting interest in a heated political discussion in which O'Rane and Mayhew, with a fine disregard of fitness, were volubly engaged.

"Well, I'll tell you something you *don't* know," said Mayhew, when we were by ourselves at the end of dinner and the last of a dozen preposterous stories had been exploded by O'Rane. "The Archduke Franz Ferdinand has gone with his wife for a tour through Bosnia——"

"Even I knew that," I said, as I cut my cigar.

"Don't interrupt," Mayhew urged. "I'll lay anybody a hundred to one they don't come back alive."

There was a suitably dramatic pause as he sat back with hand extended waiting for his wager to be taken.

"He's the heir, isn't he?" Loring inquired. "Is this some beastly new riddle?"

"It's the solution of a very old one," said O'Rane gravely. "The Archduke married a morganatic wife who'll be Queen of Hungary and can't be Empress of Austria. It'll save a lot of complication if they're put out of the way. After all, it's only two human lives."

"But—is this known?" I asked Mayhew in astonishment.

"It's being openly discussed in Budapest——"

"And London," O'Rane put in.

"Confound you, Raney," Mayhew cried. "You hear everything."

"It's a pretty story even if it isn't quite new," said O'Rane. "I shan't take your bet though, Mayhew; you're too likely to win. You see," he went on, turning to us, "the Bosnians simply hate the Archduke, so it'll look quite plausible if anyone says they've blown him up on their own initiative. And then Austria will have a wolf-and-lamb excuse for saying Servia was responsible and annexing her, just as she did with Bosnia and Herzegovina six years ago. This is the way Powers and Potentates go to work in our enlightened twentieth century."

The discussion was interrupted by a footman entering to say that the cars were at the door. It was still daylight when we began to motor down, but we arrived to find the gardens lit with tiny avenues of fairy lights and to be greeted with music borne distantly on the warm, flower-laden breeze. For an hour I danced or wandered under the trees watching the whirl of bright dresses through the open ballroom windows. Loring and Violet had disappeared from view and only returned to us at supper-time so exaggeratedly calm and self-possessed that Amy squeezed my arm warningly as we entered the Club House.

"George, I've come to the conclusion that we must have one more ball before we settle down," he said, as we drew our chairs in to the table.

"This is about the last of the season," I warned him.

He waved away the objection.

"I'll give one myself—just to a few friends and neighbours at Chepstow—some time about the end of the month before everybody's scattered. I'm giving it in Violet's honour."

We turned to look at her, and the self-possession gradually faded out of her face.

"Violet, is it true?" Amy asked, jumping up in her excitement.

She nodded, with very bright eyes.

"I will *not* have a scene!" Loring exclaimed. "Amy, sit down! If you try to kiss me in public. . . . Now, do try to look at the thing reasonably. It might have happened

to anyone ; it has, in fact, happened to a number of people. As for speeches and glass-waving. . . . Look how well George takes it ! No nonsense about being glad to have me as a cousin, no grousing because he'll have to be best man—oh, we've arranged all that, my son—he just sits and drains a second bumper of champagne before anyone else has finished his first. . . . Amy, I shan't speak about it again ! "

" My dear, I'm so happy," said his sister, subsiding with moist eyes into her chair.

" We're tolerably satisfied ourselves," Loring admitted. " Aren't we, Violet ? "

But Violet made no reply beyond a quick nod of the head that was yet not quick enough to hide the trembling of her lips.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIVE DAYS

"Now, this had proved the dry-rot of the race
He ruled o'er, that, i' the old day, when was need
They fought for their own liberty and life,
Well did they fight, none better: whence, such love
Of fighting somehow still for fighting's sake
Against no matter whose the liberty
And life, so long as self-conceit should crow
And clap the wing, while justice sheathed her claw,--
That what had been the glory of the world
When thereby came the world's good, grew its plague
Now that the champion-armour, donned to dare
The dragon once, was clattered up and down
Highway and by-path of the world at peace
Merely to mask marauding, or for sake
O' the shine and rattle that apprized the fields
Hohenstiel-Schwangau was a fighter yet. . . .

. . . Then must the world give us leave
To strike right, left, and exercise our arm
Torpid of late through overmuch repose,
And show its strength is still superlative
At somebody's expense in life or limb: . . .
Such devil's doctrine so was judged God's law . . ."

"Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society"
ROBERT BROWNING

I

THE first five-and-thirty years of my life were singularly unemotional. My father died when I was too young to appreciate the loss, and I had never seen death at close quarters nor known the breathless thrill of a great triumph or the bitterness of a great disappointment. There was nothing to change the tolerant scale of values, to bring about an intenser way of life or a harsher manner of speech. My world was comfortably free from extremes, and it hardly occurred to me that the architects of civilization would attack

their own handiwork or that a man's smooth, hairless fingers would ever revert to the likeness of a gorilla's paw.

The 'Five Days' changed all that. On the thirty-first of July I left London for Chepstow with no greater troubles than a sense of uneasiness at the breakdown of the Buckingham Palace Conference on the Irish deadlock. My uncle Bertrand, a pedantic Constitutionalist, drove me to Paddington, and from his speech I could see he was undecided whether to lament the failure of the negotiations or rejoice that a constitutional innovation had proved ineffective. With many others he felt the situation in Ireland must be very grave to allow of the Sovereign summoning the party leaders to his Palace; equally, so drastic a course could in the eyes of ordinary men only be justified by success.

And it had failed. And the next news might well be that shots were being exchanged on the borders of Ulster.

Such a possibility brought little embarrassment to the holiday-makers who thronged the station. Fighting my way through the Bank-holiday crowd, I found the nucleus of our party sitting patiently on suitcases and awaiting a train that was indefinitely delayed by the extra traffic and a minor strike of dining-car attendants. As time went by and the crowd increased, Summertown, Mayhew and O'Rane built the luggage into a circle and sat contentedly talking, while I, who was responsible to Loring for the full complement, wandered about, list in hand, ticking off the names of the new arrivals.

"Adsum!" called out Mayhew when I reached him. "Aren't you glad you didn't take my bet about the Archduke, George?"

"I nearly did," I said. "I thought we'd left that sort of thing behind with the Borgias."

"It was a wonderful opportunity," he observed, with the air of a connoisseur in political crime. "You've seen the Austrian ultimatum? Well, Servia's going to be mopped up like Bosnia and Herzegovina."

He nodded omnisciently and raised his eyebrows interrogatively at O'Rane, who was seated on the next suitcase with his chin on his hands, lost in thought.

"They told me at the Club that Russia was mobilizing," I said.

"She'll climb down all right," Mayhew assured me. "You remember the 'Shining Armour' speech? It's no joke taking on Austria and Germany, especially if you can't mobilize

under about two months. It might be different if France came in, but she's unprepared. They've been having quite a pretty dust-up in the Senate the last few days over army equipment."

Summertown scrambled down from his suit-case and strutted importantly across to us.

"I don't mind telling you fellows there's been a run on the Bank to-day," he said. "I don't know what a run on the Bank *is*, but there's been one. So now you know."

"There'll be a run on a number of banks if Austria declares war," Mayhew predicted. "And such a financial smash as the world has never seen. Our system of credit, you know. . . . I put it to a big banker last night, and he said, 'My dear Mayhew, I entirely agree with you——'"

"All big bankers talk to Mayhew like that," Summertown interrupted.

Mayhew sighed resignedly.

"Thank the Lord, here's the train," he said. "I'm wasted on Guardee subalterns. Come the useful with the luggage, Raney."

O'Rane had not spoken a word since we shook hands an hour before; the sound of his name roused him, however, and he jumped up with the words:

"If you're thanking the Lord about anything, you might thank Him that we're an island."

"Have you got anything up your sleeve, Raney?" I asked.

"Oh, a number of things. For one, the Fleet sailed from Portsmouth two days ago with coal piled up like haystacks on deck."

"What the deuce for?" I asked.

"Fresh air and exercise, I suppose," he answered. "If you want to try your hand again at war correspondence, I make no doubt you'll have the chance."

"This is devilish serious," I said. Experience had taught me that news from O'Rane was not to be lightly set aside.

"As serious as you like," he agreed. "Don't pull too long a face, though, or you'll spoil Jim's party."

And with that word his manner changed. Loring Castle lies between Chepstow and Tintern on a high ridge of hills overlooking the Severn. In normal times I have lunched in town, taken tea on the train and reached my destination after a run of four or five hours. On this occasion the strike and holiday traffic caused us to stop at countless wayside stations;

it was after eight when we reached Chepstow, but, thanks to O'Rane, the journey was the most hilarious I have ever undertaken. Panic and disorder indeed descended upon us when at last the train steamed in and our two reserved coaches yielded up their sixteen men, twelve girls and nine maids; to this day I cannot explain how I fitted the party and its luggage into the different cars and delivered all at the Castle without loss or mishap, but, when Loring entered my room as I was dressing, he informed me that not so much as a jewel-case had gone astray.

"Any news in town?" he asked, and I gave him the gossip of Mayhew and O'Rane. "I meant about Ireland," he went on. "This Austrian business won't come to anything, but there's trouble brewing in your sweet island. We're all rather depressed down here."

O'Rane, who had scrambled along the balcony, appeared at the open window in time to catch the last words.

"The only man who has a right to be depressed," he said, "is the luckless devil who's put his money into Austrian oil."

Loring turned to him swiftly.

"Are you hit, Raney?"

"Well, of course, as a Member I get four hundred a year less income-tax," he answered cheerfully.

"Talk seriously, you idiot."

O'Rane tossed a silver-topped bottle into the air and caught it again.

"I can't take myself seriously just now, Jim," he said. "We haven't earned a penny since Austria mobilized and our men were called up——"

"You save your wage-bill," I put in.

"We've got contracts, old man, and we've got penalties. Morris spent his morning raising every last penny he could lay hands on; we've been buying in the open market with the price soaring against us—and we shall just be able to supply the Ubique Motor and Cab Company to the end of our term. We were rather pleased to get that contract, too," he added, with a laugh. "As for the others——"

"What others?"

"Half a dozen more. Just enough to break us very comfortably."

"Rot, Raney!"

"So be it! We've sold the spare furniture in Gray's Inn,—Morris has developed wonderfully the last few years—and, unless Austria demobilizes within a week, I don't see us

paying twenty shillings in the pound. Still, he's thirty and I'm only thirty-one . . ."

He strolled to the door, but Loring caught one shoulder and I the other.

"Look here, Raney——" we began together.

"Dear souls! save your breath!" he laughed. "I wasn't touting. I've been in warmer corners than this in my misspent youth, and while I'm frightfully grateful——" He paused and dropped his voice as though he were talking to himself: "Why, my God! if I can't keep afloat at one-and-thirty with all my faculties . . . Hi, let me go! There's Amy, and I want to tell her how ripping she looks!"

He strained forward, but we kept our grip on his arms.

"Little man!" said Loring. "D'you remember the first time I thrashed you at Melton?"

"You brute, you nearly cut me in two!"

"I was rather uncomfortable about it," Loring admitted. "I wasn't sure that you were accountable for your actions. Now I know you're not."

With a sudden jerk he broke away and bounded to the hall, three stairs at a time, for all the world like a child at its first party.

Half-way through dinner Amy turned to me in perplexity, holding in her hand a worn gold watch with a half-obliterated L. K. worked into an intricate monogram.

"Is David *quite* mad?" she inquired. "I've been given this to keep until he asks for it back."

"It belonged to Kossuth," I explained. "He gave it to Raney's father, and I fancy Raney values it rather more than his own soul."

"But why——?" she began.

"He's afraid of losing it, I suppose."

"But if he's kept it all these years——"

"You'll be doing him a favour, Amy," I said, and without another word she slipped the watch into her waistband. It was true that the watch and its owner had faced some severe trials in different continents, but O'Rane had never up to that time undergone the humiliation of bankruptcy proceedings with the last indignity of being compelled to empty his pockets in court.

When dinner was over Loring gave him the alternative of sitting still or being turned out of the dining-room. I have never seen a man so indecently elated by the consciousness of his insolvency. The port had hardly begun to circulate

before he jumped up and ran to the window in hopes that the guests were arriving and while we smoked and talked he was shifting restlessly from chair to chair, inquiring the time at two-minute intervals.

"But for your strictly sober habits——" I began.

"There's lightning in the air!" he exclaimed, his black eyes shining with excitement. "All these years I've been waiting—I never forget, George—waiting . . . I won't be smashed! By God, I won't be smashed!"

"I'm glad I'm not one of your creditors," I said.

"Bah! They're all right. It's my beloved Austrians. I don't trust you a yard, old man, but unless I tell somebody I shall burst. If Austria makes war, she'll find a Foreign Legion fighting with the Servians; I've fixed the preliminaries, and a wire from town . . . Ye gods! why don't they start the music? I want to dance with Violet, and the next time we meet I may not have any legs!" A chord several times repeated sounded from a distant piano—violins, followed by the deep note of a 'cello, began to tune up and along the drive below our open windows came the beat of throbbing engines, a sudden scrunch of tyres slowing down on gravel, a slamming of doors and a hum of voices. "At last!" cried O'Rane, springing to the door and running headlong into the ballroom.

We threw away our cigars, drew on our gloves and walked into the hall. Lady Loring and Amy stood at the stairhead and were joined a moment later by Violet and Jim, who took up their position a pace behind to one side. It was a small party, but for twenty minutes a procession of slight girls and smooth-haired, clean-shaven men ascended the stairs—curiously and characteristically English from the easy movements of the girls and the whiteness of their slender shoulders to the sit of the men's coats and the trained condition of their bodies. Good living, hard exercise and fresh air seemed written on every face; there was a wonderful cleanliness of outline and clarity of eye and skin; the last ounce of flabbiness had been worked away. And, like any consciously self-isolated section of society, they were magnificently at ease and unembarrassed with one another; sixty per cent. were related in some degree, and all appeared to answer to diminutives or nicknames.

"There's nothing to touch them in any country *I* know," murmured Mayhew, unconsciously giving expression to my thoughts. "Shall we go up?"

"In a moment," I said.

For a while longer I watched them arriving, the girls pattering up the steps with their skirts held high over thin ankles and small feet; their eyes showed suddenly dark and mysterious in the soft light of the great electric lamps, and eternal youth seemed written in their pliant, immature lines and lithe movements. Outside, the sky was like a tent of blue velvet spangled with diamonds. The Severn far down the valley side swirled and eddied in its race to open sea, and the moon reflected in the jostling waters shivered and forked like silver lightning. A scent of summer flowers still warm with the afternoon sun and gemmed with falling dew rose like a mist and enfolded the crumbling yellow stone and blazing windows behind me.

When the last car had panted away into the night, I heard a light step on the flagstones of the terrace, and Amy Loring slipped her arm through mine; the far-off hum of voices for a moment was still, and there followed an instant of such silence as I have only known in the African desert.

"There is an Angel of Peace," she whispered, "breathing his blessing over the house."

Then the band broke into the opening bars of a waltz.

We walked back and found Violet and Loring at the door of the hall, standing arm in arm and gazing silently, as I had done, on the tumbling waters of the Severn. We smiled, and on a common impulse he and I shook hands. Violet nodded as though she understood something that neither of us had put into words, and as we entered the hall Amy turned aside to kiss her brother's cheek.

"They're very happy," said Lady Loring when I met her at the stairhead.

"You mean Jim and Violet?"

"Everybody, bless them!" she answered, pointing with her fan through the door of the ballroom.

In an alcove looking on to the terrace Valentine Arden was smoking a cigarette and idly watching the pageant. There was a ghostly, 'end-of-season' look about his white face and the dark rings round his eyes.

"One was wondering if you brought any news from town?" he drawled. "You came to-day?"

"I suppose so," I said. It seemed more than eight hours since we held our council of war on the rampart of suitcases.

"One assumes there will be no actual fighting," he went on.

"I shouldn't assume anything," I said.

A shadow of annoyance settled on his weary young face.

"One intended bringing out another book this autumn," he observed.

"Oh, that'll be all right," I said. "*We* shan't be dragged in."

I danced till supper-time and met him again by appointment for a small cigar on the terrace. We had been seated there for some ten minutes when a white touring car, driven by an elderly man in a frieze overcoat and soft hat, drew up opposite our chairs. As he came into the triangle of light by the open doors I recognized him as Colonel Farwell, the younger brother of Lord Marlyn and a frequent guest of my uncle in Princes Gardens.

"I wonder whether you gentlemen can tell me where Lord Loring's to be found?" he began. "Hallo, Oakleigh! I didn't see it was you. This is providential. You needn't bother Loring, but I should be greatly obliged if you could lay hands on my young nephew."

"I'll find him for you," I said. "I hope there's nothing wrong."

"There's no fresh news, if that's what you mean, but things are looking pretty serious. I hear that Germany has declared herself in a state of war."

"The Fleet's been ordered to take up war stations," I told him.

"You've heard that too? Well, the Army will be the next thing, and I should rather like to get Jack back to London. I can't come in with these clothes, but if you'd take him a message—— Don't make a fuss to frighten the women, of course."

I found Summertown finishing a bachelor supper with Charles Framlingham of the Rifle Brigade. Farwell's message seemed equally applicable to both and was received by both with equal disfavour.

"To declare war in the middle of supper is not the act of a gentleman," Framlingham pronounced.

He came out on to the terrace, notwithstanding, while I ran upstairs to warn Loring what was afoot. When we returned, it was to find six dutiful but protesting young officers pulling coats and rugs over their evening dress and struggling for corner seats in the car.

"I'm dreadfully sorry to break up your party, Loring," Farwell called out as they glided away amidst a subdued chorus of apologies and adieux.

Loring turned to me interrogatively.

"The Duchess of Richmond's Waterloo Ball," I remarked.

"We must keep things going upstairs," he said, turning back into the house. "On my soul, I can't see what it's all about. What's it got to do with us? If Servia and Austria *want* to fight, and we aren't strong enough to stop them, why! good heavens! let's keep out of it like gentlemen! Why the deuce are we being so officious with our Fleet?"

It was one o'clock when we re-entered the ballroom, and so successfully did we keep things going that we supped for the last time in broad daylight, and our guests left at five.

O'Rane insisted on a march-past in honour of Loring and Violet, and we ran down a line of sixteen cars with a tray of glasses and five bottles of champagne. As each car passed the door, there was a burst of cheering and the glasses flashed to the toast; from Loring on the top step, standing arm in arm with Violet, came an acknowledging cheer, and the cars swept forward to the turn of the drive, where O'Rane and I were posted. A shower of champagne glasses poured from the windows, to describe a dazzling arc in the morning sunlight and fall with greater or less precision into our hands or on to the flower-beds behind us. Above the cheering and the throb of the engines came the sound of a piano and Valentine Arden's voice:

> "Dixie! all abo-o-oard forr Dixie,
> Dixie! Tak you-ri tickuts heere forr Dixie!" . . .

II

I went to bed at six with the syncopated rhythm of the song jerking and jigging along every nerve of body and head.

When I awoke at noon on the Saturday, the papers were brought me with my tea, and I struggled sleepily to read reason into the day's record of diplomatic wrangling. Eminently moderate proposals were met by statements of irreducible minima, and in the ensuing deadlock our ambassadors surged forward like a Greek Chorus with ineffectual pleas for patience and the avoidance of irretrievable steps. Any cynic among the combatants must have laughed himself feeble at our resourceful accommodations and fertile readjustments. There was no power we were not prepared to placate, no ruffled plumage we did not hold ourselves com-

petent to smooth. And so far as I could then see, it was an affair of ruffled plumage, no more and no less.

A tired restlessness settled on our shrunken numbers at luncheon, and in the afternoon I asked Bertrand by wire to take pity on a man five miles from a station and to send me news as it was made public. We were sitting at tea under the elm trees at the back of the house when a footman appeared with a salver in his hand. O'Rane leapt to his feet—and subsided with a mutter of disappointment when the telegram was brought to me.

"Read it aloud!" they all cried, as I tore open the envelope.

"'Germany reported to have declared war on Russia,'" I said and saw Violet cover her face with her hands.

Mayhew put down his cup and lit a cigarette.

"I was wrong yesterday," he admitted. "I thought Russia 'd climb down. Jim, I must ask you to excuse me. I shall have to get back to Budapest."

O'Rane walked to my chair and took the telegram from my hands.

"Germany—reported—to—have—declared—war—on—Russia," he repeated. "Germany the aggressor, in other words. That means France will come in."

Amy jumped to her feet and then sat down again.

"I—I don't understand it!" she exclaimed. "It's all so inconceivably wicked. Just because a wretched little country like Servia . . ."

She broke off and sat interlacing her fingers and frowning perplexedly.

"Don't be too hard on Servia, Lady Amy," Mayhew said and told her his version of the Serajevo murders.

"And don't be too hard on even Austria," added O'Rane softly when the story was done. "I'm none so sure it *was* Austria that baited the trap. When you see how keen Germany is to keep the quarrel fanned——"

"And bring France in at one door and Russia at the other?" Loring interrupted sceptically. "The one combination Bismarck schemed to avoid?"

"Bismarck's dead," O'Rane flung back. "And Russia won't be mobilized for weeks. If once they break through, the Germans can march to Paris and back again while she's getting ready. It's a gamble, but she had to gamble sooner or later. No country on earth could stand her rate of preparations. *If* they can break through . . . Where's a

map, Jim? I want to see the length of line from Belgium to Switzerland. Of course, if the French can hold them for a month——"

"France hasn't *declared* war yet," I called out as they hurried away. Neither checked his pace at my words. Heaven knows! I paid little enough attention to them myself. At best it was an exercise in whistling to keep up courage.

When they had gone, Mayhew slipped quietly away, and in half an hour a car was at the door, and we went round to the front of the house to bid him good-bye. Lady Loring, who had spent the afternoon in her room, came down for a moment, and I saw that her eyes were red and her placid, pretty face haggard with distress.

"Why must it be, George?" she whispered, pointing over the valley to the blue haze of the Gloucestershire hills. "It's all so peaceful here. . . . And there must be thousands of places like this all over Europe—with men coming home through the fields in the cool of the evening. . . . Why must they start blowing each other to pieces when none of them knows what it's all about? Who can be wicked enough to take the responsibility?"

"We appear to have done our best to stop it," I said. "It seems as though there's something of the mad dog in every man."

Lady Loring smiled wistfully.

"Not in my husband, George. Were you too young to remember him? It's not quite fifteen years since he was killed, and I often wonder what good his death did. What *would* have happened if there'd been no South African War?"

"A great many fine lives would have been spared," I said. "And what good will it do to slaughter the manhood of Russia, France, Germany . . .? It's the *size* of the modern army that appals me, Lady Loring."

"Thank God we aren't called on to swell the slaughter," she replied.

By Sunday morning our further reduced party was in the profoundest depression. While Violet and the Lorings were at Mass, I motored to Chepstow with O'Rane and Val Arden in search of papers. We returned with moist, ill-printed sensational weeklies that the others had never before seen and with heads pressed close together we studied the sinister type, repeating the headlines under our breath and

gradually chanting them in a falling dirge. Bertrand's tentative announcement was confirmed, and on the assumption that France would come to the assistance of her ally, German troops were massing in stupendous numbers on the Rhine frontier.

"Some of them actually on French soil!". Loring exclaimed and read on. "Pouring into Luxembourg . . . Isn't Luxembourg a neutral, Raney?"

"*A la guerre comme à la guerre,*" murmured O'Rane. "So's Belgium, if you come to that; but they're asking leave to march through and, if leave's refused, they'll dam' well take it." He dropped the paper and walked up and down the room with his hands in his pockets. "The war'll be over in a fortnight if they advance simultaneously from north and east; it'll be another Sedan. *We* can't allow that."

"For God's sake don't drag us in!" Loring exclaimed.

O'Rane faced him with amazement in his black eyes.

"But we can't see the whole of northern France in German hands, plus, say, a five hundred million indemnity for the trouble. How long d'you suppose it would be before *our* turn came? You can build the hell of a lot of ships with five hundred millions."

Loring was silent. We were all silent as the new possibilities floated gigantically within our vision. Eight-and-forty hours before we had discussed a pair of political assassinations in an outlying province of the Austrian Empire; we were now to consider the prospect of Europe's greatest military power establishing naval bases from Cherbourg to Dunkirk. So a man, straying too near an unfenced engine, might watch in fascination as wheel bit into wheel and the cogs engaged inexorably for his destruction.

"And Mayhew told us Russia wasn't ready," murmured O'Rane.

"Oh, well," I said, "I've spent six years telling people that democracy wouldn't fight democracy."

"If once we have to start eating our words——" Loring began, and ended with a shrug of the shoulders.

I never recall a longer morning. We sat in the garden after breakfast, reviving the memories of the dance and making plans for Violet and Jim; without warning our feverish voices would stammer and stop, as with the gag of unskilled players while the stage waits. After a moment's restless silence we would break into pairs in answer to a common tacit summons, and Amy and I rounding the corner of the

terrace would meet Jim and Violet, long-faced and distraught.

"You know this is simply appalling!" one of us would say. We had all said it by luncheon-time.

The afternoon brought variety and a deputation of three from the Neutrality League—the shortest lived and not least pathetic body with which I have been associated. It was introduced by Dillworth, the red-bearded, uncompromising Socialist at whom I had gazed more in pity than anger during my first session—Rayston, the Quaker chemical manufacturer, spoke second, and the third of the party was Braddell, who rose from journalistic obscurity by demonstrating the economic impossibility of war. They had co-opted a considerable committee of recalcitrant Radicals, pacifist divines, two professors from provincial universities and the usual unclassified residue that is flattered to be asked for its signature to a memorial. Their journey from London by a stopping train was to be explained by my association with "Peace" and by the perfidy of my uncle, who saw them from his dining-room window and locked himself in his room with an internal chill. The chill, he gave them to understand from the lips of Filson, the butler, would outlast them, but they were always at liberty to interview me if they cared to visit Loring Castle, Chepstow.

A difficult meeting was not made the easier by the fact that I entertained a certain admiration for Dillworth. He was transparently honest, and we had on more than one occasion worked amicably in the interests of "Peace." I had no idea what line Bertrand proposed to take with our paper but, presuming that he left me a free hand, I spoke my thoughts as they were beginning to crystallize—and proved guilty of that inconsistency which is the unforgivable sin in the eyes of such doctrinaries as made up my deputation.

Their speeches invited my collaboration in a manifesto declaring our detachment from the European quarrel. We were to silence the increasingly aggressive tone of our diplomatic correspondence, to warn the Government of France that it must look for no assistance in a wholly unnecessary war, to detach Russia and eventually leave Servia to pay the penalty of her crimes.

"*Her* crimes?" I echoed, for my mind was full of Mayhew's grim story of the murders.

"Surely," answered Dillworth. "I'm a Socialist, Mr. Oakleigh, and I'm a Republican, but I flatter myself I've

got some little imagination. If you'd seen years of sedition in Afghanistan, if you were told that Afghans had murdered the Prince of Wales as he toured the North-West Frontier Provinces—it's no good shaking your head, sir—you'd call for securities no whit less sweeping than those that Austria is demanding. I've attacked Russia more than once for tyranny, but I never thought I should attack her for supporting political assassination."

I tried to waive causes and concentrate his mind on results.

"Will you acquiesce in the German occupation of Paris and Cherbourg?" I asked.

Rayston plunged his hand into the capacious pocket of his overcoat, produced a sheaf of cuttings and read me extracts from my own articles on Germany as a land of peace and potential friendliness.

"Is that true or is it not?" he demanded.

"I believed it true when I wrote it," I said.

"Has the whole nation changed in a week?" he demanded, flinging out his arms.

"I've changed my opinion of the nation."

"In seven days—after holding it as many years? It doesn't take much to shake your faith."

"It takes a good deal," I answered. "Unfortunately a good deal was forthcoming. In respect of your manifesto, I don't want war; I hate the idea of it; we must do all in our power to keep out of it. But I don't know the limits of our power or the obligations of the Entente. If our hands were free, I'm disposed to let France fight her own battles; if we're bound by treaty, there's no more to be said. Of course, if the Germans try to get through Switzerland or Belgium, that introduces a new factor, and we look only at the question of policy. I submit that it is not good policy to have another Sedan, and I think manifestos and counter-manifestos may well be postponed till the Government has given a lead."

Dillworth picked up his hat and buttoned his coat deliberately.

"We counted on you, Mr. Oakleigh," he said.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," I said.

That night we tried to keep away from the state of Europe, but all paths in conversation led back to the same point. The international position of Luxembourg carried us to the library: histories called for atlases, the armies at Sedan

sent us to the "Statesman's Year Book," and we ended with strategic railways, the population of Russia and our Expeditionary Force.

"I wonder what these devils in Ireland are going to do?" Loring demanded suddenly.

"And in India?" O'Rane added.

