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ALPHA AND OMEGA

NEIL BELL



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WITH LOVE

"I'M GLAD I MARRIED AND I'M GLAD
MY FATHER DID." — *Anonymous*

First printed 1946



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COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
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I acknowledge this because it is pleasant to pay a customary courtesy. I do not add that they appear here by the editors' permission, for that would be untrue, the copyright being mine. Periodicals nowadays do not claim the copyright of the material used in their pages; certainly not periodicals with a proper regard for human rights. Copyright jumping was rife a hundred years ago; even thirty years ago it was not uncommon: to-day, happily, it is not countenanced and rarely encountered.

A.UTHOR'S P R E F A C E

THIS COLLECTION of short stories contains the first short story I wrote for adult readers (I had written many for children) and the last; or rather (since I hope to write more) the latest, at the time of writing this preface: hence the title. Between the writing of those two stories there is a space of seventeen years during which I have written more than thirty novels, several hundreds of short stories, and various odds and ends. There should be a considerable difference between the product of that prentice hand of nearly twenty years ago and the one the old hand produced but yesterday. Is there really a great deal? That first story is *The Strange Case of William and Mary*. The last one is *Meet Mr. Frayne*. Of the rest of the stories in this volume most have been written during the past two years; a few date back to the beginning of the war; and one or two as far back as 1934. Of these last *The Hamnion Affair* has a mild interest apart from whatever interest it may have as a story. It was published in *The Evening News* and some days after it appeared a letter from a reader challenging the accuracy of the story was sent on to me by the editor who commented that he could not see anything wrong with the story on re-reading it, nor could other members of the staff. Yet the reader was correct and the story contained a glaring mistake. I had previously read the story several times; my wife had read it; so had the typist; and so had the editor of *The Evening News* (twice) and some of his colleagues: yet we had all failed to notice the error; and it was a cardinal one. How could we all have overlooked it? I print the story here as it appeared in *The Evening News*. What is the mistake?

I do not think any of the other stories call for comment. To say which I think are the best is to invite the criticism that I am a poor judge so I will content myself by saying that the one I like best is *The Other Man Present*, perhaps because I am fond of history; so fond that I sometimes think the reading of history is the best possible education. You may retort that this might be so were not Historians such great liars. This commonly held belief

cannot be substantiated. Most historians, and certainly such reputable ones as Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle, Trevelyan, Coulton, Green, Hume and Buckle, tell what they conceive to be the truth and they try to tell it impartially. Complete impartiality is' perhaps not possible of attainment; it is necessary to take into consideration a historian's religious and political beliefs when reading his work; a Roman Catholic historian's story of the Reformation would differ in no small measure from the story of that upheaval written by a Protestant or by an atheist: but allowing for such biases prejudices and tendencies, the work of historians is to be relied on.

It is frequently said that novelists do not handle the short story as well as those writers who confine themselves to this minor genre; for a minor genre it is; a great short story compares with a great novel as a canoe does with a liner. But the generalisation is untrue: H. G. Wells has written great novels and great short stories; so has Somerset Maugham; and so did Conrad. I imagine it is truer to say that short story writers rarely succeed with the novel. I should say here that by novelist I mean a man who begins by writing novels and whose main output is novels; and so with my use of the term short story writer. Kipling was a short story writer; when he attempted the novel he could achieve nothing better than *The Light That Failed*. The case is the same, or akin, with Poe, O. Henry. Ambrose Bierce, Leonard Merrick and a number of living writers whose names I refrain from mentioning lest I bring about my ears the proverbial hornet's nest. It is perhaps unfair to cite Wells for he is in a class by himself; one of the very greatest men of our time; and I find it astonishing and inexplicable (as I imagine will posterity) that when so many pigmies have been chosen to receive the Nobel and other literary awards and distinctions this giant has been overlooked. Why this studied omission to honour the greatest Englishman of our age? Does Arnold Bennett supply the clue in his journal? Under the date October 10, 1927, he writes (it was the occasion of the funeral of Mrs. H. G. Wells): "Number of really Ai people present very small, which shows how Wells kept out of the 'great world * and how the great world is not practically interested in Wells." A commentary, not only upon Arnold Bennett but upon our claim to be a democracy.

In this matter of short stories and novels it is understandable

that short story writers should claim for their work that it is as high an achievement of the writer's art as the novel. This is to claim the artistic equality of an exquisitely carved cherry-stone with Michelangelo's Pieta: both are works of art but it is surely incontrovertible that one is a minor and the other a major work.

However, I did not set out to discuss works of art but merely the short stories contained in this volume. They were all written for money; not that this precludes their being works of art; money has been the, greatest of all inspirations in all ages; or rather of course the things that money will buy. The greatest artists have always been comfortably off or have quickly succeeded in making themselves so. To produce great work (or even good work) the first necessity is to be adequately fed, warm, and financially unworried. The starving half frozen genius writing (or painting or composing) masterpieces in a garret is a romantic myth.

These stories are not masterpieces and if I knew any precise definition of a 'work of art' I should doubtless be able to say they were not that either. I should describe them as brief entertainments; or more simply as just yarns: the sort of thing you might have been told on a railway journey by a fellow traveller; or in a bar parlour by the village shoemaker, except for the inexplicable fact that shoemakers to-day seem to be total abstainers. Is that why we all walk so badly? If the stories interest and entertain you they are, as far as you are concerned, good; if they don't they are not; nor would all the artistic fallaleries make them so.

I have said that these stories were all written for money and that is true in so far as they were all written to be offered for sale; but they were written to please myself and not with any eye on editorial approval or I should not have troubled to write such unsaleable stories as *The Yellow Devil*, *The Widower*, *Finale*, *Return of the Bad Boy*, *The Kitten*, *Son of Jael*, *The Root of All Evil*, *The Good Old Days*, and *The Indignation of Mrs. Paradock*. I wrote those stories just for the pleasure of writing them. I knew no editor would print them and, with one exception, this has proved to be the case: and the exception, *The Root of All Evil*, was printed in an unusual little periodical conducted by a young editor prepared to print anything he liked no matter what its theme. But even those stories which were written with the expect-

tation of their being sold were written as I wanted to write them without any trimming to suit or catch a market. And that I imagine is how most authors write, whether they have private means or depend solely upon their pens: they write to please themselves and hope that what pleases them will-please others. That is why it will be found that all the writers of 'best sellers', from Dickens to Wells, have the common, or human, touch; so that what pleases them is bound to please millions of their fellows.

Authorship differs from most other professions in that it cannot be chosen as a career by a boy or young man leaving school or the university, unless that young man has private means. It is necessary to adopt some other profession which will supply the bread butter and jam while one is learning authorship. A young man can, it is true, sometimes make a living by his pen immediately on leaving the university; but it will be in some editorial or sub-editorial capacity in Fleet Street or thereabouts, or on the staff of a publishing house, and not by writing books. No one gets any pay for writing a book. It has to be written and accepted for publication before the author gets a penny piece. Occasionally publishers will advance considerable sums to authors before they put pen to paper; but that is only to authors of established reputation: the beginner will get nothing until his book is accepted; meanwhile he has to live.

The desire to write means very little, almost nothing; most people have it at some time or another: it is called the writers' itch and is as common as the other itches. Writing has to be learnt and the best way to learn is to begin young. Boys and girls who propose to become authors should read widely and write every day of their lives. It is essential that their reading should be wide and that it should begin as soon as they can read at all. It is by reading the best that has been written that their own style will be formed. There will be a stage of reading rubbish; it seems that it has usually to be passed through; but the sooner it is passed through the better and by the time they are ten or eleven children who have authorship in view should have passed beyond comic papers, bloods, Wild West crudities, Boys' and Girls' Companions or Friends and so forth, which are for milk teeth and not for second teeth which should by now have come to grips with adult minds. Given this wide reading as a background

and with daily practise in original composition ('no day without its lines', as Trollope advised) an intelligent boy or girl should by the late twenties or early thirties be in a position to launch a craft upon the sea of letters. If, in addition to a mind stored and enriched by wide reading, and to the assiduous daily practise in composition, a boy or girl has a nose for words, a born knack of handling them, and a gift for story-telling, then he or she may reasonably count upon that first craft having a moderately successful voyage and being the first of a long line of ever finer and finer craft making more and more successful voyages. That is the road to authorship: there is no other; no! not even if you are a genius.

What sort of weather may that first craft expect when it sets hopefully out upon the sea of letters? To drop metaphor (frequently used to conceal woolly thinking): what sort of reception is that first book likely to receive? It will receive more, far more, praise than dispraise; its virtues will be shouted; its defects whispered. The young author will be astonished (and warmed) at its reception, especially at the hands of other writers who will, if they find any merit in it, rush to acclaim it. What about the 'spiteful' review? Bosh. This does not mean that never in the whole history of letters has there been written a notice of a book which was maliciously spiteful, designedly wounding; but these are rare birds indeed, so rare that they may be ignored. But the 'literary racket', what about that? Let us first see what the dictionary says about the word 'racket': a dodge, a lay, a swindle; crooked business; jobbery; a piece of business conducted in dishonest or backstairs ways. That is the definition. There may be a literary 'racket' but I have never encountered it, nor the slightest evidence of its existence; and I have been writing for well over thirty years. You may therefore be assured that your first book's merits will be warmly and generously acclaimed; that you will be enthusiastically encouraged to continue; that no reviewer out of 'spite' will stab you in the back; nor any 'literary racket' prevent your reaping your rewards, both immediate and eventual. This is the truth and you may take my word for it. If it were not the truth I should not write it for I have no axes to grind nor any need to butter anyone's parsnips. I have all I can reasonably ask or wish to ask from life and have no expectations nor any wants I cannot supply myself. I would not cross the road

to receive a dukedom, or say yes when I thought no for all the glittering prizes in the world. Since every man is said to have his price I must have mine but it is in none of those things. I do not pretend that I would go to the stake for saying 'yes' when I could save my life and go free by saying 'no'. But life is not to be lightly thrown away and I take a man to be a great donkey who dies by torment for his belief or unbelief in God or in the British or Russian constitutions: such things are trifles, not to be weighed against human life; and such trifles also are dukedoms, Nobel prizes and Orders of Merit. I would fight for a belief, if I held it strongly, and risk death; but I would not meekly embrace certain death for any belief or unbelief, for I see no good to anyone nor any purpose in such an end. Even the threat of torture, or the sight of the rack thumbscrew wheel or forks, would suffice to bring from me the admission that black was white, or any colour my persecutors desired; and indeed I should be quite ready to suggest some they had not thought of. The martyr's spirit is not mine nor am I cast in the hero's mould: that is doubtless why I rate physical courage so highly, the highest perhaps of all man's attributes. Much is made of mental courage, of artistic courage, of spiritual courage: but what are they? I have no doubt I possess all three but I have never noticed them, whereas I am almost constantly aware of my lack of physical courage.

This matter of physical courage brings to mind a kindred topic, that of anaesthesia. There is much confusion of thought about anaesthesia. Doctors do not employ anaesthetics to relieve suffering to which, in others, they are utterly indifferent. They employ them because a dumb and still body is easier to vivisect, and less trying to the nerves, than one which (even if gagged and held) can twist and writhe and make blood-curdling noises. If doctors cared about suffering they would not continue to employ ether or chloroform, or a mixture of these two filthy substances, which permeate and poison the patient's whole system and deliver him over to hours of vomiting and retching *after the operation* when the surgeon is no longer there, having gone off to a cocktail party or for a round of golf. Surgery was employing these poisons to induce anaesthesia well over one hundred years ago. To-day their use should be prohibited for there is no lack of non-poisonous anaesthetics which have no distressing and painful after-effects:

they are not used because more care and intelligence is demanded in their use: it is too much trouble. It is also too much trouble to give an anaesthetic to women in child labour. Perhaps you thought that this was always done as a matter of obstetrical routine and that the ordeal of birth had been banished. Nothing could be more remote from the fact, which is that seven mothers out of ten in the British Isles are forced by the callousness of the medical profession to have their babies without the mercy of an anaesthetic. The doctor has not to witness the ordeal. He merely pops in an occasional head, tosses a smiling platitude to the wretch sweating on the bed, and strolls out and stays out for hours: stays out often so long that he is absent at the climax and the child is delivered by the nurse. Anaesthesia in childbirth should be compulsory: its use would never be omitted had doctors to be present during the whole of labour: it would otherwise be too distressing. The medical profession is not a noble one; certainly no more noble than any other. The howls of execration directed by this 'noble' profession at the Government's plan for a real medical service showed it up pretty plainly. The comfort and happiness of a doctor should not have to depend upon the number of sick people on his books: it is putting too great a strain upon human nature, by making sickness a source of profit, a means of livelihood. A doctor should be assured of an adequate income whether he treats annually a thousand patients or only a dozen. This seems so obvious that the bitter antagonism of the medical profession to a state medical service remains inexplicable to the lay mind, unless it be assumed that doctors are more venal and less compassionate than other men, an assumption that is obviously untrue. Then what is the explanation of this antagonism? It is surely in the public interest that it should be removed; as it is in the public interest that a sick community should be no more profitable to doctors than a healthy one. It should not be a matter of financial profit to a doctor to advise or conduct an operation. Why look for causes of disease and prevent them when the treatment of disease is so profitable? The plain common-sense of all this is so clear that it is staggering to find the medical profession wilfully and perversely shutting their ears to reason. Nothing is left for the State now but to educate and train its own doctors, launch its own medical service, and leave the public to choose between a state medical service whose interest

is a healthy community or a private service whose interest is a sick one.*

Having decided to adopt the profession of authorship and having launched your first craft you will wish to know what sort of profession it is which you are embracing: what are your financial and social expectations. A thousand a year is a very moderate income for a novelist. Successful novelists make anything from four to seven or eight times that figure and the writer of a single 'best seller' is brought a fortune by that one book. What sort of fortune? How big? A novel priced at seven shillings and sixpence (the usual price before the war) which sells one hundred thousand copies over here and twice as many in America (a common ratio) would bring its author about twenty thousand pounds and the film and other rights at least another five thousand. Out of this would remain, when commissions and taxes had been paid, quite a pleasant little fortune: and a really world-wide best seller such as *Gone With the Wind* or *All Quiet on the Western Front* will earn for its author before its run is over at least a hundred thousand pounds.

But even at their most modest the financial returns of authorship are tolerably adequate. Twenty pounds a week. Compare this with a miner's five, a navvy's three or four, and a merchant seaman's two: and these men all *work*. If earnings had any relation to effort then if a novelist gets twenty pounds a week (and these are only the small fry) miners, navvies, sewer men and merchant seamen (to take but a few) should be paid a hundred. A novelist hardly works at all: once he has learned his trade it is the easiest and pleasantest occupation imaginable and to pretend that it is hard and exhausting work is simply not true: and the better seller you are the less work you need do; one novel (a couple of months' pleasant occupation) a year will keep you handsomely. The rest of the year you can play (or fiddle about in your study thinking about your next book). The nonsense that is talked about brain work! It isn't work at all as men who really have to work understand the word. Miners understand what work is: so do the Bevin boys now. If every male on reaching the age of twenty had to spend a year at the coal face we should hear

¹ And at the same time the State should forbid all forms of corporal punishment. Let us have done once and for all with this savagery, whether inflicted by schoolmasters, prison officers, or parents.

less silly cackle about miners' extortionate demands. I know what coal mining is like; at second hand it is true but a vivid second hand; and if miners received twenty pounds a week they would be grotesquely and scandalously underpaid.

What of the novelist's, the author's, social standing? What drawer does he fit into in the great social chest of this democracy of ours? He can more or less please himself; if he be not warmly welcomed he will certainly not be hunted out of any drawer except perhaps the topmost; and there *have* been authors who have hobbled and nobbed with the Blood Royal. It may indeed be said that authors are the most fortunate of persons, the beloved of the gods, for wherever they go they may not only be assured of respect and a modicum of admiration but they will find, even to-day, unless their appearance and habits are utterly repulsive, that there are still people ready to regard them through a rosy mist of romance.

But that is enough of this preface, this ramble in my belfry: the rest of the book is fiction.

NEIL BDLL

BRIXHAM

May, 1945

THE OTHER MAN PRESENT

AS THE DOOR opened and the man entered, the woman sitting in a low chair beside a blazing log fire looked up quickly and half-rose. A boy of about eight and a girl somewhat younger jumped up from their toys on the hearthrug and ran over to their father with cries of welcome. He laughed and picking them up in his arms kissed them and then looked from them to the big time-piece in the corner and thence to his wife with an expression of pretended amazement.

"They begged to be allowed to stay up till you came," she said. And then to the children, "And now to bed; come, Tom; come, Bess."

"Father promised us a story," the girl said.

"Not to-night, sweetheart," her father said, taking some of her long golden ringlets in his fingers and making to pull them.

"Please Father," she pleaded and the boy added, "just a little one." And before their mother could protest he laughed and said, "A very little one, Tom." He went over to the fire and sitting down allowed the children to climb on to his knees. "Which one do you want?" he asked.

"The Princess who married the Monster," the girl said quickly; but the boy said with a grimace, "You always have that." He looked up into his father's bearded face. "The Bear and the three Pots of Honey," he said.

Their father smiled. "Well let Mother choose," he said.

The mother nodded. "Master Drake and Dame Goose," she said.

The story was short but before it was finished the girl's eyes had closed and the boy was keeping awake only by an effort. When it was over they went off sleepily with their mother and the man picked up a log from the heap at the side of the great hearth, regarded it thoughtfully for a long moment, and then carefully placed it and two others on the blazing pile and leaning back in his chair stretched out his long legs.

He might have been asleep so still he was and so slow and deep was his breathing. Now and again his lips moved as if he were

talking softly to himself and once a few words were audible, but muttered too indistinctly to be intelligible. Then for a while he was silent; but now he stirred in his chair more than once as if he were no longer comfortable. And as the sound of movement over his head suddenly ceased he shrugged his shoulders and then squared them.

A few minutes later his wife re-entered the room and coming over to him stood a little while by his side, her hand against his cheek. He took her hand and held it and then he looked up into her face. "Presently," he said; "presently. I think I'll have a bite or two first."

"There's the cold goose and the veal cheese and there's some beef collops—you said you'd have supped."

He nodded. "I have. Only a mouthful. Couldn't eat. But I can now. I feel quite sharp set. They'll do. And I'll have a jug of brown. Warm me up inside."

"It must have been cold," his wife said, as she moved quickly towards the larder.

"Bitter. Never been so cold in my life. I felt I'd never be warm again. But, there! I'll tell you all about it as soon as I've got my belly lined with something solid."

"It wouldn't take long to heat you some soup."

He seemed to consider and then he shook his head. "No, I won't have soup."

The meal being presently ready he got up slowly and stretched himself, touching the beams of the ceiling with his finger-tips. He was a tremendous man with heavy shoulders and long arms.

He ate hungrily and quickly, biting and chewing the food with a powerful almost fierce champing of his jaws. Now and then he took a long pull at his tankard and each time he put it down he sat for a while holding its handle and staring into the shadows of the room before he resumed his meal.

His appetite satisfied he refilled his tankard from the big pitcher and taking it over to his chair by the fire sat down slowly, drank, and then resting it on the arm of his chair he said, "Thank God it's over." His wife said nothing and he was silent for many minutes. She waited patiently, fearing to say the wrong thing.

"Bitter," he said at last; "the bitterest day I have ever known. There was no way of keeping warm and we had to wait for him three hours and more—out there in the open and the wind like

knives. The Thames is frozen over. Ice a foot thick. Nobody's used the bridges these three days. And there we were stuck up there for over three hours in that wind. It bit to the bone. Bit to the marrow,'

"Were there many people? "

"Many? God above! all London was there. As far as you could see was black with them. Black. And all still most of the time and quiet. It was a stillness and quietness that was frightening. They might have been dead. Frozen to death. A hundred thousand corpses all keeping each other up."

"Did you have anyone?"

He nodded. "But don't ask me who. I don't know. Nor he me. That was the arrangement. No-one knows. Nor will."

"It's best," she said.

"Yes. And then he came."

She leaned forward.

"We waited for him at the top of the steps. We caught sight of him from a long way off. There was no mistaking him. He walked slowly. It must have been a full ten minutes from the time we first caught sight of him till we received him."

"Yes?" she said, her voice a whisper.

"It was quickly over. He turned his head and looked at me and then away over the crowds. He said some words I did not catch and then he said loudly 'Remember' and knelt down. It took but one blow. I stooped and grasped the long hair (it was as soft and silken as Bess's) and held the head up and at this a great groan went sweeping over the crowd. A great groan of pity. Pity. How like a crowd."

"And afterwards? Did they—was there——?"

"Nothing," he said slowly. "Just drifted away; sort of dumb-struck."

"He was brave?"

"I'll say that for him." He laughed grimly. "He died like a King."

"And is Cromwell going to take the crown? "

"God knows. Some say one thing and some another."

There was a long silence and then he said "I'm tired. I'm tired. Can't keep awake. I think I'll go to bed."

HE TOO WAS OF THE ALUMNI

ST. BEDE'S was holding its tercentenary celebrations. Founded early in the seventeenth century by Luke Mapon, merchant of Belcaster, this perhaps most famous of all our schools could claim (if such boasts had been in its tradition) to have given to the world more great men than any two of its rivals together. But rivals is a foolish word to use in its connection; there was St. Bede's and there were other schools; it was incomparable, *sui generis*.

To mark the tercentenary Sir Paton Hoskins, a former scholar, had given a new science laboratory to the school and the new building was to be opened by Lord Budell, the great physicist, also a former scholar, on the Saturday of the celebration week.

Months earlier, pondering somewhat anxiously over these matters, the Highmaster, Dr. Aloysius Strong, had been visited by an idea, of which his wife, on learning it, so strongly and heartily approved that he was forced, not without considerable misgiving over the expense, to put it into execution. Invitations were issued to all the sons of St. Bede's, scattered over half the world as they were, not merely to come to the celebrations (for that invitation would have gone out in any case) but to attend a banquet and dance on the Saturday night, accompanied, it is unnecessary to state, by their wives; to sleep (as many as could be accommodated) in the dormitories or the Highmaster's house; and to answer the roll, breakfast, and attend chapel the following morning.

It had seemed to Dr. Strong, when he first thought of it, an attractive if somewhat nostalgically-sentimental programme and he had put it to his wife a little dubiously. But that lady had immediately declared it perfectly enchanting. And so the invitations went out. They went, as has been said, to the four corners of the earth; and they went to cabinet ministers; to members of the nobility; to ambassadors and colonial administrators; to bishops and deans; to judges and King's Counsels; to men of science; to eminent physicians and surgeons; to great soldiers and sailors; to writers, painters, composers, actors and such odd fish; and even to the small unknown unhonoured fry, the wash in the wake of magnificence.

The response was astonishing. Mrs. Strong's verdict was endorsed a hundred times over by the sons of St. Bede's. The idea of a night in the old dorms touched their hearts and that their wives were to accompany them tickled them to death. And Sunday morning roll-call, brek and chapel! sheer stroke of genius that was. The banquet too was a sound notion; sort of thing one would expect from Strong; and of course the dance; give the women a chance to show their finery.

Acceptances poured in. It is true many were accompanied by the proviso 'if I can possibly get there'; others by 'if I am still in England'; and not a few, rather pathetically, by 'if my health will permit'. But making full allowance for all doubtful cases everything pointed to the dormitories and Dr. Strong's house being crowded out and the housemasters had to be asked to take the overflows.

They began to arrive, these great alumni of St. Bede's, as early as ten on Saturday morning, and they continued to stream in until the late afternoon; three-hundred-and-seventy-eight all told; and of these two hundred and twelve brought their wives; a few score their daughters; a few dozen their sisters; and one or two, females in a category of their own.

All the afternoon these great ones perambulated the corridors, the dormitories, the quadrangle, the playing fields, renewing their boyhood, shooting out glad hands, slapping shoulders, emitting exclamations of surprise and delight, of startlement; crying out 'If it isn't old Binks! ', 'By jove! dear old Scroggs'; 'What! Poulton! my dear Polly this is grand! '; 'God bless my soul, Stenhurst! Stenny, you old war-horse! '; 'Hello, Brads! still smiling; remember Calver's Reach and the trippers? Hal ha! ha! ' And there was much pump-handling of arms, blowing of noses, and even wiping of eyes.

There was one man who somehow or other seemed to be remembered by almost everyone. He was George Togler, hailed gladly if, it must be admitted patronisingly, as Toggles, and sometimes Little Toggles. He was a small shy-looking man, not too-well dressed, with a rather wizened face, greying hair and side-whiskers, and an air of unobtrusiveness which was almost ashamed. He responded to all his greetings with a faint smile that seemed half afraid of itself; and to enquiries, mostly a trifle perfunctory, about what he was doing, he returned the same answer, "O, just rubbing

along as usual, old boy, thanks." And the great ones nodded and smiled understandingly and perhaps sympathetically. For the truth was that Toggles was one of the undistinguished ones just as, it was only too clear, he had been at school. No-one knew what he was doing and no-one cared to ask point-blank; nor did he offer to enlighten them. * Grubbing along in some wretched office or bank ' was the general thought upon the matter, for it was impossible to blink the fact that some of St. Bede's old boys had sunk so low. However he was a decent little chap and had been nursed by the same scholastic mother of them all; he was one of them; he was of the company; as old boys all were equal; there was no order of precedence; at least for the occasion. Every-one was prepared to be affable and jolly and on the easiest, the warmest and the most familiar terms.

The banquet began with the singing of the school song *Chaunt of the Beadsmen* a song in praise of the school's founder and its famous sons; and as the massed male voices boomed forth in their rich sonority the old dear familiar words there were few present not untouched by emotion; but Toggles was the only one who completely broke down. He had to cover his face with his hands. Had he been a great actor, a practised spell-binder, an accomplished player upon the deeper feelings of men and women, he could not have found a surer, a more instant road to the hearts of them all. There descended upon him, in the often odd casual way of such visitations, a tremendous if transient popularity.

At the end of the banquet, before the dancing began, there were speeches. Dr. Strong, who was in great form, made a speech that was a model for all such occasions, a blend of the humorous, the witty, the learned, of a headmaster jocosely admonishing boys and of a plain man paying tribute to the great. He was followed by three members of the House of Lords, two members of the Cabinet, an ambassador, a bishop or two, and various distinguished lawyers, physicians, surgeons, soldiers, sailors and authors.

And suddenly a cry went round the great hall and was taken up till it became a roar: " Speech, Toggles! "

He rose slowly to his feet, an odd plain little figure. There were no orders or ribbons on his coat. He was obviously overwhelmed with nervousness and stood there fumbling with the stem of a wine-glass. Someone called out: "On the chair! " at which a general laugh went up. He was such a little chap.

But he did not seem to mind. Indeed he appeared rather pleased than otherwise and smiled as he obeyed. His pale rather sad eyes went over the brilliant crowd of men and women. His fingers clenched and unclenched. He cleared his throat. "Dr. Strong", he began, "your excellencies, my lords, ladies, and gentlemen, you will wonder why I have stood up when I confess to you that I cannot make a speech. My heart is too full. Yet this is an evening, an hour, a moment, that all my life I shall cherish and never forget. I look around me and I see the bearers of great names, proud names, honoured names; men who are making history and adding glory to the name of England, and of our school, my school." He was interrupted by applause and some cheering and then went on: "I see men who are eminent in every path of human endeavour; men who are at the head of their professions; men whose name is known and honoured wherever the flag of England flies; and beyond, far beyond, across many an alien frontier. I cannot but feel humble; but I cannot too but feel proud; proud that I, who am but one of life's humble journeymen, am a sharer and a partaker of their eminence because I too am a son of St. Bede's. In this great brotherhood all are sons of the same mother and, as we know, in a mother's eyes all her sons are equal. We all pay the same homage and the same honour to that loved mother and all are in turn honoured. When I heard the words of our song, when all the memories came flooding back upon me—upon me, I could—I could—"he broke off, and finding that his emotions had again overmastered him, he sat down to applause and cheering as loud and as warm as any that had greeted the more polished and far more important speeches of the great.

He did not dance, and since he had no women-folk with him he contented himself with watching the brilliant scene for a short time and then smiled himself off to bed.

At roll-call in the morning he was missing. There were also missing Lady Bradleby's diamonds, Lady Bassington's pearls, Lady—but it would be tedious to give the full tally of the gems, trinkets, insignias, and notes which had vanished with Toggles: the total value was in the neighbourhood of sixty thousand pounds.

The Superintendent, jerked down from Scotland Yard by a peremptory wire, made a brief preliminary survey and then

remarked, a little oracularly, to Dr. Strong: " Obviously, sir, a job by a man right at the head of his profession. Now let me see . . . "

THE HAMMON AFFAIR

THIN WISPS of fog drifted by outside the window of the waiting-room at Croydon Aerodrome. I was catching the 10.30 a.m. 'plane to Paris; it was already ten o'clock and its departure was still in doubt owing to the weather conditions in the Channel. I dropped my newspaper beside me and looked round at the few other waiting passengers in the big chilly room. The burly, hearty-looking, middle-aged man next to me caught my eye and asked me for a match. " Always leave them behind on principle when I'm flying," he explained. " 'Ve you done much? "

I shook my head. " Very little until lately; but in future I intend travelling in no other way if I can help it."

" There's nothing like it," he agreed; " amazing how it squeezes the world into next to nothing." He lit his pipe, smoked slowly for a while and then went on, " And, as a sort of side issue, it's added a new technique to crime."

" Crime? Smuggling, d'you mean? "

" All sorts. Take suicide. Now I've more 'n a notion that quite a number of air disasters of the last ten years 've been due to a spectacular suicide. You think that's a bit far-fetched?" as I smiled. " Well, what about the Hammon affair? You remember that, surely? " as I looked puzzled.

" I've a hazy idea I've heard the name but that's about all. I've been in the Straits Settlements the last ten years and up country too and I'm afraid I'm not exactly a mine of information about events in England. I suppose it was England? "

" Partly, yes. Care to hear about it? We don't look like getting away just yet. And I happen to know a bit more about the Hammon business than most people."

" I'd like nothing better. But, y'know, I don't even know who Hammon was."

" All the better. I can begin at the beginning. I hate a yarn myself that starts in the middle and for that reason has to finish

with a lot of loose ends. It was about ten years ago that Hammon's name began to be seen a lot in the papers and so became pretty familiar to everybody. He was then in the early thirties and until that time was as unknown as any Tom, Dick or Harry in the streets. And then, suddenly, he began to be talked about and written about and, almost in a blink as you might say, everybody knew the name, just as they know Hobbs, Dempsey, Baldwin, Churchill and the rest of them. The Duke of Bladeshire's property in the City was in the market for a figure round about four million sterling and then it was withdrawn; and presently it leaked out that it'd been bought privately and that the purchaser was a young unknown City man named James Hammon. Well, that, as I say, was the beginning; but I won't bore you with a lot of stuff about Hammon's activities during the next five or six years; you can get those from newspaper files-and *Who's Who* and so on. Anyhow, by the time he was thirty-eight Hammon was a millionaire about ten times over, had launched over thirty companies, the chief being *Domestic Devices Limited* with its five or six offshoots, and had married one of the loveliest young women who'd ever startled a London season. Did you get picture papers where you were? "

"Occasionally; but if you mean have I seen her picture? I haven't. Nor Hammon's."

"That's a pity. Dora Hammon (she was ten years younger than he was), was the sort of woman I don't pretend to be able to describe. She was a beauty, slim and tall with honey-coloured hair, *that* type. And that's about as far as my descriptive powers go. The papers, of course, called it a love match and for once they were right. By the time he married her he was, as I've said, a multi-millionaire, about the second richest man in Europe probably, and had all the trimmings, steam-yacht, town houses, country-house, shooting-box, villa on the Riviera and another at Capri and all the rest of it. But until he married, although you can bet your life he was received everywhere, he wasn't really in the social swim as those born and bred to it are. But his marriage altered all that. His wife was Dora Bastable-Lennox, a niece of Lord Shaynor, and before the honeymoon kisses were cold, as you might say, she was one of the leading hostesses in London and an invitation to one of her crushes was reckoned something worth fishing for and James Hammon, of course, shared the honours and so forth.

"During the next two or three years he enjoyed a position in

society that he could never have hoped for in his wildest dreams as a young man. He lived like a king in a story book and spent like one. He seemed to have everything in the world, even that last bit which makes all the difference: a beautiful woman who loved him, for there was never any doubt about the happiness of *that* marriage; it was so plain they were lovers that rumour and tittle-tattle and gossip and all the rest of it never even attempted to cast any doubts; and that's saying something *these* days you'll admit. He didn't, by the bye, spend only upon his wife and himself, I mean he was as big a giver as he was a spender. To ask James Hammon for money was just like turning on a tap: out it gushed as simple and easy as you please. Hospitals, charities, libraries, schools, scouts, guides, legions of this, leagues of that, institutions and the Lord knows what else: he poured a steady stream into all of 'em. Party funds of course too. What everyone wondered was why his name never appeared in an honours' list for a baronetcy or even a knighthood. It was clear enough to my mind: he was hanging on for a peerage. And he'd 've got it sooner or later.

"But when he was forty things changed. Just as suddenly as his name had first cropped up about eight years before so tales began to go the rounds. Nothing anyone could get hold of, you know; but the innuendo sort of thing, the knowing nod and the pulled down mouth kind of business; far worse than blunt charges, just because there's no nailing 'em down to give 'em the lie. Not that Hammon *could* have given 'em the lie, as it turned out, for the innuendoes and nods and so on were all concerned with his companies and especially with *Domestic Devices Limited*, and the cold truth about *them* was that they were stumers. How the devil Hammon managed to bamboozle, or I reckon I ought to say was *allowed* to bamboozle, the public so long is the sort of thing the average men can't understand. But there it was and when the whole thing came out, as it did presently, it was just another Jabez Balfour, Horatio Bottomley business over again; and about as bad as those two affairs put together, as far as the toney involved went.

"But for a long while after the first rumours began going the rounds nothing happened; it was just rumours and nods and winks and whispers and no more. I'd forgotten to mention that Hammon had his own private 'plane and pilot-chauffeur, with hangars and a landing place big enough for a dozen 'planes to take off

down at his Surrey house, Borden Court.

"Everyone, almost daily as you might say, was expecting *Domestic Devices* and the other jay-traps to blow up sky high, but for months things went on as before. The Hammons spent a& lavishly, entertained as prodigally and exclusively, and continued their usual gifts to all the beggars authorised and unauthorised in the country. The rumours died down and it began to look, except to just those few really in the know, as if it had all been a pack of scandalous rubbish. And then, as suddenly as the rumours had begun, and with more startling effect, came the news that Hammon had committed suicide by jumping out of his 'plane while crossing the Channel. It was in June and the news didn't reach London till ten o'clock in the evening (Hammon had jumped overboard about nine o'clock); and although *The Evening Ensign* brought out a special late edition the country as a whole knew nothing about it till they read it in their papers next morning. But I happened that evening to be where there was a tape-machine and the story came over at exactly three minutes to ten, only about a quarter of an hour after Hammon's pilot landed the 'plane at Le Bourget, with his nerves just about as rattled as they can be; he made a bad landing and smashed up his undercarriage. It wasn't to be wondered at: he'd had about as thick a time during the last hour as any man who's not a glutton for trouble could ask for. He said that within five minutes of leaving the English coast Hammon tried to climb out and he'd a very hell of a time preventing him; and for something like thirty minutes he was forcibly holding Hammon down. Fortunately there was a robot-control, but something was wrong with it, or it got damaged in the dust up; for, instead of going straight across, the 'plane flew up Channel almost parallel with the coast. And then suddenly Hammon ceased struggling and began to sob and after a bit said he was all right, that his attempt to jump overboard had been a sort of brain-storm and he hadn't known what he was doing, but the thing had passed now and he gave his solemn davy that he'd not renew the attempt. So the pilot, his name was Benson, took over the controls and set his course for Boulogne, now some forty miles away, about W.S.W. But he kept a weather eye on hammen although it hardly seemed necessary as he was lying bacV apparently asleep. Still, as he said, he might merely have been lying doggo and biding his time; and so he watched him pretty

closely and it wasn't until they'd made land and were passing over Boulogne at about 5,000 feet that he, relaxed his watch. And in a flash Hammon was over the side and hurtling down towards a big field on the outskirts of the town, a field of corn it was. The thick time he'd had during the last half-hour and this coming on top of it about put paid to Benson as a reasoning being and, as he said, he didn't think things out at all or decide what was best to be done, but just flew straight on to Le Bourget and reported the tragedy and, as I've said, missing a crash by a hair. They rang up the gendarmerie at Boulogne and in less than an hour Boulogne telephoned through to say they'd found the body, or the wreck of it. It had made a hole in the ground nearly four feet deep and was in a pretty mess, thigh-bones up through the shoulder blades and that sort of thing.

" Well, as often happens, things went with a rush then. The suicide as a topic of interest was shouldered out of the chief place in the next-day-but-one's papers by the news that *Domestic Devices* and all Hammon's associated companies had failed for something like eleven millions and that the shareholders (most of 'em from the lower middle-class by the bye) might consider themselves lucky if they eventually got half-a-crown in the pound: *eventually*, mind you, and that might mean, some of the more pessimistic papers said, any time before the Day of Judgment. Other items that soon followed thick and fast were that Mrs. Hammon was penniless; that she'd collected her husband's remains and taken them down to Borden, where they were buried in the big mausoleum that had only been finished a few months; that on medical advice she'd gone away to avoid a nervous breakdown; and finally—a real startler—that Benson had disappeared. Rumour made great play with this last item, ranging a whole gamut of sensational stories, from his having gone into a mental nursing institution for a complete rest to his having gone completely loco and blown out his brains. However, that side of the affair died down pretty quickly; there was quite enough to be done about the tangle of Hammon's financial activities to occupy all concerned for some months and in all probability the thing, as far as Benson and Mrs. Hammon were concerned, would have soon fizzled out altogether. After all, it was nobody's affair now as far as they went: she was ruined financially and he was apparently a pretty sick man and ~~the~~ they were entitled to find a quiet corner to lick their wounds in.