On Monday the German declaration of war on Russia was confirmed in the papers, and we read that the unconditional neutrality of Belgium was under discussion and that the Foreign Secretary would speak in the House on the Bank Holiday afternoon. The momentary stimulus of news died away like the ebbing strength of a cocaine injection. We revived on learning that the German Embassy in London was endeavouring to localize the conflict, but in the quick reaction I went to Loring and told him I could no longer bear to be away from London.

"Stick it out till to-morrow," he implored me. "We'll all go up together."

"Then for God's sake let's do something!" I cried impatiently. "Have a car out. . . . Go somewhere. . . . You know, our nerves are going to pieces."

We drove out through Tintern to Monmouth and returned by way of Raglan, Usk and Newport. It was a run of sixty or seventy miles through varying scenery, yet every town and village presented the same appearance of suspended animation. The holiday-makers stood about in irresolute knots or walked up and down the desolate streets; carriages half filled with women in white dresses halted at the corners of the roads, while the men grouped themselves round the driver and argued fretfully where to go and whether it was worth going anywhere at all. I thought suddenly of the first time I saw Pompeii: I had always wondered how the inhabitants looked when the first hot rain of ashes began to fall.

As we entered Chepstow on our way home, Loring halted the car and went in search of news. Exploiting the freemasonry of the Press, I scribbled my Bouverie Street address on a card and won admittance to the offices of the "Chepstow Argus." The Foreign Secretary was delivering his pronouncement, and the speech was being circulated in sections over the wires. We walked through a warehouse filled with clamorous, quarrelling newsboys, up a rickety staircase and into the composing-room, where we read the introductory passages in manuscript over the compositors'

shoulders. Then we returned to the editor's room and were handed sheet after sheet as it was taken off the private wire. There was one with a blue-pencilled line in the margin, and I read the passage aloud:

"'For many years we have had a long-standing friendship with France . . . how far that friendship entails . . . an obligation, let every man look into his own heart, and his own feelings, and construe the extent of the obligation for himself.'"

"Have we or have we not pledged ourselves to help France if she's attacked?" Loring demanded in perplexity.

"We have," I said.

"Then why doesn't he say so?"

"It's left as a point of honour," I suggested. "That rules out discussion how the Government made virtual promises and never took the country into its confidence. We needn't keep the others waiting any longer. Our position's defined, and Germany goes forward at her own risk."

We hurried out of the office and carried our news to the car at the street corner.

"And what now?" asked Arden.

"Now nothing but the end of the world will keep us out of war," Loring returned.

As we drove away, a woman's voice—I could not distinguish whose it was—murmured:

"My God! Oh, my God! . . ."

III

"I'm afraid you've all had a sickening time," said Loring apologetically after dinner that night, when he had suggested the break-up of the party next day. Lady Loring had not left her room, and Amy's parting instructions to us were not to hurry over our cigars as she and Violet were going to bed.

"Let's hope it'll all be over when next we meet here," said Arden conventionally.

"If we ever do," Loring murmured, half to himself, as he lit a cigar.

"Hang it all, we aren't at war yet," I said.

Loring shrugged his shoulders.

"Does it affect my point?" he asked. "If we fight, there'll be a bill of hundreds, thousands of millions; and if we keep out of it, we shall spend not much less preparing

for our turn. I seem to see a quadrupled Navy and universal service and a general arming to the teeth; and that means an end of your big houses and cars and men-servants. A good thing too, eh, Raney?"

"A very good thing." It was Val Arden who spoke. "You can afford it, Jim, but I can't; and, honestly, if war comes and we're brought face to face with reality, if we can give up pretending . . . God knows, there's nothing beautiful in war, and in my way I've tried to find beauty; the destructiveness of war to a man who tries to create, even on the smallest scale . . . I don't say I haven't had a good time; up to a point I've succeeded. . . . That's to say, for a man who was never at a public school or university, and lived on four hundred and fifty a year paid him by Arden, Lawrence & Younger, Wholesale Bootmakers, Northampton, I've been taken pretty well at my own valuation—by being rather more precious than the most precious people I met anywhere in society——"

"You're in a chastened mood to-night, Val," commented Loring. There was something rather embarrassing in this sudden, uninvited avowal from the enigmatic Arden.

"Aren't we all?" he asked.

"It comes a bit unexpectedly from you."

Arden drew meditatively at his cigar.

"I'm tired of it all, Jim," he said, with a weary sigh. "The whole damned hothouse existence. On my honour, I almost wish I were a soldier so that I could feel I had done man's work for one day of my life. . . . It takes a time like this to show you how useless and untrained our class is." He broke off to laugh at himself. "*Our* class, indeed! Raney, you know everything; is it possible for a man like me to get into the Army nowadays?"

"Before a year's out, there'll be hardly a hale man *not* in the Army," O'Rane answered.

"A *year*?" I echoed.

He turned to me quietly.

"Don't imagine this is going to be another seven weeks' war," he said. "It's two empires, two civilizations, two ideals in conflict. There'll be no truce till one or other has been annihilated. I've lived in Germany and I know something of the German ideal; I've lived here and watched the life that we all love—and revile; and I see the form of future civilization balancing midway between the two as it balanced before between Greek and Persian or Roman and

Goth. Whatever any one of us values most in life he'll have to risk—and it's long odds, very long odds, he will lose it."

Loring studied his face attentively and then strolled to the window, where he pulled aside the curtains and gazed out into the night. He looked tired and worried, and, when he turned again to the room, it was with the suggestion that we should go to bed.

"If the worst comes to the worst, I suppose we can only die once, Raney," he said, putting his hand on the other's shoulder.

"I shan't be killed," answered O'Rane. "I've got too much to do first."

He bent forward and began blowing out the candles on the table until only two remained alight, while the rest of us watched him as though he were performing a rite. "If I'd been meant to be killed it would have happened long ago. The fact that I'm still alive . . . You fellows think it's superstition, but it serves my purpose, and we needn't quarrel over terms. . . . Good night, Jim; good night, Val. . . . George, I shall take you for a breath of fresh air in the garden before we turn in."

It was eleven o'clock when we stepped on to the terrace, one before we came in to bed, and for the first hour and three-quarters we walked arm in arm without exchanging a dozen sentences. His phrase, 'the life we all love and revile,' and the sudden sobering of Arden, had set me thinking of my own life, and as a thing for which a man might die, it seemed a mean and paltry ideal. At Melton and Oxford there had been at least generous illusions, but my dreams had left me in London. The pettiness and personal ambitions of the House, the artificiality and extravagance of society, the lifelessness, the want of purpose, the absence of enthusiasm, seemed to argue a dying civilization.

I thought of Loring and his dozen wasted years, but he at least was marrying and in the upbringing of a family could look to find an object and an interest. If the war-cloud passed, I should presumably drift on as I had done before, dancing a little less, shooting a little more as the years went by, and gossiping in Fleet Street to give me an excuse for gossiping at the Club. Had I died that night, my record for a man of education would not have been a proud one. My social groove, as I hinted to O'Rane years before at Lake House, held me fast.

"I'm depressed, Raney," I said. "Our civilization as I see it would never be missed. In place of religion we have controversies over ritual or endowments or the Kikuyu decision; for art we have cubism, for music a revue, for literature a sex novel. Sport and spending money and being invited to the right houses are the only things we care about."

We walked on in silence for a few moments; then he said:

"Think again, old man."

"I've thought, Raney. Politics, society, journalism——" The thought of Erckmann and the 'Ruban Bleu,' the memory of Sir John Woburn and the Press Combine, choked me.

"There's a world outside London, old man," he said. "It's a large thing you're condemning—the order of an empire where there's more personal liberty, freedom of speech and thought and even-handed justice than anywhere in creation. A race of degenerates seldom rules for long, and, if it's the virtues of individuality that make our rule possible, you must expect the vices of individuality to appear and drop their pebbles into the wheels of the machine."

Again we walked on until the stable clock struck one. O'Rane looked at his watch in surprise.

"I'd no idea it was so late," he said. "I've been thinking—like you."

"Or Jim, or Val Arden," I put in.

"Yes, and—like you—I'm depressed. Things move so slowly, George. I've been so busy with my own affairs that I've hardly been near the House since I was elected, and now there's likely to be war, and when that's over I shall have to start again at the bottom. And there was a lot I was in a hurry to do," he added regretfully.

"What *can* you do with our social and political machine?" I demanded.

"It's made up of human parts," he answered, with a smile, "and every human being has ears and a heart. In time I can make people listen to me and, when they listen, I can do what I like with them."

"*I* thought that before I made my first speech. You've not been broken by the House of Commons yet, Raney."

"And I doubt if I shall ever have the chance. I didn't go up there to-day because I doubted if I should ever be able to sit there again. After all, that's only one platform,

and Wesley, Newman, Tolstoi got on without it. If the fire's inside you——"

"And how do you start?" I interrupted.

"On the simplest things. I've got a commonplace mind, George, with no subtlety or cleverness, but it's frightfully hard to shake. From experience I know that hunger and physical pain and disease and indignity are terrible things—the whole world knows it—and we must put an end to them. I've only learned two lessons in life, and they came to me on the same day—I've told you about it before—when I fainted from want of food, and a prostitute, dying of consumption, fed me. I don't aim higher than that, old man—to put an end to human suffering. There's little a man can't do by example and teaching, if he knows how to touch primitive imagination. . . . I'm quite commonplace; I've got the temperament of a Salvation Army man—and like him I can make people shout, or laugh, or tremble, or cry."

Once again I put a question that I had asked him years before in Ireland.

"What can you do with me, Raney, or a hundred thousand other low-flying, unimaginative, class-conscious souls, steeped in materialism and taught from childhood to repress emotion? To get rid of selfishness and muddle, to make us alert and sympathetic, you must change human nature—set the world in the path of one of Wells' comets——"

"And can't you see the comet approaching?" He stood still, with hands outstretched, appealing, and in his eye shone the light of a visionary. "We shall fight to preserve an ideal, side by side, with disregard of class-consciousness. We shall fight to maintain our toleration and justice, and so that no man may ever have to fight again. Do you think we can come back with the scream of a shell in our ears to take up the old narrowness and futility? Shall we re-establish a social barrier between men who've undertaken the same charge? Shall we save this country from invasion so that sweated labour may be perpetuated?" His voice had grown quicker and quicker until he stopped suddenly, panting for breath. "George, you don't know the soul of a people."

"I knew it before the comet."

"You don't know its capabilities."

"I hope you will prove me wrong, Raney."

On the following morning Arden, O'Rane, Loring and I returned to town. That Tuesday was the last of the Five Days since Germany declared herself in a state of war, the

twelfth—only the twelfth—since the Austrian ultimatum. We all of us felt that we should at least get our news some hours earlier than at Chepstow, and for my own part I had to see what policy Bertrand proposed to adopt with "Peace." Also, I had wired at length to the Whips' Office, telling young Jellaby to take a note of my name in case any overworked Minister came in search of volunteers for his department.

On our way up we read the full text of the previous day's speeches. They added little to our knowledge, but the sensationalism of all Fleet Street could hardly smear the bold outline of the Commons' scene. As well as if I had been there, I could visualize the haggard faces on the Treasury Bench as the Foreign Secretary expounded a situation that momentarily changed and acquired new complexity. I could almost see him phrasing his speech as he hurried to the House and discarding sentence after sentence as an eleventh-hour dispatch was handed him to read on the way. The speech itself breathed an air of fever, like the news of the Indian floods in 1903, when at one end of the line I read scraps of a message transmitted from a station that was swept away before the end. I knew something, too, of my House of Commons and its glorious uncertainty; to some extent I could guess at the feelings of a man who called for its decision in an unexpected war.

On reaching Paddington I sent my luggage to Princes Gardens and drove to the Club for luncheon. The extended Bank Holiday gave the streets an unfamiliar aspect, like an industrial town at the beginning of a lock-out. My driver took me round through Cockspur Street, and I found the White Star offices thronged with Americans newly mindful of the Monroe Doctrine. They pressed forward in a vociferous queue and, as the first arrivals fought their way back into the street, they could have sold their passage tickets ten times over at their own price.

In a block by the Crimean Monument I heard my name called, and Summertown passed with a hurried wave of the hand. I had seen him in mess uniform a dozen times when dining with the King's Guard; this was the first occasion on which I had met him dressed for active service. It was also the last time I saw him alive. All the way down Pall Mall I saw unfamiliar khaki on men I had never regarded as soldiers, and, as I mounted the steps of the Club, Tom Dainton ran down and engaged my vacant taxi, only pausing to murmur in his deep voice:

"Bore about this war, isn't it? I'd arranged to take my wife to Scotland."

The Club itself was reconciled to the inevitable, and the members forestalled the Government by some hours in issuing their ultimatum. I heard such names as 'Wilhelmshaven,' 'The Sound' and 'Kiel' being flung about with age-long familiarity by some, while others turned furtively to an atlas or inquired angrily why no geography was taught in the public schools. A group of barristers, flannel-suited for the Long Vacation, stood in one corner prophesying a shortage of food; and before long Crabtree, whom I had not seen half a dozen times in as many years, detached himself and cashed a cheque in the dining-room to the limit set by the Club rules. More than one father of a family, following his example, wrote unpractical grocery orders or dispatched tinned tongues to helpless dependents in the country. From food shortage to bread riots was a short step, and I overheard a circle of Civil Servants discussing the early enrolment of special constables.

The long 'Parliamentary' table in the dining-room was in a condition of crowded excitement, and each new comer brought a fresh list of the Ministers who had resigned and the reasons for which they had wobbled back into the fold. Nowhere did I hear it suggested that war was avoidable, hardly anywhere that it should be avoided, though two Radical members who had consistently voted against the increased naval estimates in 1909 declaimed against the dispatch of land forces and asserted that all must be left to a happily invincible Fleet.

In the first year of the war I often marvelled at the uncritical credulity of educated men who believed and handed on every rumour or theory of the moment—from the execution of Admirals in the Tower to the certain arrival of Cossacks in Berlin by Christmas. I lay no claim to superior wisdom, as for six months I myself believed all such stories as simply as I afterwards rejected true with false. From the day of the ultimatum there was a ready disposition to canvass opinions without considering their worth, and before the end of luncheon I was ladling out second-hand judgements on the French cavalry or on reputed defects of meeting recoil as observed in the practice of German field artillery. Had I not been absent from the Club for nearly a week? Must I not be presumed to have new information or fresh points of view?

As I paid my bill, Jellaby hurried up with the suggestion that I should report next day at the Admiralty.

"Is war quite certain?" I asked.

"As certain as anything in an uncertain world," he answered.

In the smoking-room I retired to a corner to read the latest telegrams and drink my coffee in solitude. One was as impossible as the other, and lest I be thought to exaggerate I will not say how many men pursued me to find out what I had been discussing with Jellaby. I should be sorry even to guess at the number of unknown men who entered into conversation, but I cannot forget the omnipresence of Sir Adolf Erckmann. In less worthy moments I suspect him of deliberately displaying what he conceived to be sufficiently flamboyant patriotism to obscure the unhappy circumstance of his name. Certainly he edged from one end of the room to the other, unsparingly subjecting man after man to an unvarying monologue.

"These Chermans wand a lezzon," he grunted into his beard. "And we'll give id 'em, hein? They thought Bridain wouldn't gom in. We gan dell a differend story, hein?"

His scarlet face and head, bronzed with the wind and sun of his recent tour on the Continent, was moist with exertion by the time he penned me in my corner.

"How long is it going to last, Erckmann?" I asked—with some idea of testing the resources of his English.

"How long?" he repeated, pulling truculently at his tangled beard. "A month, hein? Doo months ad the oudside. I'm a bangker, my boy. I know, hein? If they doan'd ged to Baris in a vordnide, they're done, zmashed, pancrupd. You ead your Grizmas dinner in Berlin, hein?"

I resisted the obvious retort and made an excuse to get home to my uncle.

IV

The first news I received on reaching Princes Gardens was that my uncle was unwell and wished to see me at once.

"No, sir, I can't tell you no more than that," said Filson tearfully, and I judged that to serve Bertrand had been a task of difficulty during the past five days.

I found my uncle seated in his bedroom with a rug over his knees, conspicuously doing nothing. Little threads of

blood discoloured the whites of his eyes, and he seemed curiously shrunken and old. He looked at me in silence for a few moments after I had shut the door, then remarked carelessly:

"I thought it would last my time, George."

"If we live to the end of it we shall have seen the last war," I answered.

He snorted derisively.

"Till next time! As long as you let children point loaded pistols . . ."

He broke off and sat staring before him.

"Filson told me you'd been seedy," I said.

"Oh, if you talk to a fool like Filson!" my uncle exclaimed. "I went down to the House yesterday . . ." He paused and murmured to himself, as though unconscious of my presence. "We couldn't help ourselves, you know. I don't see what else we could have done. . . . I was down there, George, and walked home thinking it all over and, when I got in, I tumbled down in the hall. Good God! if a man mayn't fall about in his own hall . . .! Filson was rather surprised, but I'm perfectly all right." He kicked away the rug and drew himself shakily erect. "Seventy-nine, George, but I must live a bit longer—till the Kaiser's been strangled in the bowels of the Crown Prince. . . . By all that's holy, if I were fifty years younger!"

There was something pathetically terrible in his disillusionment and anger with all things created. As he stood with clenched fists trembling above his head, I saw his body sway and sprang forward to catch him.

"You must take things a bit easy, Bertrand," I said.

"When you're my age . . ." he began. "Bah, you never will be, your lot dies off like so many flies. Another five years will see you out, and on my soul I think you're to be envied. I've lived long enough to see everything I cared for shattered. We've got war at our doors, and, before it's been going on six weeks, mark my words! personal liberty will be at an end, you'll be under a military despotism, the freedom of the Press . . . By the way, I sent some neutrality lunatics to see you on Sunday."

"I'm afraid I didn't give them much satisfaction," I said. "Look here, Bertrand, about this paper——"

"What paper?"

"'Peace.'"

"There's no such paper. Don't stare, George; you look

as if you were only half awake. 'Peace,' indeed . . . ! Why, my God! I've at least outgrown *that* phase. I telephoned to M'Clellan to bring me the electros for the headings and I went through the damned mocking things with a hammer!" He paused to breathe heavily, with one hand pressed to his side. "I think I'd rather be alone for the present, old boy," he went on, with sudden gentleness. "You go off and amuse yourself at the Club, you're too young to be in the same room as my thoughts. If you've got your securities pass-book, you might do worse than jot down what you think your income's likely to be the next few years. Don't be too optimistic about it, you can run a pencil through three-quarters of your investments abroad. I've given everybody notice here, to be on the safe side; and you'll be well advised to overhaul your expenditure."

I was half-way through my dressing when Mayhew telephoned to invite me to dinner at the Penmen's Club. He had lived night and day at the "Wicked World" office since leaving Chepstow, quarrelling, arguing and bribing to get leave to go abroad.

"And now I'm at a loose end," he told me, as we stood in the hall waiting for O'Rane and Loring. "The Press Combine is going to work all it knows to get Kitchener put into the War Office, and from what I remember of Omdurman and South Africa, war correspondents aren't at a premium with him. It's so hard to get out of this damned country at present, or I should be half-way to St. Petersburg by now."

I told him of my uncle's decision to discontinue "Peace," and he whistled regretfully.

"Poor old Fleet Street!" he exclaimed. "There's a bad time coming for the parasites. The 'Wicked World' has sacked half its men, including me, and the chief proposes to write the paper himself."

"That's a bit stiff," I said.

"And it's not as though I were a new-comer," he continued aggrievedly, "or hadn't brought off one or two fair-sized scoops in the last few years. Hallo, here's Raney!"

Loring arrived a few moments later, and we went in to dinner. I had to remind myself that three out of the four of us had travelled up from Chepstow the same morning and that, for all the transitions of the day, war had not yet been declared and Germany had till midnight to frame a reply to our ultimatum.

"Never let it be said that the British race is not adapt-

able," Loring remarked, when I told him of my intended descent on the Admiralty. "I've spent my afternoon trying to get a commission."

"Any luck?"

"They said I was too old, so I'm to have a staff appointment. Raney and Val Arden will shortly be seen swanking about as Second Lieutenants of the Coldstream Guards. Youth will be served! What the devil does a staff captain have to do?"

"Or a Civil Servant?" I asked.

"Oh, you're all right; you just turn up at twelve and go out to lunch till three. I've been really busy to-day. I've offered House of Steynes and the places at Chepstow and Market Harborough to the War Office as hospitals. Mamma will run one, Amy another and Violet the third——"

"Hospitals?" I murmured.

In the South African War the wounded had died or been nursed back to life thousands of miles from England. It required an effort of imagination to visualize men like Tom Dainton or Summertown, whole and hale one day, under fire forty-eight hours later and perhaps back in England by the end of the week, crawling north from Southampton or Portsmouth by hospital train, broken and maimed for life. Perhaps all our imaginations were working on the same lines, for after a pause Loring changed the subject by asking where O'Rane had spent his time.

"City," was the short answer.

"Things pretty bad?" I asked.

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be," he replied. "I'm fairly sorry for my own firm, but Heaven help anyone with much money out that he wants to get back quickly. They talk of closing the Stock Exchange and declaring a moratorium."

"The Club was a sad sight at lunch-time," I said. "Everybody talking about moving into a smaller house or giving up his car——"

Mayhew threw back his head and laughed.

"The one good thing I've heard to-day!" he cried. "Do you men know an objectionable fat youth named Webster? He came to the 'Wicked World' office this morning and tried to stick us with a long, tearful account of his escape from Germany. Apparently he had no end of a time getting away, and the Germans commandeered a brand new Rolls-Royce and kicked him over the frontier on foot."

"And I had half-made up my mind to take a cure at Nauheim," I said reflectively.

"You're well out of it," said Mayhew. "We had a curious story in the office to-day from Switzerland—rather a sinister business if it's true. A party of Americans—father, mother and two daughters—were motoring through Germany when the state of war was declared. They were held up, arrested and deprived of their car. A few hours later the parents were released and sent under escort to the frontier in a carriage with the blinds down. The girls have never been seen again."

It was the first of many similar stories, and I have no idea how much truth it contained. None of us yet appreciated the lengths to which 'civilized warfare' could be carried, but one of the things that change little throughout the centuries is the position of women in the midst of armed troops.

The active life of the Penmen's Club was from six till eight and again from one till three in the morning. By the time we had finished dinner the coffee-room was deserted, and I suggested an adjournment to the Eclectic to await midnight and the answer of the German Government. Time was no object, and we walked slowly down Fleet Street and the Strand. Opposite Romano's a piano organ was grinding out its appointed six tunes, and a ring of urchins held hands and danced up and down the gutter singing:

"Dixie! All abo-o-oard for Dixie!"

"Damn that song!" Loring exclaimed irritably.

By Charing Cross we halted to let the traffic pour out of the station yard, and I felt myself touched on the shoulder.

"Surely George Oakleigh? You don't remember me?"

I looked at a shabby, thin man with bearded face and restless eyes. Then we shook hands, and I whispered to Loring over my shoulder to take the others on to the Club and await me.

"That was Jim Loring, wasn't it?" asked the shabby man eagerly.

"Yes, and the other two were Mayhew and O'Rane; they were some years junior to us, of course. Quite like the old days in Matheson's, Draycott?"

He nodded and glanced bemusedly at the glaring lights of the Strand and the thundering stream of traffic.

"I've not seen you since I cut you in the Luxembourg Gardens a dozen years ago," he said.

"I doubt if I've been in Paris six times since then," I answered.

"And I've not been in England at all. I'm—I'm liable to arrest, you know, but they made a clearance of us from Boulogne. We were a sorry crew, Oakleigh."

"What are you going to do now?" I asked. "I'll see you through as far as I can."

My hand was moving to my pocket, but he stopped me with a gesture.

"I don't want money, old chap."

"You look as if you wanted a square meal, Draycott."

He laughed with a bitterness in which there was little pride.

"And a bath. And some new clothes. I shall get 'em all in a few days."

"What are you going to do?" I repeated. "If I may advise you, you've been out of this country long enough for Scotland Yard to regard you leniently. If you go to them frankly——"

He shook his head decisively.

"I've no doubt they'd let me stay here if I behaved myself, but it's no good. I can't get back to my old position, there are too many people who remember me. I should never have stopped Jim Loring as I stopped you. No, I'm going vaguely into the Midlands, to some recruiting office——"

"They won't take you," I interrupted. "You're my age, you're thirty-five."

"I'm twenty-nine for the purposes of the Army," he answered. "And, if that's too old, I'm twenty-seven. I shall take this beard off, of course. But, look here, I'm keeping you——"

"I want to see you again, Draycott," I said, as we shook hands.

"Better not. And don't tell those other men. It was just a—a whim. We were always rather pals at Melton, you know. . . ."

Nearly a year later Corporal Draycott of the Midland Light Infantry was recommended for a Distinguished Conduct Medal, but before the dispatch reached England he was dead of dysentery in the plague pit of Gallipoli.

When I reached the Club it was to find the same new spirit of gregariousness that I had noticed at luncheon, but in an intensified degree. The old antipathies were forgotten, and from the crowded hall to the echoing gallery stretched a

living chain of eager, garrulous men. I passed from one to another under a hail of questions, as my own great-grandfather may have done a century before when 'the town' gathered beneath that same roof to await news of Leipzig.

Loring had taken refuge in the deserted card-room, and we had been sitting there raking over the old possibilities for half an hour when the door opened, and Sir Roger Dainton entered in uniform.

"I've been looking for you all the evening, George," he exclaimed. "I—look here, I want your uncle to do me a favour. I've been to his house, but they told me he was seedy. I *can't* get any news of Sonia."

O'Rane sat upright in his chair, scattering a cloud of flaky cigar-ash over his trousers. His face was hidden as he leant forward to brush it away, but I wondered whether he was recalling with me Mayhew's story of the missing American girls.

"But I thought she was home," I said. "Webster's back, and I was talking to Erckmann here after lunch."

"She stayed behind," Dainton told me. "It's a long rigmarole, and I'll go into it later. I've been to the Foreign Office and simply couldn't get past the door. I was thinking that as your uncle rather had the ear of the Ministry . . . You see, I'm mobilized, so I can't do much myself. Sonia's been wiring all over the place—Bayreuth, Munich, Heaven knows where, giving a different address each time. Where she is at present, I haven't the faintest idea."

I knew that neither Bertrand nor I could help him, but for very civility I had to offer him the chance of seeing my uncle. O'Rane followed me downstairs and helped me into my coat, observing dispassionately:

"This is a fool's errand, George."

"I don't need to be told that, Raney," I answered.

"I'm staying the night with Jim," he went on. "You might come and report progress on your way to the Admiralty. As early as you like. We've no time to lose."

"What do you propose to do?" I inquired, as we hurried into the hall.

He laughed at the question.

"Well, we can't very well leave Sonia in Germany, can we?" he asked. "At least, *I* can't. *Early* to-morrow, mind. Good night, old man."

CHAPTER VIII

DEAD YESTERDAY

". . . I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
Oh! let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice. . . ."
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, "Ode to Duty"

I

AT eleven o'clock at night—by West European time—on Tuesday the fourth of August, a state of war was established between Great Britain and Germany.

Three-quarters of an hour later I stood on the steps of my uncle's house and said good-bye to Sir Roger Dainton. Our united eloquence had half-convinced him that it was merely vexatious to goad the Foreign Office at a moment when in all likelihood our Ambassadors in Berlin and Vienna were being handed their passports. Representations must henceforth be made through a neutral channel, and he left us with the intention of calling early next day at the American Embassy. My uncle's confidential opinion of father and daughter is uncomplimentary and irrelevant.

The facts in the case, as given me between the Club and Princes Gardens, were that Sonia had left England in April, a few days after our meeting at Covent Garden. Sir Roger was in the predicament of disliking the whole idea of the tour and being unable to say that a man who was good enough to be trusted for early financial advice was not also good enough to be trusted with a worldly young woman of eight-and-twenty. The Baroness Kohnstadt, nominal hostess of the party, might have her name coupled with that of Lord Pennington, but she was Sir Adolf's sister and had been at school with Lady Dainton in Dresden. Baronesses, more-

over, are always Baronesses. Of the relations existing between Erckmann and Mrs. Welman, everything was suspected and nothing known. Webster's record was only blemished by a breach of promise case—which might have happened to anyone. Dainton shrugged his shoulders resignedly, and his daughter took silence for assent.

During May and June the party toured through France, Spain and Italy; in the middle of July a postcard announced that they had reached Bayreuth and that the Festival was in full swing. Then followed confusion.