" But in less than a month there was something really solid for rumour to get its teeth in—to say nothing of scandal: Mrs. Hammon and Benson had been seen together in Cairo, so the yarn went; they'd landed from the S.S. *Karib*, a P. & O. boat on its way to Australia, had rejoined her a day or two later, and were now en route for the Antipodes.

" You'll admit this looked slightly fishy shall we say? but one other little item made it fairly stink: three days before his death Hammon had realised some securities to the tune of eighty thousand sterling which had been paid him in easily negotiable stuff. Not a sou of this had been found on his body nor in his luggage when it was overhauled at Le Bourget and later in London.

" Pretty clear, eh? And pretty rotten. An illicit love affair and murder. Oddly enough the suspicion of murder didn't seem to shock people so much as the love affair between Dora Hammon and Benson: that was a real K.O. for London society, it always having been reckoned that James and Dora Hammon were that rare and somewhat amusing bird: a married couple still quite plainly head-over-heels in love with each other. You can imagine the sort of cynical things that were said now by the sort of dam' fool who generalises about everything and everybody: all women are rakes at heart: faithful wife is a contradiction in terms; all women can be seduced if they're tackled the right way and all the rest of it. There was enough of that to fill all the smut-rags in the country, and *then* some; but of course the real business was that Benson had murdered Hammon and pinched the boodle, that Dora Hammon was an accessory, and that anyhow there was sufficient circumstantial evidence to warrant the arrest of both of them. They were, as a matter of fact, arrested at the next port of call. It was child's play to reconstruct the murder: Benson, soon after leaving the English coast, had killed Hammon, possibly with a spanner, or at least rendered him unconscious; then changed clothes with him to the last stitch and toppled him out as soon as they were over land again. It wouldn't have suited his purpose nearly as well to have dropped him into the sea. He banked of course on the body being sufficiently smashed up to hide evidence of the murder; but that was really no risk at all, for no-one was suspecting murder; everything pointed to suicide. Hi' clumsy landing at Le Bourget and his agitation and hysteria and all the rest of it were, of course, all fake; and with the eighty

thousand in his pocket all he'd to do was to slip out of the lime-light as soon as possible and wait until. Dora Hammon had shovelled (that's about the right word) her husband's remains into the new mausoleum at Borden and could join him. All very neat, cut-and-dried and watertight, eh? Hello ! There's the bell." He began to gather his traps together. "No hurry for ten minutes or so," he went on, "time to finish my pipe."

"Did they both hang?" I asked.

He shook his head with a faint grin. "Dora Hammon managed to get a'way with it but they hanged Hammon all right."

"Benson, you mean."

"Benson?" the grin widening. "No, Hammon. You didn't tumble? Just as well; would have spoiled the yarn if you had."

I laughed. "I certainly didn't; but I'm not quite clear——"

"You mean why it wasn't spotted that it wasn't Benson who landed at Le Bourget and was seen afterwards at Cairo with Mrs. Hammon? Wasn't spotted as a matter of fact until they were both brought back to England. But it was simple enough why. Hammon and Benson were about the same age and build and facially were both of a type, and although Benson was dark and wore a short dark moustache, while Hammon was fair-haired and clean-shaven, *that* didn't offer much difficulty in the way of disguise. But of course the great thing was that nobody was expecting to see Hammon, and people usually only see what they're looking for. We'd better be moving."

A faint sun was breaking through the thinning fog as we walked towards the 'plane. "Going to be fine after all," he commented. And then, with a dry smile. "If they'd 've waited six months or so and gone out to Australia separately they might have got away with it."

I nodded. "Rather a bad break that after so much ingenuity."

"Yes. But it wasn't any lack of intelligence or reasoning or what-not that cooked their goose but the last thing you'd expect in a cynical world."

"Oh. What was that?"

"Couldn't stand being away from each other any longer. It's a fact. They made no secret of it during the trial." With an odd grin, "Bit far-fetched that, eh? Married couple risking their necks for love of each other. Sounds like a dam' lie. Isn't done these days."

"What happened to Mrs. Hammon after her acquittal?" I asked as we climbed on board.

"She shot herself the morning they hanged her husband. Perfectly sickening sentimentality, eh. Now if you regard that in a yarn. . . ." The sudden smashing roar of the engines drowned the rest of his sentence.

MEET MR. FRAYNE

IT BEGAN to grow dark. The sick man moved restlessly in the bed. The door opened and the night nurse came in. She and the day nurse talked together in low voices for some moments and then the night nurse was alone with her patient. He was awake, lying on his back, looking at the ceiling. "Would you like the light, sir?" she asked.

"No thank you. Where's Nurse Brent?"

"She's been suddenly called home to her mother who is gravely ill."

"What's your name?"

"Carew, sir."

"You know who I am?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who?"

"Adam Frayne, the famous novelist."

"Have you read any of my books?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Afraid: why afraid? It's a stupid phrase. And don't call me sir. I don't like it. And there are no titles where I'm going. It's a word much overworked by commercial travellers, schoolboys and the Services. I shall die to-night."

"O no you won't, sir. I beg your pardon."

"Don't. And what do you know about life and death and, in particular, my life and my death?"

"I'm afraid—I mean, sir——O I beg——"

"O damnation! say sir if you must. Say anything you like. But continue."

"I've forgotten what I was going to say."

"I asked you what you knew of life and death and of my life and death particularly."

" As a nurse—— "

" Never mind about ' as a nurse ' Nurses, in common with doctors, know considerably less than they, think they do and vastly less than they might do if they kept their minds and eyes open. So we won't bother about ' as a nurse'; but as a human being. Well, how much? "

" About as much as the average person, I suppose, of my age,"

" What is that? "

" Thirty,"

" Few people have begun to think at all at thirty. But about my life and death."

" Nothing at all about your life. I'm not a great reader. I know your name and that's all."

" And my death? "

" That's merely a sick fancy. You're not going to die to-night."

" How do you know? "

" If you were so near death you would not be able to carry on a conversation like this."

" Who taught you that nonsense? "

" It's a matter of experience."

" Indeed. Then I set my experience against yours and I am seventy-five. I shall die to-night. Do you think I don't know. Do you think a man of my years, who has lived as I have lived can go through what I have gone through and survive? This sudden access of strength is the surest sign. Did you know that just before a lion dies it drags itself up to its feet and roars? I like to think a roar of defiance in the face of the old charlatan and cheat. So I shall die to-night and that is all you need to know of my death. But of my life? Does that interest you? Would you like to hear about it from the lips of the man who lived it? "

" I would rather you went to sleep."

" To conserve my strength, I suppose. If I went to sleep I should not wake up again. That's how it is with me. I am within reach of my last drawn breath. I shall not see the dawn again. That does not worry me. I am tired of living. I have lived too long. I have outlived my capacity for enjoyment. I can no longer deceive myself or believe in myself. And so it is time to die. But before I die I want to talk about myself. The ruling passion. I want to talk about my life. I am going to talk about my life.

Not at length; just summarily; not a sketch for a portrait but a mere rough, as artists call it. You need not listen. I shall tell my story to the ceiling. And I don't want the light on or anything to drink or a sedative and I am not in pain. Have you any comment to make before I proceed? "

" If you would try to go to sleep——"

" There's no hurry. I've all eternity to sleep in. Now listen. Or if you'd prefer to sleep I shan't mind. I shall go on talking. And I shall not report you in the morning. It is you who will make a report. But never mind that. If I close my eyes don't think I am talking in my sleep or rambling. It is easier to tell the truth with one's eyes shut. Did you know that?

" I shall not bore you with my birthplace or my places of education. You can get these in the reference books. As you can the full tally of my literary work. I will confine myself to the few significant things. What are the few significant things of life? Don't answer. It is a rhetorical question. Love is first and foremost; so we will take love first. I have never been in love and no woman has ever loved me. I married the first time mainly out of curiosity; and for the second time because the woman was expecting me to ask her and I did not wish to hurt her feelings or to humiliate her with her large circle of friends. Also she was a very suitable match and I wanted a mistress for my house: it is a much more common want than that of a mistress for one's body. There was no question of love and after a while very little of liking. But we got along very well together. So much for sexual love. What other loves are there? Love of one's country? I have never felt it. I am glad I am an Englishman because English is such a pleasant language to write and will be the world language; and also because the English seem to me to be slightly superior to the rest of mankind whom I confess to finding a mongrel lot. It is true that I answered the call to arms in the 1914 war. That is to say I answered it towards the end of 1916. But one experience of the trenches was enough and I scuttled back to England and found more congenial work in Whitehall with the propaganda people.

" There is the love of children. I have had three children by my first wife and one by my second. I decidedly did not love them when they were small. It is true I did not see much of them; but whenever I did I found them irritating and unclean

little Yahoos. As for their loving me that is bosh. To them I was just a purse which supplied all those things necessary to their comfort and egoism and it was therefore necessary to pretend some regard for me and to keep on good terms with me. Since they have grown up and been able to supply their own necessities and luxuries we rarely meet; nor want to.

"Love of friends? What is it? Does it exist? I have had many friends. Some of them have sponged on me; some have betrayed me; some borne false witness against me. One made love to my wife. She repulsed him and told me. A chaste and faithful wife. A good woman. Later she was not so good. But she died before the affair became public.

"Love of truth? But who knows truth? I know that all men lie. As for any larger truth, where are we to look for it and what does it mean? The truth about life? But that is easy. We all know that. But we, most of us, refuse to admit it till we come to where I am now.

"Love of self? O I grant that. A lifelong romance, as Wilde put it. There are other loves but of these I have known nothing.

"And what of my work? What of all the books I have been piling up through a half century of time? The books which have made my name known over the civilized world? The books which I am told have earned me immortality? What are they worth? Worth to me now? I would give them all to be young again. Immortality. What does it mean? What does it profit me now that men will read my books a thousand years hence? What will it profit me then?

"It has not been all a way of roses. There has been praise. But there has been dispraise. The envious and the spiteful have belittled me. No pillow of mine was ever utterly free from their vipers' tongues. They hated me because I was great as they were mediocre. * And in my turn there were those I hated because the world acclaimed them as greater than I.

"I have been generous; given much to charities; helped many lame dogs over stiles. To what did it all amount? I was a rich man; these were but the crumbs from my table. Have I ever given away money I badly needed? No. Not a farthing. Have I given anything away that I wanted myself. No. I only pretended I wanted it: pretended to myself.

"And now that I am about to die is there anything in all my long life in which I can at this moment take pride? No. Anything for which I can be glad? Again no. Of which I am ashamed? No again. For at the end, we know, when we come to it, that nothing matters; nothing matters at all except the last breath. A comforting thought, Nurse. I propose to sleep now. I shall not wake again."

"O yes you will, sir. And be ready for your breakfast."

Thirty-six hours later Nurse Rayner and Nurse Carew were having a cup of tea and a cigarette. Several newspapers lay on a near chair. "The papers," Nurse Rayner said, "are full of Mr. Frayne's career. I still can't believe we had him here. Have you read them?"

"I haven't had a chance to look at them yet. And I don't see how I'm going to to-day. What do they say?"

"My dear! It would take me a month of Sundays. But here's *The Post's* account. It's the only short one. Shall I read it?"

"That would be darling of you."

"There will be," began Nurse Rayner in her reading voice, which was quite different from her speaking voice, "few people in the civilized world who will read of Adam Frayne's death without a sense of irreparable loss. An irreparable loss it is: a loss to letters: a loss to all those warm human things for which he stood and in which his work was rooted.

"It is too early yet to assess his ultimate place in English literature; it is enough to say that his place is assured. But there is much that we may assess: his humanity; his warm and wide charity; his nobility of character; his capacity for friendship. Possibly this last quality was the key to all his life: a life spent in the service of friends, of acquaintances, of strangers, of his country, of the whole world.

"What was the secret of this warm friendliness towards all? Perhaps it was that he was himself so happy a man. He radiated happiness. He was happy in his two marriages; happy in the love of his children; happy in his friends; and happy in his work.

"But it was no facile happiness. He wrested it from life. He paid the price for it; the price of service. 'I serve' might well have been his proud boast (had pride and boasting been attributes of his). He served his country; served it as a soldier: fighting

in the trenches. He served humanity in countless little ways, through loving kindness to all with whom he came into contact; and in a great and immortal way by that art which has given to the world his imperishable books. , . "

There was much more in the same strain, even in *The Post's* comparatively brief obituary. When she had finished, Nurse Rayner put down the paper and commented: "My dear, what a wonderful life! "

" Wasn't it," Nurse Carew said, almost absently.

THE PATIENCE OF MR. JUSTICE SPRENDER

THE JUDGE'S summing-up had gone against the prisoner, not, the crowded Court felt, from any bias or prejudice but in accordance with the inescapable facts; and yet perhaps there was now and again a certain harshness of expression, a certain hardness of inflexion, which belied a strict and rigid impartiality. He had said, during the course of that slow lucid reviewing of the incidents and arguments of the case, " There has been much play with the word provocation, as if its establishment would mitigate the crime. But what is provocation? Is it a rare thing? Something that only happens once or twice in the course of our lives, some unfamiliar and overwhelming crisis that may never put us to the test again? It is, of course nothing of the sort. Provocation is the daily bread of humanity. Not a day passes that we, all of us, men women and children, are not provoked in a major or a minor way. Most of us, because we have learned to do so in the hard school of life (a school in which the lessons are often unattractive and unpleasant) deal with these innumerable provocations as they must be dealt with if civilized life, if ordinary social life, is to continue: we ignore them: we are not provoked. And then comes the paradox: if one is not provoked the provocation incontinently vanishes. No. The plea of provocation should never be made. It is merely to plead weakness of character, of will. One might equally plead badness of temper as a mitigating circumstance.

" But what was this so-called provocation? A quarrel over a woman. One man was the accepted, the other the rejected lover. Is so common, so commonplace, a thing as a woman's preference to be made the excuse for violence, for the most desperate act one man can commit against another? She was the prisoner's mistress and was seduced away from him: that is how the sordid business has been put to the Court*, as if the seduction of a mistress were a far greater incentive to vengeance than the seduction of a wife, whereas the contrary is true: to lose a mistress is like losing a coin picked up; to lose a wife is to lose a coin earned by work and sacrifice.

" But even if we accepted this specious plea can a man be said to act under sudden provocation who sets out early in the evening with a loaded revolver in his pocket and spends six or seven hours in the company of, or in close propinquity to, the victim, before he shoots him? It may be that there was in the end a taunt or a blow. But ordinary people, if they enter an enemy's camp, expect taunts and blows; if they go at all they go prepared to return taunt for taunt, blow for blow: they go armed and with the intention of using those arms. If they wish to avoid such combat, such strife, such violence, such, mark you, bloody violence, they take care to keep away."

The jury retired just before three o'clock, but, despite the clear case against the prisoner and the summing-up, it was ten minutes past six before they filed into Court and returned the verdict that they had found the prisoner guilty of murder.

The usher having proclaimed silence, the judge addressed the prisoner: " George Dixon, you have been convicted, upon evidence which could leave no doubt in the minds of any reasonable men, that you deliberately killed Arthur Spence by shooting him with a revolver; and the evidence is further that that shooting was coolly and deliberately planned. This morning, before the Court assembled, a letter was put into my hands. It was a letter which was, I have reason to think, written by you. Whether you committed such a folly with or without advice I do not know, nor do I wish to know. As has been my invariable custom I did not open that letter. That is all. And now I must warn you that you should entertain no hope or expectation that you will escape the consequences of your crime and I implore you to make your peace with Almighty God. Have you anything to say before sen-

tence of the Court is passed upon you? "

The prisoner leaned forward over the edge of the dock, his hands clasped in front of him.. So hushed was the Court that a butterfly beating its wings against the top of one of the tall windows momentarily died all eyes with its rapping. The silence lasted perhaps no more than five or six seconds, but its tension was almost unendurable. The prisoner smiled; it was a grim smile, almost a sneer. "So you will kill me," he said, "as you killed the Egyptian yesterday."

He said no more and the judge, making no sign that he had heard these strange words, waited for perhaps half a minute and then continued, "I have now to pass upon you the sentence of the Court, which is that you be taken from hence to a lawful prison, and from thence to a place of execution, and that you be there hanged by the neck until you are dead, and that your body be buried in the precincts of the prison where you shall have last been confined after your conviction. And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul."

In his room some ten minutes later Mr. Justice Sprender, having removed his robes, sat down and opened the letter to which he had referred. It ran: My Dear Father, my so addressing you will not, I feel sure, occasion you any shock, for I am certain you recognised me the moment our eyes first met across the Court. That no-one else has connected or will connect me with you I am equally sure. Who could possibly guess that the man in the dock with the stooped shoulders and the thin greying hair was under forty and that he was the son of his judge, the youthful-looking, upright, soldierly Sir Charles Sprender? No; that secret is safe between you and me. My life is in your hands. I am not going to pretend with you; I have too much respect for your intelligence, your acumen, your knowledge of the world. I murdered Spence. It was no manslaughter. I meant to kill him, had meant to do so for many months before I actually did so. I have no remorse for that act. He was a snake, a venomous snake, and such creatures are better dead. Am I much better myself? We will leave that. I make no such claim. But what I do ask is my life at your hands. You will sum-up sometime to-morrow morning. It rests with you whether that summing-up points to murder or manslaughter; you can indeed, if you wish, direct the jury to find for manslaughter. But to that length you need

not go. The jury are favourably disposed towards me; that is clear to me and I am sure to you. It needs only that your summing-up should lean towards the lesser crime and the verdict will be for it. And, the verdict given, you will not be accused of undue leniency if you sentence me to no more than five years' penal servitude. I am prepared for that. I will serve that. I do not plead to go scot free for what I have done. Five years will be punishment, and severe punishment, but I shall accept it without whining. With good conduct it will be little more than four, so that I should be free by the time I am forty-three: not too old for a man to make a fresh beginning, as I am determined to do.

Now why do I appeal to you for this leniency? Not because of our blood relationship. Or, perhaps I should say, not just because of that. Let me recall to your memory some of the incidents of my life. I think you will remember them. I am sure you will for I believe they all make a pattern, a pattern whose design you consciously or unconsciously drew. There was the party on my seventh birthday. With a childish bravado and a wish to show off I took up the port decanter and you laughingly encouraged me, not by words but by your manner, to drink a glass and then a second, so that I had to be carried up to bed. How often after that you allowed me, a child of tender years, to drink port and sherry, you know as well as I. And you persuaded Mother that a glass of claret with my luncheon (and presently, before I was ten, two glasses) was what I needed; that I was anaemic and required something to put strength into me and good rich blood. By the time I went to Shelborne (at fourteen you will remember) I could comfortably put away a half-bottle of claret or hock or burgundy for luncheon and another half at dinner; and liked a liqueur with my coffee. And by the time I went up to Magdalen I was a confirmed toper. Whose fault was that?

To go back again. When I was twelve and at St. Anthony's; you remember the orchard foray I was involved in, the lies I told and the thrashing I got from the Head, a severer one than the rest because of my defiance and impertinence. What happened? You took me away, tipped me a fiver and sent me off for a month's holiday to Hastings. What was that but a direct encouragement to me to steal, to lie and to flout authority? And while I was at St. Anthony's, and afterwards at St. Michael's, I had ten shillings

a week pocket-money, four or five times as much as anyone else. And in the holidays a pound a week which I was allowed to squander, just to chuck away,, and come for more. A pound a week for a boy just into his teens. Did you show any interest in my studies? I was usually near the bottom of my form at my prep, schools and at Shelborne (how could it be otherwise expected?). How did you invariably receive my reports? Those reports which said I was lazy, untruthful and insubordinate? You gave me them to read and laughed and tossed them into the fire. And when you' had that letter from my housemaster at Shelborne about the other business, did you give me a hand there? The sort of hand that perhaps only a father can give? You know the answer to that.

And at Magdalen—but need I go on? Need I detail the whole road I trod downhill, every step of which was overtly or covertly encouraged by you. Whether or not you sincerely believed that such lack of control, such freedom from restraint, such absence of good counsel and a guiding hand was the best training for a boy, I do not know. But I do know that it was this environment of my formative years, an environment created by you, which was largely responsible for the sorry mess I have made of my life and the degraded end to which I have come. That responsibility is mainly yours, Father; and because it is mainly yours you are as much guilty of the murder of Spence as I am and should share my punishment. But because such a sharing is impossible I ask you, I implore you—nay, I demand that the punishment you mete out to me shall be justly apportioned to what responsibility is mine for the crime I have committed. I do not think there is anything I can add to what I have written, except that I rely upon your sense of justice and fair play. Your son, Edward Francis Spender.

After dinner that evening, when they were alone, Sir Charles put the letter into his wife's hands, first telling her how it had come into his possession.

He leaned back in his chair, calmly watching her growing agitation as she read it; and when she had finished and, controlling her voice with an effort, asked, her face ashen, her hands clenched about the letter, "Is this true, Charles?" he said quietly, "It was Edward." And at this she broke down and cried. "It can't

be true I O, Edward, my son, my son."

He smiled sardonically, nodding his head slowly. "That is so, Grace; *your* son, but not mine. Did you think I didn't know?"

SUDDEN BREAKDOWN

IT HAPPENED in 1913. If you remember those days you need no description of mine to remind you what they were like. If you do not remember them no description at all could give you more than the faintest touch of their savour. But it does not matter for the thing might well have happened yesterday instead of over twenty years ago.

It was just after seven o'clock in the evening of November the twenty-fourth—a damp, cold, foggy and altogether wretched Monday it had been and with the coming of darkness the fog's opacity had become suffocatingly tangible. It seeped down into the Underground stations so that the passengers waiting fretfully for the trains huddled shiveringly into their coats and wraps and gave a wide birth to the barely distinguishable white edge of the platform.

But in the warm first-class non-smoking carriage as the train grumbled its way slowly out of Oxford Circus Station there was scant evidence of the miserable weather without; the carriage was a small glowing island of cosiness in a sea of chilly darkness.

There were few people in that carriage: seven all told; three women and four men. All were well-dressed and prosperous-looking. On the right-hand side as one faced the train's direction a smallish sallow thin-faced clean-shaven man was sitting about half-way down the carriage. He wore a silk hat and a dark heavy overcoat with astrakhan collar and cuffs. Grey trousers perfectly creased were drawn up slightly over grey spats and patent leathers. He was reading *The Westminster Gazette*, or rather glancing at it desultorily, for his eyes, which had an odd trick of nervous rapid blinking, roved about the carriage with a shy almost furtive air of interest. Apart from his eyes his face was otherwise remarkable for the large high-bridged long pendulous nose which gave a predatory expression to his face. He seemed to have a difficulty with his breathing which was quick and audible. He

was sucking a lozenge whose strong eucalyptus scent pervaded the carriage.

Next to him but with a seat's space between them was a big gross man wearing a dark tweed overcoat, a black bowler hat, fawn trousers and pale brown boots. The trousers were pulled so high that several inches of silver-grey silk socks were showing. His face was full and rufous with a broad fleshy nose, a short brown moustache and a blunt square chin. Gold pince-nez with a black silk ribbon attached were a little askew on his nose. He was reading *L'Echo de Paris* and on his knees rested an evening paper folded up, yellow pig-skin gloves, a book and a black morocco wallet not much larger than a note-case. One leg was crossed over the other and was swinging slightly and as regularly as if it were beating time. He appeared to be absorbed in his paper. About two seats' space from him was a middle-aged handsome woman bare-headed and wearing a squirrel coat which reached to within a few inches of black very high-heeled shoes and, the collar being turned up, left only the upper part of her face showing with any distinctness. Her eyes were closed, her lashes very long and her nose fine if a little pinched. What could be seen of her expression was that of impatient boredom. A faint delicate scent from her person waged a retreating battle with the eucalyptus.

On the opposite side of the carriage two women sat together, plainly friends or old acquaintances for they were chatting quietly with the indifferent ease of familiarity. Both were well past middle-age; both were stout; but one was notably under the average height as the other was over it. The short one was wearing a brown fur¹ coat, a small brown hat and veil and carried a brown hand-bag; her face was red and much too fat, a series of ludicrous curves; her eyes were brown; she smiled all the while as she talked. Her companion also wore a brown fur coat, and a red hat was perched with a trace of grotesquerie upon abundant auburn hair. Her face was surprisingly thin considering her bulk, her eyes small and blue; her chin receded slightly and she showed the vulcanite of her dentures as she talked.

Some little distance away to the short woman's left was a tall youngish man wearing a brown Homburg hat and a smartly-cut brown suit with a brown and black tie, brown socks and brown shoes. A fawn overcoat lay across his knees. He was good-looking,

his skin bronzed, his eyes alert, his fair moustache close-clipped. He was reading *The Winning Post* and smiling very engagingly as he read.

A good way beyond him an old man with a fine head of white hair under a black wide-brimmed hat sat crouched a little forward over a set of pocket chessmen, obviously absorbed in a problem. Overcoat trousers and boots were black but he had a heavy blue silk muffler round his throat. All his features were small and finely cut. His skin looked amazingly youthful and was fresh and pink. He incessantly licked his lips and occasionally muttered over his problem.

On the one side then: the man with the astrakhan coat, the rapidly-blinking eyes, the predatory expression and the offensive eucalyptus; next him the big pursy man with the gold pince-nez and the wallet; and his neighbour, the squirrel-coated handsome bored woman, seemingly asleep.

On the opposite side: the short stout mechanically-smiling chubby-faced woman in amicable chat with her large weak-chinned prominent-dentured friend; beyond them, first the smartly-dressed bronzed young man enjoying his sporting paper and second, the white-haired sombrely-clad old chess enthusiast.

In brief: on one side the predatory man, the pursy man and the bored woman; and on the other the stout friends, the bronzed youngster and the old chess-player.

The train had left the station but little more than a minute when its speed slackened rapidly and, with a sudden noisy shudder of brakes, it jerked itself to a standstill. Blue lightning flashed from the wheels licking up the gloom of the tunnel; the lights in the carriage blinked, glowed redly, blinked again and went out. There drifted across the utter darkness of the carriage the alarming smell of smoke. One of the women uttered, a cry. "It's all right ladies and gentlemen," came the conductor's voice reassuringly from his platform, "they'll be on again in a minute."

The smell of smoke faded but the darkness remained intense. There was the sound of heavy breathing and restless fidgetting and someone coughed nervously. The lights glowed redly; went out again; glowed once more and came on with momentarily dazzling brilliance. The train trembled with the throb of the motors and with a jerk moved on.

The relaxing tension in the carriage was abruptly shattered by

the pursy man shouting, on a note of furious distress, "I've been robbed ! I've been robbed!" And as the conductor hastened towards him and the other "passengers regarded him with embarrassed apprehension he rose to his feet and said loudly, menacingly, his voice seeming to accuse everyone, "Conductor, my wallet's been stolen; it contained seven thousand pounds' worth of uncut diamonds. It's been stolen, I say."

"All right, sir; one moment, please," the conductor said; "here's Piccadilly." And the train pulled in to the platform. Before it stopped the predatory man rose and moved towards the door. The conductor hastened towards him and touching his shoulder said 'courteously, "Excuse me, sir, I'm afraid you can't get out. I shall——'

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "I have urgent business. I'm a Member of Parliament." He fumbled in his pocket but the conductor shook his head and said, "Sorry, sir, but you'll have to stay till I've reported this." And then turning to the others he said, "You must keep your seats, please." He shouted an unintelligible name and a man in uniform put his head into the carriage, caught his eye, nodded his head, and hurried away.

Within a minute the stationmaster and a police constable had entered the carriage and after a few words with the conductor the stationmaster turned to the pursy man and said, "You are the gentleman who has lost a wallet?"

"I've lost nothing," he retorted. "My wallet containing valuable uncut diamonds has been stolen. I demand——"

"Just one moment, sir, if you please," rejoined the stationmaster, raising a deprecating hand. He spoke in low tones to the constable who nodded and took up a position at one end of the carriage while the conductor returned to the other. The stationmaster addressed the carriage at large, his glance avoiding any direct meeting with those turned upon him, "I must ask you to remain where you are, ladies and gentlemen," he said quietly and withdrew.

He was back shortly afterwards with another constable and a sergeant; and two minutes later the seven passengers, the conductor and the three police officers, in three taxis, were hooting their way slowly through the fog to Pine Street Police Station. There, an inspector listened first to the pursy man's story and then, having jotted down a few notes, he questioned the conductor as

to the exact position, manner and duration of the breakdown. He nodded his head slowly, made a few additions to his notes and then* said quietly, glancing at the seven passengers standing in a perturbed crescent about his desk. "Your names, addresses and occupations, please. Yours first, sir," to the pursy man, who replied fiercely, "Arthur Charles Seebohm, 16A Hatton Garden, Diamond Merchant."

"Thank you," the inspector replied; "and now, ladies?"

"Lady Alice Stanlaws, 26 Morley Crescent, Mayfair," replied the handsome bored woman, adding quietly, "my husband is Sir Humphrey Stanlaws."

"Mrs. Rupert Canton, The Pines, Blean Avenue, St. John's Wood," said the short stout woman a little breathlessly, while her large friend said quietly, "Mrs. Jane Willoughby, 18 Foley Gardens, Swiss Cottage."

"And now, gentlemen?" went on the inspector, with a swift glance at the three other men.

"I am Henry Callander," snapped the predatory man, "Member of Parliament for North Ham."

"Thank you, sir; and you, sir?" to the old chess enthusiast who smiled and nodded amiably and said, "Samuel Pendlebury, The Manor House, Braintree, Essex."

"I am Captain Stuart Chambers of the 4th Lanarks," said the bronzed young man. "I have no permanent address. I am on furlough from India and am staying at present at the Waldorf Hotel."

The inspector finished his writing and then looking up said with a touch of hesitancy, "Can—er—anyone of you ladies or gentlemen give me any information concerning Mr.—er—" glancing down at his notes, "er—Mr. Seebohm's wallet?"

There being no response to his question, he went on, "Then, ladies and gentlemen, I regret that in the circumstances I must ask you to submit to being searched."

Only the predatory man spoke and he said furiously, "I protest against this outrage, inspector, and I shall refuse."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I hope you will withdraw your refusal."

The predatory man seemed about to make an angry rejoinder but thinking better of it shrugged his shoulders, threw out his hands in a gesture of irritated impatience and signified his submission.

The search was carried out in two adjoining rooms and was as thorough as skilful hands could make it. It lasted in all some seventeen minutes. The wallet was not found, It was never found nor: were the seven thousand pounds' worth of uncut diamonds.

Perhaps it is odd hut it is odder still that no-one thought of searching the conductor.

Even I think it odd and I was the conductor. I have since lived in considerable comfort upon the proceeds of my theft. I had never stolen anything before; I have never stolen anything since. If I know myself at all I am sure that never previously or since have I had any desire to steal. That is why I have called this story ' Sudden Breakdown'.

ODD AFFAIR OF MARY MILLER (*nee* O'SHEA)

WHEN GEORGE MILLER first met Mary O'Shea he was, to quote a former sweetheart, 'a mere counter-jumper.' He was just assistant in Hayter's Grocery Emporium at Market Blyton and while he was not without dreams and ambitions for a shop of his owns such a possession was, he realised in his more matter-of-fact moments (usually round about 7.0 a.m. when his alarm clock jerked him from sleep), an achievement only of the future, the rather distant future.

He was twenty-six years old and the adjectives best describing him are personable and estimable. He was of average height, somewhat slight build, fresh-complexioned and bright-eyed; he neither drank nor smoked and in the nine years during which he had been self-supporting he had saved one hundred and seven pounds. His father and mother had died when he was a small boy and he had been brought up in an orphanage. As far as he knew he was without relatives.

Mary O'Shea was twenty-one. She was born at Kilkee, County Clare, and was prettier than most Irish girls are outside poems and ballads. Providence had been almost as kind to her in the matter of relatives as it had been to George, all she possessed being a mother in New York and an uncle who was master of a 300-ton

freighter the *John Redmond* plying between Liverpool and the U.S.A. 'Counter-jumper' might also have been levelled at her by the spiteful were it a term one applies to women, for she sold silk stockings in the *Galleries Dupont*, Dublin. Apart from her physical attractions she was extremely eligible, having on her twenty-first birthday come into a fortune; a fortune, it must be understood, in the Irish sense of the word; the exact sum being one hundred and ninety-three pounds. Two months later (at the time she encountered George) it was still one hundred and ninety-three pounds: that one fact describes her better than a cartload of adjectives.

They met at Blackpool; it was high summer; they were young. It was all as simple as two and two.

They decided to get married. George's nest-egg and Mary's fortune totalled three hundred pounds. Had it been a mere two-hundred-and-ninety-nine they would have married just the same but they certainly would not have taken the bold step they did. But the fine round figure of three hundred inspired them to temerity; and instead of returning to Hayter's Grocery Emporium at Market Blyton George launched his own grocery business at Saxham. a smaller but very thriving township some seven miles or so further north.

The business prospered. At the end of two years George could afford an assistant. The marriage, from George's point of view, had not prospered so well, although had anyone told Mary so she would have been the most astonished woman in Saxham. Long before he had got used to the pleasurable excitement of waking up in the morning and finding a pretty woman in bed with him George had made the discovery that he had acquired a critic on the hearth, the most deadly of the species. Her criticism was directed entirely upon his talents as a man of business. What he chiefly lacked, she said, was 'Go'. He was too cautious and it was only by taking risks, she pointed out, that the really big things were done in the business world. When (after a while) he tried to counter the attacks by calling her attention to increasing turnover and to Mr. Arthur Heaps the assistant, she laughed. It was a laugh usually described as mirthless, the very last sort one wants to hear from the sharer of one's most intimate life. She made irritating noises, those noises which orthography renders by Pah! and Faugh! "Are you," she said, "going to

be content to stay in Saxham all your life? " She called it a hole. A dull hole. An antediluvian hole. And she called him a stick-in-the-mud; and in frqnt of Mr. Arthur-Heaps and two customers.,

At the end of three years he engaged a second assistant, but failed to win a smile of approval from the critic. Even when he puichased a Ford van and engaged a man to drive it she withheld her approbation. Yet she felt that she had been a salutary goad; that George was at last acquiring ' Go '; and there began to take shape in her dreams a vast chain of grocery stores with a golden *George Miller, THE Grocers* on their facias.

And then a letter came from her mother in New York. Its calligraphy was extremely shaky and its contents upsetting: Mrs. O'Shea, stricken with a mortal complaint, hungered to see her only child before she died. She would, she said, have sent the passage money but she had barely sufficient means to keep her until the end and bury her.

George, whom goading had somewhat hardened, said, perhaps clumsily, " Of course you won't go; 'tisn't as if she'd anything to leave,"

" I certainly shall go."

" It'll cost nearly a hundred pounds, what with one thing and another, to say nothing of my having to get a housekeeper while you're away. We can't afford it. The business won't stand it."

" I've a hundred and ninety-three pounds in the business," Mary said calmly.

He stared at her. " Don't be silly," he said, " that was a—a sort of dowry. It went into the house things, furniture and all that."

" Well, it'll have to come out then; or as much as I need."

" But I haven't a hundred clear in my account," he protested: " you know everything goes back into the business."

" Safety first! " she sneered. " Then you'll have to borrow it."

His temper began to fray. Four years of biting criticism seemed about to bear fruit in an outburst of tremendous violence. Instead he had an inspiration. " Why don't you get your Uncle Frank to take you over in his old tub. You're always saying what a grand life he has and how you wish you'd been a man and able to follow a real man's life."

It was her turn to stare now but it was a stare of cogitation. She pursed up her lips and wrinkled her forehead. " I might," she

said "the *John R*'s due in next Tuesday; I was only reading his last letter over again on Sunday. Rather a coincidence."

"Providential," George murmured.

She scrutinised his face with a four years' knowledge of its secrets and its signals. "There's the coming back," she said. "I couldn't expect Uncle——"

"We could run to paying your passage home in a proper boat," he interrupted. "I could let you have fifty pounds."

"Dare you risk it! "

He refused to be provoked and merely said, almost placatingly, "Well, what do you say, my dear? "

She said she thought she would.

The *John Redmond* sailed from Liverpool on the twenty-third of August with Mrs. George Miller as a passenger. Fifteen days later the vessel was posted as overdue at Boston; she was never heard of again.

George accepted his bereavement as a not unmixed misfortune. He weighed up the pros and cons of it. He had lost a good housekeeper but he had also lost a tireless and harsh critic. On the emotional side he considered that loss and gain about balanced. Having ticked off all debits and credits there remained on the credit side a tremendous sense of freedom, of escape from bondage. Once again he was his own master; there was no-one to say him yea or nay; no-one to look down a scornful nose; no-one to laugh mirthlessly, to mutter 'Faugh'.

Having escaped from his cage he determined never to enter another and it was this determination, added to an intention of providing no food for gossip, which guided him in choosing as housekeeper Mrs. Cremp, a scrawny woman in the fifties who on the law of averages he judged to be possessed of more than ordinary efficiency since she had nothing to recommend her to the casual eye. It was a sound judgment. The efficiency of Mrs. Cremp (the Mrs. was a courtesy title, a sort of *nom de menage*) proved to be the jewel in the toad's head of her ugliness. Never before in his life had he been so well fed and cared for; never so respectfully addressed (and what a balm that was). During her reign of seven golden years he plumped out; he grew mellow; and the business prospered exceedingly; prospered indeed to such an extent: that he opened a branch at Petworth seven miles east of Saxham and put a manager in there.