1. Sonia had wired from Bayreuth asking for money to be sent her in Nürnberg.
2. Sir Roger had immediately remitted £30 by registered post.
3. Four days later, on presentation of the Austrian ultimatum to Servia, Sir Roger had telegraphed ordering Sonia to return home at once.
4. Two days afterwards a second telegram was received from Sonia, "Must have money wire Hotel de l'Europe Munich or post Hotel Continental Innspruck."
5. Her father had telegraphed another £30 to Munich, asking in addition where Sonia was going and what she was doing.
6. Sir Adolf had called on Dainton at the House of Commons late on August Bank Holiday to announce that:
   (*a*) Sonia had lingered at Bayreuth, promising to follow as soon as Webster's car was in order.
   (*b*) Webster, arriving alone, alleged that she was returning immediately to England.
   (*c*) They had barely escaped into France before the declaration of war, and
   (*d*) They hoped she had enjoyed a comfortable journey home.

I drove to Loring House after breakfast next day, put the facts on paper and fitted the date to each.

"That little swine Webster could throw some light on this," O'Rane muttered between his teeth as the three of us tried to read a connected story into the fragments.

"Well, let's get hold of him," said Loring. "He's probably in town. Mayhew saw him yesterday."

"Oh, it's only to satisfy idle curiosity," O'Rane answered.

"The party starts out from Bayreuth, leaving Sonia and Webster to follow. They don't follow, and Sonia flies off north to Nürnberg and wires for money. That means there was a scene—he probably proposed or tried to kiss her or something—and she lets him have it between the eyes. Before she receives the money she finds she's put her head in a hornet's nest—armies mobilizing on both sides of her—and turns south to Munich to get away in the opposite direction. She's begged, borrowed or stolen enough to reach Innspruck and there she's stuck. Old Dainton's wiring money all over the globe, but I don't suppose a penny of it reaches her. As like as not she's been arrested."

"And what then?" I asked.

"If she behaves herself they may let her go as soon as they've finished moving troops. If she doesn't, they'll keep her till the end of the war."

He walked up and down with his hands in his pockets and a pipe thrust jauntily out of one corner of his mouth. The story of the missing American girls was still fresh in my mind, and I felt little of his apparent cheerfulness.

"It's the deuce of a position," said Loring. "When will Dainton be through with the Ambassador?"

"You can ring him up now," said O'Rane. "They'll have been very polite, and they'll do all they can, and the matter will receive attention, and in the meantime they've just as much power as the man in the moon. Dear man, the whole of Germany's littered with pukka Americans this time of year, and the Embassy isn't going to trouble about us till it's gathered in its own waifs and strays. Dainton's just wasting their time and his. Anybody else got any helpful suggestions?"

"You're a shade discouraging, Raney," I said.

He laughed without malice, and his black eyes shone with the excitement of coming battle.

"I'm just blowing away the froth," he explained. "If you want business, here you are. Jim, will you lend me five hundred pounds?"

Loring nodded without a word.

"You probably won't see it again in this world."

"I'll risk that."

"Good. Let me have it as soon as possible, and all in gold. You may have trouble in raising it just now, but raise it you must. Then . . . No, I think that's all. As soon as you let me have it I'll get under way"

"Where are you off to, Raney?" I asked.

I feel that I remain human even in a crisis, and Loring's lack of curiosity was as maddening as O'Rane's uncommunicativeness.

"I'm going for a short holiday abroad," he answered, with a smile.

"Ass!" I said.

"Why?"

"You're of military age. If they don't shoot you as a spy, they'll lock you up till the end of the war."

"Guess you underrate the pres-tige of the U-nited States Government," he answered, with a shattering twang. "I'm doing this stunt as an American citizen."

Loring jumped up and laid his hand on O'Rane's shoulder.

"This is all rot, Raney," he said. "You can't go. She's at Innspruck—or will be shortly. Well, that's in Austria, and you've made Austria a bit too hot to be comfortable."

O'Rane picked up a cigar from the box on the table and began to chew one end with lazy deliberation. Never have I met a grown man who so loved to play a part.

"Say, I reckon you're mistaking me for my partner O'Rane—David B. O'Rane," he remarked. "My name's Morris—James Morris of Newtown, Tennessee. Lord Loring? Pleased to meet you, Lord Loring. I'm travelling Europe for a piece on business. The Austrians just love me. I've an oil proposition down Carinthia way and I guess I got the whole durned country in my vest pocket."

"You can't go," Loring repeated, quite unmoved by manner or twang.

"And who'll stop me, Lord Loring? See here, you haven't figured out the proposition. I start away as an American citizen talking good United States, and my name stencilled all six sides of my baggage. Well, I don't anticipate dropping across Vienna, and any blamed customs-officer will do a sight of head-scratching before he measures my finger-prints or hitches me out o' my pants to see if I've a bowie-knife scar in the small of my back. They got their war to keep 'em occupied first of all. And, if that ain't enough, they can look at my passport for a piece. And, when they're tired of that, they can wrap 'emselves up and go off to sleep in my naturalization papers. Guess there's nothing much wrong with them anyway." He turned and spat scientifically into the fireplace, warming to his work. "I've thought this up some. If you'll come forward with a better stunt, why!

start in to do it and take all of my blessing you can use. Getting quit of Austria's about as easy as going through hell without singeing your pants. For you, that is. You don't speak decent German, you've no more hustle to you than a maggot in a melon-patch, the rankest breed of blind beggar on a side walk couldn't take you for anything but a Britisher. I've told you what the Embassy's been saying to old man Dainton. If you think you've filed a patent for catching the American Eagle by the tail feathers, cut in and test it: there's not a dime to pay for entrance. Otherwise, keep your head shut for a piece while James Morris gets to work. I been most kinds of fool in my time, but not the sort that goes out of his way to hunt big game with a can of flea-powder. I'm not out for that brand of heroism. I'm going now 'cos I can't find much use for any other way. If I haven't delivered the goods inside of a fortnight, you can picture me leaning graceful and easy 'gainst a wall and handing round prizes for the best show of fixed target fancy shooting. And, if the United States don't declare war inside of twenty-four hours after that, you'll know I been wasting my time and getting all I deserve."

He ended abruptly and regarded us with a provocative smile. I am far from claiming an exhaustive knowledge of O'Rane's character, but both Loring and I were familiar with a certain outthrust of the lower jaw which meant that further argument was superfluous.

"When d'you start?" I asked.

"Morris ought to be here any minute. He's lending me an approved Saratoga trunk covered with most convincing labels. I rang him up last night after you left the Club. And a complete set of papers with all the signs and countersigns and *visas* you can imagine. Morris really *is* an American citizen. He had to get naturalized when we moved out of Mexico into the States and floated some of our concessions as an American company. You won't forget about the money, Jim?"

"Raney, you're an awful fool to go," said Loring uneasily.

"My dear fellow, you'd do exactly the same thing if it were Violet out there. And you'd probably make a hash of it," he added unflatteringly. "I don't mind betting I get Sonia away without even calling on the Ambassador. I shall sugar a bit, and bluff a bit, and bribe a bit. They'll probably be as keen to get rid of her as she'll be to go, and a

chance to be civil to the great United States isn't to be disregarded in war times."

Loring shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"I'll see about the money at once," he said. "I suppose all the banks are shut to-day, but I'll let you have it as soon as I can."

II

O'Rane had come very near the truth in the explanation he hazarded of Sonia's movements and changes of purpose.

The first two months of the tour had been uneventful. She had whirled with her companions through one country after another, too busy to think or quarrel, almost too busy to be conscious of herself: it was only as they left the long plains of Lombardy behind them, and mounted the first green-clad spurs of the Alps, that a restlessness and discontent settled on their spirits. There was a new tendency to find fault with their hotels, a general disagreement over what they were to do next, a candour of criticism that was less amiable than free. The party found itself disintegrating and taking sides for or against the victim of the day: Lord Pennington confided to Sonia that Sir Adolf and the Baroness would be less unbearable if they had studied table-manners. Mrs. Welman complained to Webster that Lord Pennington ought to dine alone, as no one—least of all himself—knew what stories he would tell in mixed company when he felt himself replete and cheerful. Sir Adolf wondered—in Mrs. Welman's hearing—what "liddle Zonia" could see in "thad gread zleeby Websder. He is not half awāg: she musd zdir him up, hein? He is a gread wed planked."

In justice to Sonia, who never let sentiment obscure the main chance, it should be said that she had seldom regarded Webster otherwise than as a beast of burden: he was devoted and docile, would lie somnolently in his corner of the car without venturing on "clever conversation," and could be ignored from the moment when he tucked the dust-rug round her knees till the time when she dispatched him to procure her strawberries in a wayside village.

Sometimes, indeed, she may have wondered lazily what was going on inside the sleepy brain behind the half-closed little eyes; once she looked on with amused detachment while Mrs. Welman tried to filch him from her side; once, too, she tried to make him jealous by changing places with the

Baroness and driving for a day and a half in Lord Pennington's car. This last experiment was slightly humiliating, as her placid slave received her back at the end of it without reproach, surprise or rapture. Sonia half decided to abandon the invertebrate to the first-comer and was only checked by a feeling that she might be ostentatiously resigning an empire she had never won. Alternatively on the fourth day after their arrival at Bayreuth, in the purgatory of tedium which a Wagner festival must provide for auditors of only simulated enthusiasm, she accepted Sir Adolf's challenge and set herself to rouse " that great sleepy Webster " to an interest in herself.

The details of the campaign can only be supplied from imagination. Sonia, who confessed much, and Webster, who preserved his customary sphinx-like silence, united in suppressing all reference to what passed : the other members of the party saw only as much as the protagonists thought fit to allow. The results—which are all that is relevant here—came to light on the last morning of their stay in Bayreuth. Sir Adolf paid the bill, ordered his car, expounded the route and drove away. Lord Pennington followed suit, only waiting to ask if Sonia would care to drive with the Baroness and himself, as Webster's chauffeur had reported trouble with the timing-gear. Sonia replied that she would give the car another half-hour to come to its senses, and, if the repairs were not complete by then, Webster would have to bring her on by train and leave the chauffeur to pursue them as best he might. On that understanding Lord Pennington also drove away, and Sonia wandered through the gardens in front of the hotel and sent Webster once every quarter of an hour to inquire what progress was being made.

It was two o'clock before they got under way, and the car ran without mishap until eight. Then they halted for dinner, and Webster asked if Sonia thought it advisable to go any farther, or whether they should stay where they were till the following morning.

" We'll start again the moment we've finished dinner," she ordained, with great firmness.

" Right ! " said Webster, " but we shan't get in till about eleven. D'you mind that ? "

" Doesn't look as if it could be helped," she answered. " But I don't see myself staying alone with you in a village without a name in the middle of Bavaria."

Webster said nothing, but excused himself as soon as

dinner was over and retired to discuss the condition of the car with his chauffeur.

"It's held up all right so far," he reported on his return, "but I don't know if we shall get through without a breakdown. Wouldn't it be better——?"

"We'll start at once, please," said Sonia, and the car was ordered without further delay.

They ran uneventfully from nine till half-past eleven: then, as they left the single street of a slumbering village, the engines became suddenly silent, there was a muttered oath from the chauffeur, and the car slowed down and came to a standstill at the side of the road.

"What's up?" Webster inquired, without any great show of interest.

The chauffeur detached a headlight, opened the bonnet and explored in silence for a few moments. Then he remarked, "Ignition."

Webster lit a cigarette and leant back in his corner.

"How long's it going to take you?" asked Sonia.

"Can't get another yard to-night, miss," was the answer. "If you'll get out and give a hand, sir, we'll push her back and see if we can wake anybody up in the village."

Sonia jumped out with a feeling of exasperation towards Webster for the untrustworthiness of his car and herself for refusing Lord Pennington's offer. They walked slowly back to the village, and patrolled the one street till the chauffeur discovered a house that looked like an inn, and battered on the door with a spanner.

"It couldn't be helped, you know," Webster urged in anxious apology as they waited in front of the silent houses; and then, to make his words more convincing by iteration, "You know, it simply couldn't be helped."

A head projected itself at length from an upper window and was addressed by Webster in halting German. It was withdrawn after the exchange of a few sentences, and there came a sound of heavy feet on the stairs and a hand fumbling with bolts and a chain.

"He says he's not got much accommodation," Webster explained, "but he'll do his best."

The door opened, and a sleepy-eyed landlord admitted them to the house. Lights appeared mysteriously, there were sounds of movement upstairs and in the kitchen and, by the time the car was lodged in a stable and the luggage carried into the house, Sonia found herself seated at a meal

of ham and eggs washed down with draughts of dark Munich beer. The food gradually restored her good temper, and she became disposed to treat their break-down as a new and rather amusing experience: Webster, however, remained silent, when he was not apologetic, and seemed nervous and unsettled.

"D'you mind being left alone with me like this?" he asked. "You know, it might have happened to either of the other cars."

"I'd sooner be with you than with Lord Pennington or Sir Adolf," she admitted.

"If you don't mind, you can bet *I* don't," he answered, with a gleam of excitement in his dull eyes.

"It's rather a joke," she went on, looking round the old-fashioned, heavily-timbered room; and then warningly—"Provided it isn't repeated."

"*I* shan't say anything," he promised.

Sonia found that it was one thing for her to treat their misadventure as a joke and quite another to be exchanging the language of conspiracy with him.

"That'll do, Fatty," she said. "And it wasn't what I meant."

Webster's eyes dulled at the rebuke.

"No offence," he murmured indistinctly. "May I smoke?"

"You may do whatever you like. I'm going to bed."

He opened a cigar-case and crossed to the fireplace in search of matches.

"I'm afraid you'll find the accommodation rather limited," he remarked, with his face turned away from her.

"I don't expect the Ritz in a village of six houses," she answered.

"There's only one room."

Sonia sat up very erect in her chair; her breath came and went quickly and all her pulses seemed to be throbbing.

"Are you suggesting I should toss you for it?" she asked, with a flurried laugh.

He turned half round and regarded her out of the corner of one eye.

"No need, is there?" he mumbled.

Sonia jumped up hastily.

"Well, then, I'll take possession," she said. "You finish your cigar in peace; the landlord'll show me the way."

She hurried into the hall and rapped on a table till the proprietor appeared. He asked some question in German, but she could only shake her head and point up the stairs. Her meaning must have been clear, for he nodded and led the way with a lighted candle in his hand. There were two doors at the head of the stairs, and he opened the first. Looking over his shoulder, Sonia saw a bed without sheets or pillow-cases, and a jug standing upside down in the basin. The landlord closed the door with a muttered "Nein" and opened the one opposite. It was a room of the same size and character, but there were sheets on the bed and hot-water cans by the wash-hand stand. Two cabin trunks stood side by side under the window, their straps unloosed and hanging to the floor.

Sonia thanked the landlord and bade him good night. Left to herself, she inspected the lock, which seemed in order, removed her coat and hat—and tried to lift down Webster's trunk and drag it across the room. Her hand slipped as she tilted it off the chair, and there was a heavy thud, which reverberated through the silent house. She paused and listened. There was a footstep on the stairs and a subdued tapping at the door; then her name was called.

"You can come in, Fatty," she answered.

He entered quickly, yet with embarrassment, and stood at the door, smiling lop-sidedly.

"You're a bit of a liar, aren't you?" she suggested, as she bent once more over the trunk.

"Here, let me help!" he said, coming forward and seizing the handle. "Where d'you want this put?"

"In the next room—the room you're going to sleep in. Hurry up!"

Webster straightened his back and looked at her reproachfully.

"I say!—Sonia!" he protested.

His mouth seemed suddenly to have taken on a new flabbiness of outline.

"Hurry up, Fatty," she repeated, "and don't look so down on your luck. You've a lot to be thankful for. I've two brothers, and if either of them were in this house he'd be taking the skin off your back in strips. Clear the box out and then come back for your suitcase."

Webster obeyed her with docile humility.

"Now then," she went on, when he returned, "one or two questions, Fatty. There's nothing wrong with your

car, is there? And never was? This is all a little plot between you and your man. I thought so. Why?"

He smiled—and avoided her eyes.

"It was rather a joke. You said so."

"But not to be carried too far. How old am I, Fatty? Well, I'll tell you. Twenty-eight. And I've knocked about a bit. D'you think I go in for jokes of that kind?" He made no answer. "Well, as it happens, I don't. And if I did——! Tell me candidly, Fatty, *do* you think I should choose you?"

She stood watching him with an expression of such contempt that the worm turned in spite of himself.

"Then why the devil did you go on as you've been doing the last week?" he demanded, looking up and flushing under her gaze.

"What have I done?"

"You've led me on—the whole way."

"*You?*" She laughed and put her hands on his shoulders. "Go to bed, Fat Boy, and we'll hope you'll wake up sane."

The touch of her hands seemed to fire him.

"This is *my* joke!" he exclaimed, catching her round the waist with one arm and pressing her head forward with the other till their lips met. "What are you afraid of, Sonia?" he whispered, as she struggled to break free from his arms. "No one'll ever know. . . . My God, you've nearly blinded me!"

He loosed her with a shrill cry of pain and staggered back, holding both hands to an eye that she had all but driven through its socket with the pressure of her thumb.

"That'll teach you!" she panted. "Get out, you little cur! Get out, I say, and let me never see your face again! Get out! Get out!!"

He stumbled from the room, and she slammed and bolted the door behind him. Then she flung herself on the bed with one hand over her mouth, sobbing, "To be kissed by *that* brute! Oh, you devil, you devil!"

III

The following morning Sonia set herself to escape from a village whose name was unknown to her to a destination on which she was not yet decided, with the aid of three

pounds in English money and an entire ignorance of the German language.

During the night three or four dominant ideas had crystallized in her mind: she must get away from Webster; she could hardly face the rest of the party and their inevitable questions; it was necessary to wait somewhere within the fare-radius of her money while she telegraphed for more. During breakfast she summoned the landlord and repeated "Bayreuth. Train. Me" with many gesticulations, until he left off scratching his head and harnessed a country cart to drive her to a station five miles away.

After that there was no difficulty in reaching Bayreuth, where she was made welcome at her former hotel. She telegraphed home for money and only left at the end of two days, when instead of the money she received a wire from Sir Adolf Erckmann asking if she were still in Bayreuth and where he was to meet her. The manager of the hotel paid her fare to Nürnberg, where she invented friends to send her home, and in the meantime telegraphed again to her father.

This time she gave Innspruck as her next address: from Bayreuth she had gone north through the midst of mobilizing troops and fleeing visitors, and it became clear that, if she waited long, her only chance of escape would be to turn south on her own tracks and cross through Austria into Italy. The manager of the Nürnberg hotel proved another friend, and with the money lent her by him she made her way over the frontier and resigned herself to waiting in Innspruck till her unaccountable father vouchsafed some reply to her telegrams.

She was still at her hotel when war was declared. The city police called and demanded a passport which she did not possess; they inspected her luggage and removed all books and papers; finally she was ordered to report herself twice daily at the Town Hall, to remain in her hotel from eight at night till ten next morning and in no circumstances —on pain of death—to venture outside the city boundaries. It was too early as yet to say whether more stringent measures would be necessary: when her story had been checked, it might be possible to release her if no discrepancy were discovered in it: if she had any responsible friends or relations in Innspruck or the surrounding country, much time and trouble might be saved by getting them to attest her identity and *bona fides*. The interview was conducted

with every mark of courtesy. With a sinking heart Sonia settled down to wait—in a hostile country, without money or friends, till the end of an endless war.

Her treatment for the first day or two was sympathetic. The hotel manager explained that he had no quarrel with the English, who were among his best customers: it would indeed be a tragedy if they and the Austrians met and killed each other in battle: possibly if England confined herself to a naval war . . . He grew less suave when it became known that troops were being poured across the Channel into France, and in her morning and evening walks to the Town Hall Sonia found herself greeted with menacing and contemptuous murmurs.

At the end of the week the public spirit had changed to a note of jubilant exultation. Her waiter, under the eyes of the manager and unchecked by word or sign, would hand her copies of the "Kölnische Zeitung" or "Neue Freie Presse" at luncheon, with a triumphant finger to the heavy headlines and a word or two of translation thrown out between the courses.

"Paris one week—one," he would say, "zen Calais, zen London. London in dree week. Belgrade next week. And zen Warsaw. Warsaw in one months from now. See, it is all here, all. Yes. Ze war will be all over in one months."

Sonia attempted no reply. For ten days she spoke no word save to repeat her name night and morning to an officer of police and after the first week only ventured outside the hotel to report herself at the Town Hall. She was waiting her turn one afternoon in the now familiar queue when the Chief of Police summoned her into his room and presented her with a letter: the envelope had been opened and bore some initials and a date in blue pencil on the flap:

"DEAR MISS DAINTON,"—it ran—"I wonder if you remember me and the visit I gave myself the pleasure of paying you and your father when I was over from the States a year or two back? I am in this city for a day or two on business in connection with some oil-wells in which my firm is interested. I thought—and I sincerely hope I was not mistaken—that I caught sight of you as I drove from the depot to the Imperial (where I am staying). I am sending this by hand to every hotel in the town on the off chance of finding you. If it really was you, I trust you will grant me permission to call on you, and perhaps you will give me the

pleasure of your company at luncheon or dinner before I go on into Italy.—Believe me to be, dear Miss Dainton, very truly yours, JAS. MORRIS"

Sonia read the letter under the vigilant scrutiny of the Chief of Police. The stilted phrasing was as unfamiliar as the name, but the neat, precise writing, small and regular as a monkish manuscript, was the writing of O'Rane.

"You are acquainted with this Mr. Morris?" asked the Chief of Police.

"I—I've met him once," stammered Sonia, "some years ago."

"He knows you? Well enough to identify you? I have asked him to attend here this afternoon. Be good enough to be seated."

Sonia walked uncertainly to a chair and sat with thumping heart while the Chief of Police went on with his writing. Five, ten and fifteen minutes passed: there was no sign of O'Rane, and she felt herself growing desperate under the suspense. Then the door opened, and he was ushered in.

"Guess you're the Chief of Police," he hazarded, stretching out his hand and not noticing the corner in which Sonia was sitting. "Pleased to meet you, sir. I got your note. What's your trouble anyway?"

The Chief of Police presented him with his own letter and put a question in German.

"Say, I don't use German," O'Rane answered. "French is the best I can manage. "Why, that's uncommon like my fist! What way d'you come to have it?"

It was explained that Miss Dainton was under police supervision and that any letters were liable to be opened and read.

"*Gee!* What's *she* been doing?" asked O'Rane. "Oh, I forgot! This blamed war. Yes. I reckon she's a prisoner. And I wanted her to dine with me."

"Miss Dainton is in the room," said the Chief of Police, and O'Rane turned with a start of surprise. "It was hoped you might be able to verify the particulars she has given about herself."

Sonia rose from her chair and came forward, with a feeling that every movement was betraying her and that the Chief of Police saw through the whole piece of play-acting and only waited an opportunity to break in and expose the masquerading American. O'Rane eyed her with superb deliberation.

" It's Miss Dainton, sure," he said, with a bow. " Pleased to meet you, Miss Dainton. Now, sir, what's the piece I'm to say ? "

The Chief of Police extracted a foolscap sheet from his table-drawer.

" Perhaps you can check the lady's statements," he said. " We only keep her till someone gives us guarantees of her good faith."

O'Rane was affected with sudden scruples.

" Guess you'd better find someone that knows her a bit better," he suggested. " I met her folk often enough, but I've not seen her for years."

His hand moved towards his hat as though the last word had been said, but the more he strove to avoid responsibility the more it was pressed upon him.

" Quite formal questions," the Chief of Police kept repeating; but O'Rane continued to excuse himself.

" See here," he explained. " It's God knows how many years since I met her. I wrote that letter 'cos I've known her father since I was a boy and I wanted to do the civil to his daughter. This war's an international proposition, and we Americans aren't backing either side. If you let her go on my evidence, maybe you'll regret it and start getting off protests to my Government. And, if you keep her here, I shall be up against her folk and all the everlasting State Departments of Great Britain. Guess I'd sooner be quit of the proposition right now."

" We will take all responsibility," urged the Chief of Police; and O'Rane began to yield with a bad grace. " They are just formal questions. . . ."

For five minutes O'Rane reluctantly allowed a minimum of uncompromising information to be corkscrewed out of him. Sonia's Christian name, surname and address were confirmed, but he knew nothing of her age and the reason for her presence in Austria. On the subject of her parents he was slightly more communicative, but Sir Roger Dainton, Baronet (or Knight—O'Rane knew little of these dime distinctions among the British aristocracy) was only known to fame as the director of a company which his firm had the honour to supply with Carinthian oil. That was all he could say, and more than he cared to take the responsibility of saying. He was, of course, happy to be of assistance to either party, provided the strict neutrality of his country were maintained, and would hold himself at the disposal of

Miss Dainton or of the police authorities until his departure for Italy the following day. Perhaps in return the Chief of Police would tell him if any difficulties were to be anticipated in crossing the frontier. . . .

The next morning a clerk from the police head-quarters called at the Imperial Hotel. O'Rane was seated in shirt-sleeves in his private room, with a green cigar jutting out of his mouth and the table in front of him littered with specifications and oil-prices. The clerk announced that there seemed no reason to detain Miss Dainton any longer, but she had exhausted her money and could hardly travel back to England without assistance.

"Guess that young woman regards me as a pocket-size providence," observed O'Rane impatiently. "I'm not through with my mail yet. What's the damage anyway? No, figure it out in dollars, I've no use for your everlasting krones. Or see here, you freeze on to these bills and fix things at the hotel, and, if Miss Dainton can get her baggage to the depot by four o'clock, I'll take her slick through to Genoa and put her on a packet there. It's no great way out of my road. I guess your Chief will fix her papers for her. That all? Then I'll finish off my mail."

At a quarter to four he met Sonia at the station and greeted her with the words, "Guess you don't give a row of beans how soon you're quit of this township, Miss Dainton."

As they crossed the frontier he threw his cigar out of the window and began filling a pipe.

"Now, young lady, perhaps you'll explain yourself," he said.

IV

In what follows I have for authority the account of O'Rane, given hurriedly and with unconcentrated mind, and that of Sonia, acidulated with the bitterness of a pampered woman suddenly exposed to a torrent of unexpected insult. Sonia's conscience, if she have one, must have been disturbed when her deliverance came at the hands of a man whom her greatest adulators could hardly say she had treated well. She was prepared to make acknowledgment. O'Rane, however, gave her no opportunity.

"Come along!" he said, slapping a cane against his leg.

"David . . . !" she exclaimed in astonishment at his tone.

His brows contracted and he became very still.

"Look here, Sonia," he said. "Let's clear away romance and come to grips. Possibly you don't know that, if I'd been caught on Austrian territory, I should have been shot——"

"I do. It's just that . . ."

"Don't interrupt! There's a war on, and your father's been mobilized, so that I came in his place. From now until we get back to England you will obey whatever orders I choose to give you. First of all, what's the latest game you've been up to?"

Sonia stared at him in amazement. He was lying negligently back in his corner with his feet stretched out on the seat, drawling his words in a tone that a half-caste might use to a dog. She kept her lips tightly shut until he rapped the window menacingly with his knuckles.

"If you talk to me like that, David . . ." she began.

He laughed derisively and watched her angry, flushed face until she turned and looked out of the window to avoid his eyes.

No other word was spoken. As the train wound its way in and out of the mountains, afternoon changed to evening, and the low-flung last shaft of sunlight showed her that O'Rane's eyes were closed and his lips smiling. Sonia became suddenly frightened, as though he were laughing at her in his sleep. Turning away, she closed her own eyes, but the stifling August heat parched her mouth and set the skin of her body pricking.

At a wayside station an old woman hobbled to the window with a basket of grapes. Sonia felt in her purse and found it empty. After a moment's uneasy hesitation, she took a bunch with one hand and pointed to O'Rane with the other. The old woman nodded smilingly and tapped him gently on the shoulder. Still smiling he awoke, glanced round and spoke a few words in Italian: Sonia saw the old woman argue for a moment unavailingly, then shrug her shoulders and extend a skinny brown hand for the return of the grapes.

"No, no! They're mine! I want them!" Sonia cried.

The old woman gesticulated violently and touched O'Rane's arm for support against his countrywoman.

"Have you paid for them?" he asked.

Sonia glared at him through a mist of tears, bit her lip and threw the grapes back into the basket. O'Rane felt in his pocket and produced a lira, which he gave to the old woman as the train moved away from the station. She hurried pain-

fully alongside with both hands full of the largest bunches, but he only shook his head and pulled the window up. The carriage was suddenly darkened as they entered a tunnel; on shooting into daylight the other side, he saw that Sonia's face was hidden and her shoulders heaving. O'Rane knocked out his pipe and composed himself for sleep.

Night had fallen before she spoke again.

"You must get me something to eat, David," she said. "I'm simply sick for want of food."

He yawned slightly and filled another pipe.

"I'm starving," she went on hysterically. "I've had nothing since breakfast."

"Nor have I, if it comes to that," he answered, breaking his long silence.

"You may be different," she replied, covering her eyes with her hand. "You forget what I've been through."

"You forget I am still waiting to hear," he answered politely.

Sonia relapsed into silence for a few moments, but the sight of O'Rane lighting his pipe and settling comfortably into his corner was too much for her.

"I *must* have food," she exclaimed. "I'll tell you, if you'll give me something to eat."

"You'll tell me unconditionally," O'Rane answered lazily.

A wave of passion swept over her. "You brute!" she gasped, springing to her feet. "You utter brute! I'll never tell you as long as I live!" O'Rane took a second match to his pipe, blew it out and threw it under the seat. "You sit there smoking——"

"I'll stop if you like, and we'll run level. I warn you that I can hold out for four days without food and two or three without drink."

The anger passed as suddenly as it had come, and she dropped back on to the seat.

"I think you'll probably get fainter if you wear your nerves out," he remarked disinterestedly.

"I'd kill you if I could!" she muttered between her teeth.

An hour later he was roused by a slight choking cry and looked up to find Sonia sitting huddled in a heap, with her head fallen forward on her chest and her arms hanging limply to her sides. Pulling out his watch, he looked at her for a few moments, and then observed:

"You must relax *all* your muscles for a pukka faint, not only the neck and arms." She made no movement. "I used to sham faint on trigonometry afternoons at school," he went on, with a yawn. "Go flop on the floor and make Greenbank himself carry me out. I assure you it's not done like that, Sonia."

The limp arms gradually stiffened, and she looked round with half-opened eyes. "Where am I?"

"Some few hours from Genoa, I should think," he answered cheerfully. "I've not booked beyond Milan, so as to have complete liberty of action."

She closed her eyes and lay back. "You're killing me, David," she moaned.

He took a paper-backed novel out of his pocket and began to read it without troubling to answer.

The capitulation took place four hours later, when the dawn came stealing in at the window and illumined the dusty carriage with its cold grey light. Sonia raised a tear-stained face, and with swollen, parched lips begged for mercy. O'Rane lifted his suitcase from the rack and slowly unlocked it.

"This is unconditional?" he asked.

She nodded.

"You will do as I tell you as long as I find it worth while to give you orders?"

"Don't make me do anything horrid!"

He locked the suitcase and replaced it in the rack. Sonia looked at him for a moment without understanding and then burst into convulsive weeping.

"I can't bear it! I can't bear it any longer!" she sobbed. "You're torturing me! I'll do what*ever* you want!"

O'Rane smiled and lifted down the case once more.

"I haven't laid a finger on you," he remarked contemptuously. "I haven't spoken a dozen sentences. You've just had eighteen hours without food and eleven in my agreeable company. And you're broken! And you thought to measure wills with me! Have some food—and a drink. It's weak brandy and water. Not too much or your pride'll get the better of you, to say nothing of indigestion."

He handed her bread and a wing of chicken, which she ate ravenously in her fingers; then hard-boiled eggs and a piece of cheese.

"Say 'Thank you,'" he commanded at the end. She murmured something inaudible. "Clearly!" She repeated

the words. "That's better. Now I'll start my breakfast, and you shall entertain me by telling the full and true account of your latest scrape. And after that I'll tell you what I'm going to do with you. Fire away."

He began a leisurely, nonchalant meal, but Sonia made no sound.

"I'm waiting," he was prompt to remind her.

She sat with folded arms, bidding him a silent defiance.

"Sonia, I'm not disobeyed—much," he told her very quietly.

Her brave attempt to look unwaveringly into his purposeful black eyes broke down precipitately.

"I'll tell you!" she promised breathlessly, and, as he resumed his breakfast, smiling, "You can see how you like it, you brute!"

I have often thought over the story she told him without ever quite understanding its spirit. There was no longer the old endeavour to shock for the sake of shocking, but something more angry and bitter, as though she were matching his account of the risk he had undergone in reaching her by proving him a fool for his pains. The effect on his mind was shown in his brief, acid comment at the end:

"And men have been ready to spoil their lives for you!"

"I didn't think you'd like it when you got it," she taunted.

O'Rane looked wistfully out of the window.

"And I've dreamed of you in five continents," he murmured half to himself. "Lying out under the stars in Mexico, just whispering your name in very hunger. . . . Ever since I was a boy at Oxford, and you promised . . . you promised . . ."

"You've waited patiently for your revenge, David."

"You weren't taking risks even then," he retorted. "*Toujours le grand jeu.* I could always get men to trust me . . . put their lives in my hand. *They* knew I shouldn't let them down, but you could never stand your soul being seen naked . . ."

She broke in violently on his meditation.

"Why did you ever come here?" she demanded.

"Because I've lived in a world of dreams, Sonia. I've been poor and rich and poor again—that made no difference—but I fancied that one day you would need me——"

"You've insulted me . . .!" she interrupted.

He laid his hand gently on her knee.

"If anyone had had the courage ten years ago to tell you what I've told you to-day, instead of spoiling you, petting you, filling your head with the idea that the whole world revolved round you——"

"Yet—you came out here——!" she put in mockingly, brushing his hand disdainfully away.

"There's a war on, Sonia," he answered. "Your old world's been blotted out. You'll find everything changed when you get back, and no niche for you to fill. Everything we value or love will have to be sacrificed, and you've never sacrificed anything but your friends. I came out here because I hoped the war would have sobered you. It might have been the making of you. It might have made a woman of you."

Nine days later they parted at Paddington. From Genoa they had taken an Italian boat to Marseilles, changed to a P. & O. and landed at Plymouth. Lady Dainton was engaged in turning Crowley Court into a hospital, and at Sir Roger's request I met Sonia, gave her a late luncheon, notified the Foreign Office of her return and put her on board a Melton train at Waterloo.

She was communicative with the volubility of an aggrieved woman, and more than one passer-by on the platform looked curiously at her flushed face and indignant brown eyes.

"No, I decline to be mixed up in the quarrel," I told her, when she invited my opinion of O'Rane.

"Then you agree with him?"

"I have no views, Sonia," I said.

"That's nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I've told you what he said, and it's either true or not true." Her voice suddenly softened and became pleading. "George, I'm—I'm *not* like that."

"I *will* not discuss you with yourself," I said. "Generally speaking, I don't understand the modern Society girl——"

"And you hate her!" Sonia put in.

I said nothing.

"Why?" she pursued.

"Too much of an *arrivisté*," I hazarded. "Too much on the make, too keen to get there."

She pondered my criticism deliberately.

"You were born there," she observed, as though explaining a distinction I ought to have appreciated.

"My dear Sonia, a bachelor has no social status," I said.

"Whether he's received or not depends on the possession of respectable dress-clothes."

"Beryl was born there," she continued, following her own line of thought. "So was Violet, or Amy Loring. If you're the daughter of a successful brewer, packed off to London to get married——"

"This is morbid," I interrupted, looking at my watch to see how much longer we were to be kept waiting.

"That little cur talked as if it were my *fault*!" she cried in shrill excitement.

I found a note at the Admiralty to say that O'Rane would be grateful for a bed in Princes Gardens as the Gray's Inn rooms had been let. During dinner that night he made no mention of his Austrian expedition and seemed only interested to learn how the war had progressed in his absence. We discussed the changes in the War Office and Cabinet, speculated on the untried Haldane Expeditionary Force and came back eternally to the reputed infallibility of German arms. No man alive at that time will forget his thrill on reading that the massed might of Germany had been brought to a standstill before Liége. The engine of destruction was so perfect that a single pebble might seemingly throw it out of gear, and with the crude optimism of those early days we talked of the Russians hammering at the gates of East Prussia and the possibility of peace by Christmas.

O'Rane, unwontedly taciturn and out of humour, laughed scornfully.

"A five months' war when Germany knows that if she fails she'll sink to the level of Spain? We've got a superhuman job. Every man we can get. . . . I hope you'll forgive me, sir, I'm treating your house as my own and inviting a few men for a recruiting campaign——"

"Go carefully," urged Bertrand. "I suggested you for an interpretership in France or Russia, whichever they wanted."

"I wonder how long they'll take to make up their minds?" O'Rane asked, with a touch of impatience. "I applied for a commission before I left England. I—I can't wait, sir."

"My dear boy . . . !"

"Oh, I know it's very childish, sir," O'Rane answered, with a laugh. "But I'm desperate."

Bertrand, who knew of his financial troubles, raised his eyebrows and said nothing. The next evening we had our informal recruiting committee-meeting and divided the home

counties into twelve districts, pledging each member to gather in five hundred recruits within a week. The Government machinery was slow to gather motion, and patriotism and restlessness combined to make of every man an amateur Napoleon. As I looked round my uncle's dining-room, one feature of O'Rane's committee was noticeable as illustrating a simple philosophy he had held in boyhood. On his right sat Sinclair, whose adherence had been won more than fifteen years ago in the matter of a forged copy of Greek Alcaics for the Shelton Prize; on his left I recognized Brent, elected to an All Souls' Fellowship shortly after O'Rane had retired from the contest; at the foot of the table was James Morris of Ennismore Gardens, Mexico City Gaol and elsewhere. The others I had not met before, but their sole common characteristic seemed to be that at some period of their careers David O'Rane had made himself indispensable to them all.

"I want a week of your undivided time," said the Chairman. "Each one will have a district, a car and a doctor. I want each to raise five hundred men, and you'll find it easiest to borrow a system, which Mr. Sinclair can explain to you, of getting hold of the enthusiasts and making each one bring in another, snowball fashion. You're on strong ground if you're in first yourselves. Is there anybody here who won't help me?"

The house—at full strength—went into committee. With what he described as poetic justice and I preferred to call malice, O'Rane gave me the town of Easterly, which is known to history for its anti-Government riots in the South African War and to the Disarmament League for the flattering reception accorded to five years of peace propaganda. As I could only address evening meetings, when my work at the Admiralty was over, Bertrand undertook to canvass the district by day in such time as he could spare from turning Princes Gardens into a hospital.

"How soon do we start, Raney?" I asked, when the committee was dispersed, and we were walking upstairs to bed.

"To-morrow," he answered. "Five hundred multiplied by twelve, six thousand. Most of them will take a bullet in their brain; you can't begin that sort of thing too soon."

"You're in a cheerful mood," I observed.

"If I could get out to-morrow . . . ! Man, I know the drill from A to Z, I was under fire all through the Balkan Wars . . . and your uncle, in the kindness of his heart, talks about interpreterships! My God!"

"He only wanted to preserve your precious young life," I said.

"You damned fool, d'you think I *want* my life preserved?" he blazed out, with such passion as I had not seen in his face since the first weeks that I knew him at Melton.

V

A recruiting campaign presents sorry studies in psychology. Easterly was the only ground I worked, but I imagine the Easterly types are to be found everywhere. There were hale, open-air men who enlisted because it was the obvious thing to do, over-age men who struggled to circumvent the doctor, and boys who rushed forward adventurous and unheeding as they would have rushed to a race-meeting or polar expedition.

Others reflected longer and advanced more slowly—men with domestic responsibilities who yet appreciated the gravity of what was at stake; men who were urged on by speeches or taunts; and again, and with pathetic impetuosity, boys whose fathers and brothers were already falling in the tragic glory of the Mons retreat.

Slower still came the self-conscious men who could never visualize themselves as soldiers, some so slowly that they never reached the booth. There was an almost articulate struggle of mind with those who had mounted socially until they affected contempt for mere privates and yet saw no likelihood of securing a commission; yet this was to some extent balanced by the readiness of others to sink in the social scale. Many a clerk, who had starved to preserve black-coated gentility, grasped the opportunity of abandoning pretension and a semi-detached villa. "I'm comfortable—for the first time in my life," one of them told my uncle. And there was an appreciable minority of sons with excessive mothers, and husbands with too persistent wives, crowding to the Colours like schoolboys on holiday.

By the time that my canvass started in earnest, the cream had been skinned from the district. Lord Kitchener's magic name and the alarm of the great retreat had attracted the willing fighters, and we were left with some whose imagination was unstirred and others who frankly opposed our efforts. My first meeting was strongly reminiscent of old political wrangles in the Cranbourne Division. I was met at the doors

of the National School by Kestrell, the secretary of the Easterly Democratic Union, who had habitually sat on my platform and moved votes of thanks when I discoursed on international disarmament. Some years earlier he had abandoned an assured livelihood to organize the hotter-headed section of labour in the town. Throughout the week he preached the General Strike and on Sundays performed the office of Reader in the conventicle of a microscopic sect. Frail and passionate, with excited gestures and the eyes of a fanatic, I always regarded him as a man who would burn or be burned with almost equal serenity.

"I'm surprised to see *you* here, Mr. Oakleigh," he remarked, with strong disapproval in his tones as he shook hands.

"I'm afraid we can't talk about the federation of Europe till we've won this war," I said.

He sniffed contemptuously and walked to the back of the hall, where he opened fire with extracts from my speeches and articles, lovingly culled and flatteringly sandwiched between those of the Right Honourable Michael Bendix, one-time self-styled leader of pro-Boer nonconformity, later the chief ornament of the "Little Navy" group, later still—in the first days of August—the Cabinet champion of non-intervention, and subsequently a fire-eating Conscriptionist and parvenu War Lord.

Bertrand and I laboured unremittingly for the first four out of our appointed seven days, but the numbers never rose beyond a daily average of fifty, and I was compelled to warn O'Rane that if he wanted better results he must come and lend a hand. Two evenings later he appeared with Loring, scornful and charged with his new resentment against the world.

"The fellows have been falling over each other in my district," he said. "I always told you I could make men follow me."

"Let's have an ocular demonstration here," I suggested.

"You get up and do your turn," he answered. "I'll stampede the meeting later if you don't catch on."

Our meeting was held in Easterly Market Square round the steps of the Cross as the men returned from work. As there were two new speakers present, I introduced them and left Bertrand to prove for the hundredth time that the war had been engineered by Germany and that the stakes were no less than the whole order of civilization which England repre-

sented. As the speech began, Kestrell moved to the foot of the steps and quoted my uncle's earlier assurances that Germany was entirely amicable: when it was over he invited the audience to say whether the German working man had willed the war and what the English labouring classes stood to get out of it.

"What I says is, it takes two to make a quarrel," he proceeded, thumping a clenched fist into the open palm of the other hand. "'Oo done it 'ere? You? Me? I don't think. Was it Parliament? Ask these gentlemen: you've got a lord 'ere and two members. Of course the workin' man was gettin' uppish with 'is strikes and what not, but that's jest 'is pore misguided way. A bit o' martial law will set that right. You bin given King and Country for three weeks—'ard, and your duty's plain: work for Capital when there's peace and fight for it when there's war. It must be you as fights, 'cause there's no one else. An' you'll fight so that when it's over you can come back—if you 'aven't been killed—and find everything jest as it was before. I know what war is, and I saw our chaps when they came back from fighting for Capital in the Transvaal. You won't get no more of this blessed country by fightin' for it, and you couldn't lose more if the Germans came and collared the lot. Now if some of these lords and members 'ere went out and did a bit of fighting themselves——"

Loring rose swiftly to his feet.

"Of the three 'lords and members' present," he said, "one is considerably over military age, another *has* a commission, the third has applied for one."

"And 'ow soon are you going out?" inquired Kestrell.

"As soon as I can get transferred to a service battalion."

Kestrell grimaced knowingly.

"Do they send lords out?" he inquired, with a wink to his supporters.

Loring, who had been spared the wit and urbanity of a contested election, turned suddenly white, and I, remembering the day fifteen years before when the news of his father's death in the Transvaal reached Oxford, pulled him back into his seat before he could reply.

O'Rane yawned and pulled his hands slowly out of his pockets.

"Dam' dull meeting, George," he observed. "What's the fellow's name? Kestrell? Bet you I enlist him within seven minutes."

"A fiver you don't," I whispered back.

He rose to his feet and slowly swept the circle of faces with his eyes, waiting deliberately to let the graceful debonair poise of his body be seen. The crowd watched him silently, as a music-hall audience awaits the development of a new turn; but he seemed indifferent to their interest and appeared to linger for a yet profounder depth of silence. Then with a quick turn of the head he faced Kestrell.

"Will you come to France with me?" he asked. "I am going as soon as possible, because the men there who are defending us and our women are heavily outnumbered. I don't care who made the war, but I do care about my friends being killed. *You'll* probably be killed if you come, but you'll have done your best—just as you would if a dozen hooligans knocked down a friend of yours and jumped on him. Will you come?"

Kestrell's lips parted, but before he could speak a boy at the back of the crowd called out:

"I'll come, mister!"

O'Rane raised his hand to silence the interruption.

"I am speaking to Mr. Kestrell," he said, "he knows what war is."

"The working man never wanted this one," Kestrell cried excitedly.

"Nobody in England wanted it. But it's upon us, and the working man is being killed like everyone else. Don't you care to help?"

There was no reply, but the crowd moved restlessly. O'Rane glanced at his watch and picked up his dustcoat from the seat of the car.

"There are two lads here, sir," called a farmer from the left of the circle.

O'Rane shook his head and thrust his arms into the coat.

"Unless Mr. Kestrell comes I prefer to go alone," he said: and then to my uncle, "Shall we get back, sir?"

The farmer's two recruits hurried forward, blushing deeply as the eyes of the meeting turned on to them.

"You don't know what war is," O'Rane told them. "I—*have* been under fire, and, like Mr. Kestrell, I *do* know. If every man in this square volunteered, the half of you would be killed and those that came back would be cut about, crippled, blind. You'd have done the brave thing, but a lifetime of helplessness is a long price to pay for it."

"I'll take my chance, sir!" This time the voice came from the right.

"Two—three—four." O'Rane shook his head and half turned away. "I'll go alone and trust to luck. Mr. Kestrell——"

"Oh, damn old Kestrell!"

I could not locate the speaker, but the voice was new.

"He speaks for labour here," said O'Rane, "and, though I've worked with my hands in most parts of the world, I was a capitalist till the war. He says this is a capitalist's war——"

"Ay, and so it is!" burst from Kestrell.

"Then let Capital fight for Capital, and God help the working man who's out there at this moment if the working man at home won't go out and fight for him."

He stepped into the car and caught hold of the wheel, finding time to whisper—

"I've never driven one of these dam' things, George."

There was a convulsive movement in the crowd, and a knot of men ran up to the side of the car.

"Aren't you going to take us, sir?" they demanded.

"There are plenty of recruiting offices if you want to join," he answered, rapidly counting the men with his eyes. "I want all or none and I hoped when you knew your own friends were fighting and others were going out to help. . . ." He broke off and looked eagerly at the faces in front of him. "We should have made a fine show!" he cried, his voice ringing with excitement. "I—I've never let a man down yet, and you'd have stood by me, wouldn't you? We've never had a chance like this before—to risk everything so that if we're killed we shall have spent our lives to some purpose, and if we come back—however maimed—we shall have done the brave, proud thing. I wanted Kestrell on my right. . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders slightly and buttoned his coat, but the excitement in his voice and black eyes was infecting the crowd.

"Never mind him, sir," urged the little group round the car.

With sudden decision O'Rane jumped out and walked to the steps of the Cross where Kestrell was standing. Not a man moved, but every eye followed his progress, and in the silence of the crowded square there was no sound but the light tread of his feet.

"Let's part friends, Mr. Kestrell," he said. "You were

the only one here with pluck enough to speak against this war."

"It's an unrighteous war!" cried Kestrell, two spots of colour burning vividly on his white cheeks.

"Most wars are that, my friend, but as long as the boys I was at school with are being shot down. . . . Good-bye . . . if you *won't* come?"

There was no answer, and the two faced each other until Kestrell's eyes fell. O'Rane's voice sank and took on a softer tone.

"If it's ever right to shed blood, this is the time," he said. "We'll see it through together, side by side——"

"You're an officer!" Kestrell interjected, as a man worsted in an argument will seize on a slip of grammar.

"I'm nothing at present. If you'll come, we'll go into the ranks together. Get another friend on your other side—no man comes with us unless he brings a friend,—and if only one's hit, the other can bring back word of him. Why won't you shake hands, Kestrell? This is the morning of our greatest day."

That night Bertrand, Loring and I motored back to town alone. Until we said good-bye in Knightsbridge, hardly a word had passed between us, but as Loring and I shook hands I remarked:

"Well, you see how it's done? It took ten minutes instead of seven as he promised, but the meeting stampeded all right."

"I've seen it done," he answered. "Seeing *how* it's done is a different thing."

We were all charged with something of O'Rane's electric personality that night, but at breakfast next morning Bertrand set himself to undo the effects of the Easterly meeting in so far as they concerned O'Rane.

"It's all nonsense, George," he said. "A man of his talents and experience, a born leader of men——"

"I doubt if you shift him," I answered. "He's committed to it—like thousands of others who are burying themselves in the ranks because they can't wait for commissions."

"He must outgrow that phase," said my uncle impatiently.

When O'Rane called on me some weeks later in a private's uniform, he would hardly discuss the subject. Morris was now in a Yeomanry regiment, and the purpose of the visit was to ask me to accept power of attorney in his absence, realize the scanty remaining assets of the firm, and arrange what

terms I could with the creditors—at best an extension of time, at worst a scheme of composition. I had the books examined soon afterwards by an accountant, and with every allowance for moratorium and the "act of God or of the King's enemies" a deficit of £15,000 would have to be faced within two months.

"Bertrand's very keen to get you a job where you'll be less wasted than at present," I said, when our business was done.

"He still seems to think I want to come back," he commented scornfully.

"You're one and thirty, Raney, and in full possession of your powers, as you told us at Chepstow a few weeks ago."

"A good deal's happened since then, George," he answered, offering me his hand. "Look here, I must get back to camp. I'll say good-bye now——"

"I shall see you before you go out," I said.

He shook his head.

"I shan't see anyone."

I caught hold of him by the shoulders and made him look me in the eyes.

"What the devil's the matter?" I asked. "You've lost all your pluck."

"Because I've the wit to see when the game's up?" he asked, with a curl of the lip. "I'm broke——"

"You can start again, as you've done a dozen times."

"What for? I hoped once that I might rouse the public conscience and give my whole life to reducing the total of human misery. . . . The one thing I've done in the last month is to gather so much extra food for powder."

"The world will still have to be rebuilt when the war's over," I reminded him.

He wriggled out of my hands and picked up his cap from the table.

"If your uncle's about," he said, "I should like to say good-bye."

I went to Bertrand's room and found him at work with some of the women who were to be responsible for turning the house into a hospital. To my surprise, Sonia Dainton was among them, and I stayed to speak to her while my uncle excused himself and went down to O'Rane in the dining-room.

"I want Mr. Oakleigh to let me help here," she explained. "I must do something, and mother's got all the nurses she wants."

"Are you trained?" I asked.

"No, but——"

"My dear Sonia, he spends his day turning away untrained amateurs."

"But I could do *something*," she insisted.

"I'm afraid it'll be a waste of time."

"But I *must* do something, George! All the men I know are getting commissions, all the girls are nursing or taking the men's places . . ." She paused indignantly, as though I had suggested that she was in some way exceptionally incompetent.

"Stay and see him by all means," I said. "He's only saying good-bye to Raney."

"Is David going out?"

"Some time."

"What's he in?"

"The Midland Fusiliers. If you want to see him again, Sonia——"

The door opened, and my uncle came in with his forehead wrinkled in annoyance.

"It's too late now," said Sonia, with a mixture of relief and regret in her voice. "And in any case I don't know what I should have said."

"You might have just shaken hands," I suggested, as I got up to return to my work.

She caught my arm and lowered her voice.

"George, why did he ever come out to Innspruck?"

"Because he had a good deal of affection for you," I said.

"Then why did he talk like that?" she demanded, with flushed cheeks.

"You know his disconcerting way of telling people what he thinks is good for them," I said.

"*That* wasn't the reason!"

But what the reason was, I have never been told. Sometimes I remind myself that, when Sonia crossed the Austrian frontier into Italy, O'Rane with the world at his feet knew himself to be insolvent. An early draft of the Midland Fusiliers carried him to France in January, before I had time to verify my hypothesis.

CHAPTER IX

THE MAKING OF AN ENGLISHWOMAN

"Then he stood up, and trod to dust
Fear and desire, mistrust and trust,
And dreams of bitter sleep and sweet,
And bound for sandals on his feet
Knowledge and patience of what must
And what things may be, in the heat
And cold of years that rot and rust
And alter; and his spirit's meat
Was freedom, and his staff was wrought
Of strength, and his cloak woven of thought."

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE,
Prelude, "Songs before Sunrise"

I

WHEN my cousin Greville Hunter-Oakleigh went out with the Expeditionary Force, Violet made me promise to write and keep him posted in all that was going on in England. It was not till the end of April that a stray shrapnel bullet sent him to join the rest of his battery, and in the intervening nine months I wrote never less than twice a week. After his death his effects were sent to his mother, and she forwarded me a sealed packet. I was surprised and not a little touched to find that he had kept all my letters—grimy, sodden with water and tied up in the remains of an old puttee, but—so far as I could remember—a complete series.

It was a strange experience to sit down and read them all over again. I had written discursively and promiscuously—anything that came into my head, anything that I thought would amuse him. There was the rumour of the hour, the joke of the day, an astonishing assortment of other people's opinions and prophecies, and a make-weight of personalia about our common friends. So strange did I find my own

words that I would have denied authorship, were it not for the writing. The jokes of the day died in their day, and the rumours endured until they were contradicted : I cannot now believe I ever felt the spirits in which I wrote, or believed the mushroom prophecies that cropped up in the night.

Yet I am glad to have the letters again in my possession. I keep no diary, and this rambling chronicle has to take its place in showing me the things we said and did in the first months of the war, not as we should like to reconstruct them in our wisdom after the event, but as they were thought or felt or done in all our folly and shortsightedness and want of perspective. The old world had passed away, and these letters show me the state of mind in which we sat up for the dawn.

Bertrand and I moved from Princes Gardens to a flat in Queen Anne's Mansions, and the house, used temporarily for the reception of refugees, was gradually transformed into a hospital as soon as we obtained recognition from the War Office. I must insert a parenthesis to express my admiration for my uncle at this time. In his eightieth year, and at the end of a generation of luxurious living, he spent his day raising funds for the Red Cross, and his evenings as a Special Constable in Knightsbridge. Like many another he felt that without incessant work the war would be too much for him.

It is with the coming of the refugees that the letters to my cousin Greville begin. Every morning we looked at our maps to find the black line of the German advance thrust an inch or two nearer Paris : wild stories of incredible cruelties were passed from lip to lip : our flash of hope at the resistance of Liége died away with the fall of Namur. The short-memoried Press told us later that we were too resolute to feel panic or lose heart, but not one man in a hundred believed that our Army could extricate itself from the German grip. By the rules of war the retreat from Mons was an impossibility. We were driven to the outskirts of Paris, the French Government transferred itself to Bordeaux ; some talked of gathering together the fragments on the Pyrenees, others whispered that the French would make a separate peace.

And scattered before the conqueror like chaff or crawling maimed and crushed between his feet, came the population of a prosperous and independent kingdom. Night after night Bertrand and I waited at Charing Cross or Victoria to meet the refugee trains : we watched the crowded carriages emptying their piteous burden and saw the dazed, lost look

on the white faces of the draggled, black-clad women. So the slums of San Francisco may have appeared in her last earthquake : an unreal, nightmare crowd hurrying to and fro with a child in one arm and a hastily tied bundle in the other, while the lamps of the station beat down like limelight on their faces and showed in their eyes the terror that drives men mad.

The Belgian exodus revealed to England one facet of modern war. Recruits poured in by the hundred thousand, and hardly a village was too poor to take upon itself the support of some few of the refugees. We listened to the broken tales of their endurance, and our thoughts went back to the land they had left. For North France was sharing the fate of Belgium : our armies retreated and still retreated. . . . I remember Bertrand pacing up and down the dining-room and repeating the one word, " Men, Men, Men ! "

Then without warning the men seemed found. I left the Admiralty one day to call on my solicitor with a bundle of O'Rane's papers, but, instead of discussing business, he said, " What's all this about the Russian troops ? A client of mine in Birmingham tells me there's been an enormous number of Russians passing through the Midlands. What's it all about ? "

I thought for a moment and then asked for an atlas. We had heard nothing of the story in Whitehall, but the world was apparently humming with the talk of Russian millions, and an army corps or so flung in to reinforce our western troops might save the day. Together we traced a route from Archangel to Scotland.

" What about the ice ? " asked my solicitor.

" Where's an encyclopædia ? " I demanded excitedly.

To our own perfect conviction we established that Archangel could be kept ice-free till the end of August or—occasionally—of September. I left the office and drove down to the Club. On the steps I met Loring in uniform, with a suitcase in his hand.

" Russians ? " he repeated ; " I've just come up from Liverpool. All the traffic's being held up for them. I saw train after train go through Chester bung full of them."

" You're sure they were Russians ? "

" Well, the blinds were down—quite properly. But one train pulled up alongside of us, and a man in my carriage got out and spoke to them—*in Russian.* A fellow who used

to be our Consul-General in St. Petersburg. *He* ought to know."