All this and much else he did of his own volition, off his own bat. But now Fate or Providence or what you will took a hand. Or so it might well have seemed to the onlooker; or, for that matter, to George himself. The new branch did so well that George determined to expand and the lease of the next door shop almost miraculously expiring just then he bought the premises. Still the Petworth branch expanded and George spent a few days there to spy out the land. There were three more shops in the block and none seemed to be doing much business. If he could buy them out . . . and in his mind there took shape the vision of a vast grocery emporium. He sought out the local house-agent and within three months the purchase was accomplished and within another six Miller's Grocery Emporium occupied the whole block and was the most imposing building in Petworth's market-square.

But while George was popping in and out of Petworth to watch progress a certain Miss Amy Lawrence, a young schoolmistress, came to stay for a holiday at *The Laurels* in the far corner of the square. Miss Lawrence was twenty-nine. She was fair-haired, very pretty, and with an extremely alluring figure. She was single from choice, none of the men who had wanted to marry her being sufficiently eligible in her rather exacting eyes. She was aware of her worth and did not propose to abate a penny of her price. She looked at George Miller and weighed him in her balance. She looked at Miller's Grocery Emporium and weighed that in with him. While she found George decidedly wanting she considered the Emporium made up for whatever else lacked.' And George was lost. He did not even put up a fight, literally kissing the hand that bound him. They were married just before Christmas (George having obtained the Court's permission to presume his wife's death), and Amy decided they would live at Petworth and that the shop at Saxham would be kept open as a branch under the former Petworth manager.

At first they lived over the Emporium but as prosperity waxed Amy grew to dislike the propinquity and in response to this feeling there presently rose on the outskirts of Petworth an extremely pretty villa *Mon Repos* (the *mon* is significant) to which they moved on its completion and whose furnishing cost George a pretty penny. But then he had a plentiful supply of pretty pennies
and the snending of one or many of them occasioned him on

concern. He had too much else to bother him. Not the business, for that continued to grow and to prosper amazingly; something far, more important, more intimate; his marriage. It had gone awry. That he looked back longingly not only to the reign of the admirable Cremp but even to that of his first wife is the measure of that awryness.

If Mary had criticised him with whips Amy wielded scorpions. Not that she had anything to say concerning his lack of 'Go'. Far from it; she considered him if anything too enterprising, even venturesome, almost reckless, and was occasionally wont to exercise a restraining hand by reminding him of those merchant princes who had ventured too much and failing had come to suicide or penal servitude. Amy's criticisms were directed at something far more sensitive than a mere lack of 'Go': his speech, his accent and his table manners. It is to be regretted that these were by no means perfect. George's formative years at the orphanage had certainly not had a cultural background nor, in the real sense of the word, had he been educated. He had been unaware of his deplorable shortcomings and would have passed through life ignorant of the heinousness of dropping aitches, mispronouncing words, eating with his knife, drinking with his mouth full (to name the most striking of his failings) had he not met and wedded the admirable Amy. Within six months of their marriage he had grown so sensitive about his lack of these graces that he was never at ease in his wife's presence and by the time the marriage was four years old he had developed a dour taciturnity from taking too much thought over what he was about to say, and a nagging indigestion from eating his food mincingly and without zest. He was saved from the taciturnity becoming an inescapable habit and the indigestion from growing chronic by the discovery that tobacco was good, beer even better, and that both could be enjoyed at pubs in general and at the local Constitutional Club in particular, at which places foregathered jolly fellows who didn't bother about speech or accent or even notice a dropped aitch in the pleasant query, "What will you 'ave?" And for the way one drank they were equally charitable and ever ready to turn the blind eye.

And then Mary came back.

She returned just after dark one warm August evening and she had a strange story to tell. Briefly she had been picked up in

her nightclothes, the sole survivor, and suffering from complete loss of memory, owing to a head injury when the *John Redmond* was run down and sunk in a fog. She was taken to a New York hospital and there recovered her health but not her memory. She obtained work in a store and remained there twelve years, rising to be manageress. An automobile accident re-opened the crack in her skull and restored her memory; and here she was back again; and what did George propose to do about it, to say nothing of Amy?

George didn't know. He failed completely to cope with the situation. Here were two women, both young and of an age, both pretty and both, apparently, his wife. The two women found the situation equally difficult of solution. George made a tentative suggestion that he should go round to the Club and smoke a few pipes over the problem but found the suggestion doubly vetoed and a glance from one face to the other of the rival claimants made it abundantly clear that there was no escape for him from the role of Solomon.

He thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, stared at his wives, then at the ceiling and then whistled softly. Presently he said, "Look 'ere, Mary; it's no good doing things in a 'u-u-hurry; things we might regret for the rest of our lives. I propose you come and stay with us for a time until we can decide what's best to be done. And so as not to—er—to sort of confuse the issue, I think we—er—I ought not to sleep with Amy, if you see what I mean, until we've come to some decision."

"I was going to suggest that," Mary said, turning upon Amy a smile not unlike that of Mona Lisa.

"I quite agree with you, my dear George," Amy said, ignoring Mary's words and her smile.

He nodded. "Make things less awkward. And now I'll get the car out and we'll all go to the pictures. Take our minds off it."

During the first few days of this quaint domestic association each of the two women made several attempts to bring the matter to discussion; but every time George sheered off on some or other specious plea; and presently it came to be understood, without anything definite being said, that the affair should be allowed, in George's phrase, to ripen of itself without interference.

A week went by. George had by now begun to resume his evening call at the Club, and coming home late one night after

many friendly pints he found his wives naa gone to tneir rooms and the cook and two maids were also abed. The good beer and the pleasant converse had given him a feeling of exaltation which had by now changed into a sleepy amorousness and moved by sentimental memories of his early days with Mary he paused at her door, hesitated a moment, and turned the handle. The door was locked. With a faint shrug of his shoulders he tiptoed along the corridor until he came to Amy's bedroom. Here he hesitated somewhat longer before turning the handle, only to find that door also locked. It was nearly a week later when, after another late and merry evening he stopped at Mary's door and softly turned the handle. The door opened to his push, which almost startled an exclamation out of him. He gently closed it and with a faint chuckle tiptoed along to Amy's room, but found her door locked. Four nights later, after a supper at the Club which did not break up till one o'clock, he found neither door locked against him. With a grin and a faint hiccup he made for the harbour of his own room and reached it without disaster.

The wives had taken to calling for him in the car at the Emporium, which he usually left about a quarter to six. This had been Mary's suggestion, to which Amy had added her support, unaware that Mary could drive, an accomplishment she had never bothered to acquire. She found herself therefore on the return journey taking a back seat literally and figuratively; and her attempts to join in the conversation seemed to her invariably to synchronise with Mary's changing gear loudly or sounding the klaxon. Mary had a way of touching George's shoulder with hers and giving him a quick smile every now and then which Amy found not only infuriating but alarming. Once or twice she saw George return the smile and it seemed to her that in his eye she noted a gleam that boded ill to her own hopes.

Some six weeks after ' the cat came back ' (the phrase, regrettably, was George's but it was a mental one and did not, to his credit, pass his lips) the two wives called at the Emporium as usual, only to learn that Mr. Miller had been suddenly called away on urgent business and might not be home until very late.

The two women looked at one another; and then, without speaking, returned to the car and drove to *Mon Repos* in a silence which was but once broken when Amy said tartly, "Urgent business! Rubbish! Why didn't he ring up and tell us?" To this very

reasonable question Mary made no reply.

George did not return that night, and it was not until two, o'clock that both women went to bed, after each had, during the past few hours, generously suggested many times that the other should go to bed while she sat up. In the morning George's bed had not been slept in and the first post brought a letter addressed to Mrs. George Miller. It arrived at breakfast time and as soon as the maid had left the room Amy picked up the letter to open it, when Mary snatched it from her. "It's addressed to me," she said breathlessly.

Amy flushed, licked her lips, swallowed convulsively and then said, "You are being absurd; but I refuse to quarrel with you. I will not demean myself. Open it if you wish."

"I'm going to," Mary said bluntly, and did so. Inside was another sealed envelope and upon this was written: *Amy and Mary*.

Amy held out her hand. "Give it me," she said; "my name is first; I will read it out."

"That's alphabetical. I'll read it."

"Will you read it out, then, please."

"No thank you." Sarcastically, "I might mispronounce a word. But there's nothing to stop you reading it over my shoulder, if you can demean yourself."

Amy slid her chair over the polished parquet until it brought up against Mary's. "We'll read it together!" she snapped.

My Dear Wives (the letter began) and that's the last time I'll call you that for we'll clear that bit up first. Mary was presumed dead so she can't be my wife. But she's not dead and so you Amy can't be my wife neither. That isn't perhaps law nor logic but it's plain commonsense, a man's commonsense anyhow. So neither of you's my wife and have therefore no claim on me, as I see it. Never mind about the law. I'm not; take my word for it. The law won't know where I'm going and nor will you. But I don't mind telling you the broad facts as they're called. I've not been idle these six weeks but business deals sometimes take longer than you expect and this one has perhaps because I've had to keep it dark. But it's all shipshape now. I've disposed of the business lock stock and barrel. Hooker the Chain-Store people bought it. They paid me twenty thousand for it. I've also sold *Mon Repos* (although it was *your* Repos Amy not mine) as it

stands with all the sticks. Two thousand five hundred was the fig. Not too bad. I'm now a man of means and leisure as the saying is, not to mention freedom, and I'm going to do what has always been a dream of mine even when I was a white-faced shrinking little chap in that bloody orphanage. And if you don't like the word Amy you can do the other thing. But I've not told you what my dream was. It was to see the world. And now I'm going to do it, and I reckon with over twenty thousand in my pocket I can go on doing it as long as I live. But I've not forgotten you, my dears. You were both once my wives and I daresay did your best according to your lights. The trouble was they weren't my lights. But that's over and done with. You stick to your lights and I'll stick to mine. I've left you the branch at Saxham. It's quite a prosperous little business and you're to share it between you. The only stipulation is that you both live there. If you separate, the business is to be sold and the proceeds will go to the Constitutional Club, Petworth. A harsh stipulation you'll think. It's no harsher than those of holy wedlock. But I think you'll be happy enough together. You'll both have plenty to criticise and that seems to make for happiness in women for you've both told me several times during the last few weeks that the years you spent with me were the happiest of your lives. And you spent most of the time ticking me off you pair of——but I won't say what I was going to. That's all over and done with and I'm so happy myself that I can honestly say I hope you'll be happy together. Well, goodbye, my dears. Goodbye Mary. You were the first. You taught me Go and now I've gone. Goodbye Amy. You were the second. You taught me how to eat. And drove me to drink. (And very nice too.) Two of you and both teaching me. Well, I was always a slow learner but I've learnt my lesson now. *There won't be a number three!* And so good luck to you my dears from your former husband and old pupil

George.

CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH

"YOU'VE BEEN the damndest of silly young fools, my boy," said Sir Francis Sterne; "and how in the name of sanity you came to do it is beyond me."

"It's all very well to grouse, Pater," Second Lieutenant Paul Sterne retorted, shrugging his shoulders, "but you weren't there. You can't——"

"Rot. , Nothing can excuse your folly. You're engaged to the sweetest and best little girl in the world and you let yourself be trapped into spending the night with that harpy——"

"Hardly with her, Pater. Or not exactly——"

"Rot. What else was it? And now she's blackmailing you for two thousand and you expect me to pay it. If it weren't for Letty"——he threw out his hands. "You must have been mad."

"I was tinned. Probably doped too."

"But why the devil did you go there? You weren't tipsy then. You weren't tipsy till after you'd had dinner, according to your own account. Why? Why?"

"I don't know, Pater. One does these things. Drifts into them. But anyone might have done it. It all came about so perfectly naturally."

"Of course, you young idiot. It was a trap and you fell into it. Ran into it with your eyes open."

"I don't think it was, Pater. Not at the beginning. I met her at a cocktail party at Wimper's studio. I've known Wimps for years. You're not saying that Wimps had a hand in anything dirty."

"Fin not saying anything."

"Well, we simply got talking and somehow or other we got on to old books and first editions and I told her of some of your things."

"She led the talk to that, you young ass. That was part of the trap. You oughtn't to be let out without a Nannie."

"Well, I don't think she did, Pater. As far as I can remember——"

"And how much is that after being so tipsy you didn't know what you were doing according to your account?"

"I remember that. I'm sure I do. And she said she'd some old books that had belonged to her father and to his father and they'd always been considered valuable. Naturally I pricked up my ears and asked her about them and then she said, 'Why not come along and see them?' Wasn't it the merest courtesy to say I'd be delighted?"

"Courtesy with a woman like that. Don't be a fool."

"But I didn't know she was like that."

"Haven't you eyes in your head and some gumption? You're twenty-six not sixteen."

"She wasn't that sort at all. Her people belong to the Meadshire Fenwicks and she's been to——"

"I don't believe a word of it. You mean she was pretty and knew all the tricks of her trade and you gulped the bait like a gudgeon."

"She was pretty. As pretty as you make 'em, and charming and—and fascinating."

"I guessed she wasn't exactly a hag. What time did you get to her web? "

"About six or so."

"And you had dinner at eight? "

"Nearer half-past, I should say."

"And in all that time you couldn't find an excuse for getting away! What the devil were you doing? "

"We looked at her books."

"And they were rubbish."

"Well, they were."

"That was the cue for you to clear out. Why didn't you? "

"I meant to but she began to play the piano. How could I go then? "

"And so you sat and drank."

"I had a few. But I'm not blaming them. I don't want to make that an excuse. Not for just then. I didn't go because I didn't want to go."

"Admirably frank."

"You don't know how devilishly attractive she was, Pater. She was wearing—O I don't know really; it was a blue gossamer thing and it made her look about seventeen. And the room was charming and cosy and it was arctic outside. And there was an extraordinary subtle fragrance everywhere; *stephanotis* I believe it was. It seemed to drowse the senses and drug the will——"

"Was that the dope you referred to? "

"Nothing so crude as that, Pater. No, it was just a faint intoxicating perfume. You remember those lines of Keats——"

"Don't quote poetry at me. Perhaps she quoted Keats."

"We didn't talk poetry at all. She just played to me and I sat and listened."

"Until dinner."

" Yes."

" And after dinner several of her jackals looked in. Why didn't you go then? "

" I was no longer capable of going then."

" Too tipsy."

" Well, Pater, that, and—and, O everything."

"And afterwards?"

" I can't say. I really don't know what happened. I didn't wake up till the maid came in with tea in the morning."

" And there you were in bed together. Very pretty picture. And I have to pay a cool two thousand for it. When precisely, may I ask, did she bare her fangs? "

" That was when, Pater. Two thousand or Letty would be told where I spent the night."

" Very prompt and business-like. Did she think you had it on you? "

" Not at all. She knows I've only my army pay and your allowance. She seemed to know everything. More about your business affairs, Pater, than I know."

"That remains to be seen. I shall go and have a word with this young woman."

" It'll be of no use, Pater. You'll only lose your temper. She told me that two thousand was cheap, was her minimum, and if it weren't paid in a week it would be three."

"We shall see. This is England and the country's not run by crooks and gangsters. Not yet, my boy. There's a train at ten-fifteen which gets into Paddington at noon. I shall have an early luncheon at the Club and I shall be home in time for dinner. You've not been such an ass as to hint anything of this to your mother? "

"O I say, Pater, I'm not quite——"

"Aren't you? I wish I thought so. I'm beginning to think you're like that fellow Habakkuk."

Just after five o'clock that afternoon Sir Francis rang up from town to say that he was unexpectedly delayed over the business with his solicitor (whom he had professedly gone up to see) and that he might be unable to catch the last train down which left Paddington at nine, in which case he should sleep at his Club and

catch the first train in the morning. He added that it was foggy, Paul, who happened to be in, took the message and passed the information on to his mother who expressed some faint surprise: "But surely, my dear Paul, Bronson doesn't do business 'so late in the evenings."

"Does it any old time these days, Mater, I expect. It's all a matter of fitting-in."

"I thought everything closed down with the black-out."

"Perhaps he's dining at Bronson's house and they're talking business afterwards. They do that occasionally."

"Then I suppose he will sleep there."

He nodded. "Yes," congratulating himself upon not having mentioned the Club. "I shouldn't expect him, Mater. If the fog's at all bad they'll probably take the nine train off."

"But how inconsiderate of them, Paul!"

He laughed. "They don't have to consider the inconvenience of passengers these days. I'll be surprised if the Pater turns up to-night. If he does he'll be very late. Don't you wait up."

Sir Francis did not turn up that night, and after breakfast the next morning Paul took the two Sealyhams and walked to the station (about two miles away across country) to meet him.

"What made you bring those wretched animals?" Sir Francis said testily; "you know what a nuisance they are in a car."

"They brought me," Paul grinned. "They wanted a run. Livers not up to the mark. You're not looking too good yourself, Pater. A walk wouldn't hurt you."

His father grunted something and they set off across the fields.

"Did you see her?"

"Look here, my boy, I don't want a lot of catechism. I did see her and the fact is I made a damned fool of myself."

Something in his father's tone made Paul turn his head and regard him searchingly. "You don't mean, Pater," he said slowly, "you stayed the night."

"That's precisely what I do mean."

Paul stifled a wild desire to laugh. "You can't mean it."

"Let's change the subject."

"How in the name of sanity you came to do it is beyond me! "

"That's enough. Was your mother down when you left?"

"No. She thinks she's in for one of her headaches."

"H'm. There'll be two of us."

" Good Lord! Were you tinned last night? "

"That's the only explanation I can think of." And then, almost defiantly, "Except that she's a, dam' pretty young woman."

"Did she wear——"

"I've forgotten what she wore."

Paul shook his head slowly and said smugly and with intense enjoyment, " It's beyond me, Pater; you're married to the sweetest and best little woman in the world and you let yourself be trapped into spending the night with that harpy."

" Don't be facetious, Paul. I'm not in the mood for it."

" Did you shell out? "

" I did."

" There's a bright side to it, Pater."

" Indeed."

Paul nodded. " Both of us got a lesson for the two thou. instead of only me."

" Don't be a fool. It cost me five."

Paul whistled. " Did the maid come in with——"

"That'll do, Paul. You can take it that the whole nefarious plan went without a hitch. And now let's talk of something else."

" One more question, Pater."

" Well? "

"Was it stephanotis? "

" No." With a faint wry smile, " It was jasmine."

NIGHTMARE PREDICAMENT OF MR. JUSTICE STANBROKE

AS THE closing speech for the defence neared its end Mr. Justice Stanbroke glanced at the clock and realising that now the case could not possibly end on the morrow he decided to adjourn until Monday. He felt that he needed those two days before finally making up his mind. He had almost come to the decision that the prisoner was guilty but the evidence was entirely circumstantial and to sentence a man to death upon circumstantial evidence alone was something not to be contemplated with lightness. Perhaps those two days, right away from the environment of the sordid business and spent as he spent much of his leisure, in walking, might clarify his mind and give him a deeper insight

into the case and into the actions of the man in the dock. And as he heard the defending counsel's rather harsh voice say ". . . and if you come to that conclusion, and I suggest it is the only conclusion, you will unhesitatingly declare the prisoner not guilty . . ." he began to plan his week-end. What should he make his starting-point and should he go there by car or by train? He decided upon Watford and, unusual choice, the train: he would do that lovely walk through Buckinghamshire that he had first done on his honeymoon.

Shortly after ten-thirty on Saturday morning Sir Charles Stanbroke strode briskly out of Watford Station. He wore light brown tweeds, was bareheaded, and carried a heavy ash stick. He looked ten years younger than the man who, little more than a dozen hours earlier, had sat in the tense and stuffy atmosphere of the court listening, watching, weighing words to the exactness of an apothecary's scruple. There was so jaunty, so carefree, so almost boyish an air about him as he cocked an approving eye at the sunny sky that had he broken into a whistled song it would have seemed perfectly congruous; yet Mr. Justice Stanbroke whistling a popular song was something that would not have occurred to the most imaginative of his colleagues as a possibility. Perhaps the old brown tweed suit was responsible for the miracle since nothing could have been more unlike it than the scarlet robe and white wig of yesterday. It is permissible to wonder whether a judge who presided over a court wearing an old suit of brown tweeds might not get nearer to the heart of the cases he tried than do those remote forbidding figures in their inhuman wigs and robes.

There was nothing of the stroller about Sir Charles. When he set off on a walk he walked: a mile every fourteen minutes with the precision of a speedometer. It was a hot day and by the time he had been walking three hours his thoughts began to pre-occupy themselves almost exclusively with liquids: water for his skin, beer for his throat. The swim first: he had in fact been making that his goal all the morning. He knew the wood, and the stream running through it so solitary and secluded that he and Diana coining delightedly upon it had had no hesitation, even in those prudish days, in stripping and plunging in. As he entered the wood memory touched his heart nostalgically and the lines of his face softened. Almost he could believe the thirty-five years were rolled back and his young bride walked beside him.

He smiled faintly at the fancy and found his heart could still ache for his long-dead wife.

He swam down the stream a hundred yards or so, passing the bend where he remembered an alder had reached out over the water. It was still there. He turned over on his back and allowed the stream to do with him as it would. Along the banks he heard rustlings in the undergrowth and felt himself watched by the inquisitive eyes of small furry things. The leaves of the trees susurrated lazily. Somewhere a bird called. Memories poignantly sweet slipped wraithlike through the galleries of his mind. A quarter of an hour went by before he swam back to where he had left his clothes. They were gone; only the ash-stick remained and if its solitary presence evidenced a sense of humour on the thief's part Sir Charles was in no mood to appreciate it.

Pursuit of the thief was, he realised, useless. He sat down, his chin resting upon his drawn up clasped knees and set himself to consider the situation. The nearest village, Brayton, a sizeable place of some fifteen hundred people, was nearly seven miles away. Less than half-way to Brayton there was, or had been, a public house on the main road. Even if it were still there it was not what he wanted and without further consideration he ruled it out. There remained Brayton. Somehow or other he had to get to Brayton. He was not very clear as to what he proposed to do on getting there; probably go to the police station. But that was not immediately urgent: the thing was to get there and the problem was how. He certainly couldn't walk there naked. There came over him something of the distress of mind with which he was familiar in that type of nightmare common to all civilised people: finding one's self suddenly naked in a public thoroughfare. It was a form of nightmare which frequently troubled him and which in recollection he had always found amusing; but with the dream become actuality the funny side seemed less apparent.

After long thought he decided that his best plan would be to stop a car, explain the circumstances, and ask for a lift to Brayton. Nor need he go entirely naked. Surely if a leaf were enough for Adam a branch would be more than enough for the most exacting demands of decorum.

With some difficulty he pulled off a branch of sufficient dimensions and immediately felt clothed in front, if the more excessively bare behind. He made his way to the highroad, cautiously recon-

noitred, and then, the branch modestly in place, set off slowly towards Brayton, turning round frequently to see if any cars were coining. Presently he saw one and went to meet it. As it drew near it seemed to him that it was not going to stop and in his agitation he frantically waved his branch, only to see the car accelerate and shoot past him, leaving behind the image of a stern-faced woman driver whose glazed eyes stared remotely ahead.

He discovered a well of profanity that he had thought long since dried up and cursed her in particular and female prudes in general. He set off walking again and within the next twenty or thirty yards had picked up no fewer than five thorns. As he removed the last one, watching the little spurt of blood which followed it, his profanity found an even richer note and his exasperated thoughts took a botanical turn: what in the devil's name was the use of thorns? What purpose did they, could they possibly, serve? He could find none. They were, he decided, just one of those things in life for whose existence there is no reason (unless to annoy people is a reasonable basis for existence): mosquitoes, the east wind, the common cold, cats, bores, crooners, toadstools, fogs and the Labour Party.

He had limped several hundred yards further toward Brayton before he turned and saw, far off and very small, another car. Thinking it better perhaps to stay hidden until the car was within hailing distance he crouched down on the sloping grass verge behind his branch. When the car was about thirty or forty yards away he jumped to his feet and ran towards it calling out: " Will you stop please! " He caught sight of a flushed face, staring eyes, a large red nose, and a mouth gaped half open in an expression that was part fright, part astonishment, part fury, as the car swerved violently, shot nearly to the other side of the road and then accelerated in a cloud of dust, shooting out of its exhaust a spurt of evil-smelling black smoke which drifted over to him making him wrinkle his nose in disgust and adding almost a frenzied note to the volley of obscene abuse he bawled after the disappearing car.

Some five minutes later distant noises behind him claimed his attention from his immediate misfortunes and turning he saw a charabanc speeding and swaying towards him. It was still several hundred yards away but its load of apparently inebriated merry-makers heralded its coming with unmelodious song and an instrumental accompaniment as pleasing to the ear as a saw on a nail.

Sir Charles was intimidated by the monstrous cacophony. He felt he could not face that horde of drunken revellers and an appeal to them for a lift was unthinkable. He took hasty refuge in a ditch at the side of the road, crouching down among the thick greenery which was, he discovered too late, mainly stinging nettles.

He crawled out as soon as the monster had gone by; neither swearing at it nor shaking a futile fist. He did not give it a thought; nor his sore feet; nor his embarrassing and exasperating plight. For he had just then other things claiming all his attention; several scores of them and in the tenderest places. He was able to add one more to his list of those things for whose existence he could see no reason and without hesitation he placed nettles first on the list.

He shambled on. Gone was the jaunty stride with which he had emerged from Watford Station that morning. That tweed-clad figure had been so obviously that of a distinguished person, a personage. The thing that was shambling along the road to Brayton, dusty, tired, hungry, thirsty, sore, smarting, and in a state of increasing fury, might have been the lowest and meanest of mankind.

A dog made a sudden almost thaumaturgic appearance on the opposite side of the road. It was a nasty looking beast with coarse yellow hair, a black muzzle and shifty eyes. It waited until Sir Charles had plodded slowly by and then it sidled obliquely across the road and taking up a strategic position about ten feet from his heels padded along after him.

Sir Charles was fond of dogs but he didn't like this one and he mistrusted its intentions. Never had he felt more vulnerable. For a time he shambled on, determinedly ignoring the beast, but his uneasiness grew; more and more he felt how bare he was behind and how open to attack. His imagination took a hand and he felt the brute's breath on his legs, almost its teeth in his calf, and he stopped and turned round. The dog, still as much as five feet away, stopped too. "Good dog," Sir Charles said, "good hoy." The dog growled. A surge of uncontrollable anger swept over Sir Charles. "Go away, damn you!" he roared and lunged at the animal with his branch. The cur snarled and retreated, but when Sir Charles turned to walk on rushed in again and as the branch was once more thrust towards him seized it in his teeth

and in the subsequent tug-of-war was victor and bore off his prize in triumph.

The loss of his branch did not greatly trouble Sir Charles. At least he'd got rid of the dog and for the rest there were plenty of branches. Where there were trees there were branches. But as it happened just then there was not a tree in sight. Sir Charles meditated going in search of one and then with a muttered oath and a shrug of his shoulders he plodded on. He was fast reaching a condition of furious exasperation which twenty-four hours earlier he would not have believed possible to him.

Three cars at intervals of a few minutes went by in the opposite direction. He had no hope of persuading a driver to turn round (never had his opinion of human nature been so low) and as he did not wish to attract useless attention he took refuge each time in the dry ditch which continued to flank the road, carefully avoiding the nettles. But presently, as he clambered out of the ditch, he saw a car coming towards Brayton. It was a small car and he was determined to stop it if he had to throw himself in front of it.

Stop it he did. It pulled up with a screech of brakes and the driver, a smallish middle-aged man, surveyed him through the small open space of his window with a look that conveyed various emotions, none of them friendly.

"I was bathing and my clothes have been stolen," Sir Charles said, "will you oblige me with a lift as far as Brayton?"

"Bathing," the driver said, allowing his glance to take in the whole countryside, "where?"

"Er—some miles from here, a little stream/" And then, testily, "What does it matter where! Will you oblige me with a lift?"

The driver shook his head. "Sorry," he said; "you may be all right but you don't look it. You may be barmy and you're twice my size, if you see what I mean. Or you might be an escaped conny. Sorry," and he stooped over his clutch.

"Just a moment," Sir Charles said desperately, holding on to the bonnet, "will you sell me your trousers then?"

"Will I what! "

"Sell me your trousers."

"Cheese it! And where's your money anyway?"

"Then lend me them. I promise——"

"Hop it! "

" I swear——"

The car jerked into life and Sir Charles, jumping back just in time to avoid being knocked over, stood staring after it in a silence beyond the relief of profanity.

Presently it began to rain. For a while this was refreshing but after some time, the rain increasing, he began to feel chilly and crawled through a wire fence to take shelter in a wood just beginning on the opposite side of the road and stretching away for some considerable distance. He had to go some way in before he found adequate shelter, where he passed the next ten minutes in a by no means philosophical contemplation of his plight. The rain ceasing he was about to take to the road again when an unpleasant vulgar voice said, " And what the hell are you doing here? " He turned sideways and encountered the hostile stare of a gamekeeper, gun under arm.

" I'm taking shelter," he said placatingly; " I lost my clothes bathing."

" This is a private preserve."

" I'm doing no harm."

" You're trespassing."

"Trespass is not an offence if there is no damage done."

"You seem to know all about it. What're you doing here? "

"Sheltering."

" You said that before."

" Because it's the truth." A sudden hopeful thought struck him.

" Who owns these preserves? " he asked.

" I thought you did. It's Lord Bending if you want to know."

This far exceeded his hopes and was, besides being a striking coincidence, the first bright spot in a grey experience, for he knew Lord Bending quite well and had dined at his house in Berkeley Square. "How fortunate!" he exclaimed; "is his Lordship at home? "

" He is."

" Please take me to him."

" What?" staring.

" I said please take me to him. We are old friends."

"Beat it."

" But I assure you——"

" Skin out of it. Quick. Buzz off. Before I put my toe somewhere."

" Will you listen——"

The gamekeeper aimed a sudden kick at a point of utmost vulnerability. Sir Charles dodged and, beside himself with fury, hit the fellow flush on the jaw, toppled him over, and took to his heels. As he ran he heard the sound of a gun shot, felt a stinging sensation and putting his hand behind him found that he was bleeding. He ran on in a swerving course, ducking his head, and presently gasping for breath. But there were no more shots fired and the gamekeeper had apparently given up the chase.

He estimated that he must by now have covered several miles and that Brayton could not be more than four miles distant. A boy on a bicycle overtook him silently and Sir Charles, taken unawares, broke into a pursuing run and grabbed the boy so violently that he came off, sat down in the road beside his upset cycle, glared malignantly at the tall naked figure, and said, "'Ere, wotchupto, mister!"

"I'm so sorry," Sir Charles said. " I hope you're not hurt."

" I dunno. Nor me bike."

" Let me help you with it," stooping to grasp the handles as a wild idea slipped invitingly into his mind.

"You le' it alone."

Should he take it? He weighed the pros and cons. It was sheer highway robbery. With a sigh he dismissed the idea. " Do you want to earn a pound? " he asked with as winning a smile as he could produce.

" Showusit."

" Well, obviously I haven't it about me; but I assure you you'll get a pound if you'll take a message for me."

" Whereto? "

"To Brayton Police Station."

" Orright."

"Perhaps you'll lend me a pencil and paper."

" Ain't gotterpencil."

" O dear I Then it'll have to be a verbal message."

" Wossat? "

" Listen. I want you to go to the Police Station at Brayton, ask for the sergeant and tell him Sir Charles——" he broke off, realising the boy wouldn't remember his name, and then went on, " oh, just say one of His Majesty's judges has had an accident along the road and will he send a car for me."

"Tell sarjint wunner 'is Majesty's judges 'adanaccident along-eroad and will he send a car."

"That's right."

"Me go, in and say that to the sarjint?"

"Good; and then you'll get a pound."

"I know what I'll get orright. Don' w'any pigeons' milk, I suppose? or strapile? Gertl "

"But I assure you, my good boy——"

"You lemmybe. Go on opit."

"But——"

"Youlemmibikealone," and giving Sir Charles a shove he leapt into the saddle and pedalled off down the road as if the devil were after him.

Three hours later, by devious ways and many long and cramped concealments, he came to the beginnings of Brayton. He was worn out, muddy, sore, weak from hunger and thirst, bleeding; and he limped along in a black fury of half incredulous exasperation. Could such things be in a civilised country? How could it have happened to him, to Sir Charles Stanbroke, judge of the King's Bench? If this self-reminder of his own eminence were to keep his heart up and endow him with a bold front for the coming ordeal it completely failed: he knew he could not face it; knew that before he confronted the Brayton police, or indeed Brayton itself in daylight, he would have to be clothed.

He would call on the local doctor and borrow a suit of clothes. A professional man would immediately recognise him for a man of education and accept his story, however bizarre, as true. Yes, he would call upon the doctor. But as he could not bring himself to enter the village until it was dark he would have to keep in hiding till then. Fortunately the weather was very warm and he would not have more than three hours at the outside to wait before darkfall.

For all the mildness of the weather it was a chilled and wretched figure which some hours later crept into Brayton under cover of a cloudy and moonless night. Sir Charles's goal was the Brayton doctor, whoever that gentleman might be. At a guess he thought there would be over two hundred houses and cottages in the village and the only clue to the doctor's was the probability of there being a brass plate on the front gate. Luck was with him; on the fifth gate he came to was a brass plate and although it was too

dark to decipher the lettering on it there was no need of his knowing the name: to ask to see the doctor would be sufficient. Wearily, yet silently and cautiously, he entered and approached the iron door. He was about to ring when he realised that a maid might answer the door: it was necessary to obtain some covering, if little more than sufficed Adam. There were clumps of bushes by the garden gate and returning he was about to pull off sufficient foliage for his purpose when he heard the heavy tread of measured feet approaching on the pavement. He crouched down behind the nearest bush. The slow feet came on, drew level, stopped. A light flashed dazzlingly into his eyes and a grating voice demanded sharply, "What are you doing here? "

"Er—I've come to see the doctor," stammered Sir Charles.

"Oh, yes; no doubt you have. I don't think. There's two young ladies live here, the Misses Shuffle wight, dressmakers. What do you think you're doing outside their house in *that* state? " thrusting the torch towards him threateningly.

"I thought it was the doctor's house. There's a plate on the gate. You see, I've been bathing——"

"That's enough. You come with me." The constable opened the gate and took a step towards him.

"If you'll allow me to speak to the doctor—er—will you take me to the doctor's? "

"You can see the doctor in the morning. You'll come to- the station to-night."

"But I assure you——"

"Come on! " gripping his shoulder roughly.

During his legal career Sir Charles had often heard it stated that someone or other had 'seen red'. He had always believed it a melodramatic fiction used to excuse violent behaviour. Whether or not he now saw red there was no doubt about the violence. All the slights, miseries, and exasperations of the day nerved him and lent him an astonishing strength as he roared: "You damned fool! " and struck the constable in the jaw. The man reeled back and Sir Charles leapt through the gate and set off running blindly. Behind him he heard the heavy thud of hurrying feet which drew closer and closer as his heart began to beat suffocatingly. Something sharp in the road cut one of his feet agonizingly and the swift pain momentarily slowed him. A foot was thrust between his and he fell headlong. A moment

later he was roughly grasped and dragged to his feet which were then crushingly, and doubtless accidentally, trodden upon. But the fight had gone out of Sir Charles. He surrendered.

He had not completely recovered his breath when he stood in the police station where a plump pleasant-faced sergeant sat writing at a desk. "What have you got there, George?" the sergeant asked.

"Raving maniac, I reckon," George said.

Sir Charles drew himself up with dignity. But it is impossible for a naked man to look dignified: nature has so arranged things that he merely looks ludicrous. The sergeant averted his glance with admirably assumed modesty. "Get him a mac, George," he said.

The garment being brought in Sir Charles put it on and immediately felt a surge of confidence sweep through him. "Look here, sergeant," he said, "I will admit appearances are against me but I am Sir Charles Stanbroke. one of His Majesty's judges. I live at 13 St. James's Street in the West End of London and my telephone number is Blessington 3331. If you will put a call through for me I shall be able to convince you that I am speaking the truth."

The sergeant shook his head. "I daren't put a trunk call through at this hour on such a cock-and-a-bull story. I'm not saying it mayn't be true, but on the evidence, as you might say, it's a million to one it isn't. Sorry."

Sir Charles resigned himself and said flatly: "When may I put a call through?"

"We'll see about it in the morning. What about a cup of tea?"

"I'd like that," Sir Charles said humbly. And then, more boldly, he added, "Could I have anything to eat?"

"There's bread and cheese or bread and jam."

"Er—could I have both? I've had nothing to eat or drink since my breakfast at nine this morning."

The sergeant grinned. "Think we might manage it. George, ask Tom to make a pot of tea; the big one; and you can cut the bread and butter and bring it in."

After eating a heartier meal than he had done for years and having drunk three cups of strong sweet tea Sir Charles gratefully accepted a cigarette. Later he was made comfortable for the night.

Mr. Justice Stanbroke was a few minutes late in taking his place in court on the Monday morning. It was noticed that he was

limping, that one side of his face had been recently abraded, and that his left eye was discoloured.

After the closing speech of counsel for the Crown the judge began his summing up. To the astonishment of all in court it was strongly for the prisoner; and the jury, whose retirement had been expected to last four or five hours, returned in thirty-five minutes with a verdict of Not Guilty.