I went from the Club to the City. The Stock Exchange was still closed, but I found little clusters of men bareheaded in Throgmorton Street, rapidly smoking cigarettes and discussing the great news.

"Brother of mine lives near Edinburgh," I heard one man say. "He keeps four cars, and he's had 'em all commandeered to shift the beggars. They're Russian troops, right enough. His chauffeur swears to it. They're sending half down from Edinburgh and the rest from Glasgow to equalize the traffic. Fifty thousand, my brother says."

"Oh, I heard a hundred," his companion rejoined. "I've got some relations at Willesden, and they saw them. Euston was simply packed with trains, and they were stopping them outside as far as Willesden and Pinner. My people went out yesterday morning about three o'clock and gave the fellows something to eat and drink."

My cousin Greville was given the benefit of the Russian theme with all the variants I could find, and if it served no other purpose it may have shown him how little title the English people has to the traditional qualities of sobriety and intelligence. While the rumour ran, I believed and spread it; and, though the official contradiction came almost as a personal affront, I console myself with Mr. Justice Templeton's dictum when we met at the Club a few days later—"There may have been no Russians, but I've hanged men on flimsier evidence and no doubt I shall hang them again."

And side by side with the Russian myth came the mutilated Belgian children and the German secret agents. On a Sunday morning when I was spending the week-end in Hampshire, word was brought that a Belgian child was in the next village —a child of five with both hands cut off at the wrists. Within six hours the same story was told me of seven different children in as many villages within a ten-mile radius. We were beckoned on from hamlet to hamlet, always hastening to reach that 'next' one where the myth had taken its origin. And when we returned, it was to find that an equally intangible neighbour had found his wife's German maid stealing away under cover of night with a trunk full of marked ordnance survey maps and suspicious, unintelligible columns of figures. That atrocities and espionage were practised, I doubt not: the wild, unsupported stories of those early weeks I take leave to discredit.

From time to time I regaled my cousin with the expert opinions I had gleaned at fourth hand. At one moment Lloyd's were said to be taking a premium of £85 to insure against the risk of the war going on after the thirty-first of March. I invited Greville, appropriately enough, to dine with me in honour of Peace on 1st April. At another time Sir Adolf Erckmann was quoted as telling a committee of bankers that German credit would collapse on 15th November. And once a week a new date was fixed for the entry of Italy and the Balkan States into the war. The definite, circumstantial character of the stories was the one feature more amazing than their infinite variety.

It was long before the financial scare of the early days evaporated. Everyone seemed to reduce his establishment, cut down his expenses and perhaps live in only three or four rooms of his house. There was also a deliberate, if rather sentimental, attempt to live more simply out of consideration for the hardships of men at the Front. The gourmets of the Eclectic Club ceased to drink champagne for a while, and the grumblers gave committee and secretary a rest. There was no entertaining for the first three months of the war, and when I started dining out again towards the end of the year I found much talk of "War meals" and "what we used to do before the war." You would also hear arrangements being made for the purchase of clothes "on the day peace is signed"—as though the pangs of asceticism were being quickly felt.

The personal notes in my letters make melancholy reading in retrospect. Again and again I find such words as, "Have you seen that Summertown has just been killed?" "Sinclair is home wounded." And, though many pages were taken up with the names of friends who had taken commissions in one or other regiment, the list of those who went out never to return grew longer with every letter. My cousin outlasted all our common acquaintances with the exception of Loring, Tom Dainton and O'Rane—and of these three Dainton only survived him nine days.

After reading the last letter in the bundle and reminding myself of our methods of making war, I could not help wondering what was to be made of our strange national character. Our pose of indifference and triviality deceived half Europe into thinking we were too demoralized to fight—and the history of war has shown no endurance to equal the retreat from Mons. Girls who had never stained their

fingers with anything less commonplace than ink, found themselves, after a few weeks' training, established in base hospitals, piecing together the fragments of what had once been men. The least military race in the world called an army of millions into existence; and, while the Germans were being flung back from the Marne, our women had to make shirts for the new troops, and our colonels advertised in "The Times" for field-glasses to serve out to their subalterns. As I sat up for the dawn the old problem which Loring and I had discussed in the window-seat of 93D High Street still presented itself for solution. Liberty and discipline were not yet reconciled.

It was towards the end of November that Loring told me, in the course of luncheon at the Club, that he stood in need of my services to help him get married.

"There's no point in waiting," he explained. "Vi and I have only got ourselves to consider; it'll be quite private. If our date suits you, we'll consider it fixed."

"Is the War Office giving leave these times?" I asked.

"A week—between jobs. I'm chucking the Staff and joining Val in the Guards. It's all rot, you know," he went on defensively, as though I were trying to dissuade him. 'I'm as fit to spend my day in a water-logged trench as anyone out there; and anybody with the brain of a louse could do my present work. Talking of Valentine, I'm coming to the conclusion that he's one of the bravest men I've ever met."

"What's he been doing?" I asked.

"Lying awake at night with the thought of having to go out," Loring answered. "You daren't talk war-talk with him; he's going through hell at the prospect. But he sticks to it. And he'll probably break down before he's been out three days—like any number of other fellows. Poor old Val! I thought it might cheer him up if I got into his battalion." He sat silent for a moment, drumming with his fingers on the table. "I say, let's cut all the usual trimmings—if I get killed, I want you to look after Vi. You'll be her trustee under the settlement, if you'll be so kind; and, if there are any kids, I should like you to be guardian. Will you do it? Thanks! Now let's come and get some coffee."

A fortnight later the wedding took place from Loring House. Lady Loring, Amy, Mrs. Hunter-Oakleigh and I were the only persons present beside the bride and bride-

groom. Loring appeared for the last time in his staff officer's uniform and shed it with evident relief as soon as we had lunched. The honeymoon was being spent in Ireland, and, while Violet changed into her going-away dress, we withdrew to the library for a last smoke together.

"I am now a married man," he observed thoughtfully.

"I see no outward change," I said.

"No. All the same, it *is* different. For example, ought married men to have secrets from their wives?"

"It depends on the secret."

He smoked for a few minutes without speaking and then got up and stood in front of the fire with his back to me.

"You shall hear it," he said, half turning round, "and I'll be bound by your decision. I had a call last night from Sonia Dainton."

I raised my eyebrows but said nothing.

"Vi'd been dining here," he went on, "and I'd just seen her home. When I got back I was told a lady was waiting to see me. I found her in here—alone. We hadn't met since the engagement was broken off."

He paused and turned his head away again.

"I don't know what *I* looked like. *She* was as white as paper. I asked her to sit down, but she didn't seem to hear me. We neither of us seemed able to start, but at last she managed to say, in a breathless sort of fashion, 'You're being married to-morrow. I've come to offer you my best wishes.' It sounds very conventional as I tell it, but last night . . . I mumbled out some thanks. Then she said, 'I want you to do something for me.' I said I should be delighted. She hesitated a bit and fidgeted with her fingers; then she sort of narrowed her eyes—you know the way she has—and looked me in the face. 'I made your life unbearable for two years,' she said. 'I'm not going to apologize—it's too late for that kind of thing. I don't know why I did it; I'm not sure that I saw I *was* doing it. I want you to say you'll try to forgive me some day.'"

Loring paused again and then went on as though he were thinking aloud. "I was simply bowled over. Sonia Dainton of all people! I didn't think she'd got the courage. I couldn't get a word out. She stood there composed, without a tremor in her voice, only very pale and breathing rather quickly—I was nearly crying . . . the surprise . . . the pain, too. . . . You know, George, you can't forget things and people who've been part of your life. . . . I caught up

one of her hands and kissed it. Cold as ice, it was! 'There's nothing to forgive, Sonia,' I said. 'Oh yes, there is!' she answered. 'Then God knows I forgive it,' I said. The next minute she was gone. I found myself sitting on the edge of that table with my hand over my eyes, and, when I took the hand away the room was empty." He turned and faced me again. "Shall I tell that to my wife?"

"No," I advised him.

"I want to do justice to Sonia. I didn't know she'd got it in her."

"I give you my advice for what it's worth," I said.

"But, George, it was magnificent of her. . . . Why mustn't I tell Vi?"

"You oughtn't to have told me. Is she staying in town?"

"I don't know. We didn't have time for general conversation. Why d'you ask?"

"I've no idea. I just felt I wanted to go and see her."

"What for?"

"My dear Jim, I haven't the faintest notion. Call it an impulse."

He looked at me interrogatively for a moment. "No, I'm afraid I can't help."

It was not until the beginning of February that I saw her. I was returning to dine at the flat in Queen Anne's Mansions when I met her coming out into the courtyard.

"What brings you here?" I asked.

"I've been seeing your uncle again," she told me. "Again asking for a job," she added.

"Have you been doing one of these courses?" I asked, remembering that on a previous occasion Bertrand had been compelled to decline her offer of assistance.

"I tried, but it was no good," she answered. "I fainted every time at the sight of blood. Your uncle's going to give me something else to do. Perhaps I shall see you when I get to work."

The hospital was opened a few days later, but I saw nothing of Sonia till the middle of March. The Admiralty kept me employed always for six and sometimes for seven days a week: whenever I could get away on a Sunday I used to sit in the wards talking to the men, but somehow never met Sonia, whose activity seemed to range in some other part of the building. It was not, indeed, till a severe turn of influenza laid me on my back that she telephoned to know if she might come and sit with me.

"Have you been taking a holiday?" I asked, when she arrived. "I never see you in Princes Gardens."

"Perhaps you don't look in the right place," she answered; and then seeing my bed littered with books and papers, "You are surely not trying to write, are you? You'll smother your sheets in ink. Why don't you dictate to me if it's anything you're in a hurry for?"

"Oh, any time'll do for this," I said. "Tell me where you're to be found in the hospital."

"All over the place," she answered, with a rather embarrassed smile.

"I've been in all three wards," I began.

"My dear George, I told you I didn't fly as high as a ward."

"Tell me what you do, Sonia," I said.

She spoke jestingly, but I chose to fancy that it required one effort to undertake the work and another to talk about it.

"Well, sometimes I carry up trays," she said, "and sometimes I wash up. And sometimes—— But really, George, this can't interest you. Tell me what all the books are about."

"I'm trying to straighten out Raney's affairs," I said. "I had no time till I was laid up."

Sonia dropped her handkerchief and picked it up rather elaborately.

"Is he hard hit—like everyone else?" she inquired casually. "Or perhaps it's private, I oughtn't to ask."

"I'm afraid it won't be private much longer," I said. "At least—I oughtn't to say that. I don't know yet."

"You mean—it's a big amount?"

"Roughly, fifteen thousand pounds," I said, referring to the accountant's letter. "I'm going to talk it over with Bertrand, and we'll see what we can do. It's such a hopeless time to try and sell securities, that's the devil of it."

Sonia looked at me reflectively.

"And if you can't raise it, what happens? He goes bankrupt? Everything he's got together in all these years—all gone?"

"That's about it."

"Um." She got up and began drawing on her gloves. "Well, I suppose he'll survive it—like other people. I must go, George. How much longer are they going to keep you in bed? Over Sunday? I can come and see you then; it's my afternoon out. Don't try to write any more. I'll do it for

you. You ought to lie down and go to sleep; I'm afraid I've tired you."

"Indeed you haven't. And I've only got one more letter. I always write to Raney on Thursday."

"Well, I shan't offer to do *that* for you," she said, with a touch of hardness in her tone. "Good-bye till Sunday."

I wrote my letter and composed myself for the night. One habit clung to Raney in peace and war, sunshine and rain: he was the worst correspondent in either hemisphere. Sometimes a friend would report meeting him in Bangkok or Pernambuco or Port Sudan; sometimes a total stranger would bring me a message from Mexico City; sometimes he would arrive in person, expressing surprise that I should wonder what had become of him. I should have pardoned his laxity were it not that like all other bad correspondents he felt aggrieved if his friends omitted to write to him. So I wrote and received no answer: every Thursday half an hour was set religiously aside for him, and every morning for a time I scanned the casualty lists for news of a graver kind.

Sonia was as good as her word and arrived on Sunday in time for tea. We talked at random for a while, and then when one subject was exhausted and I was casting about for another, she remarked without warning:

"I say, we've always been pretty good friends, haven't we, George? I wonder why. I suppose we've always been distressingly candid to each other."

"You've told me some things about yourself that still surprise me," I said, thinking of her account of the motor tour with Webster.

"I expect they'd surprise *me* if I could remember them," she answered, with a return to her old manner. "D'you think you understand me?"

"God forbid!" I exclaimed.

"Well, will you oblige me by not trying to understand what I'm going to tell you?"

"When you're as full of influenza as I am that's not difficult."

She looked at me for a moment, and her cheeks grew very red.

"Look here," she said, "for reasons of my own, I don't want David made bankrupt."

She paused, and I nodded.

"I haven't got fifteen thousand pounds or fifteen thousand pence. And I can't raise it, either. But I can do something

if other people will help. If I find six thousand, can you or anybody else find the rest ? "

" My dear Sonia," I said, " the whole thing's arranged. I talked to Bertrand on Friday, and he's putting up the whole sum."

" The whole sum ? " she repeated, and there was dismay in her tone ; then more hopefully, " But can he afford it ? "

" It's not convenient," I said. " Very few people *would* find it convenient at a time like this, but he can do it."

" But that means he'll have to sell things, doesn't it ? And you said it was a bad time for selling."

I shrugged my shoulders. " That can't be helped. None of us carries thousands loose in his pockets."

Sonia poured herself out another cup of tea.

" He surely needn't sell the whole fifteen thousand," she urged. " I've told you I can do something."

" That only means *you*'ll have to sell, and—forgive me, Sonia—I expect your people have been hit too."

" But it isn't their money, it's mine ! " she exclaimed impatiently. " And I *have* sold already. You say people don't carry thousands loose in their pockets, but I'm afraid I do."

Her hand dived into the bag on her wrist and produced a cheque for six thousand and a few odd pounds. I tried to decipher the signature.

" Who are Gregory and Mantell ? " I asked.

" ' Gregory and Maunsell,' " she corrected me.

" Of Bond Street ? Have you been selling your jewellery, Sonia ? "

" Just a few old things I didn't want," she answered airily.

I looked at the cheque and then at her. She was wearing neither ring nor brooch nor bracelet. Even her little gold watch was gone from her wrist.

" I'll accept the cheque," I said, " with all the pleasure in life."

" There's a condition," she stipulated. " You must never tell a living soul——"

I handed the cheque back to her.

" I won't take it on these terms."

" But you must ! "

" I'm afraid no power on earth can compel me. I insist on complete liberty to tell the whole world, or keep it to myself—just as I think fit."

She looked at me for a moment, and her voice softened.

"I think you might do this for me," she said.

I shook my head.

"Oh, all right!" She walked across the room and bent over the fire with the cheque in one hand and the poker in the other.

I raised myself on my elbow.

"If you burn that cheque, Sonia . . ."

She turned a flushed and angry face on me.

"It's mine. I can do what I like with it!"

"Unquestionably. My uncle also is mine. If you burn that cheque, I shall advise Bertrand to take no further steps to help Raney."

She came back from the fire and stood by my bedside, with an expression of mingled perplexity and stubbornness on her face.

"I think you're a perfect beast, George," she said.

I held out my hand for the cheque.

II

It was at the end of this month or the beginning of April that Loring's battalion went to the Front. They had, like almost everyone else, had one or two false alarms, but this time the order was not countermanded. After taking leave of his wife he hurried up to town and dined with me his last night in England.

"According to the statistics I've got about another sixteen days of life," he observed, as we left the Admiralty and walked along the Mall to the Club. "Second Lieutenants seem to last as much as a fortnight sometimes."

"Then I hope you'll get rapid promotion," I said. "The sooner you cease to be a Second Lieutenant the better."

He laughed a little bitterly.

"My dear George, it's only a question of time. I may get wounded, of course, but otherwise all this year's vintage will be destroyed. You've been snatching at straws of hope—the Russian steam-roller, the Italian diversion in the south, the starvation of Germany, the socialist revolution, the smash up of credit . . . what's the latest? Oh, the capture of Constantinople. That's not going to end the war. You'll only get peace by killing Germans, and they'll kill as many of you as you kill of them. The people who may possibly

survive will be the fellows who enlist about two years hence. If you've got a cigarette, I'll steal it."

I handed him my case.

"You're tolerably cheerful about it," I remarked.

As he paused to light the cigarette, the flare of the match showed nothing but an expression of mild boredom.

"I'm neither one thing nor the other," he said. "I simply don't think about the war, it's too absurd! Millions of men, thousands of millions of money, chucked away in a night. And why? Because Germans breed like rabbits, scamper outside their own country and want still to be called Germans; and we won't let 'em. There's no quarrel between individual Germans and individual British—or wasn't, till they made swine of themselves in Belgium. It's the stupidest war in history. However, we're in and we must come out on top, otherwise our wives and sisters will be cut open. Hallo! here's the Club." He flung away his cigarette and stood for a moment looking up at the lighted doorway. "I wonder if I shall ever come *here* again?"

"Many times, I hope," said I, and with an indulgent smile he accompanied me in to dinner.

As we went upstairs to the smoking-room an hour later he told me—what indeed I had already heard from my sister Beryl—that Violet was expecting a child.

"I hope it's a boy," he said, cutting his cigar with a good deal of deliberation. "They have the best time—or did in the old days. I wonder what your new After-the-War world is going to be like. You're a lucky man, George; you'll have known life before *and* after the Flood; you'll be able to tell the kid what sort of animal his father was." He handed me a match and then lit his own cigar. "Jove, we've known each other a devil of a long time, George."

"And an uncommon good time it was. We haven't seen the end of it yet."

He seemed to think the point hardly worth contesting and paced restlessly to and fro, until he came to a standstill by the window.

"Come here, George," he said, after a moment's contemplation of the scene without.

I crossed the room and looked into the darkened street. A shaded lamp threw its foggy circle of light on to the pavement and house-front of the opposite side. A party of men and girls were walking down the road with arms linked: as they came under the light the left-flank man shouted,

"Left wheel!," and the line swung round on to the pavement and stood marking time before a row of recruiting posters pasted against the wall. Two of the men were in uniform, three in mufti; all were hilarious, and, as the line wheeled back and resumed the march down the street, the sound of an untuneful voice, encouraged by shrill, unrestrained laughter, floated up to the window.

"It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's—right there."

Loring let fall the blind and returned to his chair.

"England at war!" he remarked.

"Try to understand the people you're dealing with," I said. "A million men have enlisted to that tune."

"I'm not complaining. I dislike all popular songs. 'Lillibullero' drove my king out of Ireland, and the 'Marseillaise' drove the Church out of France. Democracy in the ascendant has a taste for songs, and I don't like democracy in the ascendant. But that's all by the way. I'm thinking of the comedy of life—Germany with her 'Wacht am Rhein' prodding her soldiers into battle with a bayonet, and ourselves with our own methods. A pretty scene, you know: five men and four women—all drunk. Three of the men plastered with the penny flags of the patriotic life, two of them actually in uniform and ready to uphold the neutrality of Belgium and avenge Louvain—who'd *heard* of Louvain before it was sacked?—the women all drunk on a separation allowance. And they stand nine abreast, shouting a music-hall song and looking at a poster that says, 'Women of England, is your best boy in khaki?' If you're fool enough ever to fight, I suppose you're doubly a fool for trying to keep some dignity in the business." He sighed perplexedly. "I dare say it's no worse than the 'Wacht am Rhein' and the bayonet—material absolutism against uneducated democracy."

"Is there anything in the world you think worth fighting for?" I asked, as I handed him his coffee.

"Any ideal."

"The democracy won't always be uneducated."

"It will as long as you and I have anything to do with it," he answered. "As a caste we're played out, George, and our only hope of power is to keep people's stomachs full and their heads empty. For God's sake don't perpetrate the hypocrisy of imagining we're an intelligenzia with those

posters in sight. I've been thinking a bit in camp lately, George."

"Do you fire these views off in mess?" I asked.

"To a handful of schoolboys who think war's the greatest fun in the world? No! But it makes you think when you see a pasty-faced clerk dragged from his office-stool, given a chest, turned into a man and then flung across the Channel to be blown limb from limb. I don't think it's worth it unless we've got some ideal—hardly worth praying to be 'slightly wounded,' which, I understand, is the ambition of every man over thirty. I see the opportunity, but I don't see anyone ready to grasp it."

"A lot depends on the length of the war," I suggested.

I had in mind the lessons of South Africa and the incorrigible buoyancy of the English temperament. If the war ended in a week, there would be found jaunty spirits to explain that their victory was won without preparation, all in the day's work, that they had pottered over to the Front to kill time before the opening of the London Season. In their rush back to the old life they would be accompanied by everyone who boasted what he would do or buy or drink on the day peace was signed. A longer war with its swelling casualty lists might chasten the temper of England, or equally it might provoke a Merveilleuses reaction and set men harking back to the fashions of "the good old days" before the Fourth of August.

"It's a gloomy look out either way," said Loring when we parted that night. "Good-bye, old man. We meet in heaven if not before."

Three days later I received a call from Sonia. Since my bout of influenza she had formed the habit of coming in three or four times a week when her work at the hospital was over, and we used to talk for an hour and exchange letters from friends and relations at the Front. On this occasion she arrived earlier than her wont and sent a message that she wished to see me at once. Hurriedly finishing my dressing, I went in and found her standing in front of the fire, very pale and with eyes red with weeping.

"I hope nothing's wrong . . ." I began.

She gave a little choking sob and stumbled into my arms.

"Tom's killed!" she cried.

"Sonia!"

She nodded convulsively. "Father's just heard from the War Office. He wired to me. It was two days ago."

I led her to a sofa and tried to say something that would not sound too hackneyed. Tom and I had drifted apart, but for five years we had shared a study at school, and I knew the loss that his death would bring to the family. The Dainton history, as I read it, was one of successive failures. With the accepted ingredients of happiness in their possession, Sir Roger had never been allowed to live the unobtrusive country life of his ambition, Lady Dainton never quite achieved the social conquest of her dreams, Tom had married a wife who disappointed his parents, and Sonia had not married at all. The only one who seemed to get the best out of existence was Sam, equally at home with his regiment in India and in London, and entirely unaffected by the pretentious schemings of Crowley Court.

"I want you to lend me some money," Sonia went on, as the first passion of weeping spent itself. "I haven't enough to get home, and I want to be with mummie."

I emptied my note case on to the table.

"Have you dined?" I asked.

She shook her head as though the mention of food nauseated her, but I insisted on her eating a cutlet and drinking a little wine. When my uncle came in, she made an effort to calm herself and, as we drove to Waterloo and travelled down to Melton, she was able to speak composedly of the days of twenty years before when we played and fought together in our school holidays.

"You're going to be brave, Sonia?" I asked, as the train steamed into the station.

"I shan't cry any more," she promised, giving my hand a little squeeze.

"And you will give your mother some message of sympathy from me?"

"But you're coming up to the house?"

"You'll both find it easier to meet if I'm not there," I said. "There's a train back soon after one."

She flung her arm suddenly round my neck.

"George, I feel I was always such a beast to him!" she whispered.

A day or two later the official announcement appeared in the Press, and within a fortnight a less than usually belated dispatch gave an account of the fighting in which he had met his end. A British trench had been lost, regained and once more lost. As our troops fell back the first time, Captain

Dainton stayed to assist a wounded subaltern, and it was as the two struggled from the trench into the open that a bullet passed through Tom's heart. Thanks to his assistance, the subaltern, Lieutenant Longton, had regained the British lines, and the name of Captain Dainton was included in the list of recommendations at the end of the dispatch.

Sonia came round the same evening and asked me to accompany her the following Sunday to a private hospital in Portland Place. Longton had been invalided home and was anxious to see any relations of the man who had saved his life. Lady Dainton had already called, but Sonia wanted a first-hand account of her brother's last engagement.

We were unable to add very much to the information given us in the dispatch. It was an affair of seconds—an arm stretched out, a hoist on to the shoulders, a few yards zigzag running, a sudden fall. Longton had crawled back on all fours to his own trench, with a rain of bullets piercing his clothes and furrowing the earth all round him.

"Are you badly hit?" I asked him, when his story was told.

There was a bandage round his head, but he seemed in the finest health and spirits.

"It just touched the skull," he told me. "I think I must have had a moment of concussion. I remember feeling a twenty-ton weight hit me on the top of the head, then a complete blank. The next thing was the feeling that I was being picked up, and I found myself being trotted back with my arms round Dainton's neck. I was perfectly all right by the time I got back to our reserve trench and when the counter-attack started I went along with the rest of them. It was only when we'd been beaten back a second time that I thought I'd better be cleaned up before I got any dirt into the wound."

"Are you in much pain?" Sonia asked.

"I get a bit of a headache sometimes, but I feel as fit as ten men. That's what makes it so sickening to lie here. I want to go out again."

He was a good-looking, fair-haired boy of nineteen, with blue eyes and a ready smile. His face, neck and hands were tanned deep brown with exposure to the sun and wind. He gave me the impression of not having a nerve in his body.

"As you *want* to get back," I said, "there's no harm in my telling you you're the first man I've heard say that."

The smile died from his eyes and his whole expression hardened.

"I want to kill some more of the beggars," he said, "before I can die happy." He broke off suddenly with an unexpected laugh. "Lord! if my father heard me! I'm the son of a parson, you know; I'm supposed to be taking orders some time or other. But first of all I must get level over your brother, Miss Dainton, and another man."

"Who's the other man?" Sonia asked. "I may know him if he was a friend of my brother's."

"Oh, he wasn't in our battalion at all. When we got to the reserve trenches I found him sitting very comfortably on someone else's overcoat: he'd lost his way in the retreat and seemed inclined to stay with us. I didn't mind—we were too much thinned out for that; besides, I couldn't make out if he'd been hit or what, he was staring all about him and jumping at every sound. I think he must have been wounded, 'cause when we started our counter-attack he staggered out and came a cropper over the wire and everything else. Awful plucky thing to do, you know; some of our fellows weren't half keen on attacking—nerve a bit shaken, you know. I gave the order, and for a second or two nothing happened. Then this chap shouted out, 'Come on, you men!' and went over the top of the trench like a two-year-old. The others followed after that, but I couldn't drag them out, myself. The fellow must have been pretty bad from the way he kept going over. I tried to send him back, but it was no use."

"Was he killed?" I asked, as Longton paused.

"I'm not sure it wasn't worse. We got dear old Seven Dials——"

"Got *what*?" I asked.

"That was the name of the trench," Longton explained. "We held it for a bit, and then the Boches shelled us out again. They got hold of this chap, and when we made our second counter-attack that evening we found him hanging from the supports of a dug-out, with his feet six inches off the ground and a bayonet through either hand. Crucified." He drew breath and burst out with concentrated fury, "My *God!* those devils! . . . I was in hospital by that time; I never saw him. If I had . . .! We met on the ambulance train, and he was raving with delirium. I did what I could for the poor brute. . . . He was too bad; I couldn't make out what he wanted." He sat up in bed with blazing eyes, as the picture repainted itself in his memory, then with a sudden shiver seemed to recall where he was. "I'm sorry, Miss Dainton. These are the things one's

supposed to forget when one comes back to England. But—well, it might have been me but for your brother, and I'm going to make somebody pay for it."

"But—what happened to him?" Sonia asked, with horror in her eyes. "Where is he?"

Longton shook his head.

"I should think it's long odds he's dead. All the way back to Boulogne he was raving . . . oh, Lord! Here comes the sister! It's all right, Sister; I'm not getting excited!"

Sonia bade him good-bye and clutched my arm until we got out into the street.

III

As soon as Longton was well enough to be allowed out of hospital, I arranged one or two small parties to keep him amused till the time came for his next medical board. Sonia would not dine in public so soon after her brother's death, but we all met on one occasion at the flat, on another I took Longton to the Carlton, and on yet another Bertrand insisted on our both dining with him at the Club and spending the evening at a music-hall.

Longton enjoyed everything and was only disappointed because I sent him home to bed each night at eleven-thirty instead of going on to a night club. I cannot say that a trying day's work at the Admiralty in the middle of a war is the best or even a good preparation for appreciating the lighter relaxations of London. Frankly, I was not sorry when Longton, with a wry face, departed to the parental vicarage in Worcestershire.

It was Bertrand who seemed to derive the most lasting, if also the grimmest, satisfaction from our bout of mild dissipation.

"When the Devil was sick, the Devil a monk would be," he murmured, as we put Longton into a taxi on the last night and dispatched him to Paddington. "August to April. The war's only been going on eight months, George."

"'Only'?"

"The Devil's almost well again. I don't see him ordering his cowl and sandals."