STRANGE ENCOUNTER

A MANUSCRIPT was sent to me some time ago. Its publication was left to my discretion. Here it is:

Suitemcnt sworn by me, Geoffrey Chayie, formerly de Chayne

It is an odd thought that every human being is unique: that there never has been, is not now, and never will be anyone quite like you or me in the whole universe. You, my friend, are unique; I am unique. Not of course physically, for the whole of time and space may readily supply a thousand, a million duplicates of me. It is in my thoughts and memories that I am unique; in those multitudinous images that crowd the corridors of the brain. In this lies my uniqueness; lies your uniqueness; the uniqueness of all and every one of us upon the globe. But we need not on this account puff ourselves up with pride, for the same is true of every dog, horse, cat, mouse, cockroach and maggot. Yet over and above this uniqueness I have had an experience which I imagine and affirm places me in a class apart, renders me *sui generis*.

Although my father was a casual labourer and I went to an elementary school and was shabby and underfed (as were my parents) I knew very early in my life that I came of a great and noble family, the de Chaynes, who in the thirteenth century were but little less rich and powerful than the King and who, as late as Queen Bess, were not to be elbowed aside even by a Burleigh or a Cecil. The last de Chayne with any pretensions to social position was Henry de Chayne, friend of the Prince Regent and crony of Beau Brummel. After that we were nothing; our fortunes dissipated; our estates gone under the hammer; our fine ancestral home Brene Castle, built by the first de Chayne in 1137, sold to

Nathan Rothschild; the few living representatives of our great family forced for the first time to earn their bread. It was then the de was dropped from the name as being incongruous as well as tending to the nursing of bitter regrets and impossible hopes.

My father, William Chayne, had I suppose reached the nadir of the family degradation. What few memories I have of him (he died when I was eleven) present him as a crushed, a demoralised, a broken being; even physically he was degraded, being short for a Chayne and with no great share of the traditional de Chayne good looks. My mother, who was a woman of the people, a policeman's daughter, had once been pretty and was far more distinguished looking than he. For three years after my father's death she kept some semblance of a home together and found food and firing and clothes for the two of us, God knows how. And then she died and I, now utterly alone in the world, was thrown entirely upon my own resources.

What were those resources? No mean ones. In me all that had made the de Chaynes great seemed to be concentrated and born again. Their looks were mine; their physique was mine; their health was mine; as were their pride, their arrogance, their great abilities, and their ruthlessness. I was worth a thousand pounds before I was seventeen; fifty thousand by the time I reached my majority; and before my thirtieth birthday I was a millionaire several times over and held a position in society excelled but little if at all by the great de Chaynes of former times.

I had not married. That would come in due course. As I was the greatest of the de Chaynes my wife would have to be worthy of me and, more exigent, worthy of my mother. Meanwhile I would prepare a proper setting for this jewel. Brene Castle had been burnt down during the Luddite Riots in 1817 or I should certainly have purchased it despite all difficulties. Such positiveness is not arrogance but simply a recognition of the facts. For many years now there was nothing I had coveted which I had not obtained; and the things I had coveted had at first been many, for if a man is starved of almost everything for the first fourteen years of his life he is apt to be greedy and lustful when his pockets become full. I had my phases of covetousness. At one time I coveted other men's material possessions; their pictures, their statues, their books, their cellars, their horses: and these I took. At another time I coveted their women: and these too I took.

Perhaps that was why I was not to be hurried into marriage and could wait until perfection came my way. It never occurred to me to marry any of these women I took from other men; no such faithless wanton was fit to be the wife of a de Chayne; not upon such material was the new and greater line of de Chaynes to be founded.

I finally purchased Brankton Manor, a fine Elizabethan house near Dorchester, the property being one of the largest estates in the kingdom. And now, having found the setting, the jewel, as was perhaps natural, did not long lack. I married Margaret Legh who was beautiful, young, and accomplished, and whose family was as old as my own. With her I knew such happiness as humanity can rarely experience. She was musical, literary, and extremely fond of the theatre, and we quickly gathered about us a host of friends of similar tastes whom we entertained at the Manor; and we looked upon it as a small gathering when fewer than a hundred guests were sleeping under our roof.

I built a theatre on to the west wing with seating accommodation for three hundred and there we frequently gave performances of classical and modern plays and, as several playwrights were among our friends, not a few new plays had a preliminary trial run on the stage at Brankton Manor. Margaret was a fine actress and to my surprise and delight I discovered in myself a modest talent for the art and usually had a small part in any play put on."

About four years after my marriage (which was at the time childless) we had gathered over three hundred friends at the Manor for the Christmas festivities which with us lasted a fortnight or so before and after the twenty-fifth; and the great honour had been conferred upon us by Julian Redway, the poet and dramatist, of giving on Boxing Night a first performance of his verse-drama *Claudius*, in which I had the small and quite unimportant part of Balberian, a Roman gentleman living in Britain, where the scene of the play was laid.

I did not appear in the second act, which was a long one, and having a slight headache and my nerves being a little on edge I decided to go to my study for half an hour or so and read old Izaak Walton who always has a soothing effect upon me.

The gardens all about the Manor were floodlit and as the curtains of my study were not drawn the room was quite light. I was still wearing the costume in which I appeared in the play. My

first impression on opening the door and entering was that a large looking-glass had been left standing against the opposite wall and that I was regarding my reflection; but a more attentive look assured me that this was no reflection of myself, for while face and figure were exact duplicates of my own the costume differed somewhat in detail and moreover the person was plainly in considerable emotional distress, to judge by his expression, which was one of anguish and horror. "Can I help you?" I asked, suppressing my astonishment at the amazing likeness between us; "are you ill? or in any trouble?" And at this he looked at me for the first time and the anguish and terror left his face, being replaced by the utmost bewilderment. And then he spoke and the effect was as amazing, as inexplicable, as the rest of the affair, for while his voice had a foreign accent and the words on his lips sounded those of a foreign language I understood them perfectly: it was as if during their passage from his lips to my ears they were miraculously translated. "By all the Gods!" he said, "and who are you?"

"I think it is rather I who am entitled to ask that," I said; "won't you sit down." He did so and I took a seat opposite him. He was smiling slightly now. "I have it," he said slowly; "amazing! it is perhaps the first time it has happened in the history of the world." I could only stare at him without speaking and he went on, "Do you know who I am?"

"Certainly my double," I said; and then I added, "more than a double; you might be myself."

He nodded his head slowly. "Does that not suggest something to you?"

"Well—er—no," I said hesitantly.

"My name is Aulus," he continued; "I am, or rather I was. a Roman gentleman living in Britain in a villa upon the site now occupied by your very beautiful house."

"Do you mean you are a ghost?" I asked.

Again he nodded. "But something more too," he said softly.

"Are you solid then?" I said, leaning towards him and putting out my hand.

"No! no!" he said quickly; and I thought shrank a little from my approaching hand. "I am as incorporeal as a moonbeam. I am, it is true, an apparition, or a ghost if you prefer the word, but that is nothing; what makes my and your appearance here together

so astonishing a phenomenon is that I am yourself in a previous incarnation, or rather the ghost of you."

"I was once Aulus, a Roman gentleman, living in a villa near Dorchester!" I said incredulously; "and you are my ghost, the wraith of that incarnation of me!"

"So!" he said; "is that strange? What is strange is the coincidence of our meeting; it is perhaps an incident unique in human history."

"But how can you be my spirit?" I asked; "has a man as many spirits then as he has incarnations?"

He shook his head. "Man has but one spirit and many incarnations. I am not a spirit; ghosts are not spirits; they are apparitions, appearances, images; they have no more reality than the reflection of yourself in polished silver or in the pupil of another's eye. Like a mirage in the desert they build themselves upon the air."

"But how and when and why?" I asked.

"How?" he said; "it is not difficult; they use the power that is always latent in great emotion. Because of that power any scene which human beings have played out in great turmoil and agitation of mind, or in great joyousness, may be reproduced as an image again and again in the identical place for thousands of years; perhaps for ever."

"Our men of science tell us," I said slowly, "that no sound uttered is ever completely lost; that, in theory, the first cry of the first babe still drifts tenuously through space and could be picked up and heard had we the proper instruments. Perhaps it is so with all the actions performed by humanity since Eden: the image of them all could be reproduced upon the air had we the proper instruments. It is a fascinating yet a haunting, a terrible, thought,"

"It is surely a true one," he said; "and for proof here am I who died nearly two thousand years ago; I who was Aulus and now am you." He paused a moment and then added, "It was no doubt the manner of my death that endowed the air here with the power to reproduce my image; yet it is strange that I only should appear and not the others. But let me tell you the way of my death. The Romans were in occupation; the Britons were subjugated; we were the conquerors; they the defeated. We had our camps, our settlements, our towns. There were many Roman gentlemen like myself who had come to Britain on a brief visit of curiosity and, liking the country and the very lively society of soldiers, poets,

wits and courtesans, had built a villa on, the outskirts of a town with the intention of staying some years. As for the Britons they were gone, fled; into the marshes of Wales and beyond. No-one bothered about them and their existence might've well have been forgotten had they not adopted the unpleasant trick of a sudden descent by small raiding bands upon outlying posts, minor settlements, or isolated dwelling-places. The leader of such bands who gave us most trouble was one Caradoc who had a hundred murders of Romans on his black conscience and a hundred pieces of gold on his head. It was Caradoc's band which came down upon my villa one summer afternoon, butchered my slaves, violated my wife before my face, afterwards torturing and killing her; and finally beat me, a Roman citizen, shamefully to death with whips. It was perhaps this last indignity which filled me with such passion that the air about me became so charged with my furious emotion that my image is upon it for all time and becomes visible when the conditions are favourable."

"As they apparently are this evening," I said.

He nodded. "But I do not appear often," he said.

"This is not your first appearance?"

"My first I " he laughed; "in two thousand years! my dear fellow! A few score; perhaps a hundred; but not enough to give the buildings occupying the site the reputation of being haunted. By the bye, I forgot to mention that Caradoc's men burnt the villa down. The site was not built upon again till Alfred's time; then in the reign of Stephen; and this present very beautiful house under Elizabeth. That would make it about four hundred years old. During those four hundred years I have not I think appeared more than twenty times."

"Why did you appear to-night?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The power was there. I know no more than that."

"And when the power fades you vanish?"

He nodded. "It is like the burning out of a lamp. Already I feel it. My image will soon be invisible to you. But I shall be visible again soon. I am sure of that. I feel the presence of latent power and I confess, my dear fellow, that I am glad; for the situation is, you will admit, a fascinating one. Has ever a man before been haunted by his own ghost!"

"Do you propose to haunt me?"

He smiled, but a little dimly, for already his image was less clearly defined. "Not in the least. I shall merely appear occasionally; for a chat, shall we say? You should not find that unattractive; there is much that I can tell you, you know."

"For example?"

"I can tell you of your former incarnations."

"How can *you*, if I don't remember them?" I said.

"They are all in your memory; stored in the deep places of your mind. To those places I, as a past incarnation, have access; you have not, except in dreams."

"It would explain much," I said, contemplating his fading image, "it might be interesting, for I am given much to dreaming, and have often been puzzled. Are there other things you know that are hidden from me?"

"O yes; the term of your present incarnation and the period of your next. Do you wish to know?"

"God forbid!" I exclaimed, as his form began to merge into the air about him. "One moment I" I cried loudly and peremptorily as if that might hold him back: "You will appear only to me; I cannot have anyone frightened; especially the staff."

His image was too far gone for me to catch the expression of the face but I thought I perceived the faintest of smiles and heard like a remote whisper, the words: "Only to you, my dear fellow."

That was how it began, and I was fool enough to think it could remain like that. Of course it could not. Sooner or later he would get careless, or I, and he would be discovered. So things came about. He was first seen by members of the staff and there was some fuss and a few scenes with the hurried packing of trunks and agitated leavings. And presently the story was common talk that the Manor was haunted.

Margaret had not yet seen him but the meeting could not long be delayed and after much thought I decided to forestall the event by telling her everything. She was not as astonished as I had expected; her attitude was indeed almost matter of fact and she expressed an eager desire to meet Aulus. Reluctant as I felt (for some unknown reason) to satisfy her desire it was of course impossible not to fall in with her wishes and the meeting took place and was, if I may put it so, a great success, Aulus and Margaret being mutually attracted from the first moment. Nor was that of course strange.

Thereafter Margaret was always present. And then, after a while, a few months at the outside, I began to suspect that he was appearing to her unknown to me. I longed to ask her but I forbore, being half ashamed of my suspicion, and too proud to force her confidence. But soon I was certain, having both ocular and auricular proof. Still I said nothing, waiting for her to speak. But she said nothing; and I would not ask.

And then an amazing, an incredible thing began to happen. At first I ascribed it to my imagination and my jealousy (yes, I admit I was jealous of Aulus. jealous of that intimacy he now shared with Margaret and from which I was locked out) for it seemed a sheer impossibility. But I waited and watched and found ways again and again of testing this grotesque, this monstrous change that was taking place in Aulus: *he was slowly becoming flesh and blood*. O I know it sounds fantastic, mad; but it was true enough, as I quickly found ways and means of proving to myself.

And close upon the heels of that discovery I made another, and one that threatened irretrievably my happiness, my life itself; for life without Margaret seemed unthinkable: I realised that Margaret and Aulus were lovers. And so when, some months after I had made that shattering discovery, she told me she was *enciente* I knew it was no child of mine and that there was but one thing to do. Out of that agonising and unbearable situation there was but one way and I steeled my heart to take it. I would kill Margaret. Whether or not I could kill Aulus remained to be seen.

NOTE.—There the MS. ended. It may be as well to say that it was sent to me by the resident medical officer of one of our criminal lunatic asylums. In an accompanying letter he wrote: " . . . I should tell you that as far as is known the whole story is fandangle; a rigmarole of sheer imagination. The writer, Gregory Baynes, was an ex-schoolmaster who, ten years ago, cut his wife's throat, was found' insane, and sent here. He died last winter. One small matter you may find not uninteresting: for some years he had been saying that he would die on the tenth of January 1943 and that was in fact the day of his death. But that sort of thing is, as you know, not uncommon . . . "

STORIES FROM THE DIARY OF A VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER

I. THE UNCANNY AFFAIR OF MR. SENDALL

YOU WOULD NOT, I imagine, expect a village schoolmaster's life to be anything but a quiet and rather dull affair; and yet when I look back upon my years here at Hadley, a very ordinary English village, I am astonished at the number and variety of the events, of the quite extraordinary events I think I may call them, which have astounded or delighted or sometimes even shocked the eyes and ears and understandings of the eight hundred or so very ordinary human beings who compose Hadley's population. And I feel I have cause to congratulate myself upon that decision to keep a diary which I made that very day of August 1907 when I took up my scholastic appointment at Hadley.

It was a decision (made suddenly and, I confess, lightly) to which I owe a great deal of happiness and innocent pleasure (for surely no pleasure is more innocent than the writing down of one's thoughts upon the passing pageantry of life); and, more tangibly, those four stout leather-bound volumes which I am careful to keep safely locked up in my little study.

Few evenings pass that I do not read in one or other of these treasures of mine for I freely admit that I know of no other book which I can open with such assurance of being held captive; and if I am charged, as I well may be, with egoism I shall submit that it is a trait common enough with authors and not rare among schoolmasters; and since I am something of both rather more than the average human share of that quality must be forgiven me.

Perhaps in the whole length of those four long volumes there are no stranger entries than those referring to what I may call the uncanny affair of Mr. Sendall. I had then been here three years and the village was just beginning to accept me. I had helped to dispel their chief cause of suspicion and prejudice against me, that I was a bachelor, by engaging as my housekeeper Mrs. Paradock, a Hadley widow of ripe age and great physical unattractiveness.

As she brought in my breakfast that lovely June morning Mrs.

Paradock said, "They Post Office people are doing something at Rose Cottage and one of them's up Ted Loveridge's pole."

"They must be putting in the telephone," I said; "now I wonder who the new tenant 'll be and what she wants the telephone for."

"It'll be a him," Mrs. Paradock said; "who ever heard of a woman wanting a telephone. Tongues were, made before telephones and they carry far enough for reasonable folk. Too far by half sometimes. Look how far a whisper 'll carry in Hadley."

It was another week before Mr. Sendall arrived. No-one saw his arrival or knew anything about it until the next morning. Came like a thief in the night, the village said later on, when people had begun to talk. Or perhaps I should say begun to talk a great deal, for they began to talk from the very first. And really it was not to be wondered at for it was certainly a very odd business indeed.

I dislike gossip and I never indulge in it on principle but unfortunately Mrs. Paradock was addicted to it and while I decidedly did not encourage her it was not always possible to avoid being a prey to her chatter. She was clearing away my tea when she said, "Nobody's seen Mr. Sendall yet and he's been here four days." I knew by her tone and the slow way she was clearing the table that she wanted to talk. I'd made a good tea, my pipe was drawing well and sweetly, and altogether I felt so comfortable and at peace with the world that I hadn't the heart to repulse her. It wasn't as if she demanded replies or even attentive noises from a listener. All she needed was an ear and given that and a send-off she dribbled on and on like a leak in a cistern. And so I nodded my head and said, "Dear me, that's rather odd, Mrs. Paradock."

"It's fair rum," she declared, "and it's not the only rum thing about this Mr. Sendall. Nobody's seen him because he don't go out; not by day anyhow; whatever he does at night. And he don't deal with any o' the shops in Hadley. Gets everything from Chelcaster. Orders it by telephone and the tradesmen's vans deliver. Don't even have a newspaper from Hawkinses for Ted Raikes says there's a copy of *The Times* with his afternoon post every day. And a lot of letters he gets and there's been a parcel or two but so far, Ted says, no postcards. Ted just opens the front door and leaves everything on the table in the little lobby and that's what the tradesmen have to do.

"He can't be a ninvaleed for Ted says he's several times heard him dashing about the house and once or twice singing but he couldn't make the words out and said they weren't English, he'd swear to that, and it was his opinion he was a foreigner of some sort and Sendall wasn't his name at all. Well, of course, if he's a foreigner that would explain everything."

I've no doubt that Mrs. Paradock ran on for a considerable time in that fashion but I have no recollection of it now or any record of it for it was not my habit, except occasionally, to enter her rambling chatter in my diary.

But interest in Mr. Sendall far from dying away as the weeks went by steadily increased; and it was undoubtedly his queer habits which were responsible. For if he never went out by day he frequently did at night, and late at night too, returning to Rose Cottage no-one knew at what early hours in the morning. That in itself was sufficient to cause talk but it was not the only thing. He apparently never did any cooking. Hadley had quickly realised he didn't eat meat, for no butcher's van ever called, but even vegetarians cook. But this Mr. Sendall didn't and also to judge by his chimneys he never even had a fire. Of course it was summer-time and a hot summer it was with a drought lasting from the end of June to the middle of August. It was the year of the severe diphtheria epidemic and there were fifteen deaths in the village, which was nearly three times our average. But whether he ate cooked food or not he'd have to have a fire in the winter unless he were a very extraordinary sort of person. But the winter was a long way off and the village's curiosity was impatient.

And then the news went round that Mr. Sendall was a negro. Bert Joicey was coming home just after dawn one morning and he saw him over by Skerry's Copse, and he said that although Mr. Sendall turned away quickly and made off through the Copse he took) a short cut and almost came up with him, and his face was as black as an oven door. It's true Bert Joicey was a poacher but that did not dispose me for one to disbelieve him and he was able to give the village the first description of the new tenant of Rose Cottage. He said he was tall and well-built and, judging from his swinging stride, quite young.

We got a little more information a day or so later. I had at from Mrs. Paradock when she was dusting my room. "He's a gentleman, anyway, and that's something 'tany rate," she said,

" for if you can't tell a gentleman from his voice what can you tell him from? And I heard it myself. Hearing's believing. I happened to be passing the cottage when Brean's van stopped outside and I stopped to look at the roses in the garden and when the driver put the things inside the lobby he called out something I didn't catch; but I did catch what the other voice, Mr. Sendall's voice, said. It was something about it being all right and that next time would do. I don't say I've got the words exact but that doesn't matter. What does matter was that it was a gentleman's voice, a proper college voice."

Naturally enough others besides Mrs. Paradock soon heard Mr. Sendall's voice, and before long few of us in Hadley had not heard it either by accident or by scheming. But still no-one had seen the owner of the voice except poacher Joicey. It was a pleasant enough voice, for I heard it myself; it undoubtedly belonged to a man of education and its influence was so very much in Mr. Sendall's favour that the general feeling against him might rapidly have disappeared altogether had not the village common-sense been suddenly unseated by an invasion of that blind superstition whose recurrent appearance in our midst is the constant despair of educationalists. I will admit that we, as a community, were just then subjected to quite an epidemic of small accidents; and some not so small. George Davey's roof caught fire; Fred Belcher's cow Sarah died in calf; Abel Searl's cob broke a fetlock; and there were more upset saucepans, cracked mirrors, sprained ankles, poor litters and straying cows and hens than might reasonably be looked for. Knowing something of village life I quite expected that here and there some silly old woman or equally silly old man would shake an empty old head and mumble something about Mr. Sendall being responsible for the mishaps; but to find, as I did, the great majority of our people ascribing these mischances to the presence in Hadley of the tenant of Rose Cottage was to me, as the custodian of enlightenment in the village, a very shocking discovery.

But there it was: there was a spate of absurd chatter about evil eyes, foreign devils, sorcerers, warlocks, vampires and the like, more suitable for the tenth than the twentieth century. Nor did it stop at chatter for there were not a few dark hints about taking action, from so mild a one as getting the vicar to call, to the violence of burning down Rose Cottage. And in fact the vicar did

call; but he wasn't asked in; and he didn't get a sight of Mr. Sendall; and from the quick way he came walking from the cottage he may have heard something unpleasant. But I certainly didn't believe the tale that presently went round the village that he'd found stuck on the door inside the lobby a large printed card with 'No hawkers, no circulars, no visitors, no parsons, no relations' on it. That, I felt sure, was an invention of young Mr. Lucey who was a reporter on the *Chelcaster Observer*.

No-one risked setting fire to the cottage but somebody in the village sent a registered letter to Mr. Sendall, and quite a crowd was waiting outside when Ted Raikes delivered it. But it didn't come off, for Mr. Sendall just shouted downstairs that he wouldn't take it in.

And then the burglaries began. No, not at Hadley. The first were at Chelcaster seven miles away. Chelcaster was a sizeable town where burglary might naturally be expected but the odd thing was there hadn't been a burglary in Chelcaster for nearly ten years; and then suddenly there were three in a fortnight. And then three more in the next month. Then there were two at Stapledon, only four miles from Hadley; and one at Morden, about the same distance; and then there was one at Seton Parva, the next village to us. And there hadn't been burglaries at Stapledon, Morden, or Seton in living memory.

Well, there you are. Could anything have been clearer? I admit I was convinced myself. It was true Mrs. Paradock wouldn't hear of it. She maintained that he was a gentleman and that while a gentleman might be a scoundrel, a blackguard, or even a murderer, he would never be a burglar, since that would involve entering other people's houses without an invitation, a thing no gentleman could bring himself to do.

But few people in Hadley shared Mrs. Paradock's opinion and feeling ran so strong that anonymous letters were sent to the police station and then a round robin was sent signed by over a hundred men and women. I did not sign it. I always felt that as the village schoolmaster I should be strictly impartial and non-committal in all things. But quite a number of important names appeared on the round robin and the police, I suppose, concluded they could not ignore this expression of solid public opinion. However that may be Sergeant Thomas and Constable Baker called at Rose Cottage, entered, and stayed a quarter of an hour: well,

it was fourteen minutes and a quarter, to be precise.

But whatever the police learned the village got no satisfaction. Mrs; Paradock was triumphant and said of course there was nothing to learn; and when I mildly said Thomas and Baker might have been sworn to secrecy she laughed at me and said, "Coming upl"—an odd expression of hers—"and Baker a married man! If you was married you'd know different. If there was anything wrong in Rose Cottage Alice Baker'd Ve known all about it before she went to sleep last night and 'twould 'a been all over Hadley by now."

And then Mr. Sendall left the village. And he went as mysteriously and as unseen as he'd come: on Monday he was there and when Tuesday morning came he was gone. And within a few weeks it all came out for it was in the newspapers. The Christmas before there'd been a big fire in a London store where they were holding a children's bazaar and Mr. Sendall (but of course that wasn't his name) had saved many of the children, and in doing so had been so badly burnt about the face that he no longer looked like a human being. When he came out of hospital he came down to Hadley to rest and get strength before undergoing operations to build him a new face. That was why he never went out at Hadley and wouldn't allow himself to be seen and why even when he went out at night he wore a black silk mask all over his face.

But what chiefly upset Hadley was not that it had so shamefully misjudged a very gallant young man but that Mr. Sendall belonged to the Upper Ten and only a year later succeeded to the title. I don't mean there was anything particularly snobbish about Hadley's feelings but as Mrs. Paradock quite rightly said: "A lord's a lord and you can't get away from that."

II. THE WELL OF UNTRUTH

I often think while browsing in the pages of my diary that a countryman is likely to be a richer and truer chronicler of the human scene than a townsman for he has a closer and more intimate knowledge of his material and this is especially true if he lives in a village which, like Hadley, is small enough to make all its inhabitants neighbours as you might say.

A village is a world in little and if you know a village and its inhabitants you know the world and you know human nature. I 'have always found the odd ways of human beings more likeable than not, and frequently laughable, and this is no doubt due to the fact that I am myself a man of jovial habit, a characteristic I owe to a good digestion.

I even liked old Amos Sears and found him quite congenial company, if in not too large doses. There were certainly few others in Hadley who liked him and this he owed entirely to himself, as I often told him, for he liked to drop in and smoke a pipe with me for an hour or so on Saturday evenings. Mrs. Paradox also told him so quite frequently and much more bluntly than I, for she allowed her tongue the freedom of such opprobrious colloquialisms as 'miserly old skinflint', 'old curmudgeon', 'bear with a sore head' and the like. Not that Amos was old at the time I'm speaking of; no more than the early fifties. He never took offence at her tongue and gave as good as he got and sometimes better and I often thought he enjoyed those exchanges with my housekeeper more than he did our talks; they lent a savour to his pipe. I am sure at bottom they really liked each other and showed it in the not uncommon way of rough chaff.

Amos had a small holding, about seven acres and on this he grew enough to keep him very comfortably, taking his produce to Chelcaster market by horse and cart. He worked hard and spent little and rumour had it in Hadley that he'd a nice little sum settled away somewhere. It was one of his pet jokes to pretend he was on the verge of destitution and that he was going into the Grubber as we call the workhouse in these parts. He was a bachelor and was fond of saying, to draw Mrs. Paradox, that the thing he was most proud of in his life was having escaped the clutches of women. Mrs. Paradox usually rose to the bait. "You're suffering from delusions," she used to say; "no woman ever looked twice at you; once was an eyeful. You're a bachelor, and a bad tempered old one into the bargain, because no woman would marry you."

He used to grin and take his pipe out of his mouth at this and retort: "Hundreds would have jumped at me if I'd so much as raised a finger; all sorts; young maids, old maids, and widows. You'd jump at me yourself if I asked you."

This always made Mrs. Paradox flush up and snap: "O would

"I ask me and see." And her flush would deepen when he'd chuckle and leer and say: " You don't catch me like that, Missis! "

Amos was reckoned the shrewdest and hardest man at a bargain in the village and to this acumen he owed what little admiration flowed in his direction, for Hadley folk loved a hard bargain and I am afraid put business first and foremost in their lives. To his cunning at a bargain Amos added a sheer pig-headedness that usually, it is true, gained him his way but not infrequently earned him some jeering laughter. There was the matter of the water. When Hadley had the water put in, Amos's place being several hundred yards outside the village the Company told him there would be a small charge, about a pound I think it was. A pound was nothing to Amos but he flatly refused to pay it and when the Company insisted he said he wouldn't have the water in but would continue with the well in his garden he had always used, as his father and grandfather had before him.

This he did and presently, as it were making virtue out of necessity, he was for ever declaring what marvellous water his well gave and to it he owed, he would say, his perfect health. And then he would rasp his chin with his linger and leer and add: " To that and keeping single." When Mrs. Paradock mocked at his obstinacy over the water and told him he was cutting" off his nose to spite his face he grinned and retorted. " No, no, Missis; it's you poor fools who're being diddled. God gave us water for nothing and I'm not going to pay good money to have it run through a dirty pipe before drinking it."

" Rubbidge! " Mrs. Paradock said, " if the pipes was dirty the water'd show it and taste too."

" So 'twould, Missis," he retorted, " if they didn't put chemicals in to hide it. You'll all be in Doctor Clyde's hands before the year's out. Look at me! " thumping his chest, "not a day's illness in my life and I owe it all to my well water and to steering clear o' women."

"That saved one poor thing from misery 'tanyrate," snapped Mrs. Paradock.

Now the odd thing was that from so frequently talking about the quite imaginary virtues of his well Amos began to believe in them, or pretended to and pretended so craftily that he deceived everyone. And after a while, hearing it said so often, I suppose, the village began half to believe in them too and in course of time,

from the nonsense talked by some of the sillier folk (and of course encouraged by Amos with a pack of lies), a stranger might have thought Amos's well possessed of the miraculous powers ascribed to the waters of Lourdes.

One Saturday evening (it was high summer) Amos was somewhat later than usual coming in for his chat and smoke and when he did come along he was clearly in a bad temper and sat smoking for a long time in silence broken by the gurgling of his pipe. Even when Mrs. Paradock pointedly put an absurdly large bundle of feathers beside his elbow he said nothing. But presently it came out as it always will if one exercises patience and remains silent too. And really what a much-ado-about-nothing it was!

"The number of idle young whippersnappers rushing about the country in cars is enough to make a decent man sick," he said. "And their cheek! You'd think they was Lord Muck. On'y got to ask for something in a public school voice and everybody'll rush to get it for 'em. Well, one's had a lesson that'll do him a world o' good."

"They're on'y boys," commented Mrs. Paradock. "I don't hold with being hard on young folk. Nor would you if you'd ever been young yourself."

Amos ignored her. "I was tying up my peas about half-an-hour ago," he said, "when a sort of racing-looking car pulled up outside with a screech and a young man poked his head out through a Hap and said, 'Could I have some tea, Dad?' " Amos glared over to me. "Dad! What d'you think of that I "

"You ought t'a been flattered," Mrs. Paradock said.

"A dad's the last thing I'd want to be!" he snapped.

"It's all for the best," Mrs. Paradock said with a smirk; "it's saved some poor helpless mites from misery and suffering."

Amos relit his pipe. "That was it. 'Could I have some tea, Dad!' I told him he couldn't and he had the cheek to say why not? and hadn't I got any? I told him to mind his own business and that brought him up a bit, or so I thought, and he said he on'y wanted something to drink as he was thirsty. And so I said, 'Well. Mister, if you're thirsty there's a well o' the best water in England; there's a bucket; and there's a tin mug,' and I turned back to the peas.

"I heard him drawing up the water and a labour he made 6f it; a woman couldn't 've made a worse hand of it. But he managed

it at last and I'd half-forgotten he was there when he said something and I turned and there he was standing with the tin mug in his hand looking at it as if it was poison.

" ' What? ' I said.

" ' Does your water always taste like this? ' he said.

" ' Like what? ' I said, when I could say anything, for I could see this was his way of getting his own back, the insulting little runt.

" ' If I knew what I'd tell you,' he said, ' but I don't. Pah 1 ' He gobbled on the ground; put the mug carefully down on the coping; gave me a nasty grin and said, 'If you'll take my advice, Dad, you'll have that well bricked up.' And he was into his car and off with a rush. And dam' lucky for him he was for if I'd a got my hands on him I'd a trimmed him." He grunted and pulled hard at his pipe. " I've half a notion those scoundrels at the water Company sent him."

He was in a much better humour when I saw him a week later. Several strangers during the week had stopped at his little place for a drink and had praised the water. " Yes," he said, " and one old gentleman pulled up in a big car and asked for a glass of water and got quite excited about it; said it was the best water he'd ever tasted and could he take some away with him as he was sure it would be good for his liver or something. And when I said he could have what he liked, darned if the shuvver didn't turn out half-a-dozen thermos flasks and when I filled them the old gent slipped a pound note into my hand and drove off smiling as pleasant as you make 'em."

" I'm surprised at you taking money for your water." Mrs. Paradox remarked, " I thought you said God made water free for all."

" That's right, Missis," he grinned, " but I had to draw it up and the labourer's worthy of his hire."

Just after I'd reopened school after the summer holidays Amos came round to see me on Thursday evening, a thing he'd never done before, and I guessed by that he'd something urgent he wanted to discuss, or at least to talk about. And sure enough as soon as he'd lit his pipe and I'd poured him out a mug of beer, out it came. He produced a letter from a firm of solicitors and read it out, following the words with his forefinger. The solicitors wrote that their clients were building residential hotels in beauty spots and having been much struck by the prospect from his holding were

prepared to buy the property and offered him three thousand pounds.

"Are you going to accept?" I asked.

"What!" he exclaimed, "three thousand! why, it's worth every penny of fifteen hundred." He grinned at me. "Taken a fancy to it they must 've done," he said; "and if they want a fancy article they'll have to pay a fancy price."

And a fancy price they certainly paid and within a fortnight: eight thousand pounds.

And then Amos sprang another surprise on the village. He said he was sick to death of Hadley; that he was well off enough now to retire and that he'd bought a nice little house at Crosby-on-Sea and that he was going there to live.

He came round to bid me goodbye the evening before he left. "D'you know," he said, giving me one of his odd looks, "I don't believe that yarn about residential hotels. I believe my little bit o' property's been bought by oil prospectors."

"Oil prospectors!" I gasped.

He nodded. "There's a lot o' prospecting being done on the Q.T.," he said; "you see, I've got a bit o' my savings in oil, and so, being interested, I keep an eye on what the papers say about it. 'Twouldn't surprise me if some of those people who came drinking my water weren't after oil. And thought they tasted it."

"But *you* haven't, have you?" I said.

"Can't say I have," he grinned; "but they might have done." And then he gave me a leer and added, "I won't say I haven't been a bit careless with the paraffeen at times. I wish 'em the best o' luck, but I don't somehow think they'll find much oil."

Nor did they, although they made an ugly mess of what had once been Amos's pleasant little holding.

Whether or not Amos finally profited by the deal I shouldn't care to say but Hadley certainly got a shock when about a year later the news came that Amos was married and to a youngish wife.

When I told Mrs. Paradock she folded her arms round her waist, nodded her head slowly, and giving me a sly malicious smile said, "The mills of God grind slowly, as the Scriptures say, but they grind exceeding small."

I thought this an excessively odd comment to make upon a marriage, but I contented myself with saying, "Not the Scrip-

tures, Mrs, Paradock; but the poet Longfellow," to which she replied calmly, and I am afraid with impudent intent: " There now! what it is to be a schoolmaster! "

III. SIMEY RESTON'S SECOND MARRIAGE

Reston's, Tailors Outfitters and Breechesmakers, had been established since the reign of George the third and had always made for the best people. The Restons had always been important folk in Hadley and Simey Reston, who was about forty at the time I'm speaking of, was both looked up to and liked. It will give you some idea of the man when I tell you that although he was the most prosperous tradesman in Hadley, no-one called him Mr. Reston or even Simon; it was Simey with everyone. And yet although he was on such friendly easy terms with every man woman and child in the village no-one ever took advantage of it or would have dreamt of treating him with anything but respect. He was of course a fine big handsome man with a really imposing presence and no doubt that had something to do with people's attitude towards him. I don't want you to get the impression that he was one of those good-natured heavy ox-like amiable men always ambling around with a rather silly smile on their faces. Simey wasn't in the least like that. He was quick, alert and business-like, and he'd a temper that *could* be roused; and when it was roused there were fireworks.

He had married young, in the early twenties, and he and his wife had lived in the big house over and behind the shop, as Restons had always done. They didn't employ a lot of servants, I daresay they could have afforded to but the idea would never have occurred to Mary Reston or to Simey. If you had asked him about it he would probably have said: 'I run the business and Mary, as my wife, naturally runs the household.' And that was what she did and very capably too, doing all the cooking and quite a lot of the housework, with only a maid and a daily charwoman to help her. They had no children. It's often said that childless marriages tend to be unhappy and to break up. 'As a bachelor I don't feel competent to discuss the matter but I can put it on record that Simey's and Mary's marriage was an ideally happy

one and to be broken only by what unhappily did break it, death. And it was one of those deaths that you couldn't help feeling just ought not to have happened. Mary was as well as ever when she went to bed one night; was taken with violent pains in the early hours; and Dr. Clyde being summoned said she had acute appendicitis and must be taken immediately to the hospital at Chelcaster for an operation. Well, Chelcaster was seven miles away and what with one thing and another it was noon before Mary was got there and although the operation was, as they say, successful, she died without recovering from the anaesthetic. A strong healthy young woman, for she was no more than thirty-seven; in her prime; and to be allowed to die like that! It just ought not to have been allowed to happen and I know that we all in Hadley said there must be something wrong somewhere or it *couldn't* have happened. It was that which started the agitation for a cottage hospital in Hadley but that's another story.

Poor Simey was just frantic. Yes, I know that's the thing to say in such cases but with Simey it was literally true; he was beside himself; almost out of his mind; it seemed as if he couldn't believe it had happened.

And of course there was no-one to look after him and it's that side of a wife's dying that most affects a man, although it mayn't be very romantic to say so. Although I'm an old bachelor I'm sure it's true to say that a man doesn't realize all a wife does for him until he's lost her; and then he's doubly miserable wandering about the empty house (for no house is so empty as when a loved one is gone from it) wondering where this that or the other is kept, and how to do this, and what to do for that: all those things he'd accepted as part of his comfortable cushioned life without realising that somebody had to do them. For a time Simey's sister in London came and looked after him; but she was married and with children and could stay only a few weeks until he'd found a housekeeper. Or rather she had found one; for so domestically helpless had nearly twenty years of happy married life made Simey that he seemed quite incapable of making any household arrangements at all. Of course when the housekeeper, Mrs. Soames, arrived Mrs. Paradock said it was plain enough the sister had engaged her, for a more formidable and uncomely female it would have been difficult to find. Men, Mrs. Paradock said, would engage any silly young empty headed female if she'd a dimple or a pretty

leg, and in no time find themselves with indigestion or, worse still, hooked into a most unsuitable marriage.

I might have pointed out that a woman could have a dimple and a pretty leg and indeed every female charm under the sun and yet be most capable but I always felt it was a little undignified to argue with Mrs. Paradock (not to say useless) and so I generally refrained. But had I not refrained then I should for once have scored a sort of indirect or converse victory for Mrs. Soaines quickly demonstrated that plainness in a woman is not necessarily allied to ability. Far from being the treasure her appearance promised she proved to be a slapdash slattern and the sort of cook who says: "O I always guess it I". She was also addicted to an extreme form of piety which necessitated her attendance at chapel twice on Sundays and on two other evenings in the week. Poor Simey endured her for eight months, so helpless had he become, and began to show quite obvious signs in his appearance of the disruptive effects of her ministrations. And then, goaded by some intolerable affront to stomach or person (what it was we never learned), Simey roused himself from his domestic apathy and there were fireworks from whose thunders a scared Mrs. Soames emerged carrying a suitcase and on her way to the station.

For some weeks postman Ted Raikes's wife Bessie went in to cook for Simey and he pigged along with the help of the maid and the charwoman, who were for ever bickering over precedence. And then in that mysterious sudden way such things seem to happen everybody in the village was whispering or hinting at Jane Bovey's name as that of the second Mrs. Simon Reston. Miss Bovey was Mary Reston's age and they had in fact been to school together and had been the greatest of friends all their lives.

Jane Bovey was no beauty but she was an extremely pleasant and comfortable little body, plump and good-natured. She lived in Alma Villa on a small but sufficient patrimony, with a maid and two blue Persian cats. She was one of those women of whom everyone says: 'Isn't it extraordinary she's never married; a real womanly woman and so capable; a perfectly marvellous cook; and yet no man has ever asked her!' All that was true in Jane Bovey's case; no man had ever wanted to marry her and no woman had ever been jealous of her. Perhaps that was why she and Mary had remained such friends, frequently dining or supping at one another's houses, and occasionally going away for holidays together.

By a coincidence Jane's and Mary's birthdays fell on Christmas Eve and they had for years kept that day as a sort of intimate little festival, supping and spending the evening one year at Alma Villa and the next at Simey's house. After supper they played dummy and then chatted and as midnight drew near a punch was made, healths drunk, and Christmas greetings exchanged. The previous Christmas Eve's festival had been at Simey's house, Mary being then alive; and as the autumn drew on there was added to the other whisperings about Simey and Jane the question as to whether or not Simey would go to Alma Villa next Christmas Eve. If he did go the village reckoned that would settle it.

And then, about six weeks before Christmas, Simey got himself a new housekeeper and Hadley opened its eyes and gasped and then shook its head, for Mrs. Power was young and pretty and quickly showed that she was also supremely capable. But the village didn't like her. Perhaps it was because it had, as you might say, already married Simey and Jane and was angry at having its fomatic dream shattered. For shattered it seemed to be, or about to be; Simey being but a man and, in Mrs. Paradock's words, 'wax in the hands of a creature like that'. No, the village certainly didn't like Mrs. Power in the least. 'Where's Mr. Power?' people asked; and 'Who is he or was he? Don't believe there ever was a Mr. Power!' There was another school of thought which declared there had been a Mr. Power but he'd divorced his wife and no wonder. Mrs. Power proffered no information herself and if Simey had any he did not impart it. He seemed quite happy and contented, and soon lost, Hadley was quick to note and found ominous, those disruptive marks acquired under the sluttish regime of Mrs. Soames.

Christmas Eve dawned and all day long the village waited with an almost breathless expectancy. And just after five o'clock Simey was seen to leave his house with a big parcel under his arm and make his way towards Alma Villa. It was bitterly cold and freezing hard and he walked rapidly. Not until he was safely inside did the village breathe easily. If not on everyone's tongue certainly in everyone's heart was the question: would Jane pull it off? And knocking at the back of every heart was that other question: had the hussy, the creature Power, already pulled it off?

No-one except the two people concerned knew what took place inside Alma Villa that evening; but a few minutes after midnight

Jane opened the door to let Simey out and he promptly slipped on the icy flags and falling heavily broke his leg and injured his back. Willing hands, hastily summoned, carried him upstairs, Dr. Clyde leading and directing after having declared that it would be dangerous to move him to his own house. And so he was placed in Jane's bed and there he remained for five weeks while Jane nursed him. And cooked for him. And she was the best cook in Hadley and, as I have said, a plump pleasant comfortable little body. And Simey was just a man.

Yes, Jane pulled it off and they were married that Easter.

The evening after they had left for their honeymoon Mrs. Paradox said to me as she was clearing away my tea-things, "So that creature's staying on till they come back. I wonder she's the impudence. But Jane'll soon put her going. She won't stand any nonsense."

"I hope she won't," I said; "but she's very gentle-natured and soft-hearted and I'm sure she'd hate to hurt anyone's feelings."

"Ah!" commented Mrs. Paradox, "perhaps she might and perhaps she mightn't."

I didn't want to discuss it, and so I said, "It's an unkind thing to say, considering his sufferings, but it was providential Jane's flags were covered with ice that night."

"Coming up!" said Mrs. Paradox, giving me an odd look; "don't they say Providence helps them what helps themselves?"

"Well, near enough," I said.

Mrs. Paradox nodded. "That's what Jane thought; and so she poured a jug of water over the flags after Simey was inside for I saw her do it myself."

"Mrs. Paradox!" I gasped, "I don't believe it; she wouldn't have been so wicked; why she might have killed him!"

Mrs. Paradox smiled sardonically and rubbed the side of her nose with her finger. "It's wonderful the risks gentle little women'll take when they want something mighty bad," she said.

IV. ODD MAN OUT

Few evenings pass that do not find me turning over the pages of my diary, reading an entry here and another there, stepping back across the years to revive memories of events in the village

which were once a nine days' wonder but are now long since forgotten. And always after I have closed the heavy leather covers of the volume on my knee I am moved to wonder at the infinite variety of human behaviour, even upon so small a stage as Hadley; and upon the heels of this wonder invariably treads the thought that it is therefore unreasonable to be astonished at anything people do; and further, that human actions are unpredictable, despite what the psychologists may say.

And yet, how astounded the village was at the events which I have entitled aptly, if somewhat vulgarly, *Odd Man Out*.

It happened just twenty years ago. Or, I should say, it began then, for the events were spread over a period of several years and indeed it is possible, if highly improbable, that the end of the story as I relate it may not be the final end. After all it is the highly improbable that is so often true.

Dick Strong was a hedger and ditcher employed by the Rural District Council. He was a good-looking young fellow and lived with his mother, a widow, in Crossways Cottage at the western end of the village. Mrs. Strong owned the cottage; and it and everything in it were to be Dick's when she died. He was steady, hardworking, thrifty, and had a tidy little sum put by. Perhaps it is therefore unnecessary to mention that he neither drank nor smoked, which is no bad thing in a young man; I did neither myself until I was forty. But he was also abstinent in another way and one of which it is impossible to approve: he avoided the company of young women. I ascribed it to excessive shyness but Mrs. Paradock, who had not been long with me then, thought otherwise. "He's nothing of the sort," she declared roundly; "he's a mother's boy and they're all as alike as turnips. They're good men spoiled and it's always the mothers' fault, the stupid women. If I had the making of the law o' the land I'd give them all the birch-rod, every son's mother of them."

There was of course a modicum of truth in that, as there usually was in Mrs. Paradock's tirades; but I felt she was going too far when she added that the best service such mothers could do for their sons was to die. I was indeed profoundly shocked at such a callous suggestion.

Yet that was just what Mrs. Strong did. And there was Dick, a well-set-up young man of five-or-six-and-twenty, with a good wage, something in the bank, and a six-roomed (if you counted

the scullery) cottage as well furnished as any in the land: a handsome prize indeed in the matrimonial lottery. Who was going to win it was a matter of intense interest to every female heart in Hadley above school age (and to not a few, I fear, even younger). There were quite a score of young women in the village who would have made Dick a good wife or, as Mrs. Paradock put it, made him a good husband; but before the hunt was really up Dick astonished everybody by marrying a Chelcaster girl, Daisy Grey. She was a pretty fair flighty little thing, and had been an assistant in a milliner's, and was about the least suitable wife he could have brought to share his life in a village and to run a house whose standard of comfort, cleanliness and efficiency had been set by one of the most capable managers in Hadley, or for that matter in England.

The matrimonial barque so hastily and foolishly launched was soon, it was plain, experiencing rough weather; for both parties to the contract were expecting and demanding in each other attributes neither possessed.

Daisy was left much alone, for Dick's work kept him away all day. He used to leave home after an early breakfast, cycle to where he happened to be working, sometimes five or six miles away, and did not get back until the evening when, tired and hungry, he expected the sort of comfort and the sort of meal his mother had provided. He got neither, resented it bitterly, and no doubt presently began to voice his resentment.

And then Dave Plowright, Butcher Thomas's vanman and the best-looking and most dashing young fellow in Hadley, began to find an extraordinary amount of time to hang about Crossways Cottage while Dick was away at work; and of course set all tongues wagging in the village and not a few heads prophetically nodding. It was plain Daisy was very much to Dave's taste, which was for the flighty and the fluffy; and as for Daisy, well, there were few girls in Hadley, or as far as Chelcaster for that matter, who wouldn't have welcomed his admiration. How far was the thing going? the village asked itself; how long would it be before Dick found out? and what would he do?

There was no immediate answer to any of those exciting questions but they were momentarily displaced in interest by the wave of astonishment, of sheer stupefaction, which swept the village when Dave gave up his lodgings at Mrs. Crowe's in Church

Lane and went to lodge with the Strongs.

This was really too much for Hadley; it couldn't grasp it; couldn't see round it at all, it could only shrug shoulders, raise eyebrows, and say: " Well, of all the lickers! "

What was the basis of the association of those three young people in Crossways Cottage we didn't know and even the wildest guesses seemed as probable as improbable. Naturally there was a lot of talk and a lot of whispering and some of the things whispered were no credit to human nature and found no place in my diary: there are matters of which one ought not to write.

That strange and unusual association lasted eleven months and then Dick put an end to it by bolting. He left a letter behind, it was said in the village, although no one ever knew for certain, saying he intended going to sea, that he left Daisy to the better man, and he wished them both happiness. " The poor silly fool I " Mrs. Paradock said, "pah! but what could you expect of a mother's boy? Why half a man would have given Dave Plow-right the knuckle side of his hand and Daisy the flat. The softie. Perhaps the sea'll make a man of him. It'll be a tough job."

Only three days after Dick had gone, and before the village had regained its breath, it was knocked sideways by the news that Dave had bolted and had also left a note saying he was going to sea.

And then, after waiting five weeks, we got some authentic tidings and it came in a letter addressed to me and bearing a United States stamp. Dick must have known I'd a warm spot in my heart for him, for he'd been one of my brightest and least troublesome boys at school, and he knew very well that he could depend upon me. He said that by a coincidence he and Dave had joined the same ship; that they were now the best of friends; that they liked seafaring and had no intention of returning to England at present; and finally (and I confess that this considerably disturbed me by its implications) that he and Dave would send money regularly to Daisy through me.

He did not say whether or not they were writing to Daisy and I never enquired. For five years enough money arrived for Daisy to live on quite comfortably; and then it stopped. But Daisy had saved quite a tidy little sum and another year went by with her continuing to live at Crossways Cottage. A further six months went by and then apparently Daisy's savings were exhausted. She

began to get into debt and to look worried, and, according to some, half-starved, although I must confess I failed to notice it.

And then she went away for a holiday and came back as bold as brass married to a pleasant-looking young man named Sidney Peek from East Anglia. He was a carpenter and a clever workman and soon found good employment. Daisy was supposed to have said that as seven years had passed since Dick had deserted her she was free to marry again. I don't know whether she said it or no but I didn't hear her. If she did say it she certainly had the law on her side although some oracles in the village declared, with all the assurance of legal experts, that a man couldn't be held to have deserted a woman while he was sending her money. However that may be the law didn't interfere with Daisy's second (or was it third?) venture upon the most perilous of all seas.

It might be thought that surely here was the end of this queer affair. But not a bit of it. Two years after Daisy and Sidney's marriage Dick and Dave came home. They walked up from the station as calmly and unconcernedly as if they'd never been away at all (or so it seemed to the thousand or so eyes watching them from behind curtains), made their way to Crossways Cottage, knocked at the door, which opened, admitted them, and closed upon a village so astounded as to be for once bereft of comment.

So far there has not perhaps been anything really astonishing to a student of human nature in this story but I freely admit that even I found the events of the next few days quite outside both my personal experience and my wide reading.

Dave and Dick stayed on at the cottage and the four of them went out together on apparently friendly terms. All went to Chelcaster several times shopping and to the cinema. The two wanderers had returned on the Saturday and on the following Thursday the three men spent the evening in *The Jolly Brewers* drinking together as friendly as you like and playing several games of skittles.

And the next morning two of them were gone: Dave and Sidney, leaving Dick in possession.

But it was clearly a very different Dick from the mother's boy who had run away to sea; and as the months ran into a year, and then into years, it was evident that Dick and Daisy were as happy a couple as any in the countryside. Some of the good folk of Hadley (perhaps I should say the unco' guid) were a little dubious

about the relationship, pretending that Daisy's marriage to Sidney having been more or less legal the former marriage was now invalid and the least Dick and Daisy could do for respectability's sake was to be married again. It was certainly, it seemed to me, a pretty legal puzzle. Not that Dick and Daisy bothered their heads. They went on living together very contentedly; and presently Daisy had a baby; and now, fifteen years later, there are three fine children and all my scholars and by no means the worst.

I am not sure I ought to give Mrs. Paradock's comment upon this strange affair and I certainly do not endorse the latter part of it. "Well," she said, "the sea or something certainly made a man of him."

I agreed and added, "And the affair has made a woman of Daisy." To which she made the odd reply: "Coming up! Women are always women although silly little fools sometimes try to hide it. It's only men who have to be made."

V. METAMORPHOSIS

We all have pet words which we tend to overwork and if you could look over my shoulder one evening as I was turning over the leaves of my diary you would no doubt remark on the frequency of my use of the word which I have given as the title of this story. The psychologists I am sure can explain, to their own satisfaction at least, why we have these favourite words; but I do not need their assistance. I am quite sure my fondness for the word is due to my constant wonder at the thing itself which to me is an abiding and lovely miracle. It has always seemed strange and somehow rather debasing that the seven wonders of the ancient world should have been such mere mechanic affairs as the pyramids, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Pharos lighthouse, and the rest of them; when all around, for every eye to see or ear to hear, were common things of surpassing wonder and beauty; the metamorphosis of insects; the song of birds; dawn and sunset; the incredible communities of bees and ants; the stars of the Milky Way; flowers and a hundred others. I spoke of this once to Mrs. Paradock, and she said. "Coming up I never heard of the seven wonders of the world and as for ants they're a pest and nothing else. If you want a real

wonder it's a man's shirt; why it has to be half a mile longer at the back than at the front's a thing no woman can understand. If only men knew what sights they looked in them! "

But I'm forgetting my story. If you ever come to Hadley the first thing that will take your eye (if you come in from the East as most do) is a big white house with tall trees behind it looking down on the village. The house is *Tweketrees* and there are thirty acres of land with it, owned and farmed by James Fowler. At the time of the events I am relating James Fowler was forty-five and looked barely forty; and Alice, his wife, was thirty-five and looked a good ten years more. They had no children.

Years ago the newspapers used to carry an advertisement asking, 'Why does a woman look old sooner than a man?' I have forgotten what the answer was but I certainly know why Alice Fowler, who when she was married at twenty was as pretty and rosy a young woman as you could find, was at thirty-five thin, lined, greying and sallow: as scared-looking and dowdy a creature as ever made a doormat of herself, or was made into one.

James Fowler was not a likeable man, which is as charitable a way of putting it as I can find. He was a big florid fellow; handsome in his way; blustering; hectoring; domineering. He was a domestic tyrant demanding service and obedience from his wife in as full measure as from his servants and farmhands.

Your big handsome blustering fellows are often free with their money but not so James Fowler. He was closefisted to the point of mania and Alice had not only to come to him for every farthing but account for its spending. He was for ever declaiming against the wastefulness of servants, of women, and especially of wives; saying that if they'd had to earn it (earn it! and Alice doing twelve hours' work a day) they wouldn't squander it so casually; swearing he wouldn't stand it; and working himself into so insane a temper that, so the talk went in the village, he often passed from vocal violence to physical. He despised books and every form of culture. His sole reading was *The Farmer and Stock-Breeder*. Alice, who had been a great reader, was afraid to be seen with a book for this provoked him into a splenetic outburst.

But there was one human being to whom James Fowler was generous and indulgent: himself. Had anyone had the temerity to question his right to act so he would possibly have been sincerely astonished and would quite certainly have said: " And why in the

name of reason shouldn't I? I work hard; I produce those things the community most needs; and in doing so I make a considerable income: have I not the right to spend it how I like? And if my liking leans to a good table, to good wines, to cigars and having my clothes made at Reston's, whose business is that but my own? "

He omitted one item from the list of his likings: pretty young women. Perhaps he did this because it was only since Alice had become such a dowdy little old doormat that his eye had gone roving. He may of course have omitted it because he was ashamed of it; certainly not because he imagined people were not aware of it; he was too much of a countryman to entertain any such silly notions. He had never attempted to hide his affairs from Alice and indeed it was said in the village that he flaunted them before her and boasted of his conquests. His contempt for her feelings in the matter must have been the final humiliation for poor Alice.

And then he fell ill and for the first time in his life: pneumonia (not a particularly acute attack) followed by lumbago. Dr. Clyde flatly refused to allow his wife to nurse him (as she was not strong enough), and said that he must have a nurse. James, sure he was dying, mustered up with difficulty a wan protest and for the first time in his adult life found his wishes brushed aside as if they had been no more important than his wife's. And that same day Miss Beryl Cowper (pronounced Cooper, as her first words on arriving informed all and sundry) took up her duties at *Twelvetrees*; and within a very few hours had made it clear to the patient that her word was law and to everyone else in the house that she was an extremely capable young woman.

She was also a very charming one, and so pretty that the invalid, despite his wretchedness and sheer funk, must have congratulated himself upon her coming.

Love at first sight, mutual love, is generally accepted as a fact and I see no reason why there should not be friendship, a mutual great liking, at first sight. That certainly was how it fell with Alice Fowler and Nurse Cowper. From the moment of meeting they liked each other very much and that liking continued and went on increasing with every passing day.

Nurse Cowper had soon taken the measure of her patient and of the state of affairs at *Twelvetrees* and moved by those two strong motives, anger and affection, set herself to redress the wrongs of twenty years.

She could do little until her patient was on the mend; but fortunately his convalescence was a long one, with recurrent if brief attacks of the lumbago which reduced him to whimpering profanity. He was, she told me (for I had most of this story from her own lips) one of the worst patients she had ever had and bore pain so badly that she tried to put some fortitude into him by telling him contemptuously that a child would be ashamed to make so much fuss.

But it was all of no use; he continued to whimper and swear-and even yell when the pain caught him. When it was over he did not bluster and hector as he would have done with Alice but was contrite and humble, and presently, as he began to feel better, amorous.

Nurses are accustomed to the amorousness of convalescence and ignore it, aware that it will pass with the return to full health. Some of course, wilfully shutting their eyes, marry their patients to the subsequent regret of both. Few can ever have put this transient emotion to better uses than did Nurse Cowper and at no inconsiderable cost to her feelings for she heartily disliked her patient and it was repellent to her to allow him merely to hold her hand (and she saw that it got no further than that, whatever hopes she maliciously encouraged).

And while the fatuous husband made love to her she took the wife in hand. They began to go off together, for shopping afternoons into Chelcaster; Alice, coached to the tactics, asking James for money in front of Miss Cowper who gaily did her part by interjecting lightly, and as it were casually, "O that won't be enough, I'm afraid, Mrs. Fowler." And then, turning to her patient with a smile and an inviting look: "Better make it ten pounds."

Nor was it always merely ten pounds. It was frequently much more and very happy afternoons the two friends spent at Chelcaster. But Alice got more out of those afternoons than the passing enjoyment of shopping and a very great deal more than the new and smart clothes she bought. She recovered her zest for living; her hair regained its colour; her cheeks their bloom; her eyes their sparkle. It was an authentic metamorphosis; the faded little door-mat was changed into a pretty young woman who carried her thirty-five years so lightly that Nurse Cowper, with more than a touch of malice, said to her patient one morning as she helped him

with his shaving: "How grey you're getting, James. Dear Alice would easily pass for your daughter."

Nor was that her shrewdest thrust, which was delivered (as she told me, her eyes 'sparkling with amusement) when her patient was virtually recovered. The two of them were standing at the window in the drawing room looking out on to the garden where Dr. Clyde and Mrs. Fowler were strolling together chatting and enjoying the spring sunshine.

"Are you as blind as you seem, James?" Nurse Cowper asked.

"Blind!" he ejaculated; "what d'you mean?"

"What do I mean? O, well, nothing," shrugging her shoulders, "except that your wife is a very pretty young woman and Dr. Clyde is a man and an attractive man. And they have a lot in common; both are great readers and they are always discussing books. You know, my dear James, she must find you rather a dull old boor at times."

Mrs. Paradock, when I was relating all this to her, remarked upon this: "It takes a woman to give a scratch like that. And the things men write in poetry books about women! The poor fools! "

However that may be, the treatment was salutary. I do not pretend that James Fowler became a changed man in himself (there was no metamorphosis in his case) but he certainly became a very different husband and as affectionate and generous as he was capable of being. Doubtless what contributed largely to this happy state of affairs was the continuing close friendship of Alice and Miss Cowper and her frequent presence at *Twelvetrees* as a welcome and watchful visitor with an intimate and devastating knowledge of her host and a tongue like a rapier.

It is perhaps not unapt to close my tale with a remark Mrs. Paradock once made to me; it is one which I have often pondered and wondered just how much truth there was in it. "Men never find out what women are really like," she said, "until it's too late to be of any use to them. Men are so soft and gullible it's a shame to take the money. If women hadn't always hated each other so much they'd have ruled the world from the year dot: easy! "

VI. THE HAUNTINGS AT *THE TOWERS*

You will find no ghosts in the pages of my diary for being a schoolmaster I am of course not superstitious, education and superstition being irreconcilable bedfellows. But that does not mean that between its covers there are no stories of hauntings. Far from it. And Hadley folk themselves were, despite all my work of enlightenment, as superstitious as their medieval forefathers. But there's no reasoning with credulity and people who will believe in the evil eye, in witches white and black, in charms spells and love potions; that the moon influences the weather; that bees know when there's a death in the house; and that dogs can see things hidden from human eyes, as the villagers did to a man, will have no difficulty in swallowing ghosts and the black legions of Tophet.

The Towers was a fine old house of the Restoration Period about two miles out of Hadley and a few years before I took up my post in the village the heir, a ward in chancery, came of age and succeeded to the estate and the accumulated revenues. He was a wild and rackety young man, this last of the Bewleys, and by the time he was thirty, when I had been at Hadley about six years, he had run through all his money, mortgaged the property and destroyed his health; and one hot thundery August night he shot himself in his library, a bizarre choice of rooms for that desperate act of farewell, it being a room he rarely entered, and he had never been seen to open one of its many thousands of books. Perhaps it was because it was one of the few rooms which had not been shamed by the things done there that he chose it, as if in a last gesture of regret for a wasted life.

As he was the last of his line *The Towers* came into the market and a middle-aged couple from Stapledon, John Carr and his wife, were put in by the agent as caretakers. They occupied three rooms of the servants' quarters, and all the other rooms of the big house, over forty in all, were closed.

And almost immediately (it was then November) the hauntings began. I suspected that they did not amount to a great deal but the Carrs, superstitious and frightened, made the most of them; and Hadley made more; so that between them there was little

lacking in the whole range of spookery from bloodcurdling yells and howls, to rattling chains and icy blasts of air.

I confess that at first I suspected the Carrs were responsible, for it was a comfortable easy and well-paid post and John Carr had been singularly unfortunate during his married life in the matter of employment. It seemed the obvious thing for them to do to spread a story of the house being haunted and so scare off prospective buyers. But John Carr called to see me and there was no mistaking his being a very frightened man. I tried to reason with him but it was a waste of breath. "Come now," I said, "you'll admit that you've seen nothing."

"O but we have, in a manner o' speaking," he said; "we seen, both me and the wife, my bitch Floss running up the stairs biting at something that wasn't there."

"Exactly!" I laughed; "there was nothing there."

"Nothing we could see," he said; "but *she* could."

"I daresay," I said, "some small insect, no doubt."

"It's a rum insect what makes the sound o' running feet."

I laughed again. "Floss's feet," I said; "and your nerves. Ask Dr. Clyde to give you some bromide."

He shook his head. "You wouldn't 'a laughed if you'd been there," he said. "And another time I couldn't get Floss to go into the hall; she just stood shivering and glaring with her hackles up. That warn't imagination and nor war the shots or the "broken windows or the other noises and—and things."

"But tell me John," I said, "why in the name of heaven should a ghost take all the trouble to return to earth just to break a window?"

"Because that was his nature when he was alive, I reckon," he said; "just dying don't turn a silly fool into a wise man."

"It hardly seems worth dying then," I chaffed; but he refused to take the matter lightly and went away with an aggrieved air after inviting me, or challenging me, to spend a night at *The Towers*.

I did not accept or refuse but I do not think I had any real intention of going. I was not a young man and a night passed away from those small but very dear creature comforts to which I had grown accustomed was not an attractive prospect. Nor, if there were manifestations, as I believe the spooky jargon has it, would it advance matters at all unless I could there and then put

my finger on the physical cause, which was not a likely prospect for I am not the detective sort of person.

Almost the last thing I had said to John Carr was, "Try and ignore it and when the Tomfool who's doing it finds you're taking no notice hell drop it." And that in fact was what I expected to happen in any case: a fizzling out of the whole affair. But I was mistaken. Things became worse, much worse, alarmingly worse, if the Carrs were to be believed. And presently it was no longer possible to doubt at least their integrity in the business for they gave the best possible proof of it by declaring life was unbearable at *The Towers* and resigning their caretakership, no inconsiderable sacrifice, for employment was hard to obtain at John Carr's age.

There was some speculation in Hadley about the Carrs' successors and the general opinion was that the house agent would have to get someone from outside the county as no local folk would take the post. But to everyone's surprise Artie Purchas and his wife from Seton Parva, our neighbouring village, were very shortly installed in *The Towers* as the new caretakers.

People were not only surprised but amused. If John Carr and his wife, who were a fine strapping couple, couldn't stand it, how on earth could the Purchases hope to, for Artie was a wizened little runt and Emma had a weak heart and was half an invalid.

But stand it they certainly did and experiences far more horrifying than any which had befallen the Carrs, according to Artie in *The Jolly Brewers*. For Artie and Emma had actually *seen* things: white shapes flitting along passages and vanishing into walls; ghastly faces peering through windows; spectral fingers fumbling at door handles. As for the catalogue of things heard and felt it was endless and Artie, inspired by a few pints of rough cider, did it full justice. As I listened to him one evening I thought of the lines in Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* and composed a somewhat similar couplet myself:

*And still he spoke while all around him stared
That one small man should dare the things he'd dared.*

Not quite up to Goldsmith, perhaps, but certainly apt, for anyone less like a hero in appearance and repute than Artie Purchas it was difficult to imagine. The verdict in *The Jolly Brewers* after Artie's departure was that he was enduring the ordeal fortified

by Dutch courage, for he was a notorious boozier; but the source of Emma Purchases courage in facing the horrors described by Artie no-one could guess. I think Tom Peters the landlord voked the genera! opinion not only in *The Jolly Brewers* but in Hadley and Seton Parva when he said that Artie and Emma would suddenly crack up and cut and run. "And it's to be hoped there won't be a tragedy," he added.

There was a tragedy, if but a minor one, for it is a tragedy being out of work at Artie's age with an ailing wife. And that was what it came to, for a rich London gentleman bought *The Towers* and occupied it and Artie's and Emma's comfortable livelihood vanished.

And now one of those odd things happened which are the very seed of superstition: within three months of his coming to *The Towers* the London gentleman, a Mr. Coleman, fell down the stairs and broke his neck. And of course it at once began to be whispered round that there was a curse on the place. The more inventive said that the last of the Bewleys would permit no interlopers into the house of his ancestors and would undoubtedly slay anyone bold enough to defy the ban. It was unfortunate that this flight of fancy was never put to the proof for the night following the London gentleman's funeral, and with the staff still in residence, the house caught fire and was burned down, happily without any loss of life. The insurance company sent down their representatives to make enquiries but we never learned if they discovered the cause of the fire. But Hadley knew all about it: the last of the Bewleys had fired his ancestral home to ensure that no stranger should violate it.

I fear I cannot explain how Hadley reconciled this with the truth about the hauntings at *The Towers* which presently came out and proved to be what any sane and properly balanced person would expect. Artie Purchas, fallen upon evil days, took to haunting (if I may be allowed the word) *The Jolly Brewers* and other public houses to cadge drinks and under their influence, and with perhaps some fuddled notion of making payment for them, he would tell the story of how, disappointed at not obtaining the caretakership upon which he and his wife had counted, he had determined to play the ghost and frighten out the Carts. To me the most interesting part of his story was that all he had done was fired a few shots; opened and slammed down a few windows,

two of which had broken; and uttered a fair variety of hideous noises.

As far as I was concerned the most satisfactory side of the affair was Mrs. Paradock's derisive scepticism. I should indeed have been hurt had she, after all her years of association with me, shown herself a prey to superstition. "The fools! " she said; "ghosts, pah! it's all through hearing about them; if there was no ghost stories there'd be no ghosts. It's like love. If people never read about it they wouldn't know there was any such thing. That's why marriage gives lots of people such a knock down they never get up again." She rubbed her nose reflectively with her forefinger. "Paradock was like that. He'd read no end of love stories before we was married and when he found out I wasn't like the young judies in the stories he took to drink and that finished him. Ghosts and ro-mance and what not! Luvaduck! When are people going to grow up! "

VII. A QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE

It had long been a grievance in Hadley that the nearest hospital accommodation was at Chelcaster seven miles away; and when Simey Reston's wife Mary died in Chelcaster Hospital it was said in Hadley that it was all because so much time had been wasted getting her there and that it was a scandal and something ought to be done about it. But nothing was done.

And then Sid Penfold's wife died in the ambulance on the way to Chelcaster and Dr. Clyde said bluntly that she oughtn't to have had to be moved so far; and Hadley, stirred at last to action, held a mass meeting and passed a resolution demanding that the Parish Council should get estimates for a cottage hospital and levy a rate to meet the cost. The lowest estimate, which included salaries for a small staff, was certainly something of a shock: twenty thousand pounds. And the levy of a special hospital rate brought in but twelve hundred in two years. Subscription lists were also opened and these during the same period brought in two thousand; and tombolas, whist drives, dances and rummage sales at last brought the total up to eight thousand.

And then old Mr. Prendergast of *The Manse* said that if Hadley could find another six thousand in the next year he'd give the rest.

This lent a tremendous fillip to things. There was an additional twopenny rate; there were more dances and whist drives and sports and rummage sales and the total slowly crept up to the required fourteen thousand.

The period of a year (an arbitrary one we all thought) fixed by Mr. Prendergast expired at the end of October and the vicar, Mr. Courtenay Pagett, called for a tremendous effort at the Harvest Festival, everything given to be auctioned later for the Hospital Fund. But when everything had been sold there remained a hundred pounds still to be found. There were several people in Hadley who could have afforded that sum but they had been generous with their subscriptions and were not disposed to give more.

In the October issue of the Parish Magazine Mr. Pagett gave notice that he would hold a Grand Bazaar in the Drill Hall on October the twenty-first and begged earnestly for a special effort to be made. Gifts would be received at the Drill Hall up to and including the morning of the twenty-first.

It would be exaggerating to say that gifts rolled in, for the rummage sales and tombolas and such like of the past three years had exhausted the supply of white elephants in the village. As Mis. Paradock said, "If we never get the hospital the village has had a proper ol' clean-up selling to the donkeys of Stapledon, Seton and Morden enough rubbish to make the world's biggest bon-fire." Hadley folk being but human were reluctant to give up anything useful or that might prove useful during the next twenty years, and material for the bazaar might have been sadly lacking had not the Rev. Courtenay Pagett taken his courage in both hands, conducted a house to house inspection of the village and brazenly demanded this that and the other. Hadley found it difficult to refuse these point blank demands ('hold-ups', Mrs. Paradock called them, with a dry chuckle), and the available space in the Drill Hall began to fill up with some really useful articles, and not a few handsome ones for which the vicar no doubt calculated there would be some spirited bidding between the reluctant donors eager to buy them back and those determined to thwart them. There were in the event several fierce duels of this kind, one of which led to violence and the smashing of a grandfather clock, fortunately after it had been paid for.

Thursday was early closing day in Hadley and immediately

after breakfast the vicar proceeded to the Drill Hall to receive any last gifts which might come along. The auction was to begin at two o'clock and at a quarter to the hour the vicar was presented with as pretty a little problem in ethics as he could ever have encountered, in addition to a more concrete dilemma: Bert Joicey came bustling in with as fine a brace of pheasants as had been seen in Hadley for years, and striding up to the vicar said that he was sorry he was a bit late but he hoped not too late as he'd brought something really choice for the bazaar. And with that he proffered the brace with a smile which may have been appreciative of the situation.

For it was certainly a situation, Bert Joicey being the most notorious and skilful poacher in the district. The vicar stared at the pheasants as if he were tranced. His mind may have been a welter of confused thoughts or he may have been completely master of that instrument and engaged in a lucid weighing of the pros and cons of acceptance of Bert Joicey's gift. Undoubtedly the chief argument against was that the pheasants had quite probably been poached from the coverts of old Mr. Prendergast, who had promised to come to the bazaar and might arrive at any moment. He would not of course be able to swear to the birds but if he learned who had been the donor, as he probably would, he would certainly have his suspicions; and as he was a choleric old fellow an extremely awkward situation might arise. Better perhaps, Mr. Pagett thought, decline the risky gift. There was no need to hurt Mr. Joicey's feelings since the advertised time for the reception of last gifts was in the morning.

But the decision was taken out of his hands. "Nice birds, sir," said a voice behind him; "there'll be brisk bidding for them; wish I could bid myself." It was the voice of Simey Reston who was acting as auctioneer. "Let me take them," Simey went on; and his large hand grasped the birds, simultaneously settling the ethical problem and the physical dilemma and providing the vicar's conscience with a watertight excuse.

The vicar fully intended instructing Simey to put the birds up at the earliest possible moment in the hope of getting them out of the way before old Mr. Prendergast arrived; but he was button-holed by so many people and there was such a press about him and so much excited noise and talk that it was driven out of his head until nearly four o'clock when, mounting the platform to

check the sales with Simey Reston, he was horrified to see the pheasants still waiting their turn.

He whispered to Simey, who nodded, and taking up the birds held them up and began, "Here, ladies and gentlemen, is as fine a brace of pheasants——" he broke off, for at that moment old Mr. Prendergast entered the room and, the crowd making way for him, walked slowly up towards the platform. It was an exquisite moment. If he did not suspect they were from his own coverts certainly everybody else in the room did and most eyes there went from Mr. Prendergast's face to Bert Joicey's and back again. There was a faint grin on Bert's face but Mr. Prendergast's was an expressionless mask as with complete imperturbability he straddled his legs, placed his hands behind his coat-tails, and opened the bidding with a sovereign.

A cheer went up and the bidding proceeded briskly until at two pounds ten shillings, bid by Tom Peters of *The Jolly Brewers*, the auctioneer, Simey Reston bent down and whispered to the vicar, who smiled broadly and hurried over to Mr. Prendergast and whispered to him. Someone caught the whisper and a cheer began and quickly swept over the room and rattled the windows: the required hundred pounds had been reached.

When the cheering had died away old Mr. Prendergast with a smile bid three pounds and, it plainly being felt that it was most fitting he should have them, there was no further bidding and the birds were knocked down to him.

Again there was a burst of cheering which dropped quickly away to an expectant silence, broken by a voice shouting: "Speech, Bert!" There was a burst of laughter and then the cry was taken up by a score of voices and as Bert Joicey was seen to be making his way towards the platform once more the cheering rattled the windows.

He faced the crowd, his hands in his pockets, his head cocked a little, an impudent sly smile on his face. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I don't know why you've asked me to make a speech. Perhaps you're wanting me to tell you something about that fine brace of pheasants what Mr. Prendergast has generously paid three o' the best for. Mr. Prendergast knows a good bird and so do I. Perhaps you're hoping I'll tell you where I got them from." He paused and his smile widened into a grin as voices about the hall cried such varying encouragements as "Go on. Bert, tell us," or

"We know, Old Son," or, "Tell me the old, old story," and so form.