I knew quite well what he meant, for in the first week of August we had dined together at the Eclectic Club and marvelled at the new spirit of uncomplaining frugality in unexpected quarters. By April the grumblers grumbled again

and no longer attempted to live as simply as soldiers under fire.

"We were quite sorry for the Belgians," my uncle went on. "We couldn't do too much for them; they were the one topic of conversation——"

"They're still that," I said.

"Yes. Women who have not seen their husbands killed or their daughters violated can always raise a laugh by saying, 'How are *your* Belgian atrocities getting on? I *can't* get my creatures to take baths.'" Bertrand heaved a sigh. "So the great nations of the world help the weak. I'm glad they keep the streets darkened—we must have something to remind us we're at war. And of course we can't get alcohol after ten."

"Unless you know the manager personally," I said, "or call it by another name."

Bertrand linked his arm in mine and leaned on my shoulder.

"George, there are moments when I think we deserve to be beaten," he said. 'Not the fellows who are fighting—they ought to win, they *will* win. But it would be a rough-and-ready poetic justice if they marched to Berlin to find the German Army had gone up in air-ships and was wiping out the people at home. I wouldn't mind driving about with a light to show 'em where to go. We'd clear out a few politicians first—fellows who are trying to grab Cabinet rank out of the turmoil of the war, other fellows who are using the war as an excuse for fomenting some dirty conspiracy to attack a class or push a nostrum thrice-damned in times of peace. And we'd clear out the Press. And the strike leaders. And the women who flutter about in Red Cross uniforms and high-heeled patent leather shoes seeking whom they may devour."

"I could spare the Erckmann group," I added.

"It takes more than a war to drive *them* out of the limelight," said my uncle. "I had supper at the Empire Hotel the other night, and they were all there—Erckmann (by the way, he calls himself Erskine now) and Mrs. Welman and that fellow Pennington *et illud genus omne.*"

"I thought they were running a hospital near Boulogne," I said. "There was some scandal or other in connexion with it."

Bertrand nodded. "The authorities don't allow anybody to go to it now, so there's nothing for the promoters to do but come back to England. I met Mrs. Welman as I was putting on my coat, and she said, 'Isn't this war dreadful?

There'll be no Season this year.' I said to her, 'Mrs. Welman, the saddest thing about this war is the number of people who haven't been killed.'"

As we turned into St. James's Park, Bertrand paused and swept his arm demonstratively round.

"Little has been left of the London I knew as a boy," he said—"or of the England, or the world, for that matter. It's all changed—except Man. I'm old, George: devilish near eighty. Half a century ago, when I was your age, I used to think we were moving slowly upwards; our laws, our sports, our whole attitude of mind, everything seemed to be becoming more humane. Bless my soul! I went to cock-fights when I was a youngster! And I've seen men hanged in public outside Newgate. . . . When the war came I watched my ideals being blown away like cobwebs over the mouth of a gun. . . . I—I outgrew that phase. And though there was a reaction and I thought I saw the country sobering, hang me if I haven't outgrown that phase too! If we non-combatants can't keep the promises we made to ourselves eight short months ago . . . is it only want of imagination, George? . . . There's but one person I see much whose life has been changed by the war—and I don't know how long it will last there. You know your friend Miss Dainton washes saucepans and cleans grates?"

"And a number of other things," I said

"Her brother's death——"

"It began before that, Bertrand."

"I believe it did. She's got pluck, that girl, I shall be sorry to lose her."

"Is she leaving the hospital?"

He nodded.

"She's strained her heart. Nothing serious, but she's got to rest. As soon as I can get someone to take her place she's leaving me. Well, she's the one and pretty well the only one. George, I can't believe the people of this country is the rotten stuff it pretends to be!"

CHAPTER X

AMID THE BLAZE OF NOON

" In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbow'd."
W. E. HENLEY, " Invictus "

I

TOWARDS the end of April it occurred to me that Burgess might like a short account of Tom Dainton's death for publication in the " Meltonian." I gave him the story as I had received it from Longton, and in thanking me for my letter Burgess sent me half a dozen pages of the proofs of the " Melton Roll of Honour." It was a formidable list. Of all my friends from Melton and elsewhere, Val Arden, Greville Oakleigh and Loring were still untouched ; Sam Dainton was in hospital with a flesh wound and might be expected back in the fighting line in eight weeks, and a score of civilians from twenty peaceful walks of life were still in training. The rest would never return—and the war was but nine months old. I could not yet classify O'Rane's fate, but it was five months since he had gone out, and the Midland Fusiliers had been through murderous fighting. I had long since given up reading the closely printed daily " Casualties among non-commissioned officers and men."

" I am afraid," I wrote to Burgess, " the odds are against our seeing him again."

Then I corrected the proofs and dropped them into the letter-box in the passage. My uncle had left the flat at half-past eight for his turn of duty as a Special Constable, and in his absence I settled down to deal with the month's accounts from the hospital in Princes Gardens. It was a cold night, with a wind that sent gusts of smoke blowing into the room ;

I shivered and coughed for a while, but the draught at my back was unbearable, and I was jumping up to close the door when a low voice immediately behind me said :

" You left the door open, so I thought I'd walk in."

O'Rane was standing within a yard of me. Thinner even than when I met him first as a half-starved waif at Melton, white-cheeked and lined, with his skin drawn tight as drum parchment over the bones of his face, but alive and smiling, with his great black eyes fixed on my face, he grasped his hat with one hand while the other rested on the handle of the door.

" I've just been telling Burgess you were dead," I cried.

" Infernal cheek ! " he answered, with a faint breathless laugh. " Steady on with my hand, old man, it's bandaged ! I've just come up from Melton. You might ask me to come in, George."

I looked at him and drew a long breath.

" Thank Heaven, Raney ! "

" May I . . . I *say*, go gently with me ! " He leant against the door, panting with exertion. " Did you come here to dodge me ? I went straight from Waterloo to your house, but there was a reek of iodoform. . . . I've had my fill of iodoform lately. I want you to give me a bed, George, and help me out of my coat and put me into a comfortable chair."

" Where were you wounded ? " I asked, as I took his coat and pressed him into a chair by the fire.

He held out his hands, which were covered by loose chamois leather gloves.

" A bit cut about," he explained. " I'm just keeping the dirt out."

" Was that all ? "

" My only wounds," he answered rather deliberately.

" You look a most awful wreck, Raney."

He was lying back in the chair as though he had no bones in his body, and his weak, tired voice had lost its tone and music.

" I only left hospital yesterday," he protested.

" How much leave have you got ? "

" As much as I like. The Army's bored with me. That's why I went to Melton."

" Do try to be intelligible, Raney," I begged.

He assumed a comical expression of grievance.

"Really, George! You know how fond of me Burgess is——"

"I remember he asked you to join his staff ten years ago."

His lank body became alert with interest.

"You hadn't forgotten that either? They were my first words to him. I marched into his library,—he hasn't had a window open since I left,—seized him by the hand and told him I hadn't seen him since he offered me a place on his staff. 'Which thou didst greet with mockery and scorn, laddie,' he said.

"'Was it a firm offer, sir?' I asked.

"'I know not this babble of the money-changers,' he said. 'The vineyard is full.'

"'Haven't you room for one more labourer, sir?' I asked.

"'Laddie,' he said, 'thy place is set in the forefront of the hottest battle. Wherefore hast thou broken and fled?'"

O'Rane's gloved right hand travelled up and covered his eyes.

"I talked to him for a bit, with the result that I propose to stay with you till Thursday and then go back to Melton as a master."

He uncovered his eyes and looked at me as if to see how I should take the news.

"But how soon are you going back to France?" I asked.

He shook his head slowly.

"I told you the Army was bored with me, George. I've been invalided out."

"For a cut hand?"

He laughed sadly.

"My looks don't pity me, do they? A patriotic lady at Waterloo was quite indignant because I wasn't in uniform. I feel shaken up, George, and if you offer me a drink I shan't refuse it."

He was unaccountably distraught and stayed my hand before I had begun pouring out the whisky. Then he accepted a cigar and threw it back on to the table. I felt that he had been allowed out of hospital too soon.

"How did you get wounded?" I asked.

"In a counter-attack," he answered listlessly. "We were shelled out of our trench, then we got it back, then they cleared us again, and I—well, you see, I didn't run fast enough."

The account was sufficiently vague, but phrase following phrase had a ring of familiarity, and a picture began to form itself in my mind.

"Where did this happen, Raney?" I asked.

"I don't know whereabouts it was on the map," he answered. "If you want to put up a tablet in my honour, get anyone on our front to direct you to Seven Dials."

As long as I could I resisted the memories stirred by that name. O'Rane sat carelessly swinging one leg over the arm of the chair and staring into the fire. As I watched his pale face and nervous movements, a wave of nausea swept over me, and moments passed, leaden-footed, before I could be sure of my voice.

"What's the matter with the other hand?" I asked carelessly.

"A bayonet jab," he answered.

I sprang to my feet as the last web of uncertainty was swept away.

"God in Heaven! It was *you*, Raney!"

"*What* was me?" he flung back, leaping out of the chair as though I were attacking him.

We stood face to face, panting with excitement.

"I heard what happened," I said. "Of course I didn't know who it was. A fellow in the hospital train, after you were cut down——"

O'Rane stumbled forward and laid his maimed hands clumsily on my shoulders.

"Man, you don't want to drive me mad, do you?" he whispered.

I threw an arm round his waist and led him back to his chair. He dropped limply back and sat motionless, save when he wiped his forehead with the back of his glove.

"It's been touch-and-go as it is," he murmured, pressing his hand against his side. "Now and again . . . when I can't sleep, you know . . . and it all comes back . . . I—I—I never know how long I can keep my brain." He stretched out his hand for me to take. "Promise me one thing, George!" he begged, with a graver note in his voice. "You'll never ask me about it or mention it to me? And you won't pity me? And—and—well, you know the sort of thing I can't stand, George."

"I promise."

"It was—just a bayonet wound. You know how I was caught?"

"You were wounded before, weren't you? I heard you went down two or three times in the charge."

He rose slowly and stood before me.

"I've been invalided out, and yet nothing shows? Burgess thought I was a deserter, and the patriotic lady at Waterloo . . . You see nothing wrong?"

I walked slowly round him.

"I may be blind, Raney——" I began.

His face twitched into a smile, and one hand shot out and closed over my wrist.

"Old man, you're almost as blind as I am!" he whispered. "Mind my hand, for God's sake! Yes, I told you at Chepstow we should have to risk everything we valued. . . . Both, yes. . . . Oh, stone-blind. . . . Old man, if—if I can stand it, you can too!"

. . . . . .

That night I sat up by myself waiting for my uncle to return. He was on duty till two, but I could not go to bed without seeing him. O'Rane had retired early in a state of complete exhaustion and dropped asleep almost as soon as he was between the sheets. He would—as ever—accept no assistance. I showed him his room, watched him touch his way round the walls and furniture and then left him. He rejoined me for a moment to complete his tour and find out where the bathroom lay, and we said good night a second time. A few moments later I strolled in to say I had given orders that he was not to be called. The room was in darkness when I entered, and he was unpacking his suitcase and arranging brushes and razors on the dressing-table. It may be to confess a want of imagination, but I think I realized then for the first time something of the meaning of blindness.

Bertrand returned punctually at two-thirty.

"You're late, George," he said. "Hallo, are you seedy? You look as if you'd been seeing a ghost."

"I have," I said. "Look here, I've got a peculiarly revolting story to tell you. D'you like it now or in the morning?"

"I'm not very keen to have it any time," Bertrand answered, with distaste in his tone.

"I'm afraid you must. Raney's back from the Front and staying here——"

"Raney?"

"Yes, and there are one or two things that mustn't be

mentioned before him. I only want to put you on your guard."

"Oh, if that's all . . . drive along; I may as well sleep on it."

"If you can," I said. "You remember that story of Longton's I told you?"

"About the man . . ." My uncle shuddered. "Please don't let's have that again."

"Only two sentences," I said. "The man they crucified was Raney. And the reason they caught him was because he was blind."

Bertrand twice moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. All the vigour seemed to have gone out of him, and his hands twitched as though he had no control over them. I thought I had better finish what I had begun.

"It was the concussion of a bursting shell," I said. "Double detachment of the retina. He wandered about dazed and half mad, got into the wrong trench, charged . . . Well, you know the rest."

My uncle rose slowly to his feet, steadied himself against the table and stumbled towards the door.

"Where have you put him?" he asked.

"I'll show you," I answered. "He's asleep, so you mustn't disturb him, and—the subject's never discussed."

My uncle nodded.

I could have sworn that we crossed the hall and opened the door opposite without a sound being made, yet before I had time to turn on the light, Raney was sitting up in bed demanding who we were.

"We didn't mean to wake you," I said. "My uncle's just come in."

The startled expression passed from his face and left it smiling.

"The last time we met, sir," he said, in the terrible weak whisper that did duty for a voice, "I was once again a self-invited guest in your house."

He held out a bandaged hand in the direction from which my voice was coming, and my uncle clasped it tenderly.

"It's the most welcome compliment you can pay me, David," he said. "When first we met I asked leave to help you in any way I could. I ask again, though I'm afraid there'll be no change in the answer."

No better appreciated tribute could have been offered, and I saw Raney's white cheeks flush with pleasure.

"You don't think I'm done for, sir?" he demanded, drawing his thin body erect in the bed. "They—they couldn't kill me, you see."

"You're only just beginning. Good night, my boy." He paused as though he had something else to say, then laid a hand on O'Rane's head, and repeated, "Good night, my boy."

At the door I heard myself recalled. Raney waited till my uncle's footsteps had died away and then beckoned me to the bedside.

"I want to clear up one thing, George," he said. "That charge, you know. I can't say what your version may be, but I tell you frankly I went out because I wanted to be finished off." He wriggled down under the sheets and lay with his hands clasped under his head. "I don't feel like that now. There's any amount of kick left in me. The only things. . . . Look here, George, give me time to get used to it, to put some side on, you know. I've always ridden a pretty high horse, and it's a bit of an effort to get down and walk. . . . Don't spring any surprises on me, will you? There are some people I feel I can't meet. . . . Let me down gently: you can prepare people a bit. . . . George, I'm not going to chuck the House. Fawcett was blind, and he was a Minister. . . . I'm not going to chuck anything!"

In the morning I wrote half a dozen notes to the people I thought would be most interested to hear of O'Rane's return. The half-dozen did not include Sonia, and I am not in the least concerned to know whether I did right or wrong in omitting her. When we met at the hospital on the following Sunday, she announced her intention of coming back to tea with me. I told her of O'Rane's presence, adding that he was wounded and that the ordering of the flat was no longer in my hands. She inquired the extent of his wounds, and I made a clean breast of the whole story. Sonia whitened to the lips, pressed for further information and formulated a grievance that she had not been told before.

"You must take me to see him at once," she said, as I attempted no defence.

"He's not always very keen to meet people," I warned her.

"There's something I want to say to him," she answered.

I bowed to the inevitable, and we returned to Queen Anne's Mansions. Sonia waited in the hall while I went in to O'Rane, but there was no sign of her when I returned.

Hurrying along the corridor I found her standing by the lift.

"I'm sorry, Sonia . . . " I began.

"Oh, I knew when you didn't come back that he wouldn't see me."

"He's nothing like himself yet," I explained lamely.

Sonia laughed sceptically.

"He'll have to be all right before he goes to Melton on Thursday. My dear George, I thought you and I were always candid with each other!"

I said nothing.

"Don't bother to come down with me," she begged, as the lift door opened.

II

On the morning after Sonia's brief call I went into O'Rane's bedroom while he was dressing and asked him if he would give her a chance of meeting him before he went down to Melton. It was a difficult overture to make, for I knew something of his personal sensitiveness, but he could not indefinitely plead ill-health as a reason for avoiding her, and—at worst—I wished to be furnished with a new excuse.

His brows contracted when I mentioned her name, and I was sorry to have introduced the subject, for though in mind, body and voice he was rapidly recovering strength, I felt he required still to be handled delicately.

"I'm very busy," he told me, "and if I weren't I see no good in meeting her. To-night your uncle's piloting me down to the House——"

"I think you will be doing her a kindness, Rancy," I suggested.

"I can't afford it."

"It will cost you nothing."

He lathered his face in silence for a few moments.

"George, I once had Sonia Dainton in the hollow of my hand," he said. "I've done my share of handling crowds and getting my orders carried out, and when we came back from Austria last summer I'd bent her will. You've known me some time, old man, and you know I don't placate Nemesis. I've had a good run for my money and I've not done yet, but Sonia saw me climb from nothing to—well, at least, something. I had money and a position—and by God! I didn't need a Bobby's arm to get across the street! You can tell her that!"

I lit a cigarette and waited for his passion to cool.

"Tell her that, George!" he repeated more quietly.

"If you want to insult her," I said, "you must do it yourself."

"I don't want to meet her!"

"Are you afraid to, Raney?"

"Fear isn't a common fault of mine," he answered.

"Are you afraid to meet her, Raney?" I repeated.

He turned round and faced me, his thin body silhouetted by the sun shining through his pyjamas.

"I've not got the courage to hear people say she married me out of pity for a blind man," he answered through closed teeth, "if that's what you mean."

"I have only asked you to see her for five minutes before you go down to Melton," I reminded him.

He covered his face with his hands and turned away.

"Did your friend on the hospital train tell you that when I was delirious I shouted her name till they heard me the other end of Boulogne? I'm flesh and blood like other people, old man; I know my limitations——"

"What shall I tell her?" I asked as I got up to go.

"Anything you like! The flat's yours, you can let in whom you please. . . . No, I don't want to make your position any harder, but the account's closed. I paid for the fun of bringing her back from Innspruck by telling her what I thought of her. It may have done her good. . . . She's got no claim on me, and I don't see that I'm bound to meet her."

As we sat down to breakfast I was handed a telegram from Val Arden, asking if I should be lunching at the Club, as he was home on leave. I am growing used to this as to a thousand other new developments of war, yet I long found it strange to meet a man driving from Victoria in the mud that had plastered his clothes in the trenches, to see him change into mufti, dine and spend the evening at a music-hall, hurry away to the country for a day's shooting and return to his regiment ninety-six hours after leaving it.

I have met a score of friends enjoying this short reprieve, all in riotous spirits and splendid health, full of confidence for the future and treating war and its ghastly concomitants with the cheerful flippancy that makes our race the despair of other nations. And if these meetings had their *macabre* side, I hope it was hidden at least from my guests. Yet I

should be sorry to count the men who have scrambled back, leave over, into the trenches to be killed almost before their feet touch the ground.

"You must come and help, Raney," I said, after reading the telegram. From hints in Loring's rare letters I gathered—what any but a professional soldier might have guessed—that all men are not equally fitted to shoulder a rifle and that more than six months' route-marching and musketry practice was needed to turn a neurotic novelist into a nerveless fighter. Indeed, there are few professions so modest as the army in its assumption that a few months' drill and a shilling manual will make a soldier. "Pick me up at the Admiralty and we'll go together."

"I must call at the bank first." He paused and crumbled his toast between his fingers. "George, in two words, how do I stand?"

Like many questions that have to be answered sooner or later, I should have preferred to answer this later.

"I realized everything," I told him. "You came out square."

He sat in silence, calculating in his head.

"You realized everything?" he said at last. "That's not the whole truth, George. You didn't bring me out square on *that*."

I pushed away my plate and filled a pipe.

"Jove! I must get down to the Admiralty!" I said "There was a small balance against you, Raney. One or two people offered to advance it, and as I had your power of attorney——"

"Who were they, George?"

". . . I accepted the money, which was accompanied by a request that their names should not be disclosed Meet me at one, Raney Good-bye."

I started to the door, but his troubled expression was so piteous that I did not like leaving him.

"I get paid as a Member. . . " he murmured to himself. "Burgess will pay me, too . . . and I shall get a pension. . . . It doesn't cost much to live. . . ." Then turning to me imploringly he cried, "George, you *must* tell me who they were! I must repay them! Old man, you don't want to break my luck?"

With his wonderful black eyes on mine—eyes that I could hardly yet believe were sightless—I was unable to discuss what he was pleased to call his luck.

"The secret's not mine," I said. "But I'll arrange for the repayment."

"Jim Loring was one."

"Perhaps; or again, perhaps not."

My luncheon-party opened uncomfortably, for I had first to warn Arden what fate had overtaken O'Rane and then whisper to Raney that he must exert himself to make the meal cheerful. Valentine greeted me unsmilingly with the words, "They prolong the agony scientifically, don't they?"

"Three months without a scratch isn't bad," said O'Rane.

"But if you're going to be killed in the end?" he asked, spreading out his hands. "I don't mind roughing it, I don't mind responsibility—I'd send a battalion to certain death as blithely as the most incompetent staff officer. I suppose I can stand being killed like other people, but I can't face being wounded and—my God!—I can't stand that infernal, never-ending noise!" He shuddered and was silent for a while. "I'm an exception to the general rule," he went on. "Out there, there's only one religion—you're going to escape and your neighbour's going to be killed. It must be cheering to believe that."

We survived luncheon because O'Rane took hold of the conversation on that word and discussed the new wave of mysticism that was passing over the world. "The ways of God to man" were justified in a hundred different fashions, and from the first week of the war the Book of the Revelation had been more quoted—and perhaps less understood—than at any time since the middle of the seventeenth century. The exegesis of the day contemplated the war as a Divine purge to cleanse Germany of moral perversion and punish Belgium for the Congo atrocities. France was being held to account for a stationary birthrate and the expulsion of the religious orders, and England—*faute de mieux*—shared the guilt of a Liberal Government which had carried a Welsh Disestablishment Bill.

"*Is* there anything below the surface, Raney?" I asked. "I see a megalomaniac preaching universal empire for a generation to people who have some show of reason for regarding themselves as invincible. Will the history books endorse that view in a hundred years' time?"

"A hundred—yes. A thousand—no." He shook his head reflectively. "In a thousand years, when the world's a single State, it will be able to criticize and abolish an institution without going to war. There's a survival of the fittest among

institutions as well as among animals, and all the non-dynastic wars have been challenges flung to an existing order. The Holy Roman Empire was challenged by Napoleon—and couldn't justify itself. Philip the Second challenged the Reformed Church—unsuccessfully. Alexander the Fifth challenged John Huss—and beat him. Alaric challenged Rome, Hannibal challenged Rome. And Rome justified herself once, but not the second time. It's a non-moral system which let the Inquisition survive four hundred years and slavery as many thousand.

> 'Lift not your hands to it for help, for it
> Rolls impotently on as thou or I.'

You've six different civilizations struggling to justify themselves in this war."

My guests walked back with me to the Admiralty, and we parted at the Arch.

"Let me know when you're home again, Val," I said, as we shook hands.

He looked at me absent-mindedly for a moment, then turned on his heel, only pausing to call back over his shoulder, "Good-bye to you both."

O'Rane put his hand on my shoulder and whispered in my ear:

"Make Jim Loring state a case to the colonel and get the boy sent back to train recruits at the Base. I've seen fellows go like that before."

I wrote to Loring that night, and received a reply six days later. Valentine had diagnosed his own case better than any of us, and the letter contained the news of his death. "It was instantaneous, I am glad to say," Loring wrote. "But a stray bullet, miles behind the line——! There's an awful perversity about this dreadful business."

After O'Rane left me at the Admiralty I received a message inviting me to join him and my uncle at the House for dinner. I had to decline, as I could not say how soon my work would be over, and I was preparing to dine alone at the flat when Sonia was announced.

"Come and join me," I said, but she hesitated at the door and shook her head.

"I've dined already, but I wanted to say good-bye. You know I've had to leave the hospital?"

"Do come in, Sonia," I said.

"D'you allow dogs in? I've brought Jumbo."

She opened the door to its widest extent and a vast St. Bernard squeezed past her and ambled up to my chair.

"My dear, where did you get him?" I asked. "I understood the mastodon was extinct."

"Darling, don't let him call you names!" she cried, throwing off her cloak and flinging her white arms round the great shaggy neck. "He was Tom's, and I've had him since—you know. Is David in?"

"He's dining at the House," I told her.

She dropped on to her knees and pulled the dog's head on to her lap.

"Come and look at the new collar, George," she said, crumpling his ears with her fingers.

I bent down and read the inscription:

"DAVID O'RANE, ESQRE, M.P.,
HOUSE OF COMMONS"

"It's the only address I know," she explained. "George I simply can't bear to think of him going off and living all alone at Melton—in the dark. Just introduce them and—and please, George, don't tell him it comes from me or I know he'll refuse it."

"I'll do my best," I said.

In the distance I heard the grating sound of a latchkey. Sonia scrambled to her feet with terror in her brown eyes.

"George, was that the front door?"

It was barely nine, but before I could speak the door slammed and cautious feet crossed the hall.

"Any dinner left, George?" O'Rane demanded, as he put his head into the room. "The House is up, and your uncle's gone to the Club. I was rather tired, so I thought I'd come here." He paused to sniff. "Onion sauce! Say there's enough for two!"

"Any amount," I answered. "Tell me how you got on."

Sonia nodded to the door and telegraphed me a question with her eyes.

"I'd better tell you——" I began.

"Everyone was as kind as kind could be," he said, pulling in a chair to the table and placing his hat carefully within reach. "Everyone tumbled over everyone else to shake hands with me. . . . I say, have you started a dog? I thought I touched something warm and soft. It's all right. . . . Of course, the voices are the very devil at first. Your uncle piloted me in . . ." He stopped suddenly and faced

round to every corner of the room with head thrown back and dilated nostrils. "George, is there anyone here?"

Sonia rose from her chair.

"I am, David."

"I was trying to explain——" I began.

"I didn't think you'd be back so soon," she added.

O'Rane pushed back his chair.

"Why should *you* apologize?" he asked, with a laugh. "I'm afraid I interrupted you without knowing it."

His hand felt its way along the table until his fingers closed over the brim of his hat.

"Where are you off to, Raney?" I asked.

"I'll slip round to the Club," he answered, as he moved to the door.

Sonia laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I'm really going, David," she said. "The doctor says I've got to be in bed by ten. As I'm here, I must just tell you how pleased I am to hear you're getting on all right. Mother will be very glad to see you any time you can come over from Melton."

"Very kind of her," he murmured conventionally.

Sonia turned and held out her hand to me. The line of her lips was very straight.

"Good-bye, George."

She stretched out her hand to O'Rane, but had to touch his before he understood what she was doing. "I have never thanked you for bringing me back from Innspruck."

O'Rane's face, already hard, seemed to grow tighter in every muscle.

"That was before we came into the war," he said. "I've forgotten everything before that."

"You told me then that I shouldn't be able to help anyone——" she began.

"I apologize, Sonia."

"I'm afraid it was true. I can't carry a tray from one room to another. If, in spite of that, I can be of any assistance to you"—he made an almost imperceptible gesture of impatience, but she went on deliberately,—"If I can help you by body or soul in any way—at any time—in any place——"

"It's sufficiently comprehensive, Sonia."

She dropped on one knee and kissed his gloved hand. I had to put my arm round her as we went into the hall for her

eyes were dim with tears, and her whole body trembled. The St. Bernard followed us to the door and looked reproachfully at her as she bent down and pressed kisses on to his broad forehead.

"You've been the devil of a time," O'Rane said irritably, when I returned.

"I couldn't take her through the hall with the tears running down her cheeks," I answered.

He got up and walked to the fireplace, where he stood resting his head on his hand. He was still there twenty minutes later when my uncle came in from the Club.

"Could George give you any dinner?" asked Bertrand.

"I didn't feel inclined for any, thank you, sir."

III

On the day before the opening of the Melton term I went as usual to talk to O'Rane while he was dressing for breakfast. Burgess was allotting him rooms in the bachelor quarters, and there O'Rane's interest in the subject ceased. There might be furniture, carpets and bedding, and in that case he would—in his own phrase—"be striking it rich"; or again there might be bare boards, and in that event his travelling rug would be useful. Someone would lend him a cap and gown, there were shops in Melton, and, above all, he was an old campaigner.

My first idea had been to ask Lady Dainton to see him settled. Then I discovered a wish to go myself and see how my young cousin Laurence was progressing. Finally I produced an old letter from Burgess, reproaching me for never going near the school.

"You do fuss so!" Raney exclaimed, walking barefoot round the room until he found a sunny piece of carpet. "I've got to start on my own sometime. And I've got a dog. Where did Jumbo come from, George?"

"The clouds," I said. "Why shouldn't I be allowed to see my own cousin?"

"Send him a fiver. He'll appreciate it much more. George, I know you want to be helpful, but none of the masters knows I'm coming, nobody knows I've been—wounded. They—they can just dam' well find out, especially the boys. You haven't given me away to your cousin?"

"I've said nothing, but if you're taking the Under Sixth

you'll drop across him. Raney, what in the name of fortune are you going to Melton at all for ? "

He gave a l w whistle, and the great St. Bernard moved slowly forward and touched his hand.