He waited till the noise had died down and then he said in a loud voice, "well, I'll tell you." He drew a piece of paper out of his pocket and held it up. "I bought them this morning from Pearman's of Chelcaster and here's the receipt." He waved it in the air as a roar of cheering swept the hall. It died away and he went on, "You thought I'd poached 'em. Give a dog a bad name and hang him. No, ladies and gentlemen, I've got a conscience the same as you have and my gift to the bazaar had to be something I'd bought and paid for. So I slipped into Chelcaster 's morning and bought that brace from Pearman's." And then he brought down the house by adding, with a sly grin towards Mr. Prendergast, "I often do business with Tom Pearman."

Mr. Prendergast wrote his cheque for six thousand there and then and handed it over to the vicar and there was more cheering; but it all seemed a bit flat after Bert Joicey's speech and it being obvious that the interest had gone out of the affair, and the crowd already thinning rapidly, Simey Reston hurriedly put up the remainder of the lots and knocked them down to the first bidders, so that there were several genuine bargains.

Mrs. Paradock got one of these and she displayed it to me that evening after she had cleared away my supper. It was a handsome silk bedspread of a rich crimson colour. "Half a crown," she said; "it's giving it away; went against my conscience to take it for the money and I almost let it go. Almost."

I smiled. "Your conscience is apparently a more amenable one than Mr. Joicey's," I remarked.

"Coming up!" she said; and then with the sly faintly malicious smile I knew so well she went on, "It's like bringing up dogs and children; it's all a matter o' early training. You can do anything with a conscience if you start training it early enough. I began mine young. Younger than anybody's in Hadley, I reckon." She rubbed her nose reflectively and added, "barring the vicar's."

THE COWARD

THERE HAD been family friendship between the Daltons and the Vanes for three generations but there had never been a marriage; and so when eighteen-year-old John Vane and Mary Dalton, a year younger, found the comradeship of a dozen years suddenly slipping into something warmer both families regarded the affair with great satisfaction, if with a tendency towards jocosity because of the lovers' youth.

There had been Daltons and Vanes in Medstowe since Harry the Eighth's time; they were good Downshire county stock and their estates shrunk, their wealth dwindled, they were still comfortably off and of good repute, if for no more than paying their accounts and keeping their word. Both families had in their time produced soldiers, sailors, lawyers, and minor statesmen for their country's service; and if none had achieved great fame and place the pages of history would not forget Commodore Francis Vane who trounced a small French fleet of Ushant in 1782, nor Colonel Sir Henry Dalton's brilliant feats against the Round-heads.

It was during the summer holidays that love ousted amity in the association of John and Mary. John was home from Wellborough, Mary from Freydean. She was slim, golden-haired, violet-eyed, a true Dalton with her share of the family good looks; it was her last term at Freydean and she was going that autumn for a year to Germany. John was rather frailly built for a Vane and under the average height; more of a student than an athlete he was meditating, without any great enthusiasm, an army career. His gifts were artistic and he had the previous term written and composed an operetta which had been performed by the school Dramatic Club. Could he have followed his own bent he would have embraced the profession of letters but he was the eldest son and the eldest Vane son went into the army.

It was summer; they were young and very much in love. A philosopher has said that we are not aware of present happiness. John and Mary would have given him the lie. They were unbelievably happy and intoxicatingly aware of it and if they were

convinced that such a lovely and exalted state would last, that was but the faith and idealism common to their years.

That long golden summer (and how long and how golden it was to seem in retrospect) they played tennis together, swam together in the Stour, rode together, cycled together (for the coming of the petrol engine was a lustrum ahead); and, best of all, went for long walks together over the Downs, starting out in the morning, tramping a dozen miles to Horton, Dawling, Shelbridge, Market Bering or Baintree; lunching on bread and cheese and beer in some little wayside tavern, and returning home through Radley or Frlbton Parva (where they would stop for tea) and at last reaching Medstowe dusty and tired (but how happy) just in time for a swim in the Stour before dinner.

Perhaps their favourite walk (certainly it was John's) was to the Darland Banks, a wide grassy slope some eight or nine hundred feet above the level of the surrounding countryside through which ran the Stour Valley. The Banks were not more than four miles or so from Medstowe and they often set out after dinner, arriving there as twilight fell and returning home under the stars which held off the darkness so that their faces as they walked along or stopped to kiss had the pale duskiness of night flowers.

They would at times, if they arrived somewhat earlier than usual, sit upon the highest ridge of the Banks and look down over the lovely valley whose fields and hedges and trees, houses and cottages, were already losing their outlines and shading into the narrowing light. Overhead the slow stars would assemble and one by one down in the valley below the lights of cottages and houses would prick out as if returning those high signals. The young lovers would sit very still, hands clasped, watching the beauty of the approaching night, the more magical and moving because of their love. Always afterwards, throughout their lives, they could close their eyes and see the Darland Banks at twilight.

One evening, about a mile out of Medstowe, as they passed beyond the last cornfield before coming to the long path that led to the Banks, they came suddenly upon two louts sitting upon a stile, and as they passed one of the two, a broad, redfaced fellow of about twenty, tittered out an obscenity obviously directed at the young lovers. Mary's face flamed and she gave a little gasp at the crude offensiveness of the words. John, as if he had not heard, walked on beside her.

It was an uncomfortable, an unhappy walk. They reached the Banks, climbed to their favourite high ridge and there side by side and in silence watched the beauty of the gathering dusk. But it was the silence of uneasy thoughts and not of happiness and the magic was gone from the scene spread out below them. Their fingers were not intertwined nor did they kiss, either then or when presently they walked home, the silence still between them and only broken now and again by some desultory remark from one or the other, made to relieve the tension.

Before they parted that night she took both his hands in hers and said quietly, " John, you are a coward " and then, her voice breaking, " O I cannot bear it! " and turning she hurried away across the lawn.

Two days later she left for a holiday in Cornwall with a school friend and did not return until a week before she was due to leave for Germany, by which time John was already back at school. They did not meet again for over thirty years.

John passed through Sandhurst with distinction, was immediately gazetted as ensign in The King's Own Royal Loamshires, and went straight out to India where he was in time to take part in a punitive expedition against tribesmen of the N.W. Frontier. During this brief but bloody campaign he was thrice mentioned in dispatches and twice promoted. After a further two years in India the Loamshires were sent to Egypt for the Sudan campaign. John fought at the battle of Omdurman, was specially mentioned by Kitchener for his conspicuous gallantry, and was awarded the D.S.O. During the second Boer War he won the V.C. at the carnage of the Modder River crossing, and in the Coronation Honours List of King Edward VII Major John Vane V.C., D.S.O., received a knighthood. He served the following twelve years in India and on the outbreak of the European War in 1914 he was a Lieut.-Colonel and in command of the regiment to which he had been originally gazetted. In that war he fought in France, Belgium and Italy; was six times wounded; was cited four times in the French Orders of the Day; and was awarded a bar to his D.S.O., the Belgian Croix de Guerre with palms, the French Croix de Guerre with palm, the Italian medal for valor, and the United States medal of honour. He lost an eye at Loos and an arm at Cambrai. At the Armistice he was made a baronet. Before proceeding to the Crown Colony whose governorship was the reward

of his great services to his country he married Alicia Rorke, heiress of the wealthy American shipping family. He did not return to England until the summer of 1928.

During all these years Mary had been twice married, divorced and widowed; and being without children and having no-one but herself to please had bought a pleasant little house in Kent at St. Margaret's Bay. And there, one sunny autumn afternoon, a distinguished visitor called to see her and stayed to tea. The passing of thirty years, a whole generation, can leave no-one unmarked and both these two people had warmed their hands recklessly at the fire of life, the one in action, the other in emotion. But it seemed to them, as they clasped hands in greeting and their eyes made swift appraisal, that they were not greatly changed; each could see in the other very clearly and vividly the lover of those long-ago but unforgotten days.

They chatted during tea of this and that and a hundred things; and when he rose to go and she came to the door with him he said, "Do you remember that night when you told me I was a coward?" As if she had once forgotten it through all the years! She flushed and said quietly, her voice not quite steady, "Was it generous of you, John, to come here after so long to remind me of that folly?"

He held her hand and smiled into her eyes. "You misunderstand me, my dear Mary," he said; "I came to tell you how right you were."

THE YELLOW DEVIL

TOM CURTISS was a crane driver and the biggest and strongest man in Rorke's Iron Works. It was a skilled occupation and he earned, for those days, good money. Lily Braydon worked in Laidler's Pottery. She sat for eight hours a day at a bench. A conveyor belt brought to her tea-cups, endless tea-cups, one a minute, four hundred and eighty in eight hours. As each cup reached her she grasped it, placed it on a spindle, revolved it by a treadle, and held steadily against its circumference a brush dipped in paint, thus making a blue, red, green, or black band round the cup: one every

minute, for a minute was the time the conveyor belt paused. It was a not particularly skilled occupation and she earned not particularly good money: a penny for[^] ten cups. She was slim, fair, pretty and twenty-one. She had been putting a band of colour round cups for five years. About half a million cups had passed through her hands; few had been broken and few badly done. She could now work with the unthinking precision of a machine. A machine, a series of wheels and connecting rods and a steady drip of oil: this could have done her work. It was a waste of youth and beauty to turn her into that machine. She was tired of the work; sick of it; she'd give anything to get out of it. And so when Tom Curtiss shyly asked her to marry him she agreed eagerly.

He couldn't believe in his luck. What could she see in him? He was no oil painting (the words were his own) and there were a dozen chaps after her. But she'd said 'yes' to him. He couldn't believe it was true. And after they were married and went to live in one of the four-roomed cottages in Pavey's Lane he found it more incredible still. He couldn't believe it had happened to him. He'd never had any sisters and his mother was worn out and prematurely old from his earliest recollections of her, so that the loveliness of a woman's body came to him as an overwhelming revelation. It never ceased to astonish him; to fill him with worship; to shake him with passion. Life, because of this loveliness, became a miracle, a boon, a gift to be grateful for. But grateful to whom? To God? He'd never been a religious chap; never gone to church since he was a nipper. But he felt now the need to express his gratitude for Lil; to offer up a prayer of thanks. He did not do this openly, but in his heart; and perhaps because of this his heart warmed the more with love and passion and worship for his wife. A strange gentleness came to his caresses, a new tenderness to his voice. Sometimes as they lay embraced before sleeping he was flooded with an emotional exaltation that could express itself only in a soft stroking of her breasts and the murmuring of her name. At other times Beauty moved and stirred him to a restless pain. They had been married at a registrar's and he had never heard or read the Marriage Service; but a few months after they were married he and Lil were present at the wedding of Lil's friend Hilda in St. John's Church; and when he heard the priest say the words: 'with my body I thee worship' he caught

his breath and his heart-beat quickened at their truth. That's how it was with him. With his body he worshipped Lil. Was it so with her? he wondered and glanced at her quickly and away again. But her whole attention seemed to be on Hilda.

And then some careless fool left a crowbar lying about and Tom's crane was derailed and falling over on its side and plunging down a drop of six feet caught and pinned him as he tried to jump clear. His legs were crushed, his spine injured. When, five months later, he left the hospital for good it was in a bathchair and with the knowledge that he would never walk again. Already his legs were withering and just assistance in getting from chair to bed and bed to chair was not enough: he had to be lifted.

The bedroom (that little room upstairs which love had made magically beautiful) was given up and the living room made into a bedroom. It was a tiny room and with the bed in it and the few other necessary pieces of furniture much manoeuvring had to be done to get Tom's chair in and out. It was a hard life for Lil; not financially, for Rorke's had done handsomely by him, paying him a pension of two pounds a week. She had now to do the work of the house and attend to Tom, each in itself a full job for one person. She had to have assistance to get him from his bed to his chair or from chair to bed; but that being done she could usually manage. Mrs. Jarvis next door always helped with that in the morning but sometimes in the evenings some of Tom's mates would call in to smoke a pipe with him and they'd give her a hand before they went; Charlie Bates being especially kind and considerate and often popping in as many as three evenings a week. And of course Tom had to be taken out twice a day for fresh air. The doctor was insistent about that and said on no account was it to be missed; it didn't matter about the weather. For Tom things were grim. The one sheet anchor in the wreckage of his life was his love for Lil. Yet at times this was but a torment added to his despair: was not Lil's life now that of a slave chained to a log, and he was that log? Had he any right to ask that of her? How long would her love last under that constant strain? Would it not be the kindest thing for both of them and the straight decent thing a man ought to do to relieve her of this burden; to give her the chance to start afresh with some other man. He spoke to her once about this and he thought he caught a swift look of relief in her eyes before she could hide it; but she protested

that she couldn't bear it if he did anything like that; that she loved him and was happy in doing all she had to do for him. And stifling his doubts and thrusting back the anguish that increasingly lay in wait to invade his mind, he forced himself to believe her.

And then Lil took a cough. It was a persistent cough and kept them both awake night after night. It did not get better; and indeed, as the autumn drew into winter, it seemed clear that it was not going to get better by itself but was getting worse. And so at last Lil went to the doctor, after long persuasion by Tom. It was silly and wasteful, she said, to go to the doctor's just with a cough. Everybody had coughs in winter. They were nothing. They just had to run their course.

The doctor didn't agree. He took the cough seriously and ascribed it to various causes, but chiefly that the parlour was too small for two people to sleep in and was airless because Tom felt the cold so much now he couldn't bear the window open at night. And then of course Tom's health was suffering from being kept awake so much. No, certainly, he agreed it was out of the question for Tom to sleep upstairs; but, he said, that decidedly Lil must do so, for a time anyhow; at the very least until her cough was quite gone. Lil told Tom what the doctor said but declared she wouldn't do it; she wouldn't leave him all night long. Tom said of course she would, she'd have to; he insisted, pointing out that it was only for a short time; pleaded with her; and so at last she agreed.

Charlie Bates was the larkly sort. He'd always got a new joke or tale and his visits did Tom no end of good; and Lil too. He made them both laugh and kept them laughing, even laughing after he'd gone at the memory of something he'd said. And he was a good sort; a damned good sort. Three evenings a week at least and sometimes four or five he'd pop in. And not just a pop in and out again; he'd stay at least an hour; sometimes twice as long. And they'd all have a bottle of Guinness each. It wasn't long before he said he might just as well drink his nightly glass of Guinness at Tom's place as go toddling off up along to *The Goat*, and he had a case sent over from the off licence. Said he wasn't going to sponge on them. That made them laugh. Charlie sponge on anybody, let alone them!

And so very soon Charlie was there most nights and always helped Lil to put Tom to bed. And then he'd say: 'So long, old man' and give him a wave of the hand and then say good night

to Lil, telling her he could find his way out, he wasn't blind or drunk and he knew the house like the palm of his hand. But Lil mostly did let him out, knowing Tom liked her to do so.

The front door used to shut with a loud grating click. It led straight upstairs, the parlour being away to the right along a little passage. One night when Lil returned to the parlour after letting Charlie out Tom said, "Why you startled me, Old Girl! I didn't know Charlie had gone; didn't hear the latch click."

"No," Lil said; "I oiled it to-day; it got on my nerves; it's grand now, isn't it,"

"Fine. It did make a ruddy row. Silly we didn't think of oiling it before."

One night Lil was an extra long time seeing Charlie out and then went upstairs and stayed some minutes before coming back to settle Tom down for the night. This made him uneasy; he didn't quite know why. But it was funny she should do that. She'd never done it before. "Thought you'd forgotten me. Lil," he said lightly when she came in. "It was raining," she said; "I ran up to close my window."

Of course. How reasonable. The sort of thing anyone would do. But for all that it was a long while before he slept. If it was raining why did she stay talking to Charlie at the door so long? If it didn't matter about the window while she was talking to Charlie why couldn't it have waited till she'd seen after him and gone up? Why had she to rush upstairs? Supposing if it was to see if her hair was all right? Now he came to think of it they took a pretty good time about it these days saying good night. Did they open the door first? He wouldn't hear it anyhow since Lil oiled the lock. Wonder why she had oiled it? It hadn't got on her nerves before. After all it wasn't much of a noise. Yes, it was a long time before he slept; he was certainly awake when St. John's Church struck two; but in the morning he couldn't remember if he'd also heard it strike three.

A few nights later Lil was such a time at the door with Charlie that he thought he must be mistaken and that Charlie had gone; but then he heard the door shut, a thing he'd not heard since Lil oiled the lock. He'd have to ask Lil why that was. But it was quite a time before Lil came in.

"Raining, darling?" he asked.

"No, Tom; what makes you think," and then she laughed; "O

because I popped upstairs. What *do* you think! I remembered I hadn't made the bed"

• " Poor Old Girl;-it's all work and no play for you. What a life! Why'don't you do a bunk? "

She stooped and kissed him. " I will if you talk like that."

His face quivered. " Lock's gone wrong again, hasn't it? " he said.

" Lock? "

" Ay. On the front door. I heard you close it to-night."

"I believe it has. I remember now it did make a noise. I'll put a drop more in to-morrow."

But when she had gone up to bed there was no sleep for him. He was tortured by monstrous thoughts. He believed that Charlie was upstairs in bed with Lil. He was sure of it. Round and round in his tormented mind spun a cycle of incidents, each one in itself trivial, but in sum, it seemed to him, damning. Why was Charlie always round, every evening now without fail? His friend? Yes, but he'd other friends and they were not round every night; once a week and sometimes only once a month was enough for them. And Charlie and Lil were always laughing together and he'd caught glances passing between them. Why must she always see him out? And the time it took her. Time enough to stand kissing at the door. He groaned in spirit and turned restlessly over on his back and stared into the darkness. And oiling the catch. Why did she do that? And why have to run upstairs? Because it was raining; to make the bed; he didn't believe it. And to-night the sound of the door shutting. Why did she do that? What did it mean? It was done so that he should hear it. But why? So he'd think Charlie was gone. When he hadn't gone. *When he hadn't gone.* Of course. That was when he'd crept upstairs. And he was now in bed with Lil. Lying with Lil. Holding her in his arms, his mouth on hers, He had a sudden vision of Lil in all her loveliness. He stared into the darkness and saw her as he had so often seen her lying beside him. He remembered all their love-making and caressing. He could feel the soft swell of her breasts under his slowly moving hand, the smooth fine texture of all her body. His tortured vision peered through the darkness into that upstairs room and he saw Lil lying there in the bed where they had known such joy and happiness. And beside her now was Charlie. He knew it. He could see him. It was Charlie who lay

there now caressing her. He watched those long caresses: He watched Lil returning them as once she had returned his. He couldn't stand it; he couldn't bear it; what could he do?

Round and round in his brain the tormented thoughts drove through their incessant cycle; over and over again the torturing images painted themselves upon the darkness. Was it true? Was he deceiving himself? He couldn't stand it. It was true. But he'd have to know. He must know. He would have to go and see. He could crawl there. He could do it; drag himself there somehow. He'd got to do it.

He pushed off the clothes and moved over to the edge of the bed and leaning out felt for the floor. Further and further out he leaned until his body half rested on the floor. He thrust forward and there was a heavy noise behind him which set his heart thumping. He did not know what it was. He must not make a noise. For a long while he lay crouched there listening. Everything was quiet. But what had made the noise. And then he knew. It was his dead legs slumping down from the bed. He must be careful.

He crawled to the door, felt up for the handle, turned it, and after a while was out in the little passage and resting at the foot of the stairs. Slowly he began to climb the stairs; slowly and carefully; dragging his dead legs after him. Once or twice they made a noise and he lay still holding his breath and listening. Then he went on and at last was at the bedroom door. The room where he knew Lil was. The room that had been their bedroom. The room where she was lying in bed with Charlie. What was he going to do when he got in and found them together? He'd not thought of that. It didn't seem to matter. All he wanted was to know; to know; to be sure; dead certain. He could not bear not to know; he could not stand the torment of not knowing.

He reached up and softly turned the handle and slowly pushed open the door and crawled in. He lay still and listened. Listened for her breathing. Listened for their breathing. He had forgotten the door and suddenly it clicked and Lil's voice cried out in fright. "O there's someone in the room! "

" Yes," he said, " there's someone in the room."

" O Tom," she cried, " Tom; it's you. O Tom, how did you get here? Aren't you well? "

" You've Charlie in bed With you," he said.

" Charlie," she cried; and then slowly: " but Tom, what do you mean? How can Charlie be here? O you're not well." He heard her get out of bed and come towards him; felt her kneel down and put her arms about him. " What is it, Tom? You've been dreaming."

" Charlie's been here with you."

" But Tom how could he be? "

" You're having an affair with him."

" With Charlie! Why Tom, you're mad. With Charlie. I don't love Charlie and he doesn't love me. There's never been anything. I've never thought about him at all. What could have made you think that? "

" O I don't know. Everything."

" But Tom there's nothing, I love you. O you're shivering. Come into bed."

" With you? "

" Of course, Tom. Shall I help you? "

" Ay; just a bit." He dragged himself slowly over to the bed and presently, breathless with his effort, he lay in the bed panting. She came in beside him and put her arms round him.

" You're not lying," he said, his voice breaking. " You do love me?"

" O Tom, of course I do. You know I do."

" You don't—you don't care about Charlie? "

" Of course I don't; not a bit."

" I've been laying down there, Lil. I couldn't sleep. I thought—I was sure——" He broke off and his arms went round her.

" You poor old silly. It's that old imagination of yours. And being left alone. You oughtn't to be left alone."

" I don't mind, Lil. As long as you love me." He drew her closer into his arms, pressing his mouth to hers.

Gradually his arms relaxed; his breathing grew slower, more regular; and she knew that he had fallen into the deep sleep that always followed his lovemaking. She lay very still, wondering if it were yet safe for Charlie, naked and shivering in the big wardrobe, to make his getaway.

THE WIDOWER

IT HAD been a trying day for Arthur Pelham, a day mainly of irritations and exacerbations; but a dozen other emotions, shallow or deep had variegated the long hours, the dragging hours, for the day had dragged intolerably.

He had not realised that the funeral was going to be such a drain upon him nervously, mentally and physically, or he would either have got extra help or cut down the number of the mourners. That would have been simple enough; it was clearly a question only of the number of carriages; obviously no-one had had any intention of walking. Mourners! Good Lord, they were more like revellers at a carnival once they had done lip-service to 'poor Jane' and seen her safely underground. What greedy beasts people were when they hadn't to pay for things. Eating till they helched or hiccupped; drinking themselves fatuous and maudlin; and chain-smoking.

The amount they stuffed away and the time they sat at it! And of course Emma couldn't cope with all the waiting and clearing away and he'd just had to turn to and help. Help with the waiting and clearing away. Turn himself into a waiter and kitchenmaid for that crowd of gobbling, guzzling hypocrites. You wouldn't have thought they'd have let him. Let him! Why, damn them, far from remonstrating, they'd not even noticed he was doing it they were so busy with their hogging and their gossiping and scandalmongering.

The things they gossiped about! You'd have thought they'd have had the common decency to remember it was a house of death and that they were but just back from the graveyard and those solemn and moving words: 'we therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.' But not a bit of it! They might have been at a tea-party or at the theatre waiting for the curtain to go up. Dress, they were talking about, and the price of this and that; and tittle-tattle about all and sundry; and a comic turn on the wireless. Actually repeated some of his jokes. Repeated them and laughed. Laughed. He'd heard them. But that wasn't all. If that had been all he could Tiave overlooked it. But smoking-room stories. O, yes; they drew

the line at nothing. More than once he'd overheard things from little groups in corners. Swilling his whisky and smoking his cigarettes and telling bawdy stories. And guffawing. Tried to stifle it of course; put up a hand as if it was a yawn; until after a time they didn't even bother to do that; too drunk; just guffawed and let it go at that. Some of the women did call out 'Shush! ' but only in a perfunctory way and without even looking to see what it was and just going on all the time with their gossiping and tittle-tattling and sipping his port and madeira.

And how they'd stayed on and stayed on. What were they waiting for? Another meal? More free drinks and smokes? Hour after hour clacking away and drinking and smoking. And making a pretty mess of their wine glasses and coffee cups, and of the table and carpet. It wasn't as if there weren't ash-trays and plenty of them. He'd impressed that upon Emma and there must have been a dozen or more in different parts of the room. But no-one used them. Or only at first. And after that they just scattered their ash anywhere and everywhere and pressed out their stubs in saucers or dropped them into their glasses or cups making filthy stinking messes. And some didn't even bother to stub them out but left fuming ends all over the place, or put down half-smoked cigarettes and forgot them. It was a wonder the house hadn't been set on fire. Pity it hadn't and incinerated the whole crowd of them, the selfish thick-skinned guzzling hogs.

And it wasn't as if their own homes were Liberty Halls. If they had been he wouldn't have minded so much. Why, if you so much as dropped a speck of ash in most of them you'd hear a 'tt! tt! ' and have someone run at you with an ash-tray; and as for hospitality, good God! one tiny helping of meat and vegetables, a fruit tart and a scrap of mousetrap-cheese. And the drink! Light Dinner Ale. Elephant Brand or some such name. Tasteless watery swipes poured out of quart bottles broached the previous evening by some other unfortunate guest.

But at last he'd got rid of them. And spent the rest of the evening helping Emma until they were both fit to drop. And so with much still left to be done he'd packed her off to bed (for she'd to be up at six in the morning if he were to have his breakfast at eight as usual) and tackled the rest alone.

It was after eleven when he had finished. The larder was almost as bare as Mother Hubbard's, but he managed to find some bread

and cheese and chutney, and having washed it down with a bottle of Guinness, he smoked a last pipe and went up to bed. Up to their bedroom where but a few nights ago she had slept warm and living beside him as she had done for the past thirty years and more.

He undressed slowly, reviewing as he did so the incidents of his life with the woman so suddenly dead and now (how incredible, how impossible, how shocking it seemed) lying in a wooden box with six feet of earth upon it (earth he'd watched with a sort of dull horror that very afternoon being shovelled into the grave) in St. Mary's Cemetery, not three miles from where he was standing.

Inevitably his mind roved back to their first meeting, to their courting, to their marriage, to the first days of the honeymoon and the first difficult weeks and months of married life. How long ago it was; and yet, ever and again, memory hooked up some incident of those early days which seemed to have happened but a short while ago, so vividly it came back to him. Was it thirty years ago that they had leaned out of their bedroom window and pulled off cherries and eaten them before breakfast on old—old—now what was the old chap's name? began with a C; no, a G: Gibbs was it? No. Grimes? Girling. Girling, that was it. On old Girling's farm at Boughton in Kent. What a lovely holiday that had been. Couldn't have been thirty years ago. But it must have been. Thirty-two in fact; second year after they were married.

And could it be nearly thirty years since little Tom died? Just twenty-eight years it would be, for he was almost five. Just five and the life throttled out of him by diphtheria. And all because they'd gone to that filthy little village in Devonshire where an epidemic broke out and the village doctor—what was his name?—Dickson, that was it; a perfect dolt; a menace to the public health; said they never bothered about diphtheria and typhoid and measles and so forth in Devonshire; they were endemic anyway; and all the hygiene and sanitation in the world wouldn't prevent it; didn't believe in all this new-fangled nonsense; yes, he said that! a medical man! and pooh-poohed little Tom's throat and didn't take a swab of it until it was too late, and he and Jane had had that agonising night sitting beside little Tom while he fought his losing battle with Death, striking out with his little fists as he struggled for breath, his hair dripping with sweat, his face crimson and contorted, his eyes like live coals and frightened; it was the

fear in his eyes that was the worst of all to bear. And they could do nothing. Nor that fool, that murderous fool Dickson. And so little Tom had died and been buried in the churchyard there. Was it really twenty-eight years ago since that unbearable night? And Tom, if he'd lived, would now be thirty-two. Incredible. Married and with children of his own perhaps.

Well they'd never had any others. Not by design. Not that at all. Jane wanted children. Hungered after them. Not that he did. He didn't mind either way. But he certainly didn't want another affair like poor little Tom's. But no others came. It just didn't happen.

He went over to the bed to get his pyjamas and the thought came to him that he and Jane had slept together there for over twenty years and that in all the years of their married life he had not passed more than half a dozen nights away from her side; and two of these were since she had died.

He slipped on his pyjamas and sauntered slowly back to the dressing-table, where he tidied his hair. "Poor Jane," he muttered. He stroked his chin and stared meditatively at his image in the mirror: "Queer you never liked her," he said.

TOLD ON THE LOWESTOFT ROAD

i NEVER could understand this hankering after another world. This one's good enough for me. Why worry about the next life I say; what's the matter with this one? Isn't it good? I know I've had my bit o' fun. I once heard a chap say it's best not to be born at all. There's a fool for you. I wouldn't have missed my life for anything. I've had a grand time; I've enjoyed it; I've been happy.

I don't mean I've had an easy life or a soft one. I was born rough and that's how my life's been. I've never had any money to speak of and no education: never went to school at all. What do I mean by born rough? I mean born under a hedge with no doctor, no midwife and no nurse. And no hot water or chloroform neither. Just a woman and her man to help her. And on the road again the next day. That's born rough.

There's a lot o' children 'd like to know how I dodged schooling. It was easy enough. We were gypsies. Well partly. My father was a gypsy and my mother was a school teacher. You think it funny a school teacher 'd marry a gypsy but my father was a very handsome man and school teachers are only human beings. By the time I was old enough to go to school my father had prospered and we had a van and used to travel about the country selling mats and rugs and shawls and cheap tinware. We were never anywhere long enough for me to go to school. None of us went. There were four of us; my brother Bob and my sisters Kate and Lucy. But it's my story I'm telling you about.

So, as I say, we had no schooling. Of course we were supposed to. The law said so. But you don't want to take too much notice of the law. I never have done. Do what you want to and keep your weather eye lifted has been my motto. English people are too law abiding. They're afraid of a policeman. The Irish aren't. You want to live in Ireland to see what they think of the peelers. And they don't mind telling 'em neither. And to their faces. And loud enough to hear a mile off. No, we never went to school; not one of us; not for a day. Mother taught us to read and write and wanted to teach Father but he wouldn't. And then he let Lucy teach him. Funny that, wasn't it. She was his favourite. Pretty's not the word. She was beautiful. And I'm her brother mind you. She went on the Halls and made pots and then—but it's my story I'm telling you not hers.

Fact is I don't want to tell you hers. Not now. One day perhaps. Too sad. Let's forget it. Lucy was the first to go. No, I'm not going to tell you her story. She was only thirteen when she left the van and she didn't look any more. And she found trouble straight off. She went into a touring show doing the provincial halls and the manager, a fat dago old enough to be her father twice over, put her in the family way. It was born dead and nearly killed her. But after that the luck changed for Lucy and it was roses all the way as the saying goes; a fair bed o' roses. For years.

Katie went next. When she was fifteen. She got married. He wasn't one of us. He was a townie and lived in a house and worked in a paint factory. Good job and regular wages and all that. Only saw him once, at the wedding, and I couldn't tell you his name now if you asked me.

And then Mother died. Bob was sixteen then and I was seventeen and we were both thinking of clearing out. It was early spring and I meant to go busking round the coast. I'd a concertina and could, play it, and I'd got a good voice. Still have. And I've never met the instrument I couldn't play given a bit o' time to get the hang of it. Bob thought of joining a boxing-booth. He'd been handy with his dukes since he was a kid and although I was bigger and older 'n he was he could make rings round me. I don't mean we ever fought. Except just fun and for practise for Bob. We were always the best o' friends. He was a picture to look at too. Good-looking like Father and built like a Greek statue. O I know what I'm talking about. I've seen plenty of Greek statues. The real thing. None of your plaster casts. Yes, Bob was a picture. And before he was twenty-five—but it's my story I'm telling you.

As I was saying we were both thinking of pushing off and Father wasn't above hinting it was about time we did when we had an accident in the fog at a level crossing. The van wasn't on the crossing but about fifty yards away. I was leading the horse and Father was on ahead with a lantern. And he was run down and killed by a train. He was killed right out; cut to pieces; so we don't know how it happened. He wasn't tight, although he'd got a skinful; but he could always hold his liquor. But there it was. And there was Bob and me left with the van and the business and neither of us much wanting it. Bob said I was the older and so it was mine but I pointed out to him (what of course he knew) that it was an English law and didn't hold good with gypsies. Which we aren't, Bob said. Which the best half of us is, I told him. And so we tossed up for it and Bob lost and went off with the van and the next thing I heard of him—but it's my story I'm telling you.

I don't say it's much of a story. It's just little things and ups and downs like most people's; but it's been good and there's plenty of variety and it's been a bit queer at times. I mean I've seen one or two queer things. Well, Bob and I parted, him going off with the doings and me off busking. And very well I did. I stuck to it for more'n three years. Did every seaside place round the coast from Yarmouth to Brighton and averaged a pound a day from the end o' April to the middle o' October. By the end of each season I'd have nearly a hundred quid saved up.

Enough to live on during the winter if I'd felt that way. But I didn't. I wanted to save money. Get a good sum behind me, Not just keep going, rubbing along. And so all' winter I played and sang outside theatres and pubs and I even got; some engagements at concerts held in halls at the back of boozers. And so one way and another I saved nearly a hundred and fifty a year for I'd a plan and I wanted a thousand behind me to try it. Of course I never got the thousand and the plan went west like they mostly do. I got tired of busking and tired of saving after three or four years and turned it in and went on the loose and blewed the lot in less'n six months. But that's life. Isn't that what makes the fun? And when it was all blewed that was that and I got another job.

It was with a circus and menagerie. I drove one of the vans and made myself generally useful. I shared quarters with the lion-tamer. A real nice chap. I learnt a lot about animals from him. He used to say wild animals weren't savage and the only one a bit that way was the hyena, and it wasn't half as savage as human beings. That was a favourite saying of his that the only savage creatures on earth were human beings. He said he always laughed at the name lion-tamer. He said lions didn't need any taming and they were peaceful gentle lazy and as easy to handle as a dog. He said they were more like dogs than anything else and to call them big cats was silly. Tigers were like cats but not lions. I once asked him about there being cruelty in the game and he just laughed and said a cruel tamer wouldn't last a month. You'd got to know the animals and like them and understand their habits and likes and dislikes and that was all the secret. You'd got to be able to talk to them, he said. Sounds funny, doesn't it? But to see him with his animals ne might 've been one. I mean if you shut your eyes and only used your ears. He'd snarl and growl and purr and make a dozen other noises there's no names for and the animals 'd do the same and let him do anything with them. They knew by the noises he made what he was thinking and he knew what they were thinking and if that isn't talking what is?

There was an old chap about the circus who used to be a Crocus. You know, a travelling quack doctor. Always known by the name of Crocus among showmen. It's a sort of joke with words: Crocus, c-r-o-a-k-u-s, d'you see. Croak meaning to die or be killed. Well

this old Crocus had gone blind and he'd have gone to the work-hotise if she Old Man hadn't found him a job in the circus. A circus is no end of a place for sprains and wricks and dislocations and this old Crocus was a master bone-setter. He was a fair marvel. He'd got long thin fingers and they were like steel and so were his wrists. He could do miracles. He told me that when he was on the road and working with fairs the local doctors used to send him their patients who they couldn't cure. And one night, he said, after dark and his show over a doctor himself came, tapping at the door of his van and told him he'd been limping for years with a bad foot and didn't know what the devil was the matter with it. And so he had him in his van and the doc. took off his shoe and sock and the Crocus took one squint at the foot, stroked it a bit, kneaded it, and then gripping the ankle gave it a pull with a twist o' the foot at the same time and the doc. let out a howl and the Crocus told him it was all right now and if he'd not made such a blinking row he'd have heard the bone click in.

He taught me a lot this old Crocus. A lot about bone-setting (as much as he could teach in two years, which isn't everything but more 'n most doctors know) and he taught me a lot too about herbs and drugs and medicines and how to draw teeth and all the rest of a Crocus's capers. And so when I packed up the circus (it was over a girl; no, nothing dirty; I wanted her but she didn't want me. She liked one of the clowns and married him). So, as I say, I packed up and went into the Crocus lay. And very well I did out of it. I've made fifty pounds in less'n a week more than once. At Nottingham Goose Fair one year I made eighty pounds all in bobs and tizzies. Might have saved hundreds. But I didn't. Blewed it all one way and another.

But what I wanted to tell you about was me getting friendly with a sword-swallower. It was while I was in the Crocus lay. He was another marvel. Strapping great chap. The things he could swallow. You wouldn't believe it. Swords, cutlasses, carving knives, carving forks, watches. I've seen a chap in the crowd hand him up one of the real old fashioned turnips as big and almost as round as a tennis ball and to see him swallow that was something to remember. Bulged his throat out as it went down like those pictures you see of ostriches swallowing big balls. And when it was down anyone could come and listen to it ticking in his chest. He thought nothing of swallowing bayonets and the

only things, he said, that ever beat him were a butcher's cleaver and a fish-hook handed up by a little boy with a face like an angel. He got out of it by telling the kid he only swallowed fish-hooks on Friday, being a Roman Catholic.

We got very friendly. After the shows were over he'd sometimes come into my van for supper and a game of draughts or crib; or we'd just sit and smoke and yarn. He was an interesting chap. Been round the world three times. Said all his family had big swallows and he'd a brother who always ate oranges by peeling 'em and swallowing 'em whole and a sister who could swallow a hen's egg shell and all and bring it up again as often as you like.

He came into my van one night looking a bit white about the gills and fair scared and I asked him what was up and he told me he'd swallowed a tin tack. I thought he was joking but he wasn't. He wasn't at all. He'd been tacking a bit of American cloth on a shelf and held the tacks in his mouth and somehow swallowed one of 'em. I told him that oughtn't to be nothing to him but he wouldn't have it and said it wasn't the same and would I give him something. Well, I knew what to give him. I'd got a nice bit o' steak for our supper which I was going to fry with onions but I could see I'd now have to eat it myself and I'd make him a couple of basins of boiled bread. Large ones. It's a grand supper when you're short of funds. I'm not joking. It's tasty and warming and filling. You put about two pints o' water in a saucepan, bring it to the boil, then drop in bits o' bread about the size o' crab-apples and when all the water's been soaked up (and the bread mustn't be pappy but with body in it) you stir in a chunk o' butter, a big chunk, and pepper and salt to taste, and then eat quick. It's a grand meal.

Well, I made old Charlie (that was his name) stow away three basins of that, gave him something to take first thing in the morning, and sent him off to bed. And ninety-nine times out of a hundred that would have been all right. But this time wasn't. The tack made a hole in him somewhere and he began to bleed inside him (that was the next day) and he died before they could do anything for him at the hospital where the Old Man had him sent in the afternoon. Queer wasn't it? I turn left here. You going to Lowestoft? Well, so long. I'll be seeing you some day.

EXHIBIT 9

I WENT over to ex-Inspector Blakeney's bungalow (at his request) to see his peas; and afterwards (at my request) he returned with me to my little place to see mine. He didn't say much. Not about the peas. And so I exercised a like restraint. Comparisons are odious. He accepted a whisky and soda and we sat down in the arbour and smoked our pipes and looked at the garden. And it was worth looking at. Not that Blakeney said anything about it; nor did L. There are some things talking can't improve. Good wine needs no bush.

Presently I said to him, as being something in his line, "Have you read the leader in *The Mercury* this morning?"

He nodded. "And poisonous nonsense it is. I doubt if one innocent man has been hanged in this country in the last hundred years, and precious few other innocent people have been sent to prison." He snorted. "Miscarriages of justice ! Certainly. I agree. But not the sort *The Mercury* is driving at. It's the guilty escaping that I'm thinking about. There are hundreds of evil-doers who escape punishment every year; some because they're not detected and others who get away with it at the trial. It's the same with murder. I estimate, and it's a cautious estimate, that there are at least a hundred undetected murders in the United Kingdom every year. And there are (and this is no estimate but fact) on an average a score of trials for murder in this country every year, and how many convictions would you say?"

"Ten?"

"Four. It's a fact. I can show you the statistics. And of the sixteen who get away with it I'd gamble everything I've got half are guilty."

"But how do you account for it?"

"The Jury System."

"What! Why I thought that was the strongest stone in the fortress of our liberties; the keystone of the arch reared upon Magna Carta."

"H'm I liberty's right; many scoundrels owe their liberty to it. If all trials were held without juries, the verdict being left to the judge, there wouldn't be many miscarriages of justice."

"Surely twelve heads are better than one."

"Not fatheads."

"Aren't you being rather hard on them? They're just ordinary people like our—like myself, aren't they?"

"The man in the street I Isn't that the idea. The common sense of the average man. Sounds fine. In theory. But it doesn't work out in practice."

"Why not?"

"Put twelve people together into a box or a room and you've got a selection of twelve varying intelligences. Not when it comes to giving an opinion. You've a massed intelligence equal not to the highest of the twelve but to the lowest. It's like the speed of a convoy. Twelve's a crowd. And it has all the vagaries and failings of a crowd: fickle, romantic, sentimental, bigoted, shallow. Do you remember the Vera Wingate case? But you wouldn't probably as you've only lived here a couple of years and I don't think the case made any great stir outside the locality. It was nearly ten years ago; June 1935 in fact. It was my last big case before I retired and one of the greatest disappointments in my life."

"The name has a familiar ring somehow," I said; "but Vera's a common name. No, I can't say I remember it. A local case you say?"

He nodded. "Quite local. No further off than Scarr Copse. Early on the morning of Thursday, June the thirteenth, the body of a young woman was found by Bates the hedger and ditcher in Scarr Copse. Bates was on his way to work at Thorley. The body, from which much of the clothing had been torn, was that of Vera Wingate. She had been outraged and strangled."

"Miss Wingate was a young teacher at the Infants' School. She had been here only about a year. She was a pretty girl; rather flighty; and considered a bit fast. I don't suppose there was any more in it than high spirits, fondness for admiration, and that zest for living which people are apt to condemn (and envy) when they've lost theirs. She'd had three different lodgings since coming here and each time she'd moved because there was unpleasantness about her staying out late. 'Keeping folks up with her goings on' was the way it was put. Naturally enough, not being used to country habits and prejudices, she said then why not let her have a latchkey and then no one need stop up." Blakeney

chuckled. "Imagine it! asking for a latchkey in Splayden! Why, if the King came down here and took lodgings they wouldn't let him have a latchkey. Npne of the natives, I mean. But in her third lodgings she got with a Mrs. Cater who was London born and had only been here ten years and hadn't the native prejudices; and so Miss Wingate had her way and with a latchkey could let herself in at any hour of the night. Not that I hold with that. Not for a young girl. She was only one-and-twenty.

"It wasn't till the military camp was built at Hawley that there was really much talk about Miss Wingate. But as soon as the soldiers came there was talk and plenty of it. You know the sort of thing. Mostly spiteful. After all what are young people to do? If they don't meet young men and enjoy themselves before they're married it's my experience they'll not settle down to marriage but will want their bit of fun and not with their husbands either. And as she'd only a bed-sitting-room she couldn't take her young men to her lodgings (Mrs. Cater drawing the line there apparently, but I'm not sure justifiably) and so she'd had to 'gad about' with them, as Splayden put it. What annoyed the busy-bodies was that it was rarely the same chap twice. Or so they said. What it boiled down to was that she'd quite a circle of young men friends, most of them keen on her. And isn't there supposed to be safety in numbers?

"However, there wasn't safety for her and her body was, as I've said, found in Scarr Copse. It had been thrust into the thick undergrowth and quite hidden. About thirty yards away was her handbag and a few yards further on a camera which belonged to her. It was seeing the bag that caused Bates to stop and search."

"What was he doing there?" I asked; "it's a fairish way off the footpath to Thorley."

Blakeney smiled. "He'd snares there, of course. I've forgotten what his explanation was. Very lame. But we didn't press him. He was some time finding the camera, which was covered by bracken, it having fallen in a thick clump. It was an expensive precision camera and hardly the sort of thing you'd expect a girl in her position to possess. It turned out that it was a present from her father, who was a pawnbroker in London, and it had been an unredeemed pledge. The motive for the crime was quite plain and any question of robbery did not arise.

"The news of the affair was common property before the morn-

ing was out and about four o'clock that afternoon a young soldier from the camp, a Corporal Ridgeway, called at the Station here and said he wanted to make a statement. He was cautioned and then said that he'd been out with Miss Wingate on the Tuesday afternoon and again in the evening, but that on the Wednesday afternoon he'd been alone to the pictures at Stanton, had returned straight to camp, and immediately after having his tea had gone on guard till ten o'clock when he went to bed. He seemed a very intelligent young chap and was obviously much upset. I asked him if anyone had accompanied him to the pictures but he said he'd gone alone and then added that he'd unwittingly pushed the torn half of his seat ticket into his tunic pocket instead of, as was his habit, dropping it on the floor, and he'd come across it while searching his pockets for a pencil. We took possession of it and I told him it might prove a lucky chance he'd found it. After signing the statement, he went back to the camp.

"The inquest was held on Friday afternoon and I asked for an adjournment till the Monday, explaining that our enquiries were not yet complete. The coroner agreed to my request and that left me two clear days to put a rope round somebody's neck. And already I'd a feeling, no more than a sort of intuition, that I knew whose neck it was. My feeling was to prove right enough but I was to be proved wrong about the rope.

"In the camera was a roll of film and there had been only one exposure: a picture of Corporal Ridgeway. He'd told us all about that so the developing was no surprise in that respect. It had been taken on the Tuesday afternoon, he said, on the far side of the hedge by Mrs. Gisborne's Six Acre Field. I had several prints made. The picture was clear and sharp. I studied all the prints under a lens. And in the background, fairly high up over the distant trees was a speck. I obtained a much more powerful lens and I had the best print enlarged from 2½ inches by a inches to 20 inches by 16 inches. This enlargement was Exhibit 9 at the subsequent trial in September at the Meadshire Assizes.

"At the resumed inquest Corporal Ridgeway, whom I had arrested on the coroner's warrant, was charged with the wilful murder of Miss Wingate and committed to the next assizes. On what evidence?" Blakeney paused, smiled, and relit his pipe. "On the evidence of the small speck which the enlargement showed quite plainly to be a parachute coming down. Before the re-

sumed inquest I had made enquiries and learned that an R.A.F. pilot on the previous Wednesday afternoon (the important Wednesday) had had to bail out of his 'plane and had floated slowly down to earth about five miles to the N.W. of Splayden, while his machine had gone on to crash another six miles further on. He had jumped just before four o'clock and had reached the ground about seven minutes later; and that beautiful precision camera with which the dead girl was taking a snap of Corporal Ridgeway had picked up that speck in the sky and the enlargement had done the rest.

"At the inquest I asked Ridgeway if he could remember what time it was on Tuesday (the day he stuck to in his evidence) that Miss Wingate had taken the photograph and he said it was just after four o'clock as he had heard the church clock strike while they were waiting for the sun to come from behind, a large bank of clouds. That answer should have hanged him. But it didn't, thanks to the Jury System.

"At his trial he stuck to his story that he had not seen Miss Wingate on the Wednesday, despite the plain evidence of the camera that the photograph had been taken a few minutes past four o'clock on the Wednesday. And after an absence of only an hour-and-a-half the jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty. What do you think of that for a miscarriage of justice?"

"But how could they," I asked, "in the face of the evidence? Was there any doubt at all that the speck was a parachute?"

"Not the slightest; and Exhibit 9 was passed round in the jury box several times, besides their having seen it previously with the other exhibits. Even Ridgeway's counsel had to admit that it was like a parachute."

"Only *like*," I said.

"Good Lord! Wasn't *that* an admission for the defence to make! Had there been any doubt at all, his counsel would have poured ridicule on the bare idea. No; it was quite obvious it was a parachute."

"What did the judge think? Or didn't he pass any definite opinion."

"He said there was no doubt it was a parachute; and *the* parachute in question; and that Ridgeway was lying. His summing-up was dead against the prisoner and when the jury gave their verdict he stared, glared's the better word, and said in a tone of

plain contempt, ' Well, that is *your* verdict, ladies and gentlemen." "

" How do you account for the verdict? " I asked.

He knocked out his pipe. "Just what I've said. The slowest ship in the convoy. And the mass-intelligence, or mass-stupidity, of that jury was not going to convict a man of murder on the evidence of a precision camera. And if you'd been present at the jury's deliberations I'm prepared to wager you'd have heard from more than one of them something like this sort of sapience: 'No, gen'lemen; I for one bain't going to convict a young lad on the evidence of a box o' tricks like thaccy.'" Blakeney pocketed his pipe and stood up. "That's just what it was, to their medieval minds: a box o' tricks; and they weren't going to be diddled by it. And so one more murderer goes scot free to swell the list of thousands of others, all liberated by our fatheaded Jury System."

"But the half of the cinema ticket? " I said.

"Picked it up in his hut no doubt. Several of the men in his hut had been to the picture house at Stanton that Wednesday afternoon. None had seen Ridgeway there, although one, a Lance Corporal Piercey, 'thought he'd caught sight of him'. But Piercey was a pal of Ridgeway's. Of course his counsel made the most of it but it wasn't much and the jury weren't a bit impressed." He grinned. "Of course they weren't. They weren't bothering about bits o' paper. They were concentrating on the box o' tricks and they'd already made up what passed for their minds about *that*. Well, I'll be seeing you later. Quite a nice lot of peas you've got."

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE NATURE

PENDLEBY is a village in Devonshire consisting of a long straggling street out of which run a discouraged small road or two and some three or four lanes. The inhabitants numbered at the last census eight hundred and forty; it possesses a thirteenth century (much re-built) Norman church; a nineteenth century Baptist Tabernacle; two public houses, *The Goat in Boots* and *The Bear and Priest*, the one a fine example of the William and Mary period, the other an equally fine one of the Victoria and Albert; and the usual

number of the customary little rather fly-blown shops of the one-man-business sort still surviving in the backwaters of life. Among these shops was that of Mr. Ben Sayers, chemist, *the* chemist, the only chemist in Pendleby, as his father and grandfather had been before him. He was a bachelor and looked after himself except for the morning ministrations of a charwoman. Like all monopolists Mr. Sayers was something of an oracle and a dictator. There was no doctor in Pendleby (the nearest, Dr. Swobb, living six miles away at Chudleigh Magna) and the chemist being the only man who knew anything about their bodies, and especially their 'insides', the villagers regarded him with respect, admiration and not a little awe. Further, Mr. Sayers was easily, with the possible exception of Mr. Crow, the most well-to-do man in the village; rich, the village reckoned him. It may be wondered how a small shopkeeper in a small village could possibly become rich, even by so modest an interpretation of the word as the villagers'. But Pendleby, as many another Devonshire village, was an unhealthy spot where pimply faces, blotched complexions and bad teeth were the common lot; and those soft skins of cream and roses celebrated in song and story were as rare as a wiped nose on one of the children's faces.

The largest shop, in respect to window-space, was kept by Mr. Fred Crow. It was a ham-and-beef shop. Its window was always filled. Mr. Fred Crow, Mrs. Crow, Sidney Crow aged nineteen, and Eddie Crow aged twenty-one, were kept busy twelve hours a day cooking and serving; for Pendleby wives found it cheaper and far less trouble (indeed no trouble at all) to buy dinners and suppers than to cook them. And since it was all very tasty Pendleby wives did not bother over the fact that most of the meats had been cooked twice and some three times and that it was of poor quality to begin with; nor were they aware (and certainly didn't want to know) that a diet consisting mainly of re-cooked, highly-spiced, poor-quality meat and 'rich' pastry made from cheap fats,, washed down by tea from a pot which has been on the hob for hours is not one conducive to well-being or good looks. Hence Mr. Crow's prosperity; hence the pimples; hence Mr. Sayers's riches: that chain of cause and effect beloved of the scientific mind.

One day, perhaps a memorable day in the annals of Pendleby, Soper the haberdasher moved, and his small shop opposite the chemist's stood vacant for some weeks. And then painters got

busy with blow-lamps and then with paint; a sign-writer put in a languid appearance and presently under his slow, painstaking hand appeared on the fascia, in gold lettering' on the green surface, first, large and bold, in the centre, *John Wapdle*; then, to the left, *Herbalist*; and finally, to balance, *Natureopath*. Nothing further happened for a few days except that the inquisitive (that is, all Pendleby) came singly or in small knots during that brief period to gaze at the fascia, to argue about the meaning of Natureopath, and to conjecture regarding the appearance of this John Wardle. Not a few thought it looked like one in the eye for Mr. Sayers, and two or three bolder (or duller) than the rest tried the subject as a topic over the counter with the chemist. The stare (product of three generations of accepted omniscience) which he directed upon them withered all but one: idle, good-for-nothing poaching Tom Hinks, who returned the stare with interest and then said, "What would you say a Natureopath is, Mr. Sayers? "

"I should say he was a quack."

"Thanks. What I think. Not o' course that there ain't quacks and quacks. Mean t'——" but Mr. Sayers turned away and went into his parlour and Mr. Hinks with a grimace in his direction sauntered out. "The old cock," he said later to his wife, "isn't half rorty about this Wardle chap; ought to see some fun when he turns up."

"What's a natureopath, Tom? "

"Quack, old Sayers said."

"But a herbalist isn't a quack, Tom."

"What if he ain't."

"Well, how can a man be a quack and not a quack?"

"That's good, that is! " commented her admiring husband; "I must ask the old boy that one. Sort of riddle: when is a quack not a quack? " He guffawed and tapped his unkempt head. "'You've got it there all right, old dear."

A few days later a small furniture van arrived outside the newly painted shop with Mr. Wardle to superintend the unloading of his effects. Pendleby noted with pleasure that as an oddity he surpassed expectation. Tall, scrawny, sallow, and lushly hirsute, wearing queer-looking tweeds too short in the sleeves and legs, with horn-rimmed glasses upon a big rich nose, he seemed to have

strayed out of a Hollywood film; while the tireless agility of his long skinny legs as they pranced and cavorted from van to house served as advanc'e publicity for his wares. And Stentor might have' envied his voice which, within an hour of the van's arrival, had caused the vicar's study window, a hundred yards away, to be closed with a vicious bang.

As Mr. Sayers smoked his pipe and drank his pint slowly and appreciatively in *The Goat* that evening he was the centre of interest; but it was an interest which was chiefly busy with the question exercising all thoughts there: would Wardle come in for a drink? Towards closing-time one or two slipped along to *The Bear* to see if by any chance he had dropped in there for a quick one; but returned almost immediately to answer raised brows with discreetly shaken heads. Five minutes before the half-hour Tom Hinks came in and the warmth of his vocal welcome surprised him. Tom, surely, went the excited thoughts of all, will say something to old Sayers about Wardle. Nor did he disappoint. "Whiskers been in, Mr. Sayers?" he asked.

The chemist looked up. "Who, Mr. Hinks?"

"Whiskers. Hairy Joe of Borne-oh. The nature chap?"

"I've not seen him and I should think it very unlikely that he likes beer."

"How's that, Mr. Sayers?" asked several voices, encouraged by the chemist's mildness. But before he could answer Mr. Hinks put down his mug and pushing it across the counter to the landlord said loudly, "Don't you believe it I I lay he likes a drop all right an' if he don't have it out he 'as it in. Secret boozier. Looks that sort if you ask me."

"Well, he doesn't smoke, any old 'ow," put in Rorkes the grocer, "for I asked 'im for a match and he told me so."

"He probably neither drinks nor smokes," Mr. Sayers said loudly and magisterially; "and I should say he's also a vegetarian and suffers a great deal from flatulence. I've met his sort before." And with this and a nod to the landlord, he walked slowly out as the call of 'Time please' sent at least half-a-dozen mugs sliding hopefully across the counter.

Mr. Wardle was plainly a believer in the slogan and when at nine o'clock the next morning his blind went up to display his wares they were found to consist largely of decorative placards

assuring Pendleby that *Nature Knows Best; You Can't Beat Nature; Nature Never Lets You Down; Let Nature Cure You*. The one that had the place of honour in the centre was reckoned by Pendleby as a nasty one for old Sayers and recognised by¹ the more perspicacious as the first shot fired in a war which was likely to enliven the dullness of their too familiar village. It ran: *Don't Dope with Drugs Nature Cures are Safe Cures*.

This was certainly much cry and just as certainly was there but little wool, for there were not more than a dozen or so small boxes and bottles scattered sparsely on the shelves in the window; and when one or two pioneers entered the new shop for 'something for a headache' and 'something to put on a wart' they reported that the shelves at the back were almost empty compared with Mr. Sayers's heavy load of medicines; but they also reported that Mr. Wardle had charged them nothing as he was, to introduce the wonders of Nature, treating everyone gratis for the first week. And Mr. Wardle had moreover the most plausible of reasons for the smallness of stock carried, as he explained very lucidly to Mr. Tom Hinks, when that gentleman came in for 'something' for his corns, his wife's toothache and his little boy's colic and receiving the three cures thanked the giver, and then, cocking an eye at the shelves had said, "Not sort of overstocked as you might say."

"I am sure," said Mr. Wardle, with that jerky movement of the whiskers which betokened a smile beneath, "that a man of your intelligence, my dear sir, does not need to be told why I carry so little stock, as you so aptly remark."

"Ah," Mr. Hinks said, for once at a loss.

"But let us suppose," went on Mr. Wardle, "that a man of less intelligence had made that remark to me; you'll guess what I should have said."

"You're right," Mr. Hinks nodded and thought it was time he was moving.

"I should have said, my dear sir," continued the Natureopath loudly, "that I use for my medicines and toilet preparations only the freshest of herbs, many of which I prefer to gather and dry myself. And therefore I make only sufficient for present needs. As the inestimable worth of Nature's bounteous produce becomes known in Pendleby, and the demand increases by the leaps and bounds which my experience teaches me to foresee, so will my

stock grow in quantity. But not in quality, my dear sir, for that would be impossible."

"You're right," repeated Mr. Hinks, a little dazed by this eloquence. "Well, good-day." And then at the door, as a bold afterthought, "Thanks for the doings. Have a pint with me at *The Goat* to-night."

"Very kind of you, but I am an abstainer."

"Teetotaller? "

Mr. Wardle bowed.

Mr. Hinks was inspired. "But beer's herbs, ain't it; most, any old how."

"I'm afraid not, in these days. But if it were, my dear sir, I must remind you that there are herbs and herbs; deadly nightshade for example . . . you see my point? "

Mr. Hinks nodded dubiously. He found himself devoid of further controversial ammunition and withdrew from the field.

Mr. Wardle got rid of all his stock twice over during that first week and then the next week sold practically nothing. This he had expected. The following week customers began to come in again and those who praised his wares found next day, somewhat to their embarrassment, their own words staring at them from fresh window-placards under such headings as *Mrs. Soper Praises Natures Methods*, *Mr. Bottling Declares Nature Does the Trick*.

By the time a month was gone Mr. Ben Sayers was beginning to experience for the first time in his life the annoyance of rivalry; and with the passing of another month he was stimulated (such are the blessings of competition) into intenser thought than he had given to his business affairs for many years. This mountain of cerebation produced (from so great a man) a singularly small mouse of result; small, but for all that, a tribute to Mr. Wardle's success.

It was so small indeed that it was merely a grotesque and far-fetched innuendo; and it was made in the bar-parlour of *The Goat* very shortly before closing-time; it was undignified, unworthy of Mr. Sayers's lineage and standing in Pendleby, and not at all what might have been expected of him. Possibly his mood earlier in the evening had led him to drink more than his habit, with a consequent lessening of his self-control. Ted Emmett, the green-grocer, had just said to Bill Snape, the mason, "Wonder when old Whiskers gets any sleep; in his shop all day and collecting

'erbs all night; fair licker that is," when Mr. Sayers looked up from the paper he was reading and said in a nasty voice, but not speaking to anyone in particular, "Our herbalist's night-operations strike me as being extremely odd; not to say suspicious."

"How's that, Mr. Sayers?" asked the voice of sycophancy.

The chemist shrugged his shoulders. "Don't ask me . . . wasn't there a burglary at Boughton the night before last? ... I believe there was ..." and he returned to his reading.

But this was too much for the sober ones present; and Henry Ernshaw, the tailor, expostulated, "You're not serious, Mr. Sayers!" to which the chemist replied sharply, "I'm merely stating two facts; one, Mr. Wardle spends the night hours er—abroad; and two, there was a burglary at Boughton."

"So does Tom Hinks for that matter," said the tailor.

The poacher's flushed face appeared round a partition. "What's that?" he asked.

"I only said you went out o' nights, Tom," the tailor said soothingly.

"Oh, did y'! and 'oo told you I went out o' nights? And what's it got to do with you anyway?"

"It's all right, Tom. Mr. Sayers was just saying——"

"So you said I went out o' nights, did y'?" Tom asked, turning on the chemist with the swift foolish anger of semi-inebriation.

His tone and manner infuriated Mr. Sayers. Him to be spoken to like that by a drunken lout of a poacher! "You're mistaken, Hinks," he snapped; "I didn't say it." He paused; "but I say it now. If you want my opinion of you you're a good-for-nothing poaching rascal." He rose jerkily and a little unsteadily to his feet, glared at Hinks, who now quite sobered was regarding him wickedly, a faint grin on his lips; and with a series of jerking nods to the room he said, "Good-night, gentlemen," and went out.

There were a few faint titters but Hinks's face forbade comment from all except one, Cowles, the smith, the biggest man there, who guffawed and said, "Gor! the straight griffin." But Henry Ernshaw brought peace, if a rather uneasy one, by buying Tom a pint and explaining to him just what had been said. It was the general opinion in the bar that Mr. Sayers's remark about the Natureopath was scandalous, absurd and should never have been made. As is the way of villages Mr. Wardle had heard all about it before he went to bed that night.

But in the morning there was an abrupt right-about-turn of opinion; the first man affected was Tom Hinks, who was round at the chemist's shop before eight o'clock and had to go round the back where he found Mr. Sayers busy in the kitchen. "Well, what is it, Hinks?" he asked.

"I've come to beg your pardon," the poacher said.

"Oh, that's all right, quite all right," with considerable relief.

"Thankee, Mr. Sayers. And I reckon there's something in what you said, sir. My two ducks went last night."

"Your *what*, Tom?"

"My two ducks what I was going to fatten up for Christmas. And I reckon old wh—old Wardle's got 'em an' as soon as I've had a bite o' breakfast I'm off up to Policeman White's. My Ernie's been cryin' ever since we tol' him; like brother and sisters they were, Ernie and the ducks. So I just come round to beg your pardon and to thank you for giving me the tip. We'll see what the lor's got to say about such capers."

Mr. Sayers had been thinking hard; or was under the illusion that he had been so occupied. "I shouldn't do that, Tom," he said.

"How's that, sir?"

"How are you going to bring it home to him? The way to lay Mr. Herbalist by the heels is to catch him *flagrante delicto*."

"Where's that?"

"I mean in the act, with his hands on the goods."

"Wants some doing."

"I'm not so sure, if he were followed at a distance every night he went out, sooner or later he'd be bowled out."

"Sounds good. I'll have a shot to-night, Mr. Sayers."

"No use at all. One tracker's no good. One man's word is as good as another's in law. We'll have to make up a party. You and myself and say three others; not more; who do you suggest?"

"Bill Snape and Harry Cowles would come along, I know, and Harry would be useful if it came to a chase. And perhaps Charlie Dean would come. They do, sir?"

"Admirably. All right, Tom, I'll leave you to arrange it."

And so, when shortly after midnight Mr. John Wardle stole quietly out of his back gate and set off towards the open country,

there followed some hundred yards behind five sleuths who had little to learn, judging by their antics, from the most snakey of trackers of the Wild West.

Nevertheless within half-an-hour they had lost their quarry and lost him so completely that after three hours' intensive search they gave it up and set off for home. Day had just broken as they walked slowly down Pendleby high street. As they neared Mr. Wardle's the window above the shop shot up and the herbalist, in a nightshirt, beamed down upon them. "Ah, Good-morning!" he said affably; "been strolling over the dewy meadows? Splendid! that is Nature's way to health."

This was too much for the chemist's temper. "We've been out looking for a rascal, Mr. Wardle," he snapped,

"Someone 'oo stole my two ducks," rasped Tom Hinks.

"Stole your ducks? Dear me! and have you been out in the fields looking for them?"

"Never you mind what we been doing."

Mr. Wardle leaned out of his window, "Waste of time going all that way," he said with a smile. "You should have looked nearer home. My tip is Mr. Sayers's larder."

The blacksmith laughed. The chemist shook his fist and shouted, "You get back to bed, you insulting old—old—" and then broke off, disconcerted by Tom Hinks's stare. "What's the matter, Tom," he snapped.

"Oh, nothing, Mr. Sayers, nothing." But he continued to stare.

"Do you mean to say you b-believe what—what—"

"Of course he does!" roared Wardle with a great laugh; "and so do I."

"I'll have the law on you for this, Wardle."

"Why not let Tom have a look, sir," said Bill Snape mildly.

"Rubbish. It's an outrage. Be damned if I do." And then, with belated realisation, he said angrily, "Well, come along and see for yourselves."

A moment later he threw open the door of his pantry to reveal shelves as well stocked as those of his shop. But there were no ducks. "Satisfied?" he jerked out and was about to shut the door when Tom Hinks darted forward and pulled back a large tray leaning against the wall; and there, plucked and dressed, were a pair of ducks.

The chemist's face flamed, his eyes protruded. In the silence

his breathing whistled and wheezed like a tubed horse. " It's—it's a plant/' he said.

No-one spoke.

And then he said a silly thing. " How d'you know they're your ducks? "

Tom Hinks pointed to one of the feet from which a toe and part of the web was missing. It was evidently an old wound. He turned to Dean, " Remember when I did that, Charlie? "

Dean nodded. " With your hoe, Tom; and how she squawked, b'Gor! "

" I never thought, sir," Tom began, when Sayers, beside himself, roared, "Get out of my house! Go on! Get out! all of you! "

" I want my ducks, sir."

" Take them."

Tom took them. " I don't want to make trouble, Mr. Sayers," he said; "and I ain't going to do anything about it; p'raps it was on'y a bit o' fun on your part, 'though I mus' say there's fun an'——"

"Will you get out! " the chemist roared, a note of hysteria in his voice.

They went.

Not many of the Pendleby folk who pretended to believe the charge against the chemist really did so, although not a few did; but the rest were glad of an opportunity of scoring off one who as oracle and dictator had for forty years made them feel small. Thus do all dictators fall. And so they stayed away from Mr. Sayers's shop and with as great a parade of publicity as possible gave their patronage to the herbalist. Things would have blown over and been forgotten in time and the chemist's customers have returned to him but in that October, while the boycott was still in lively if waning operation, a shop fell vacant and was presently opened as *The Modern Pharmacy* by a very smart young man fresh from college who put a brass plate on his shop door: *fames Payne, M.P.S.*

Mr. Sayers, lacking the bounce and elasticity of youth, felt the struggle beyond him. He had ample means. Why should he continue to live among these grinning clod-hoppers when there were a hundred pleasant little places in England where he would

be welcome and happy. And so, a month before Christmas he pulled up the roots of three generations and departed.

Tom Hinks's Christmas dinner was quite a gala affair. There was a turkey and other matters quite beyond his purse. There were also two guests: Mr. John Wardle and Mr. James Payne. At the end of the meal the three men stood up. Mr. Wardle raised his glass of lemonade. Mr. Hinks and Mr. Payne their mugs of ale.

A prodigious wink distorted the hairy face of the herbalist. "Here's to a couple o' ducks," he said; and after they had drunk, he added, "You can't beat Nature."

"You're right, sir," grinned Tom.

"Absolutely, Uncle John," laughed Mr. James Payne, M.P.S.

MORTMAIN

WHEN I HAD WRITTEN the words *My dear Gregson* I stopped abruptly and stared at them. It was not so much that I knew, or rather had known, Arthur Gregson but slightly, and should certainly not have addressed him so familiarly; nor was it that he had been dead nearly two years; what pulled me up short and with, I confess, considerable perturbation, was the fact that I had sat down at my writing-table and had picked up my pen with the intention of writing to Bernard Faydell, my solicitor. It is a commonplace that what is called the unconscious mind has a way of playing queer tricks; but I was well aware that this queerness is imaginary and that the workings of the unconscious mind are as normal and ordinary as those of the conscious mind. One gets the impression of queerness from ignorance of the mental process involved; once these are recognised, everything is quite straightforward. And so I set myself to track down the cause of my having written *My dear Gregson* instead of *My dear Faydell*. I carefully tabulated a list of all my associations with the name Gregson—but doubtless you know the procedure; it is all a question of mental associations; for example, one association of the name Gregson in my mind might have been the word etching and while moving over to my writing-table I might have glanced at that fine etching of Pan

above it; the spark to the tinder as it were, and the resultant flame would have been my writing *Gregson* instead of *Faydell*. And so, as I say, I set myself to track down the particular association which had caused the *apparently* odd mental lapse. I failed to find it. This did not bother me greatly. I knew that these matters are often so well hidden or disguised that long and close search is needed and even that may be fruitless. Further, I had by now quite recovered from the slight shock of the affair; and so, with a shrug of my shoulders, I screwed up the sheet of paper, tossed it into my wastepaper-basket, and began my letter to Faydell. I wished afterwards that I had kept the sheet, if only for additional evidence.

It must have been quite a month afterwards (certainly I had completely forgotten the affair) when the thing happened again. I sat down to write to my sister Diana, who is married to Dubois, the painter, and lives at Arcachon in the south of France, and a moment or so later I found myself sitting staring, pen poised over the paper, at the words: *Dear Mr. Haydon, I fully intended writing to you before Borodaile left*. That was all, but the 't' of left ended in a long straggling tail as if my pen had slipped. I was before long to note often a similar straggle and to find a better explanation for it, and the correct one. As I looked at what I had so strangely written I was of course immediately reminded of the previous happening. It may be wondered that I should use the word 'strangely' after what I have said about the merely seeming queerness of the actions of the unconscious mind. But I think it will be admitted that the epithet is just in the light of the fact that I know of no one named Haydon or Borodaile. It is true that the word Haydon has an association in my mind with Benjamin Haydon, the painter and contemporary of Coleridge, Lamb and Wordsworth, and that I was intending to write to my sister who is the wife of a painter. I am prepared to accept this as an association although it reverses the normal process. But what of Borodaile? Not only did it mean nothing whatever to me but to the best of my recollection it was the first time I had met the name.

After much brain drumming and dredging I gave it up and foolishly screwing up the paper as before I tossed it into my wastepaper-basket and wrote the letter to my sister.

I was not to have a month's respite this time. Oh, I assure you,

respite is the word, for presently I was to be subjected to almost daily torment. But the torment then lay well in the future, for the torture did not begin until I realised the truth; and it was some considerable time before that realisation came or, perhaps I should say, was forced upon me.

It could not have been more than a fortnight later, and may well have been less; I had not then begun to keep a dated record or the scripts I unconsciously wrote, and so the point is conjectural. I sat down to write a purely business letter. It was to the bursar of St. Luke's Hospital, Mayfair, with regard to the perpetual endowment of a bed. I made myself comfortable in my chair, drew a sheet of paper from the rack, and after some moments found I had written: *Dear Mrs. Lewin, If you prefer the nineteenth I am quite agreeable, delighted indeed, and as far as the matter concerns Otway, I am sure.* That was all. And again the last letter tailed off into a long straggle. The names Lewin and Otway conveyed nothing to me; and once more, after considerable and I confess somewhat agitated cogitation, I gave it up and wrote to the hospital. It will seem incredibly foolish that I again destroyed the fragment. It was a folly I did not commit again. And henceforward I kept a dated record.

The next came a week later. Intending a short note to my bookseller with a list of titles I wanted I found I had written: *My dear Henry, I certainly don't recommend Klein's, but then, as you know, I never recommend anything or anybody; it's too much of a responsibility; but if you are seriously looking for a good thing you cannot do better, I imagine.* There it ended and with the usual straggle.

Did I begin to guess? I did not. How could I? I had, yet, nothing in the shape of clue or key. I simply began to be afraid that I was becoming insane or, at the best, nearing a bad nervous breakdown. As for any suggestion of a jest, a game (however diabolical), of a fish being played for fun (however hellish), of a cat with a mouse, the notion did not occur to me.

That had happened on a Saturday morning. The following Monday evening I wrote, instead of an acceptance to dine with an old friend, Professor Leeson, at the Carlton: *My darling, Last night ah, yesternight—magical words; a poet's words; Dozvon, wasn't it? But how pale and thin and bloodless are words compared with the realities which they attempt to describe. Are*

you, I wonder, as happy this morning as I am? Can you still feel, as I feel at this moment? That was all there was, and the familiar straggle ended it.

But the first part of the game (the devilish game) was played now and over; and I was to be given the key. And the torment was to begin. I merited it? Did I? I think no human balances can justly weigh such matters.

It came the next day, Tuesday, May the twenty-fourth. It will be imagined that I never now approached my writing-table without trepidation; but while that is largely true I am sure that on this particular morning I was but very slightly influenced, haunted, by what had occurred during the past two months. I was in fact feeling extremely well physically; I had just enjoyed a hearty breakfast and was smoking that incomparable first cigar of the day. And I had a very happy letter to write, a letter to the woman I am—I was, going to marry. What I actually wrote was: *My dear Isbisier, I cannot get up to see you this week, I'm, afraid, but I will arrange a meeting as soon as I return from Amsterdam. There is of course no great hurry for the deed; Beachcroft and Russell are thoroughly satisfied and are in complete agreement; it is merely a question of the most convenient time for the whole thing to be put through. I shall be back on the fourteenth and you may therefore expect a ring any morning after then. Sincerely.* The letter plainly was complete except for the signature. But I did not need it. I could supply it myself: Stephen Torrance.

And as I realised this with a sensation of shivering nausea in my stomach I wondered how I could have previously failed to notice that while the writing was indubitably mine there was something about it, something more or something less, I was uncertain which, that witnessed the influence of another hand, of some other partial control. I knew Stephen Torrance's fist well and I saw at once, or thought I saw, more than a trace of his flowing scrawl in my more precise script. I hurriedly took from a locked drawer in the desk beside my table the other scripts I had kept, and compared them, and saw in them also the unmistakable mark of the beast, of the devil. I repeat, of the devil, for it was a devilish game that was being played. And I knew now what those straggling letters had implied: the sudden cessation of control.