" What does a kiddie do when he's hurt ? " he demanded, dropping cross-legged on to the floor. " I wanted some place I knew . . . out of the turmoil . . . some place where I could rest and think it all out We've got to get a New Way of Life out of this war, George."

" Those were pretty well Loring's last words before he went out," I said. " There's the opportunity if anyone will take it. What's to be the new Imperative, Raney ? "

He caressed the dog for a moment and then said interrogatively :

" The old one, the same old one that I gave you years ago in Ireland, ' Thou shalt cause no pain.' Why shouldn't we revert to the parable of the Good Samaritan as a standard of conduct ? "

" Will you preach it in the smoking-room of the Eclectic Club ? " I asked.

" Can't I preach it to boys before ever they get there ? " he retorted. " This war won't leave us much but lads and old men—and the old men will die. I've been out there, George, and wounded. I did all I could and stood all I could ; I'm entitled to tell people what I conceive to be their duty to mankind—infinitely better entitled than when we chopped ethics at Lake House." His excited voice grew husky. " You mustn't put a match to me yet, George. I'm as right as can be, but I—I—any arguing makes me so tired. And I haven't had time to think anything out yet."

Before leaving for the Admiralty I made him promise to telegraph as soon as he arrived at Melton, and it is perhaps superfluous to add that for a fortnight I had no news of him, and that only a letter from my cousin Laurence apprised me of his continued existence.

" My dear George,"—it ran,—" Your fiver was as welcome as it was unexpected. I thought the family had been broke by the war. This place is much the same as usual, but an awful lot of our chaps have been killed—fellows who were monitors when I was a fag. Two of our dons have left and taken commissions—they were after your time, though.

" Burgess worked off one of his pet surprises on the first day. He gave out after Call-over that Villiers would run the

Army Class and the Under Sixth would go to a fellow called O'Rane—an Old Meltonian. I don't know what reputation the form had in your immoral youth, but we're regarded as rather playful now, so it seemed only fair to let the new man see us *au naturel*, as the French say. Besides, we all felt it was up to us to see what sort of a fellow he was, and how much he knew about the place.

"*Quo jam constituto*, as they say in Latin, we strolled in half an hour late and gave him a very fine 'Good morning, sir!—welcome to Melton!' in chorus. He just bowed and said 'Good morning,' and lay back in his chair. Funny looking fellow—very thin—with black hair and great black eyes that made him rather like a panther. Everybody calls him the Black Panther here.

"*Quibus factis*, which things having been done, he wanted our names and ages and told us to arrange ourselves in alphabetical order. Of course that was simply asking for trouble. Half the fellows gave their Christian names and the other half didn't know whether W came before V, and we fell over each other and there was no end of a shindy. I thought we should bring Burgess up. Suddenly the Panther sprang up and gave tongue. It was rather like cutting a sheet of ice with a piece of forked lightning—if you take my pretty meaning. 'Gentlemen, I dislike noise. It is one of my many peculiarities, all of which you will have to learn. I never speak twice and I am never disobeyed.' My hat! I should think he wasn't! We saw we were up against something rather stiff and we all remembered our names and ages in surprisingly quick time. He didn't bother to write 'em down—just listened and repeated 'em out of his head. Then he arranged the books we were to read this term and then he got on to the holiday-task. I don't mind telling you it was a bad moment, George. Not one of us had opened a book, and, though that wouldn't have mattered with a mentally deficient like dear old Villiers, the Panther had shown his teeth. He asked what the book was, and Jordan told him it was 'Roman Society under the Later Empire.' 'Has anybody looked at it?' asked the Panther. There was the usual pin-dropping silence that you read about in the parish magazine serials. Then the Panther smiled, and I could see he was the sporting variety. He said, 'I understand from the Headmaster we have two and a half hours in which I examine the extent of your knowledge. The allowance errs on the side of generosity. How are we to employ our remaining two hours?'

"Well, Reynolds asked him to tell us about the school when he was here, and Carter invited him to read to us. He said he wouldn't read, but we might talk to him, and he would choose the subject. It didn't sound particularly exciting, and I thought he'd done the dirty by us when he got back to his old 'Roman Society.' It was rather alarming; he looked up to the ceiling and said, 'Nobody knows why the Roman Empire fell. What are your views, Marjoribanks?' Margy had a shot and broke down, and two or three other chaps did the same, and then the Panther weighed in. It was an amazing performance, George; I've never heard a fellow use such marvellous language—all perfectly natural. He wandered about, five centuries at a stride, from continent to continent. He's been everywhere. We'd got to the Mexican Aborigines when the bell went. He told us we could go, but I wanted to hear some more, so I suggested we should lump the break and go straight on. We had a vote on it, and my motion was carried *nem. con.* He started again like a two-year-old, and we tripped along from the marriage customs of the Andaman Islanders to Single Chamber Government in Costa Rica. Then he stopped dead. 'Oakleigh!' I jumped up—'Yes, sir!' 'We have now got to the constitutional devices of the Central American Republics. We started with the decadence of the Roman Empire. Find your way back.'

"George, old son! It was an awful thing to do, but with a little help I floundered through and out the other side. 'Now you will never forget anything you've heard to-day, will you?' asked the Panther. I preserved a modest silence, and then, fortunately, the second bell went.

"We were all going out when he called me back and charged me with being related to you. I admitted it. 'Did you get your fiver?' he asked. 'How did you hear about it, sir?' I said. It was in my pocket at the time. 'You're indebted to me for that,' he said. 'And when you write to thank George for it, don't forget to tell him exactly what you think of me. It'll amuse him and save me a letter. Now, if you can spare a moment, will you pilot me to the Cloisters?"

"He linked arms, and we started out of his room, but coming into Great School I cut the corner too fine and sent him against the Birch Table. I was frightfully apologetic and all that sort of thing, but he only said, 'It's my fault, I ought to have told you that I'm blind.' George, that absolutely bowled me over. You're a swine for not telling

me he was coming, and doubly a swine for not warning me about the other thing. I dropped his arm and stared at him. I've never seen anybody less blind. I murmured something about 'Jolly bad luck, sir!' He just shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. You call it luck, I call it destiny.'

"As soon as I'd taken him to his rooms, I hared back to Great Court and caught hold of our fellows. They were all discussing him, but I shut them up and told them what I'd found out. Findlay just said in his terse way, 'My God!' and after that there didn't seem much to add, till Welby remarked, 'I wish we'd known that before we tried to rag him. I vote we apologize.' No one raised any objection, so Jordan, as head of the form, wrote out a crawling note, and, as everybody seemed to think I knew him best, I was told off as postman. When I got to his rooms he said, 'A note? I shall have to ask you to read it to me.' And when I'd read it, he smiled and said, 'Thank you.'

"We haven't ragged him much since then After all, any chap who can take a form in Homer for an hour and a half without a book is a bit out of the ordinary. Has he always been blind, or is it something new?

"Well, George, I've spent three-quarters of prep. writing to you, and if I go on any longer there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth in first school to-morrow. The Panther will be responsible for the teeth-gnashing stunt. He—the Panther—is very keen on your coming down here when you can spare time from piling up battle-cruisers on sunk reefs or whatever your function at the Admiralty is. If you go over to Ireland at any time, tell the mater I'm working very hard and giving the Panther every satisfaction. Tell her also that according to the papers the cost of living has gone up over forty per cent. I shan't send love to Uncle Bertrand, because I don't think he can stand me as a gift, but, if Jim comes home on leave, you can give him a fraternal shake of the hand from me, and tell Vi to write here more regularly. I *am* her brother, even if she *is* a rotten Scotch marchioness. *A bas les aristocrats! A la lanterne!*—Ever yours (I did thank you for the fiver, didn't I?),

"LAURENCE NEAL GERALDINE HUNTER-OAKLEIGH"

I do not see that my cousin's letter calls for comment.

CHAPTER XI

WATCHERS FOR THE DAWN

". . . If you can make a heap of all your winnings
And risk them on one turn of pitch and toss
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss . . ."
RUDYARD KIPLING, "If"

I

ON the 25th May a Coalition Government replaced the old Liberal Ministry under which I had served for four years. A few people welcomed the change in hope that the direction of the war would be more vigorous and far-sighted. Most of the men I met condemned the new departure, and the detached critics at the Club showed endless fertility in the inferences they drew and the tendencies they traced.

O'Rane had gone to Melton at the end of April, and my uncle and I, dropping back into our former mode of life, saw more of each other than when we had had a guest to entertain. The outbreak of war had infused a strong spirit of party loyalty into Bertrand, and, as the clouds of destructive criticism gathered round the doomed head of the Government, there was hardly a theory or rumour too extravagant for him to embrace. I remember his fiery indignation when the Coalition idea was first canvassed. At one moment the Opposition had broken the party truce and was being silenced by having its mouth filled with plunder: at another malcontent Liberal Ministers were clearing a way to the throne with the aid of assassins suborned from the enemy. The conspiracy—and as public nerves wore thin, conspiracies multipled—in either case was worked out in minute and convincing detail with chapter and verse to support every count in the indictment. I find it unprofitable even to discuss

his theory, because a generation must elapse before the essential diaries and memoirs are made public; and there will be enough guesswork and enough errors of recollection to correct even then. Also, I feel there will be a colourable pretext for revolution when the troops come home, if a hundredth part of the charges be proved to be based on truth.

Apart from the rank and file Liberals who felt the ground had been cut from under their feet, the commonest view was that the Coalition was a London journalistic triumph, desired of no man but foisted on the country by large headlines and hard leader-writing. Erckmann took me on one side in the smoking-room at the Club and laid his heart bare for my inspection. (His intricate and far-reaching business interests had somehow stopped short of newspaper proprietorship; and the 'Sentinel," bantering him on his change of name, had harped with needless insistence on the wisdom of interning naturalized aliens.) In Erckmann's eyes, the Coalition was the latest thrill of a sensation-mongering Press. "These journalists aren't a Mudual Admiration Zociety, hein? They live by addág. Liberal Government no use: zed ub a Goalition. Goalition no good; zed ub a digdador, hein? Digdador no good, zed ub a Liberal Government. Always addág, addág. We're doo long-suffering, we English. If you pud one or doo edidors againsd a wall, pour encourager les audres, hein?"

My own explanation of the change is founded in part on a study of collective psychology, in part on a certain familiarity with the House of Commons. Democracies are volatile and over-susceptible to panic, disappointment and desire for punishment. Erckmann's estimate of the English was so far wrong that the Government's chief difficulty—from the declaration of war, through the strikes and drink problems to the cry for all-round compulsion—lay in its unillumined ignorance how far it could go without arousing uncontrollable opposition.

The Coalition came because Democracy was vaguely restless and desirous of change. The long winter agony of the trenches was borne in the hopes that spring would see a general advance, Germany thrust back to the Rhine, the beginning of the end. Neuve Chapelle showed that, thanks to apathetic organization, the war might be expected to continue at least another year. Democracy showed itself disappointed and angry. What was the good of a soldier at the War Office if this kind of thing happened?

"Something is wanted, there needeth a change." The whisper made itself heard in Whitehall, and, be it through policy, fear or intrigue, the Coalition—desired and loved of none—was brought to birth. "I suppose," said my uncle some months later when his bitterness had abated, "it was the only alternative to shutting down the House of Commons. We've all been brought up on party lines, and it takes more than a war to deafen you to the pleadings of a Whip. More than a Coalition, for that matter," he added gloomily.

So the portfolios were shuffled, salaries pooled and everything went on as before. Erckmann's "sensation-mongers," after attacking everyone else, turned to rend the few remaining figures they had set on pedestals the previous August. The Foreign Office was attacked for failing to counteract the effects of the Press campaign in Europe: the creator of the modern British Army was driven from office for not quintupling the size of that army (I sat in the House through those dreary years when we lisped in terms of small holdings and cheered every penny saved on the Estimates): and that soldier whom the Press had violated constitutional practice to place in charge of the War Office, was given press-notice to go because the war was still unfinished and the stock of victims was running low.

I remember looking back on the first six months of the war with its upheaval of ideals and standards and habits of life: I recalled my feeling in August that nothing would ever be the same again. And in May I was to find that politics and journalism had so eaten their way into our being that even the scalpel of war failed to dislodge them. Unborn Tomorrow must curb its Press or educate itself into independence of it.

While the Coalition was still a conjecture and occasion for blaspheming, my uncle announced his intention of retiring from politics and making over to me the reversion of his seat. As I had done no work for the party since my defeat in 1910 it is more than doubtful whether his nomination would have been endorsed in the Whips' Office, but in any case I had neither time nor strength to sit in the Admiralty by day and the House by night. Such leisure as I could find was already double-mortgaged. I spent my Sundays at Bertrand's hospital, and my evenings in entertaining officers on leave or trying to keep in touch with friends who seemed to have been caught up into another and busier world since the outbreak of war.

It was half-way through May when my cousin Violet crossed from Ireland with her mother and took up her residence in Loring House. Her confinement was expected to take place early in July, and by moving to London she hoped to see more of her husband when his three times deferred leave was granted. Old Lady Loring and Amy came down from Scotland to get the house ready and keep her company, and, as soon as I could find a free evening, I called round to see them and give Violet the message contained in her brother's letter from Melton.

Loring was writing regularly and in good spirits at this time: the life suited him, he was in perfect health, and his company was the finest of any army in the world. He had been given his fair share of fighting, promoted to the rank of captain, and had taken part in the advance to Neuve Chapelle—a circumstance which he never ceased to deplore, as it involved the exchange of a trench "with all the comforts of home" for one for which he looked in vain for a good word to say.

When I got up to go that night, Violet came with me to the head of the stairs and confided to me that she had a favour to ask.

"I want you to go to the War Office," she said. "If Jim's wounded, or . . . or anything, they'll send a telegram to me. I want you to arrange to have it sent to you. For the next six weeks I'm simply going to vegetate. I shall write to Jim, of course, and if he writes to me I shall read his letters. If he doesn't, I shall try not to worry." She slipped her arm through mine. "You see, George, it's everything in the world to me now. And to poor dear old Jim. I'm doing it for his sake, too. It's all I can do. So if anything does happen . . ."

"Isn't the Dowager the right person to take this on?' I suggested. "She *is* his mother."

Violet shook her head.

"She'd tell me. Not in so many words, but I should see it. And the same with Amy. Say you will, George."

"I will, by all means."

"Good boy! You'd better not come again for the present. If you walked in one evening with a long face . . . Amy'll ring you up as soon as there's anything to report."

"Whatever you think best, my dear."

I kissed her good-night and started to walk down the stairs. She stopped me with a whisper.

"George, I'm . . . I'm not a bit afraid!"

"Best of luck!" I said. "Good night!"

Thereafter for some weeks Loring's letters continued to come with fair regularity, but there were times when he had no opportunity of writing, and I had no difficulty in understanding Violet's self-denying ordinance. We had two or three scares in the course of May and June—unexplained periods of time when no word came. Then a hurried scrawl would tell us that Loring had just come out of the trenches and was resting in billets behind the lines—"no time to write the last day or two, and no news even if the censor let it through. You know much more about the war than we do." And then we could all breathe more freely.

One such interval of suspense came to an end on June the 25th. I remember the date, if for no other reason, because it was my uncle's birthday. He had ordered his will to be sent round from the solicitor's and spent several hours, pencil in hand, drafting alterations and working out elaborate calculations in the margin. After dinner he returned to his task, and I was settling down to letter-writing when he suddenly said:

"Will you feel aggrieved, George, if I leave you out of this thing?"

"Not in the least," I said. "As I never expected——"

"Oh, nonsense! We've lived together for years, and I never could find anyone to do *that* before. They're all afraid of me, think I'm going to bite their heads off. I *had* put you down for everything and, if you think you're being shabbily treated, I won't alter the thing."

"I've really got as much as I need," I answered.

He nodded without looking up.

"Then the books and oddments will come to you, and the money will go to David."

"He'll refuse it, Bertrand," I said.

My uncle shrugged his shoulders. "He must please himself—as I am pleasing myself. Other things apart, I couldn't die and leave his father's son . . . George, I'm not comfortable about the boy."

"Why not?"

"I always think that blindness is one of the few excuses for suicide," Bertrand answered.

"I'll go down for the week-end and see him, if you like," I said.

Reaching for a telegraph form, I was beginning to write

when a maid entered and handed me a buff envelope. I read the contents and passed them over to my uncle.

"There is no answer," I told the maid.

The Secretary of State for War "regretted to inform" me that Captain the Marquess Loring was reported as "missing."

"He's only missing, George," said Bertrand gently, laying his hand over mine on the table.

"Isn't that—rather worse?" I asked, but Bertrand had crept away to leave me undisturbed.

I got away from the Admiralty early on the Saturday afternoon and reached Melton at four. In the disturbance of the previous evening I had forgotten to complete my telegram, and it seemed prudent to leave my luggage at the station until I had found out whether O'Rane could take me in for the week-end. I had won clear of the town and was half-way to the school when I heard my name called and looked up to find Lady Dainton driving with a brake-load of convalescent soldiers.

"Are you coming to see us?" she asked.

"Eventually," I said.

"If you can find room inside," said Sonia from the box-seat, "we can drive you home in time for tea."

I wanted a word with Sonia privately, so I suggested that she and I should walk the rest of the way.

"We shall be frightfully late," she said dubiously as she descended from the box. Her rest-cure was doing her little good, to judge from her hollow cheeks and the dark rings round her eyes.

"Never mind," I said. "Right away! I say, Sonia, I'm a bird of ill-omen."

'What's the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"A friend of mine is missing—a friend of Raney and of us all. I was on my way to the school when you overtook me."

Sonia had stopped in the middle of the road and was looking at me with her big, beseeching eyes.

"You don't mean—Jim?" she said.

I nodded.

She gave a half sob. "Oh, poor, poor Violet!" And then, with the calmness that everyone seemed to acquire in the terrible first months of the war, "When did you hear about it?"

"Last night. Violet's not to be told till after the child's born. I felt Raney ought to know—he was our greatest friend."

We walked the best part of a mile in silence. Then Sonia said, " You were coming to tell me too ? "

" Certainly."

" Thank you." Her head was bowed and her eyes turned to the ground. ' I don't suppose you understand, George. . . . A man can't. . . . Oh, there was so much I wanted to say ! "

" I think he understood everything," I said, taking her hand. " From the time when you offered him your good wishes on his marriage."

She seemed startled. " He told you about that ? "

" You're not ashamed of it, are you ? "

We were walking through country that to me was steeped in Loring's personality—the School Cricket Ground where he and I fielded at the nets as fags—the big Brynash Pond where we skated in the long frost of '94, the pavilion in the Southampton Road that marked the southernmost limit of Junior Bounds and skirting the forest the ribbon of white road along which seniors were privileged to tramp on their winter walks.

" You haven't been to the school yet, have you ? " asked Sonia.

" Not yet. But I was thinking of it when you spoke. I remember walking along here with Jim one afternoon in autumn. It was Raney's first term. We tramped through the forest and up the hill till we came in sight of the milestone round the next corner. I recollect there was a figure seated on it, swinging his legs ; and as we got nearer, we saw it was Raney. We'd thrashed him that term as many times as school rules permitted, and here he was calmly defying two monitors of his own house by dawdling a good two miles out of bounds. Poor boy !—there were tears shining on his eyelashes. Yes, he knew it was out of bounds, but it was the only place hereabouts where you could smell the English Channel, and sometimes, if you were lucky, you'd see smoke from a passing ship, and that gladdened the heart of him. I remember him saying it, with a brogue that he'd heard in his cradle and hardly since. Then without warning he became a sardonic little spitfire, oozing insubordination at every pore and drawling in hideous hybrid American. ' Guess I'm up against another of your everlasting rules, Loring.' "

" What did you say ? " asked Sonia.

" I left it to Jim. They seemed to understand each other, and Jim never lost his temper, though I must say Raney was the most consummate little fiend in his first term that I've

ever met. All Jim ever said was, 'Lonely little devil!' He certainly looked it, sitting on the milestone."

We walked on, turning over old memories, until we were out of the sweet, heavy pine forest, and the road curved sharply and ran downhill to Crowley.

As we rounded the corner a giant St. Bernard turned his head lazily in our direction, gathered himself together as though for a spring and raced towards us.

II

"It's a great noise ye're making, Jumbo," said a voice, and I saw that as once before there was a figure on the milestone. "Quiet, sir! Where are your manners?"

The attitude, voice and very tone of dejection were as I remembered them once, and once only, sixteen years before, when—as now—O'Rane had wandered forth to hide his misery from the world.

"I shan't tell him yet," I whispered to Sonia, instinctively stopping short.

She nodded her approval.

The dog's deep-chested bark had turned to a whimper of joyous welcome.

"Don't be heeding him, madame," O'Rane called out. "He'll not hurt you."

Sonia had walked on a few steps, but at sound of his voice she too stopped. Some time was yet to pass before she appreciated the sightlessness of those vivid, commanding eyes.

"Raney!" I cried.

He slid down from the milestone and faced us.

"George! what brings you here? It was a woman's step!"

"I was walking on the grass," I explained. "Sonia's here. She's taking me home with her to tea."

He pulled off his hat and stood with outstretched hand.

"Why don't you come too?" asked Sonia.

He hesitated. "I must be getting back to school," he said.

"Not yet," I urged. "Saturday afternoon? I came down here to invite you to take me in for the week-end. Come on to Crowley Court, and we'll walk back together."

He was without excuse and forced to accept.

"Well, why not?" he asked after a moment's delibera-

tion and picked up his ash-plant from the roadside. "Not the first time we've met at this milestone, George?"

The wind was blowing from the south, salt and wet.

"You can still smell the sea from here," I said, as we set out.

"I can still see them, two a minute," he cried. "The grimy Cardiff colliers, and the P. & O.'s swaggering down Channel as if they owned the seas. And out of the grey into the blue of the Bay. And the Rock towering over you one morning. And then the roar of the quayside in Marseilles. . . . And those parching nights and days in the Canal . . . Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Hong-Kong, Shanghai. . . . The P. & O. sailings are like an ode of Keats. Java Sea, China Sea. . . . Salt and sunshine and great swampy rivers losing themselves in a midnight jungle. . . . The rattle of the derricks, and all the cursing, sweating stevedores in their rolling lighters. . . . The Pacific Coast and the sweepings of God's universe. 'The smell of goats and incense, and the mule-bells tinkling through.' Put me near tar and salt or the throb of an engine."

He stood with head thrown back and the wind playing through his hair, once more five thousand miles from Melton. Sonia looked at him and turned away with lowered eyes. I slipped my arm through his, and we walked on, idly discussing the latest news of the war.

Crowley Court had been changed out of recognition. The bigger rooms were turned into wards, nurses in uniform were hurrying up and down stairs, and there were groups of wounded soldiers in their blue overalls sitting or limping about the garden. Twenty-five new patients were expected that night from Southampton, and the resources of the house were being strained to breaking point. Lady Dainton with a mourning brassard over her grey dress gave us tea, amid alarums and excursions in the old smoking-room.

"Raney and I had better make ourselves scarce," I told Sonia, as her mother was called out of the room for the sixth time.

"Let me just talk to a few of these fellows first," begged O'Rane. "We may have been through the same places."

He jumped up and hurried out of the room with his fingers through Jumbo's collar.

"D'you care to walk back part of the way with us?" I asked Sonia.

She shook her head, and her eyes filled with tears.

"He doesn't like me near him. Didn't you see? He never spoke a word to me the whole way coming here. George—" she hesitated, and played with the hem of her handkerchief—"George, is it true he refused an interpretership on the Staff?"

"He could have had one," I said.

"Well, when he went into the ranks . . ."

"Sonia, don't try to take *all* the troubles of the world on your shoulders. Frankly, you don't look as if you could stand much more."

She lingered for a moment at the window, looking out on to the lawn where O'Rane was sitting cross-legged on the grass, surrounded by soldiers. Then she walked to the door.

"Say good-bye to him for me, George," she said. "I have to lie down before dinner."

I smoked half a pipe and went into the garden. The conversation on the lawn was abounding in historic, blood-drenched names—La Bassée, Ypres, Neuve Chapelle, Festhubert; the men talked with bright eyes, and there was a flush on O'Rane's thin cheeks.

"Is it time to go?" he asked, as he felt my hand on his shoulder.

"There's a fresh lot due," I said.

He jumped up and waved a hand round the circle. "Good-bye, you chaps. You've bucked me up no end."

"Good-bye, sir! Good-bye!" The voices rang with cordiality and almost drowned the "Poor devil!" that fell from a man with one arm and no legs. "Come and see us again, sir."

"I'll try to! Now, George, I'm ready."

We went back to the house for our hats, and O'Rane asked if Lady Dainton was to be found. I said I thought she had better not be disturbed.

"Sonia sent 'good-bye' to you," I added.

"Then we may as well start," he said.

"Unless you'd care to speak to her before you go?"

He picked up his hat and whistled for the dog.

"At her present rate of progress it may be your last chance, Raney."

"What the devil d'you mean?" he demanded fiercely.

"She thinks she's responsible for getting you wounded," I told him. "She thinks you went into the ranks and chucked over a comparatively safe job. . . ."

"On her account?"

"Yes. And she's breaking her heart over it. Is it true?"

He stood silent, without a restive face-muscle to give me the key to his thoughts.

"You want me to tell her it's untrue?"

"Yes," I said.

"Where is she?"

I led him upstairs and tapped on Sonia's door.

"May Raney come in and say good-bye?" I asked.

Then I went downstairs again. "I shall smoke a pipe at the milestone," I called up to him from the hall.

A third pipe followed the second, and for the twentieth time I looked impatiently at my watch, jumped down from the milestone and gazed down the dusty road in search of O'Rane. It was past seven when at last I saw him, striding along with the dog at his side, swinging his stick and apparently guiding his feet only by the flat crown to the road.

"Hope I haven't been very long, George," he apologized, as he drew up alongside.

"It's a beautiful evening to be in the country," I said, luxuriously sniffing the warm scents of the evening air.

"The may's good," Raney murmured half to himself. "I'd give something to see the chestnuts and golden rain." Then he linked his arm in mine. "George, you oughtn't to have sent me back."

"Why, what's happened?" I asked.

I could feel him shivering.

"Oh, it was damnable," he said. "I walked in with the words, 'I've come to say good-bye, Sonia.' There I wanted the thing to end, and I held out my hand to signify as much. She took it and—kept hold of it. 'D'you know those are the first words you've spoken to me to-day?' she said. I suppose she was right. I didn't mean to be rude. She asked me why I went into the ranks. . . ." His voice sank, and he walked for fifty yards without speaking. "Well, I was broke, George. Of course I could have started again, but—my God!—was it worth doing? . . . I told her I wanted to get recruits. It was true, George, the whole thing was real—even that nonsensical meeting at Easterly. The only thing in life then was to get men. Men and more men. . . . And, good heavens, officers aren't immune from bursting shells. . . . Then I said good-bye, and she told me Sam was due out of hospital next week, and would I come over and see him."

His head dropped forward so that his face was hidden.

"I told her I couldn't meet her again. Once I'd asked her to marry me and now I thanked God she hadn't. . . . Then she crumpled up. Literally. And I had to catch hold of her to keep her from falling. . . . She lay there sobbing . . . and I could feel the beat of her heart. 'God in heaven!' I said, 'd'you think I'd see you married to a blind man?'"

It was half-past eight when we reached Melton, and as we were too late to dine in Common Room I sent my suitcase up to the school and carried O'Rane off with me to the "Raven."

"Bertrand told me to ask if you were going to keep on your seat in the House," I said half-way through dinner.

"I'll give up nothing!" he answered defiantly. "You think I'm going to let this make any difference— ?"

"Apparently you told Sonia it would. In your place I should certainly stick to it. Four hundred a year——"

O'Rane stopped me suddenly.

"By next January I can let you have three hundred on account," he said.

"You'd better pay it back direct," I suggested. "Two hundred to my uncle, who'll be mortally offended at receiving it——"

"I can't help that," he interrupted obstinately.

"And the next time you go to Crowley Court——"

"I'm not going there again, George."

"My dear Raney, in common decency you *must*! When a girl sells the pearls her father gave her when she came out——"

"George!"

"And things from her dead brother, and a twopenny wrist-watch——"

"George, *please* stop!" He sat with his fists pressed to his temples. "I'd have sworn it was Jim. I wrote to him a fortnight ago. . . . And as he didn't deny it . . ."

There was a long silence.

"Perhaps he never got your letter," I said.

III

We walked up to the school after dinner and joined the staff at dessert I had gone to Melton to break the news of Loring's disappearance and not to spy the incongruity of O'Rane's self-sought surroundings, but I left without touching

on the subject of my visit. O'Rane seemed to be carrying as much sail as he could stand. Being a Saturday night the masters had all dined in Common Room, with the exception, of course, of Burgess. I found them profiting by his absence to compare the ideal way of running a great public school with the way actually adopted at Melton.

So long as a regimental mess devotes every moment of its spare time to discussing regimental politics, so long as three barristers at a dinner-party of twenty-four segregate themselves to discuss the last appointment, so long as Members of Parliament refight in the Smoking-Room the battle they have just left in the Chamber, I suppose it is not surprising that schoolmasters should widen their outlook and refresh their minds for the morrow by returning to the chalk dust and ink of their classrooms.

The criticism of Burgess hung on a peg provided by one Vickers. (I shall never forget his name and some day perhaps I shall meet him.) It seems that Vickers, in the opinion of his form-master Matheson, was ripe for superannuation on the ground that he knew nothing, learned nothing and was only being injured in health by having to spend his leisure hours in detention-school. Ponsonby, in whose house Vickers spun out his unprofitable existence, disagreed *in toto* with his good friend Matheson. Vickers was slow, without a doubt; a little patience, however . . . And the boy was admirably behaved. And there must be something in the son of a man who had captained Somerset. I was given to understand that the *chose* Vickers had been under discussion for some while and that the antagonists only agreed in condemning the Head.

Burgess, it seemed, had admitted the boy five years before on the strength of a chance conversation on early Church music. He took the weak line that Melton might do Vickers good and that Vickers could not possibly harm Melton; finally he was believed to attach less than no importance to Matheson's reiterated complaints to the senior Vickers that their son admittedly spent evening preparation in reading oratorio scores. On this last point Ponsonby ventured to say that he paid a personal visit to prep. room every night and could only say that he had never discovered Vickers so employed. Had anyone described to me the conversation of that Common Room, I should have dismissed his account as a cruel parody.

Raney had walked up from the hotel in unbroken silence

but I saw him gradually awakening to the sound of the Common-Room talk, where four conversations were always in progress at once and no one waited to hear what his neighbour had to say.

"Send him to O'Rane," suggested Ponsonby. "If he can't make anything of him . . . Hallo, Oakleigh, where have you sprung from?"

"O'Rane is welcome to him," returned Matheson. "But you may remember my contention was that this is a school and not an asylum."

The term was two-thirds over, and I will make all allowances for rawed nerves. But there was still a note of pathos running through the acrid conversation. Sixteen years had passed since I last entered the smoky Common Room over Big Gateway, and I was then being entertained to a farewell dinner by men who seemed to shed their mannerisms with their gowns and become suddenly human. In the interval I had wandered about the world and tried my hand at many things; O'Rane had wandered farther and made more experiments. Yet the Common Room was hardly changed: there was the same round hole in the carpet by the fireplace; the horsehair was still bursting through the scorched part of the largest chair; the tongs, still in two pieces, were still used as pokers.

The men, too, were hardly changed. Only the younger ones came and went—some to headmasterships, some far away from scholasticism. There were a few science men, imported grudgingly by Burgess to tend the growing but still suspect Modern Side; and each one knew his neighbour too well. They knew their work too well and had corrected the same mistakes too long. I wondered what they made of O'Rane and he of them.

As Headmaster, Burgess stood in a different position; with his enormous range of knowledge he would always be differentiated from his fellows. I tried to see him that night before going, but he was engaged with the Bishop of Minehead, who was preaching in chapel next day. We met, however, in the Cloisters after Roll Call while I was waiting for O'Rane to come out of Early School.

"Behold, I have prepared my dinner," he said, as we shook hands. "My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready."

I interpreted his words as an invitation to breakfast and asked whether I might bring O'Rane.

"Priests and Levites sit at meat with me this day," he answered, with a warning glance to the end of the Cloisters where the Bishop was reading the inscription on the South African memorial. "An he be not afraid. . . . Laddie, doth thy memory hold the day when David O'Rane came first among us?"

"I went in fear of my life, sir, for the first term."

"I, too, laddie," said Burgess, stroking his long beard. "Cloven tongues, like as of fire, sat upon him, and he prophesied with strange utterance, saying, 'See here, Dr. Burgess, I propose to come to your old school for a piece. There's my money, every last dime. When that's petered out, I guess I'll have to find more. When do you start anyway, and what are the rules?' Laddie, I spake a word here and a word there. It was not good for a babe to know what he knew. Yet I would not fling him into outer darkness, for he was not without valour."

We left the Cloisters and walked into the sunlight of Great Court.

"You saw him when he came back from France, sir?" I asked.

Burgess struggled out of his gown and threw it over one shoulder.

"Not for long did we commune together," he said, as we walked towards Little End. "A word here and a word there. I knew little but that one of my young men was come back to me with eyes that saw not. The laddies call him the 'Black Panther,'" he added.

"So my cousin tells me. How did you find that out, sir?"

He shook his head vaguely.

"I am an old man, broken with the cares and sorrows of this life, yet—all things are revealed unto me. There was turbulence in the Under Sixth when Plancus was Consul."

"I believe there was, sir," I admitted.

Burgess beckoned with one finger.

"Come and see," he said.

We had walked round from Little End to the front of his house, and he now led the way back through Big Gateway, across Great Court and up the steps into Great School. The folding doors of Under Sixth room stood open, and as we approached, a boy was standing up reading a passage of Greek Testament; O'Rane stopped him at the end of the chapter, and the construe began.

"How does he manage about the written work?" I whispered to Burgess.

"It is read aloud to him and he does not forget. Boy is a noble savage, laddie," he remarked reflectively, looking at the still, orderly form. "They wot not that the High Priest is even now at hand."

We walked down School and waited in Great Court for the bell to ring.

"It was hardly the end I pictured for Raney," I said.

"The end, laddie?" Burgess echoed.

The bell rang, and almost immediately a wave of boys poured headlong down the steps and separated to their houses. In their rear came O'Rane, with his hand on the shoulder of my cousin Laurence.

"Thus grows mankind's ritual," Burgess commented. "The self-appointed guardian guards still, though his services be no longer required." He called my cousin to him. "Laddie, if thine house-master grant thee leave, I pray thee to a place at my board."

On the evening of my return from Melton I called at the War Office to inquire for news of Loring. It was a fruitless mission that I had to repeat every day that week. Sometimes I varied the procedure by calling at Cox's Bank as well, but the result was always the same. On the Saturday I determined to call at Loring House and prepare its inmates for the official notice that I had not been able to intercept on its way to the Press.

I was met in the hall by Amy, tremulous with excitement.

"You got my message?" she inquired.

"I've not been home."

"My dear, it's a boy! At six o'clock this morning. I couldn't get hold of you at the Admiralty, so I sent a message to Queen Anne's Mansions."

"How's Violet?" I asked.

"Splendid. They both are. Everything went beautifully. She's sleeping at present, but she wants to see you."

"Isn't it—rather soon?" I asked.

"It's only for a minute, and of course you mustn't excite her. I mentioned in my message——"

"Amy," I interrupted, "how long is it since you heard from Jim?"

Her eyes grew apprehensive.

"You've not got bad news of him?"

"I've no news at all."

She reflected for a moment.

"It was ten days ago. We haven't heard since then, but so often we get no letter for a week or so, and then three or four come together."

"I haven't heard either." I took her arm and walked to a settee. "It's possible that he's missing, Amy."

"Missing?" She did not yet take the word in its specialized sense.

"It doesn't necessarily mean anything," I said. "Thousands of 'missing' men turn up again. You see, if you get separated from your company——"

Amy covered her face with her hands, and I put my arm round her shoulders.

"You mustn't meet trouble half-way," I said. "He may be as right as I am——"

"You don't think that, or you wouldn't have told me," she whispered.

"I told you because you may see his name in the papers any day."

Her hands dropped into her lap, and she gazed across the hall to the staircase as if she expected to see her brother's tall form descending.

"Jim—Jim—Jim!" she repeated with twitching lips.

"Nothing's known yet, Amy," I said. "I told you because I wanted you to help me."

Slowly her eyes turned and met mine in a dazed and tearless stare.

"What am I to do?" she murmured.

"We must think of Jim's son," I said. "Keep Violet utterly in the dark at present. Lie to her—anything you like—invent news of Jim. She mustn't see the papers, she mustn't see her letters. As soon as he's reported missing in the papers people will write and sympathize. You and your mother must keep up the play till she's strong enough to be told. And then you must laugh at her fears as I've laughed at yours. Missing? What of it? With millions of men stretching over hundreds of miles——"

The dazed expression left her eyes, and her steadiness of voice and touch as she laid her hand on mine showed me that all the courage of her soul had gone forth to battle and returned triumphant.

"What do you think yourself, George?" she demanded.

"It's long odds against any man now out there returning with a whole skin," I said.

She stood up and looked slowly round the great hall, instinct with the personality of its owner. No word passed her lips, but it was the most eloquent silence I have experienced.

"Come upstairs and see if Violet's awake," she suggested. "He's a beautiful boy."

I found my cousin in a darkened room, leaning back on her pillows, weak-voiced but radiant. She pointed one hand to the far side of the bed, where a nurse stood with a newborn child in her arms.

"James Alexander Erskine Claverhouse-Moray," she whispered. "Poor mite! it isn't fair on him. Jim wouldn't miss any of them out, though."

"If I'm to be one of his godfathers, I shan't allow it," I said. "He shall be Sandy, plain and unadorned. How are you feeling, Vi?"

"So tired, George!" she answered, with a sigh. "I oughtn't to be seeing you, but I want you to do something for me. Will you"—she paused, as though the effort of speaking hurt her—"will you tell Jim you've seen Sandy—plain and unadorned?"

I bent down and kissed her forehead. "Seen him and approved of him," I said. "I'll write to-night."

"Oh, send him a wire."

"I'll wire," I said. "Good night, Violet."

She had dropped asleep before I reached the door. As I walked downstairs, Lady Loring came out of the drawing-room and stood waiting for me by the stairhead. Her round face was as placid as ever, but her eyes were restless.

"Amy has told me everything," she said.

I bowed without speaking.

"Would you prefer to tell Violet, or shall I?" she asked. "Perhaps, as Jim's mother——"

"I should prefer you to do it," I said, "as soon as you think it's safe."

"Very well. As regards the boy—I've not sent any announcement to the papers."

"I will see to that," I said.

After calling at the offices of "The Times" and "Morning Post," I wrote letters to ten or twelve people including O'Rane and Laurence. Thinking over the events of the day as I walked home from the Club, I could not help feeling that one of the hardest things to bear in all the war was the courage of the women.

IV

A week or two elapsed before I received any acknowledgment from Melton. Then my cousin wrote a letter designed to release both myself and O'Rane from obligations, to convey an invitation for Speech Day and as long afterwards as I could spare for Raney's tried and approved spare room, and finally to impart a great deal of such miscellaneous information as my cousin thought would interest me or seemed suitable for treatment by an epistolary method in which he took considerable pride.

"This is awful news about Jim," he wrote. "Though I really hardly knew him, he seemed an awful good sort—white all through. The Panther says I haven't gone half far enough. It was an awful shock for *him*, poor chap. I usually roll round after Early School on my way to breakfast, just to read him his letters and the headlines in the paper. I found your fist staring at me, so I told the Panther and read out the letter. If I'd had time to read my own first, I might have let him down easier: as it was, I was frightfully abrupt.

"Well, as you say, there's always hope until they definitely write him off. It does seem rotten luck on Vi, though. She writes a fairly cheery letter in spite of all: I heard from her this morning, asking me to be godfather to the kid.

"I've had a most astonishing time here since last I wrote. I was coming out of the racquet court the other day and haring along through the rain when I bumped up against a girl in Big Archway. I apologized with my usual pretty grace and was hurrying on when she asked me the way to the Panther's rooms. As I happened to be going there myself on the chance of tea, I volunteered to show her the way. With any luck the Panther might be out and then my theory was to invite her to the 'Raven.' It would have been worth getting sacked just for the fun of it, George. She was some beauty—like the picture of Lady Hamilton dressed as a Bacchante. (If you happen to remember it, and if I'm thinking of the right one, the thing in the dining-room in Dublin.) She'd been walking through the rain and wind and her hair was shining with the wet, and there were little baby diamonds on her eyelashes. (Said he, poetically.) I—George, my life is blighted: I fell in love at first sight of her eyes (colour dark brown and an 'out' size) and at the sound of her voice.

I feel I could write reams of bad poetry about her. You should have seen me doing the Walter Raleigh stunt and bagging our Mr. Matheson's green brolly from Common Room passage.

"It took us some time to get to the Cloisters, as I led her round Big School by a *lucus a non* short cut through Chapel and by the Baths. However, we got there eventually, and I knocked at the Panther's door.

"'That you, Oakleigh?' he asked.

"'Yes, sir,' I said.

"'You're just in time to make tea. The water's boiling. Come along in and shut the rain out.'

"'A lady's called to see you, sir,' I said; and waited for him to hand out hush-money.

"The Panther hardly raised an eyebrow. 'Get a move on with the tea, then,' he said. 'What have you done with her?'

"'I'm here, David,' answered My Dream. Curse him! she called him by his Christian name!

"The Panther held out his hand. 'I didn't expect you so soon,' he said.

"'I got your letter this morning,' she answered.

"Well, George, the whole thing seemed a put-up job, and I quite made up my mind to warn Burgess how his young men were carrying on. I poured the tea out and handed round the food and was just making for the door when the Panther called me back.

"'Sonia,' he said, 'I want to introduce a young cousin of George's.'

"'George is one of my oldest friends,' she said. (You old devil, you never told me. Never mind, she called me 'Laurie' before we'd finished.)

"'And Miss Dainton is one of *my* oldest friends,' said the Panther. 'Sit down and continue to preside over the meal. I've not made tea since the days when I was your brother-in-law's fag—eighteen years ago, nearly.'

"We talked a bit, and I poured out more tea and handed more food and then I made another attempt to go.

"'You're in a great hurry, Oakleigh,' said the Panther. 'We've bored you, I'm afraid.'

"'No, sir,' I said, 'but I thought you and Miss Dainton might want to talk.'

"'I should like you to stay,' he said. 'Miss Dainton has called to see these rooms, and I want you to show her

round. There is a question whether she would care to live here.'

"You could have counted me out over that, George. He said it in the most matter-of-fact way, standing by the fireplace with his hands in his pockets. *I* didn't know what to say. I looked at her. She was leaning forward with her hands round her knees and her head bent. Her eyes were full of tears, and I couldn't make out if she was frightfully happy or frightfully miserable.

"'What's your view, Oakleigh?' he asked.

"'I . . . I don't know yet, sir,' I stammered. It was a damned unfair question, George.

"'We were engaged when I was sixteen," said Miss Dainton.

"'Well, what have you been waiting for?' I asked. It was awful cheek, but it slipped out. The Panther simply yelled with laughter.

"'Then—in my place, Oakleigh?' he asked.

"'Rather, sir!' I said. I was warming to the job. I had a look at her, but she didn't seem to mind.

"The Panther thought it over for a minute. Then he sobered down and said very quietly:

"'If you were blind?'

"'It doesn't seem to make any difference to you, sir,' I said.

"George, wasn't that a perfectly innocent remark? The Panther's simply amazing, the things he does. However, I seemed to have said the wrong thing. He clapped his hands to his eyes as though he'd been stung, and I could hear him whisper under his breath, 'Oh, my God!'

"I weighed in with the most abject of apologies, and he was all right again in a minute and turned to Miss Dainton.

"'Am I to take this young man as representative of the world at large, Sonia?' he asked.

"She said 'Yes' very quietly.

"'Oakleigh hasn't shown you round the rooms yet,' he said. 'They're nothing very much. I left my money behind in London, and a slice of my youth the far side of the Atlantic, and my sight in Flanders. If you care about what's left, Sonia. . . . I'm not half-way through my life yet.'

"She got up and whispered something that I couldn't hear, then the Panther turned to me and held out his hand. 'Will you be the first to congratulate me, Oakleigh? I shall want you to write a lot of letters to-night. One to George,

and another to your sister, and any number more. You can tell George to desert from the Admiralty and come down here for Speech Day—and as long as he can stay afterwards. You can tell the school, too, if you think it'll amuse them.'

"I shook hands with the two of them for about five minutes. They were simply bursting with cheer. I wanted to shout or make a speech or something, but all I could do was to pump-handle their arms up and down and burble 'Best of luck!' and on my honour I slapped the Panther on the back and told him to buck up!

"Never in my life did I feel such a fool as when it was all over. I got away as soon as I could and wandered down to the baths. About an hour later as I was coming up to prep. with Marjoribanks we caught sight of the Panther and Miss Dainton starting up the Crowley Road. I mentioned casually that the Panther was getting married and that I'd been having tea with them and that she struck me as being a decent sort of girl. I didn't go into details. It was all such an extraordinary business that I knew that if *I* didn't quite get the hang of it, it was useless to look to a chuckle-head like Margy for light and leading.

"You know, George, I don't believe they'd have done it if it hadn't been for me.

"And now to the fascinating task of turning Marc Antony's funeral oration into Latin Hexameters for the benefit of our Mr. O'Rane. If he gives me any lip about them, I shall tell him that she called me 'Laurie.'

"The cost of living has gone up again since I thanked you for that fiver."

CHAPTER XII

"UNBORN TO-MORROW"

"... the word
Was left upon your unmolested lips:
Your mouth unsealed, despite of eyes' eclipse,
Talked all brain's yearning into birth."
ROBERT BROWNING,
"Parleyings with Certain People: Gerard de Lairesse"

"SOME day, George, when you can spare the time, I should like you to write a little memoir . . ." Violet paused as the car was brought to a standstill by the tide of traffic at Hyde Park Corner. "For Sandy, when he grows up," she went on.

We were in the last week of July. It was almost my cousin's first day out of doors, and she looked frail and sadly young in her mourning. Two days earlier the world had been informed that Captain the Marquess Loring, previously reported missing, was now reported as killed. We were returning to Curzon Street after the Requiem Mass at the Oratory.

"You knew Jim so much longer than I did," she resumed. "I want Sandy to know what he was like at school and Oxford. And his friends. And how he talked, and the sort of life people led when he was alive. Sandy's world will be so different."

"And yet—it's hardly a year since the old world was blotted out," I said.

"A year ago we were all at Chepstow," she murmured. "You remember the news coming? . . . I think Jim was happy, but—we weren't long together, were we?"

The car slowed down and came to a standstill before Loring House.

"May I stay with you till Amy and her mother come back?" I asked.

"Please do," she answered, as she stepped out of the car. Then, as we walked upstairs to the drawing-room, "George, I never thought death would be like this. It's so—big. I couldn't have cried if I'd wanted to. I don't feel I've lost Jim. I feel he's nearer me than ever before. I shan't see him, but he'll be there—there. And I feel I must try to do him credit: I mustn't fall out before the end. Sandy and I. . . . It'll be hard for Sandy with only a mother to bring him up. We shall want you to help us, George."

"In any way I can."

"I knew you would. That's why I asked you to write the memoir. It will be something for Sandy to live up to. I want you to put in everything. Jim was never mean, but any weaknesses you think he had—or prejudices—or silly things he did—I want them all in. . . . George, I wonder what kind of world Sandy's will be?"

"Of Jim's friends only Raney and I are left," I said.

"And poor Raney. . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

"Why pity him?" I asked.

"I can't help it, George."

"Isn't he rather—big to pity?" I suggested. "Pity him by all means if we get no new inspiration out of this war. If there's to be nothing but a wrangle over frontiers, the discussion of an indemnity, a free fight for stray colonies, a fifty years' peace, even—it wasn't worth sacrificing a single life for that. We've reached the twentieth century without finding a faith to inspire it. Some one has still to preach a modern doctrine of humanity."

The following night I went down to Melton for the week's holiday that the Admiralty was giving me. It was the eve of Speech Day, and my train was filled with unmistakable parents. Sonia met me at the station and we drove up to the school together. Perfect contentment shone in her brown eyes.

"I was sorry I couldn't get to the wedding," I said, "but nowadays one is hardly master of one's own time. Burgess married you, didn't he?"

She nodded. "In Chapel. And Mr. Morris was best man. He got ninety-six hours' leave for it. George, I'm jealous of him and I know he hates me, but it doesn't matter. Nothing matters now. We did the whole thing as furtively as we could—only ourselves and mother and the witnesses. It was supposed to be a deadly secret, but when we came out

the Corps was forming a guard of honour down to the Cloisters, and old Lord Pebbleridge turned out the hounds in Little End. It was all that little cousin of yours—including the presentation. . . . George, they simply worship David here."

"Do you wonder?" I asked.

"I call that a silly question," she answered.

There was little room to spare in the Junior Bachelor suite by the time the Junior Bachelor had fitted a wife and a guest into the mediaeval, lancet-windowed rooms in the Cloisters. I was made welcome and comfortable, however, and was struck by the revolutionary changes effected by Sonia in the fortnight she had lived there.

Speech Day passed off uneventfully, with its time-honoured ritual unchanged. Once more the retiring monitors, standing face to face with Burgess at the birch table, received, reversed and yielded up the long school birch; once more the new monitors were handed their symbol of office. Then the roll was called, a diminutive malefactor publicly birched across the back of his hand, and we returned to Chapel. The breaking-up service had already taken place, but honour had yet to be paid to the dead. In a voice that twice quavered and broke, Burgess—for thirty-eight years head master of Melton—read the roll of those who had fallen in the war, every one a former pupil of his own, and seven-tenths the brothers, uncles or fathers of boys now in the school. My stall was next to O'Rane's, and his hand shot out and gripped mine when Loring's name was read out last on the list. With a twisted face Burgess pulled off his big horn spectacles and wiped them, while the organ crashed into the Dead March.

From that evening we had all Melton to ourselves. The housemasters stayed on for a couple of days to dispose of their reports, then collected their wives and children and hastened away to the sea. By the 4th of August, my last night there, only Burgess, O'Rane and Sonia were left. I remember proposing that my host and hostess should dine with me at the "Raven" by way of a change, but O'Rane told me it was impossible, as Burgess had been invited to take pot-luck with us in the Cloisters.

"There aren't enough arm-chairs or anything of that kind," he said, "but you can perch on the music-stool and I'll sit on the floor. And I doubt if we've enough knives or plates, but nothing matters as long as we hurry dinner

through and let the old man get back to his pipe. He never knows what he's eating and never complains."

At eight o'clock the slam of a door echoed through the desolation of Great Court. With one hand smoothing his long white beard and the other thrust into the bosom of his cassock, Burgess strode across to the Cloisters, hardly pausing to glance at the opal sky or the creeper-clad houses around him, their crumbling stone white and warm from the long afternoon's sunshine.

During dinner he spoke of the Germany he had known before the Danish war, when Bismarck was a young member of the Frankfurt Diet, and the callow, revolutionary Wagner lived exiled from the kingdom of Saxony. He discussed the war from many points of view—racially as the effort of a growing nation to secure adequate land and food for its members, economically as a new Punic struggle for markets and politically as the last throw of a bankrupt landed class to win back the power it had gradually lost to the encroaching democracy.

We talked of the war's duration and the probable form of its end, of the redistribution of Europe and the guarantees of a lasting peace. Then O'Rane handed round cigars and offered Burgess the better of the arm-chairs.

"I have been asked to write a sketch of the last twenty years," I said, "for a boy who's been born into the new world. Already I find it difficult to recollect the old. The future—the 'unborn to-morrow'—what's it going to be, sir?"

"We shall be dazed and bruised before an end is made, laddie, staggering like drunken men. Peradventure, if ye speak of the Promised Land, men will arise and stone you with stones, crying, 'Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the fleshpots and when we did eat bread to the full.' I am an old man, laddie, and old men and weary men, broken with the cares of this life, are fain to go back to the things they know."

O'Rane had seated himself on the floor, with his hands clasped in characteristic fashion round his knees, and his head thrown back and resting on Sonia's knees. Burgess turned to him.

"David O'Rane holds his peace," he said.

Raney shook his head despondently. "Sometimes I see it like that, sir," he said. "The country slipping back into its old ways—all the more eagerly for its moment of

asceticism. I see the old politics and the old sport and the old butterfly society of London, and the waste and the cruelty. I see the factions going back to their interrupted quarrel—capital spending its thousand on a ball and engineering a lock-out so as to sell off its bad stocks at famine prices; labour not content with money to burn on league championships and picture palaces, striking because it hasn't had a share in the last advance of profits. Two-and-seventy jarring sects preaching to us from their two-and-seventy pulpits, and still men rotten with disease, still children without enough to eat, still women walking up and down the London streets. And then I wonder if it's worth winning the war."

He jumped up suddenly, walked to his writing-table and began rummaging in one of the drawers.

"Is it anything I can do?" Sonia asked.

"I've found it, thanks." He handed me a bundle of manuscript and resumed his place at Sonia's feet.

"It's fairly legible," he said. "I typed it, but of course I can't check my typing. D'you remember my telling you in April that I was coming down here to think? I've been thinking on paper, and you have the result there. It may interest you if you have time to spare on it."

"Is it for an old man's eye also, laddie?" Burgess asked.

"Of course, sir. I'm afraid you won't find anything very new or profound. I've shirked the hard parts and quietly assumed anything I couldn't prove. I assume we're going to win, I assume our Statesmen can exact material peace guarantees that can't be broken when anyone chooses. I assume we shall move gradually towards greater international spirit and become more peaceful as political power spreads downwards. We were getting there, you know,—George, you know it better than anyone,—approaching the time when the stevedores of Hamburg would see no profit in bayoneting the stevedores of Liverpool. My first chapter is a tissue of assumptions."

"It's going to be a book, then?"

"Perhaps. The second chapter deals minutely with England before the war—an England moving rapidly towards social revolution, as I always maintained—sectionized, undisciplined, unco-ordinated, indifferent, soulless. I've tried to point out the dangers. Are we going back to an Irish question, and a Suffrage question, and a General Strike? I've tried to solve a good many problems—old ones and new,

wages and the relations of women and labour since the war; birthrate and marriage. We shall have them before us in the House, and I want to be ready. That's all the difficult part of the work—the part other people find so easy. Then we get to the really easy part, the thing we can easily do, the moral revolution, the attempt to make the world worth living in. George knows my criterion."

"Can you get it accepted?" I asked.

He sprang to his feet and faced us with arms outstretched.

"With a war like this searing each man's brain and desolating each man's house? A generation has gone to war, and two-thirds of its manhood will never return. A third may come back, and when peace dawns it will light up an England of old men, women and boys. The returning troops who have looked death in the eyes and been spared—were they spared for nothing? Destiny, Providence, God, Luck—even . . . You may choose your name. If they come back when others as good or better are blown or tortured to death, do you suppose their escape hasn't bred in them a soul? For a day and a night they have lived the Grand Life; will they slip back? If they'll die for their country, won't they live for it? Can't you dream of a New Birth . . . ?"

His hands dropped to his sides, and a spasm of pain was reflected in his eyes like a wave of light.

"And those who remained behind," he went on, "the sick, the women, the old men, the boys. It has cost heroic blood to keep them alive. They can no longer map out existence for their amusement, they are in debt for their lives. And the payment of that debt . . ."

He covered his eyes and stood silent for a while, swaying. "I can still see visions, thank God," he murmured. "This war's been going on for a year—a year to-day, and a year ago I said it would demand of each one of us whatever we held most dear. Then I looked on it all as a struggle for bodily existence, but now—unless Death seen so near and by such young eyes is going to destroy all regard for the sanctity of life—now we seem to have a chance of winning our souls back. . . . When I was a child in Prague my father took me to see a picture of Rome in the second century—a street scene with patricians in their bordered togas swinging along in litters, and slaves running on ahead, and priests and eunuchs elbowing each other out of the way, and a popular gladiator being recognized and cheered. There's a blaze of sunlight,

and you can almost hear the thunder of victorious material prosperity. Noise of jostling humanity and the polyglot shouts of an Empire's citizens in the capital of the world. And at a street-corner stands an elderly man, poorly dressed, speaking, I suppose, not the purest Latin to a half-circle of loafers. There is nothing noteworthy about him, save perhaps his eyes and, I imagine, the sincerity of his voice as he tells his tale for the thousandth time, 'Sirs, I saw him with these eyes—my Master, whom I had denied; and they judged Him . . . and nailed Him to a cross . . . and He died. . . .'"

There was deep silence as O'Rane paused. "I—all of us who were out there—have seen it. We can't forget. The courage, the cold, heart-breaking courage . . . and the smile on a dying man's face. . . . We must never let it be forgotten; we've earned the right. As long as a drunkard kicks his wife, or a child goes hungry, or a woman is driven through shame to disease and death. . . . Is it a great thing to ask? To demand of England to remember that the criminals and loafers and prostitutes are somebody's children, mothers and sisters? And that we've all been saved by a miracle of suffering? Is that too great a strain on our chivalry? I'll go out if need be, but—but *must* we stand at street-corners to tell what we have seen? To ask the bystanders—and ourselves—whether we went to war to preserve the right of inflicting pain?"

THE END

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