How did I know it was Torrance's name which should have

signed that letter? Isbister is, was I should say, Torrance's solicitor, and Torrance was a diamond merchant and was frequently in Amsterdam; and both Beachcroft and Russell were, I knew, business associates of his. Or had been. You see it is all in the past tense. Torrance died just over four years ago. He was robbed and murdered. Yes, you will have guessed by now; it was I who murdered him. And of course robbed him. Not that robbery was the motive, for I am a wealthy man. Robbery was the cause; his robbery of my wife's love. And I was never even suspected. Why should I have been? There was no motive to connect me with his death. That he and Sylvia were lovers was known to no-one. They had not even the faintest suspicion that I knew; and I am sure Sylvia did not suspect me of murder. I almost told her when she was dying. She died two years ago. She just drifted out of life because she did not want to live; died of a broken heart the sentimentalist would say. And near the end I nearly told her. Just to glut my hate. But I was afraid and refrained, lest she summoned from some unsuspected well enough strength to denounce me. As I say, no-one ever suspected me. I was never even questioned as to my movements that day. It came about quite by chance. I mean as far as the actual events of the day were concerned. I had no intention of killing him that day although I had for some time meant to kill him. But that morning nothing was further from my thoughts. I am, as I have said, a wealthy man, and so can afford to indulge my hobbies, which are botany and geology. Perhaps my geological work may be described as something more than a hobby. The world of science certainly considers it so and the paper I read before the Royal Society last year on the Brecknock Fault added its small quota to the sum of the world's knowledge and has had world wide recognition and acclaim. But that is neither here nor there. I set out that morning (it was in early June) on one of my solitary geological rambles and told Sylvia not to expect me back till late, probably well after darkfall. I took the train to Wendor and then set off walking. I am fond of walking and a good walker. By the late afternoon, when I met Torrance, I was fully twenty-five miles from Wendor. It was a chance meeting; one of those God-sent chances that crop up every now and again. He overtook me in his car and I don't know who was the more surprised. There was I, some fifty-odd miles from home, ambling along that quiet country road;

and there was Torrance in His big Buick going Londonwards on his way home from a business trip in Holland. I remember how he grinned and exclaimed, " Well, I'll be damned ! "

I was not sorry for the lift, although I was not at all tired. I had no thought of killing him then and it was not until we turned off after passing Camshot, and I realised we were going to take the cut across the lonely Barton Moor, that it came to me that here was my chance to kill him. And presently I took it. I asked him to stop for a moment and as the car came to a standstill I hit him with my geologist's hammer. I hit him perhaps six times all told and quite smashed in his head. It was, by the bye, said by Dr. Child, who conducted the post mortem, that his injuries were probably done with the butt end of a revolver. We had stopped by a part of Landon Wood and I drove the car in among the trees, searched Torrance till I found his wallet round his waist, took out the diamonds, purposely dropping one, and then flung the wallet into the undergrowth. I had kept on my pig-skin gloves all the time. The stones I later tossed into the River Ware from the bridge just beyond Boughton.

And then I set off to walk as far as I could before getting a public vehicle. I covered nearly fifteen miles before I considered it safe to get a 'bus; I was then in Manton, a big and busy enough town for a dozen such as I to have passed unnoticed. And I reached home shortly after eleven o'clock, had some supper, showed Sylvia a few of my finds, and went to bed and slept like the proverbial child.

As I have said, I was never suspected; never even questioned; it was so obvious a case. And gradually it ceased to find even a paragraph in the papers and the murder of Stephen Torrance joined the other unsolved mysteries which are, I understand, far more numerous than the solved.

I was not left long in doubt as to the manner in which I was to be tormented. For a few days I wrote each day, controlled by the dead hand of Stephen Torrance, trivial notes to unknown persons; and then, in the evening of May the thirtieth, I wrote, instead of a note to my doctor: *My dear Isbister, I want to tell you the manner of my death. I imagine you will find it.* That was all. It was more than enough. But even then I did not see where the road I was now treading was leading. It may be asked why I did not forthwith give up letter-writing, keep away from my study, go

away on holiday, do a hundred things. First and foremost I could not avoid writing; I was shortly to be married again and my future wife was staying down in Cornwall and we wrote to each other every day. And in common with most men of my position I had a dozen epistolary associations I could not break. But it would have been of no use; I did indeed attempt it for two or three days; and on the third day I found myself sitting at my writing-table with another of those hellish fragments lying on the blotting pad beside my elbow. As for shutting up my house, taking a holiday, or doing any one of the dozen other things I might have done they would all have been, I knew in my heart, without avail. And so I did nothing, except wait.

It was on June the third that I caught my first glimpse of the rack upon which I was to be stretched. Perhaps it was dull of me to need so much to open my eyes. That evening I wrote: *Dear Mr. Isbister, I want to tell you as clearly and as briefly as I can how and why I killed Stephen Torrance,* I sat a long while staring at that after I had first read it. And then I burnt it. Not that I thought I could stay the inevitable, although even then I had not fully realised what that inevitable end must be. On June the tenth, after having for some days written under that pitiless control five or six fragments, mostly concerning trivialities of which I had no knowledge, I sat down after breakfast to write to Cornwall; and half-an-hour later found I had written and signed a letter to Mr. Isbister describing my killing of Torrance and giving the reason for my action.

That damning document I burnt. But I think then that I knew it was useless; that I was doomed. It should not be difficult to guess the rest. Three days later I found the same letter written again; but this time beside it was a stamped envelope addressed to Isbister.

I burnt both. Not that they mattered now. The end was near. How soon it would come I did not know or care. I knew that the dead implacable hand of Torrance would write the letter once again and address and stamp the envelope; and this time it would be sealed and posted. I say I did not know or care how long it would be before that happened: I did not propose to wait. There is only one way of escape for me and I shall take it to-night. It is better than hanging; or Broadmoor.

AS SAFE AS MURDER

MR. HENRY SEATON, M.A., late scholar of Sidney Sussex College Cambridge, had been married sixteen years. He disliked his wife. He had disliked her for a long while; almost indeed for sixteen years. Such a state of affairs did not in the least bother Mr. Seaton; did not even faintly ruffle the surface of his emotional life; he had long realised that it was a not uncommon condition 'of marriage and, after all, that it did not matter very much; and so, being a philosopher, he refused to allow it to interfere unduly with his life, which ran on smooth lines and was quite a happy one, despite the absence of romance. He enjoyed literature and music; he was something of a connoisseur and a collector of sixteenth and seventeenth century miniatures; he was fond of good food, good wine, and good tobacco. With all these pleasures why should he hanker after the certainly less tangible and probably imaginary joys of married love. He would be a fool to do so. And Mr. Seaton was decidedly not a fool. As for Grace Seaton she was a pleasant faced, pleasant voiced, comely and capable woman, who performed very efficiently the social and other duties and obligations which fell to her as his wife. Why ask anything more? Mr. Seaton did not ask anything more.

So things were with the Seatons for nearly sixteen years. And then Henry Seaton, who had for all those years disliked his wife Grace, found himself liking someone else; and liking her so much that he decided to kill his wife. It will seem ludicrous that Mr. Seaton should have come to so desperate a decision merely to escape from a situation common enough and for which Society has provided the civilized outlet of divorce; an outlet of which the normal man is sensible enough to avail himself in preference to such a reversion to barbarism as violence upon the person, of the unbeloved.

But unfortunately Mr. Seaton was not a normal man; or rather his profession did not permit him to be normal. He was a schoolmaster, the housemaster of Cromwell House, Shelborne; and the scholastic profession frowns upon divorce; frowns upon it so minatorily that any member bold enough to seek such a way out of an unhappy marriage finds his bread and butter endangered.

Mr. Seaton was indeed doubly unfortunate for Grace was the only child of Canon Pember, senior canon of Shelcaster Cathedral; and Canon Pember was extremely High Church and his views upon divorce (which were, he being the sort of man he was, the views also of his wife Amelia and his daughter Grace) made it certain that whatever Mr. Henry Seaton did or did not Mrs. Henry Seaton would not seek relief or redress in the courts. And so, inevitably and inescapably, the desperate decision was come to.

Mr. Henry Seaton had no intention of dying for love's sake. He was determined to kill his wife because that was the only way he could be free to marry Gillian Karne. He intended to marry Gillian and expected to live with her very happily for many years; just as he expected, when the Rev. James Gorton, M.A., D.D., retired, to succeed him as the headmaster of Shelborne and to enjoy that plum of the scholastic profession for many years. Very definitely he had no intention of allowing his connubial joys and his professional honours to be cut short, or worse, denied him, by death; certainly not by so painful and degrading a death as hanging. Not in the least. He would murder Grace but he would pay no penalty; not even the faintest breath of suspicion would blow in his direction; for that was as important as innocence; a schoolmaster suspected is a schoolmaster damned.

It was necessary therefore to plan a murder which could not possibly be brought home to him nor cause one single dubious glance to be directed upon him. Mr. Seaton did not consider that a very difficult task; decidedly not one beyond a (bracketed) Senior Wrangler. A mathematician must of course be a logician and Mr. Seaton's reasoning upon the matter of his wife's murder was extremely logical and would therefore strike us as odd, for we are not logical, we ordinary people. But to give Mr. Seaton's reasoning would be both tedious and difficult; it is only his conclusions that are interesting and relevant and they were simple enough, odd as even they may momentarily seem.

His first conclusion was that a murder to be safe from detection must be done in public; the more public the act the greater the degree of safety; he therefore determined to make it as public an act as was professionally possible to him*. His second conclusion was that the chief danger to the murderer lay in the fact that there was but one victim and this, by a process of concentrating, discarding and whittling down, frequently led quickly and inevitably to the

murderer. What was needed was to disperse attention over a much wider field than a single individual; to have at least half-a-dozen victims; probably ten would be necessary to ensure absolute safety; he therefore determined to murder a number of other people at the same time as he murdered Grace. And of course, ethically speaking, one is no more (or no less) a murderer for killing a dozen, a score, a hundred, a thousand, a million, than for killing one; it would be no more of a burden on one's conscience; not indeed that Mr. Seaton bothered overmuch about his conscience; he was too much of a philosopher; and a logician.

The most public occasion in which both Mr. Seaton and his wife participated was undoubtedly Sports Day at Shelborne. There, with the playing fields thronged with boys and their parents; there, in the broad light of the summer sun; there, before them all, and before too the keen-eyed cameramen of the Press and the two policemen watching over the trophies, he would do Grace to death; and with her would die a number of others; who they would be he couldn't say; that at least was outside his control; it was in higher hands, and he hoped that was not an irreverent thought.

Sports Day at Shelborne was unique in the matter of a piece of ceremonial dating back to the days of the Regency. Midway through the events there was a break of half-an-hour for the drinking (by the visitors, staff, and boys not competing in the sports), of the famous Shelborne Claret Cup. Each house of the School had its own recipe, that of Cromwell House being claret, brandy, borage, thyme, bay, lemon, sugar, ice and soda water. And at half-past-three on that hot sunny afternoon there sat about the velvet lawn of Cromwell House some eighty or so mothers, fathers and sisters. At one of the tables Mrs. Henry Seaton was presiding; there were also at her table three fathers, five mothers, and two sisters; eleven human beings enjoying the immediate joy of the sunshine, the scene, and one another's company; and keenly anticipating the approaching joy (the more keenly because of the excessive heat) of a long cool draught of the celebrated Cromwell House Claret Cup. A short distance from the lawn, in an open fronted rectangular tent, Mr. Henry Seaton, assisted by the cook and four prefects, was busily engaged in concocting the delicious brew, his red jolly face wreathed in an almost Bacchic smile, a smile which radiated kindly goodnature and embraced the velvet lawn and its well-dressed occupants. The prefects served as cup-bearers, the cups being jugs;

huge jugs; glass jugs; china jugs; and at least one enamel jug, perhaps two.

It was probable, highly probable (although it was never definitely established) that it was from one of the enamel jugs (if there *were* more than one) that the glasses *on* Mrs. Seaton's table were filled. Within ten minutes or so of that fatal quaffing, and before the Sports had begun again, the occupants of that table were noticed to be in some bodily discomfort; then in considerable distress; and finally in great and convulsive agonies. By four o'clock all were in the School hospital under anxious medical attention; and by six o'clock all were dead.

The post-mortem showed that they had died from arsenical poisoning, but the subsequent enquiries failed to throw any light upon how the arsenic had got into the jug of claret cup. At the inquest the cook said that having unaccountably run out of fresh lemons she had had to use lemon powder for one or two of the jugs but which ones she was unable to say. It was suggested that the lemon powder might have contained arsenic, although none was found when the contents of the one packet not used was analysed. There was also a suggestion that the enamel glaze of the jug might have contained arsenic which was set free by the action of the acid in either the fresh lemons or the lemon powder. But the coroner did not give any great weight to these suggestions and he returned a general verdict of death by misadventure.

Everything happened as had been planned in the logical mind of Mr. Henry Seaton, one time (bracketed) Senior Wrangler in the Mathematical Tripos. There was nothing felt towards him but the deepest sympathy. (Why should there be? Consider again the facts calmly.) Fifteen months after his wife's death he married Gillian Karne; and two years later he obtained that plum of his profession, the headmastership of Shelborne. It was a position he graced and honoured. Of recent years a great deal has been said of the sterling character of Old Shelburnians and much of this has been publicly ascribed on numerous occasions (at least twice by Cabinet Ministers and once by no less a personage than the Primate) to the fine influence of that great and good man the present headmaster.

A strange tale. But true? O undoubtedly; why not? Consider also this: according to statistics compiled by one of the Big Two of Scotland Yard (and indeed by the bigger of the two) for every

single convicted murderer there are a dozen unconvicted; several score never brought to trial; and many hundreds never even suspected. You rub shoulders with murderers every day; your next door neighbour (that pleasant affable gentleman) may be one; why, my dear sir, if you have married a widow, and you, my dear madam, if you have married a widower, you may, with no small show of reason—but enough! let us probe no further; as civilized persons we should show a certain delicacy, a certain restraint.

STRANGE CASE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

"NO WIZARDS, witches or sorcerers," said the grey-faced man warmly, "and what about Toby Matlin?"

"Oh, yes, Toby Matlin, of course," replied the landlord soothingly, as one listening to the whimsey of an imaginative child.

"Don't we all know he's a sorcerer?" persisted the grey-faced man.

"Yes, yes," said the landlord, looking over to me with a faint smile of derision, as he turned away from the counter and went into the living-room of *The Plume*.

The grey-faced man and I were now alone in the little bar.

"You're a stranger hereabouts?" he asked, glancing at my knapsack and dusty boots.

I nodded. "I'm on the road to Veryan," I said.

"Then you'll pass Toby Matlin's cottage," he replied. "D'you care for a story?"

"I should like nothing better," I answered, leaning back comfortably in the settle and filling my pipe.

"It's a lie-story I'll be telling you, or so they say," he went on, in what seemed to me a half-pathetic half-dubious way.

"So much the better," I smiled, "I deal in lie-stories myself."

"But it's the truth and no lie," he cried.

I nodded.

He was quiet for a moment, fidgeting with his left arm, the hand of which drooped out of the sleeve pallid and withered, and lay lifelessly upon the oilcloth of the table.

He stood up, and, coming over to me, pointed out of the window to a small thatched cottage over the way. "I live there alone," he said, and went back to his seat.

I began to wonder when the story was coming. He cocked a queer eye at me, and then abruptly and suddenly he began.

I spent thirty years (he said) in the merchant service, and unlike most sailors I saved; and by the end of that time I had a tidy sum by me, and was glad to be done with the sea. I was then forty-six, and I wrote to my only brother William, who was fifty, and lived in that cottage with his wife Mary, and asked him if they were willing to take me in as a lodger.

William wrote back a very hearty letter; and so one spring morning, about fifteen years ago, I got down with my few traps from the carrier's cart outside *The Plume* here, and within ten minutes was settled in with William and Mary as cosy and comfortable as if I'd never been out of the village.

For five years I lived there, and the three of us were as happy and contented a family as you'd find in a year's voyaging.

There was a big garden attached to the cottage, and William and Mary kept pigs, cocks and hens, a donkey and two goats. Besides the vegetable garden, there was a nice little orchard, whose plum, pear, cherry and apple trees were so loaded that William was able to turn a blind eye upon the pilfering of the village children.

The fowls were wonderful layers, the sows littered well and good prices were obtained for the pigs.

They were happy days, and William and Mary were a comfortable couple, lacking only a babe of their own to make their content perfection.

Mary was as good a wife as a man had, barring a shortness of temper; maybe a babe would have softened her sharp tongue, and saved them from the terrible thing that came upon them.

But in fact William's temper was no sweeter; and when Mary had spoken to him crossly he replied in like fashion, and in no time they were hurting one another with words that they did not mean.

I don't quite remember how the real mischief began, but certain it **is** that suddenly Mary got the habit of saying, as soon as the three of us were seated at breakfast, "William, it's going to be

fine to-day; I can see by the sky: you'd better work in the garden."

Whether it was because William was hungry and irritable, or simply that he just *would* be contrary, he took to replying, "Nonsense, my dear, I'm sure it will rain before noon"

And that, I suppose, is really after all the way it began.

It sounds a silly thing for two happily married old folk to quarrel about, but quarrel they did, and very bitterly too; and before many weeks had passed, our once quiet and peaceful breakfast-time had become a babel of bickering and shouting.

Every breakfast-time was now alike. As soon as Mary had put the eggs upon the table, cut the bread and butter, made the tea and taken the honeycomb from the crock, she would look at the sky and say, "William, 'twill be fine to-day, I know."

Quick as a flash he would reply, "Nonsense, Mary, 'twill rain by noon."

It did not matter in the least what the sky looked like. However grey and threatening it hung over the cottage Mary would say it was going to be fine. And William was just as foolish: for with a blue sky overhead, and a warm sun shining through the windows upon the white napery and pleasant food, he would insist that it was going to rain.

And soon the quarrel would be at its height, and their voices would be shrill and loud with anger.

"William, don't dare to contradict me."

"Mary, you are being foolish."

"The finest day for years, 'tis going to be."

"Raining cats and dogs afore eleven."

"I say 'twill be fine."

"I say 'twon't."

"William, it will."

"Twon't, Mary."

"How *dare* you, William! "

"How *dare* *you*! "

And so on and so on, until the neighbours craned out of their windows, and the children going to school peeped in wonderingly through the open door at the dreadful spectacle.

Now one lovely morning in early summer, when the very beauty of the day should have kept folk's hearts and tempers sweet and clean, there came a tap-tap-tapping at the window in the height and midst of the quarrel.

Mary and William stopped their unkind speeches, and the three of us looked towards the window. It was wide open at the top, and looking in at us with a part-puzzled part-sad and part-mocking look upon his wrinkled face was old Toby Matlin, the wizard.

Old Toby was a wonderful man. and could charm a wart, cure a colic, ease a widow and make new hair sprout upon a bald pate in a way that was amazing.

We all stared across at him, William and Mary angrily and a little chap-fallen.

"For shame, William," he said, wagging a bent fore-finger; "and shame for you too, Mary Stacey."

"Mind your own affairs, Toby Matlin," snapped Mary.

"You be off, Toby," cried William angrily.

"Spoiling the sunshine, mocking the flowers and frightening the little birds, you be." went on Toby.

"You're a poke-nose, Toby Matlin," screamed Mary.

"The ugly face of yell sugar the honey," roared William; "take it away."

Toby drew himself up to his full height, and a rare tall fine man he was, for all his years and his bowed legs. "Mary, woman," he said softly, looking her full in the eyes, "your ill tongue is a bad friend to your good heart. William." and he looked queerly at my brother, "William, ye're a sad fool to bicker with a good wife."

"Ye're not wanted here, Toby Matlin," screeched Mary, nigh to tears, "get gone on your own business."

"Trundle off on your bandy legs, Toby," shouted William furiously, rising in his chair and shaking his fist at him.

"Til see ye to-morrow," replied Toby Matlin quietly, and then was gone.

"The poke-nose peeping old Tom," said Mary; "you'd better close the shutters on the window to-morrow, William."

"I had best, my dear, surely," replied William. And their quarrel forgotten, we all three turned to the meal and made a hearty breakfast.

But the next morning found them once more in the middle of a bitter quarrel, and once again the loud angry voices rose in the little room.

William had forgotten his promise to close the shutters; and indeed on such a gay morning as that was, who would have shut

out the pleasant sunshine. And so, suddenly, tap-tap-tap sounded upon the window; and there once again was old Toby Matlin looking down upon us.

But his face was stern and angry now, and his eyes were so strange and terrible that I felt as if a wet cold hand were dragging at my belly.

"The liddle birds——" he was beginning, when Mary in a sudden burst of fury seized the cottage-loaf and hurled it towards the window.

There was a crash of broken glass, the sun went out like a blown candle, the room rocked, I seemed all a-smother in a hot darkness, there was a noise like the beating of a great drum, and then I remembered no more.

The grey-faced man stopped and looked at me.

"But," I said, "surely that is not the end. I don't understand."

"The end?" he said sadly, "well, I don't know what the end will be, and no better than you do I understand. But I woke up afterward in bed, there were neighbours in the cottage, and Mary and William were gone; and no one's ever seen them again."

"But——" I was beginning, when he continued heavily, "till I saw them at Toby Matlin's."

He stared at me suspiciously for a while, but as I was silent he went on. "When I could get up again, weeks after it would be, I found my left arm as it is now."

"The thought came to me that Toby Matlin might have a charm for the like of that, and so I went off up to his cottage."

"I remember it was a dullish grey morning. He was very pleasant, as he mostly was, and asked me into his sitting room. And the first thing I saw when I sat down before the mantelpiece was a big wooden clock with two doors to it. And outside one of the doors was a manikin of wood, and lie-story or no lie-story, it was my brother William to the life."

"* Looking at my weather clock, Henry, eh? ' said Toby Matlin, giving me a queer look."

"I couldn't say a word."

"The old man comes out when it's going to be rainy, and the old woman when it's going to be fine. Look," and he went up to the clock and pushed the manikin through his little door. Immediately from the other door out popped a little old woman, as like

William's wife as one sparrow is to another: *it were* William's wife.

" 'A queer clock, Henry,' he said, ' I call them William and Mary/ And he turned a look on me that I can see now at nights.

" I didn't wait for any more, but got back to my cottage as fast as I could move. And that's the story," he ended; " a lie-story, as the children say. But it's no lie." And rising to his feet, and walking a little uncertainly, he made his way out of the bar and into the tiny street.

The landlord came in, and looking over to me with a laugh, said, " Henry been telling you his tale? "

"A queer tale," I replied, "but what's the explanation? "

" Easy enough," he answered. " While his brother and sister-in-law were quarrelling he had a stroke and was in bed unconscious for nigh four weeks/ "

" But Toby Matlin and the loaf? " I asked.

" Oh, *that's* right enough; poor Mary surely flung that at him,"

" But their disappearance? "

"Well, it was the time of the big 'flu epidemic of 1918, and while Henry lay unconscious, William and Mary were both took and died. But when he regained his wits he wouldn't believe it, and stuck to the rigmarole he's just told you."

" I suppose Toby Matlin has a clock of that sort? " I asked.

" Why, yes," replied the landlord, " but they're common enough hereabouts, and you can buy one any day in Falmouth for a pound or so."

" H'm," I said, as I rose to my feet, and tightening the straps of my knapsack moved towards the door: "h'm, it's a queer tale ... I don't know. . . "

The landlord laughed. " What." he cried, " has old Henry bewitched you with his lie-story? "

" Well," I answered as I opened the door, " I deal in lie-stories myself, but where the lie ends and the truth begins I've never yet been able to find out."

SON OF JAEI

DAVID HARDLY remembered his mother for she had died some months before his third birthday. Even when he thought he was remembering things she had said and done, or something she had worn, he would presently discover that the images or the laughter were not his mother's at all but were from his earliest recollections of the reign of Mrs. Caley; and since Mrs. Caley's reign had lasted seven years his mother soon became a fainter and fainter shadow to him in measure as the other woman, by daily intercourse and association, grew into a solid flesh and blood part of his life.

Mrs. Caley had stepped in to fill a gap, to cover up a blank; a merely temporary expedient. Somebody had to come in and at once when May Chalmers died so suddenly leaving husband and son with no one to look after them. To John Chalmers the emotional shock and sense of loss had been great when he had called at the hospital in good time to be ready at hand by the bedside as his young wife came out of the anæsthetic only to be told that she was dead. He couldn't believe it. Even after the funeral he would find himself forgetting and thinking of her as alive and at home waiting for him to come in for his dinner. He had to teach himself not to forget it, not to have these thoughts; teach himself to face the fact that May with her laughter and singing, her teasing, the way she wore her clothes, the curls at her neck, her love of flowers and bright colours, her apple-pies and her ginger-puddings, was gone for ever. And with her had gone not only her love which had made his life so rich and warm but her domestic efficiency which had, almost unnoticed, ministered so much to his and David's comfort and well-being. He was doubly bereaved; his love loss was poignant; but equally desolating was the helpless feeling which possessed him each morning when he woke to the grim reality of cleaning up and lighting fires and cooking and washing-up, all the unassisted labour of a small house, with the care of a small child plus his own work by which he earned the money to keep things going. He was a builder's foreman and had to be on the job before eight o'clock struck; he had from twelve to one for dinner and knocked off at five. He endured it for a

week (a week of fires which went out, of scrappy meals, of eternal washing-up and of incredible accumulations of dust and dirt). During that week he learned a great deal about married life from the point of view of a workman's wife and he knew now why men left responsible for the running of a house by the death of a wife however greatly loved and mourned quickly turn their thoughts towards a successor. But making all allowances for a widower's and an orphan's needs the decencies may not be openly outraged and John knew that the greater part of a year must pass before a new wife and mother could be installed, even if one to his liking were at hand. And so Mrs. Caley, the temporary expedient, was offered the vacant throne, not as queen or consort, but as a sort of regent and, as John made quite plain, only for a period which could be at the very outside not more than twelve months. Mrs. Caley accepted the post with a mental reservation; not that she would make it her business, and pleasure, to bring about her succession to the throne as queen, for she was fifty-five and even if (in her secret heart) she had not entirely done with the glowing follies of love she knew they were not to be had from John, who was under thirty, younger in fact than her two boys in the Navy. Her reservation was more material; she determined to retain the post of housekeeper to John Chalmers and acting-mother to little David until she got her old age pension or married again. That she failed to pull-off this commendable determination in no way lessens her very real achievement (a stay of seven years), for she was only defeated by a power no human being has yet conquered.

As David passed from babyhood to boyhood he and his father began to enjoy a closer and more intimate life than is common between father and son; they became companions, cronies. Due as this largely was to the lack of a more normal outlet for their affections (especially upon the man's part) not a little was owed to a joining of forces to combat and defeat the domestic tyrannies of Mrs. Caley. The housekeeper, a tall scrawny woman whose prim rather severe expression was rendered almost minatory by a slight squint, meant well by both man and boy and under her careful regimen neither back nor belly had any cause for complaint. But she was houseproud and addicted to nagging and singly John and David were no match for a finger pointing to mud on washed linoleum, eyes which accused, and a tongue which

lashed; for David was nervous and sensitive, easily snubbed and scared into silence and surrender; while John, a smallish man with an easy smile, mild blue eyes, and unruly hair, hated contention and would go a long way (far too long in the opinion of friendly neighbours) to avoid strife. But by combining forces and a pooling of wits they could manage to put up a defence, conduct a sort of campaign of tactical evasions dodges and repudiations which was too much for Mrs. Caley's inferior abilities.

It was perhaps this enforced co-operation to outwit and outmanoeuvre the common foe which was the strongest influence drawing father and son closer and closer together, so that by the time David was ten years old it would be no more than the truth to describe them as inseparable companions. They went walks together, swam together in the open-air swimming bath, and gradually went further and further afield on their bicycles (David's being his father's present on his ninth birthday) until in the summer months they would set off on cycling week-ends immediately after dinner on Saturday, and return dusty sunburnt and tired tremendously happy in time for a high tea on the Sunday, a meal to which they both brought mighty appetites and which old Grumblegrump (their secret name for Mrs. Caley) had devoted most of the afternoon hours to make satisfying to eye, to palate and to stomach.

There were other sides to their companionship. In the friendliest rivalry they worked at the same hobbies, kept the same pets, read the same papers and books, entered the same newspaper competitions, and regularly posted their forecasts to the Football Pool. David had his own Post Office Banking account, and every Friday evening when John gave Mrs. Caley her week's house-keeping money he gave David his weekly pocket-money to an amount which the housekeeper declared to visitors over cups of tea in the kitchen was perfectly ridiculous and much more likely to ruin the child than, as his father pretended, teach him the value of money and how to handle it. She did not bother to add that this weekly pocket-money had to last a week and not another farthing was obtainable until Friday came round again; nor the fact that David by the time he was nine was a shrewd shopper, who financed all his hobbies and other schemes, never asked his father to lend him money, and had built up from his savings the nice little capital of fifteen pounds.

And then the war came and after a year of it Mrs. Caley suffered defeat and for David life was changed into something bearing but slight semblance to all that he had hitherto known.

During the first twelve months of the war little happened to make it real to David; in July Hamborough, the big town ten miles away, had three raids, the last a bad one; but he did not go over to see the damage done and so the affair meant no more to him than the newspaper accounts of raids on other big towns; even when a month later a Dornier came over in daylight and dropped four bombs on their own railway station only one of the bombs hit anything, little damage was done, and nobody hurt; and so the war remained to David a far-off shadowy thing, 'something in the paper', a tale that is told.

And then early in September Batcher Brothers (the builders for whom John worked) obtained a government contract for the construction of a factory just outside the town and work began at once. Long hours were worked and there was a great deal of overtime and no holidays at all, not even Sundays. John earned more money than he had ever dreamed of earning and David's pocket-money became, in Mrs. Caley's phrase, 'perfectly disgraceful': but for all that David wished the old times back; there were no more jaunts now with father either afoot or by cycle; no more swimming; nothing as it used to be, for John was too tired when he came home to do anything but eat and doze in the garden and then yawn himself up to bed. It was the war that had done this; it was no longer 'something in the papers' but an unpleasant reality which had intruded disturbingly into David's life.

The new factory was nearly a mile from their house and on the days when his father was finished at six, and so came home for a high tea, David used to open his father's bedroom window (which looked out over the fields towards the quickly rising factory) sit on the sill dangling his legs outside, and watch for the familiar figure to come striding homewards. He could pick him out from the other men as soon as he emerged from the factory buildings, and he would then keep his eyes fixed on him until he was near enough to shout and wave. His father walked very fast and usually was somewhat ahead of the score or so of other men who straggled behind him singly or in twos or threes.

One afternoon (it was the last Friday in October) David was expecting his father home just before six and was sitting on the

window-sill waiting. It was a dull day of low clouds and it was some time after the men came out of the buildings before David could pick out his father. But as soon as he was certain he kept his eyes upon him; he seemed to be striding along even faster and more buoyantly than usual; David remembered that it was pay-day and thought perhaps his father had just had one of those marvellous things called bonuses; or perhaps maybe he'd some tit-bit of news and was hastening home to tell it; or he was just hungry and wanted to pack away inside him the grand high tea Mrs. Caley was then busily putting on the table. In another few minutes David calculated he would be near enough for him to shout and wave. And then from above sounded the drone of an aeroplane; it grew louder, tremendously louder with frightening speed; and out of the low cloud a Heinkel swooped, its machine-guns rattling. David watched fascinated rather than frightened; it did not occur to him to move. He saw all the men crossing the field fling themselves flat on the ground; he watched them get up as the aeroplane roared up and vanished in the clouds; some of them were shaking their fists and shouting; others were laughing. And one man did not get up. And as David saw some of the men gather round the figure on the ground he turned from the window and rushing down the stairs sped across the grass to where his father's body lay.

A new life now began for David. His only relatives, Uncle Henry and Aunt Maud, came over for the funeral and to settle things and took him back with them to their home one hundred and fifty miles away in the south-west. Uncle Henry was the head gamekeeper employed by Lord Churlton and they lived in a pleasant whitewashed thatched cottage standing alone in its own acre of land about a mile outside Claydon village. Uncle Henry was father's younger brother and he and Aunt Maud had been married seven years without having any children. They did not want children and they took David to live with them not from any love but from a sense of duty. And David quickly discovered that this *sense of duty' was a grim abiding presence in Brook Cottage. It was Uncle Henry's and Aunt Maud's taskmaster and it at once became his too.

At its behest his money in the Post Office was taken care of by Uncle Henry; his hobbies were abolished ('waste of time'); and his books were confiscated ('most unsuitable'). He was allowed

to keep his bicycle but as he had to clean all the cutlery and boots leggings and shoes, chop all the kindling, get all the water from the well, and cultivate his own vegetable garden, there was little time to ride it except on Sundays. But on Sundays he went to church in the morning, to Sunday-school in the afternoon, and in the evening had to learn the collect for the day and read to himself for an hour from the Bible. As soon as this was done he went to bed. There were no suppers at Brook Cottage. Suppers were an unnecessary meal; they were a waste of food and no-one, said Uncle Henry, with a sense of duty to his country would dream of so indulging the flesh in these difficult times. So the bicycle never left the tool shed except when something was wanted from the village, or even from Boughton the market-town eight miles away. David would have liked those trips to Boughton if he'd had time to stroll round for an hour or so, but as Uncle Henry made him out a time-table, to which he had to adhere under pain of a thrashing (the sense of duty insisted upon the need of such punishment in a boy's upbringing), they were but one more task added to the others.

He liked going to church and to Sunday-school, for not only were they a rest from his incessant labours, but they were a haven from his aunt's eye and tongue and his uncle's hand. He also for similar reasons (for his uncle and aunt always attended at even-song) liked his Sunday evenings despite the learning of the collect; the hour's reading from the Bible was no hardship for there were many fine stories there. One which had for him the attraction of horror was the story of Jael and Sisera. Even her name had a grisly fascination for him. *Jael wife of Heber the Kenite* and when he came to the passage *Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto, him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died,* he read it over and over again and each time was unable to repress a shudder.

Late one spring evening as dusk was falling he was working in his garden. His body ached, not from his labour, but because of a thrashing from his Uncle Henry after dinner. The beating caused him to vomit his meal and more stripes were laid upon him for this disgusting lack of control.

Uncle Henry and Aunt Maud had gone to Boughton for the

afternoon and evening. It was a regular fortnightly excursion for them and sometimes owing to the blackout (they said) they could not catch the last 'bus back and so stayed the night with friends. David was glad when this happened. He did not mind being in the house alone all night, and he could have something to eat for supper (if he were careful to take only a bit of this and a bit of that), read in bed, and get up for an early breakfast, all in peace. He could do things at his own pace and he had time too for his thoughts (and they were the long thoughts of boyhood) and for his dreams.

It grew slowly darker, but he went on working a long while until he suddenly stopped, wondering what time it could be, hurried in and found it was after ten and he knew his uncle and aunt now would not come. He did not go to bed until past eleven and it was nearly midnight before he fell asleep. Before getting into bed he stood naked in front of the dingy looking-glass regarding the weals on his body.

He woke suddenly just about dawn, feeling that something had roused him, some noise or other disturbance. He listened, sitting up in bed straining his ears. He thought he could hear an unfamiliar sound from the garden but it was so faint he could not be sure. It was a chilly morning and he did not want to get up just yet. But again he fancied he heard a noise and his curiosity became greater than the pull of the warm bed. He got up, went to his window, rolled up the blackout curtain, and looked out. There was something and no mistake! A dark figure sprawled on the garden and near it a billowing mass of whitish fabric.

He hurried into some clothes and darted downstairs and out into the garden. The German airman lay on his back, his eyes closed, one hand under him, the other clutching his breast where a dark patch soaked his tunic. He was muttering. David caught a word he knew: *vater*. He hurried back to the kitchen and filled a pannikin from the big pitcher. As he turned to the door he saw lying on the window-sill three or four of the five-inch nails his uncle had been using that morning; beside them lay the big-hammer.

He put down the pannikin and taking a nail and the hammer walked slowly down the garden to where the airman lay. The wounded man's head had fallen sideways; he was still muttering and again and again David caught the word *vater*. He knelt:

down and placing the point of the nail against the temple he raised the hammer. The German opened his eyes slowly and stared unseeingly. They were mild blue eyes. 'Vater,' he whispered, and other words that were unintelligible.

David put down the nail and the hammer and went back to the kitchen, walking very slowly and carefully as if he were picking his steps. He came out with the pannikin of water and when he reached the sprawled figure he put down the pannikin and sitting down took the airman's head upon his knees. The muttering had ceased. The mild blue eyes stared blankly at the sky where the light was broadening fast. David held the pannikin to his lips but when he tried to pour some into his mouth it ran down the chin, upon which there was a stubble of fair hair, and over David's knee. And abruptly it came to him that the water would not be needed now. He put down the pannikin. The dead man's head slipped from his knees to the ground upsetting the water.

David did not move. He felt the upset water cold against his bare knee. He began to cry, quietly, miserably, hopelessly.

THE MAN AT THE DOOR

THERE WAS a rather hesitating knock at the street door and as I happened to have come down from my studio at that moment I opened the door myself. It was an icy day and the man who stood there looked frozen and ill. He was a threadbare creature with a scanty grey beard and dark steel-rimmed glasses and he carried a large suitcase. "Can I interest you, sir," he asked, "in some real quality brushes?"

"Possibly," I said, shivering slightly; "let me see what you have."

He opened his bag. There was an array of all sorts of household brushes, some of them of the most ingenious sort, but no painters' brushes.

"Oh," I said, "I don't want any of these; I thought you meant brushes for painting."

"But these are, sir," he said, pointing to a range of house-painters' brushes.

"I mean for painting pictures," I said; "I'm a portrait painter."

His face became drawn, wan, desolated. "They told me down the road, sir, that I'd be able to sell you some brushes."

"They were trying to be funny," I said; "so sorry."

He began to close his bag and then, to my concern, he staggered on to me and collapsed in a faint.

I cursed him, for I was up to my eyes in work and there was no one else in the house upon whom to foist the responsibility of looking after this half-frozen sick rat. I lowered him to the floor and presently he recovered and sat up and began to stammer apologies. He seemed too ill to be turned out again just yet into that icy air and so I took him up to my studio, sat him down before my fire, and gave him a stiff whisky and a cigarette. A lot of bunkum is talked about whisky having no medicinal properties. You could see the life creeping back into him as the good spirit warmed him and in ten minutes he was a man again instead of a half-frozen rat. He accepted a second cigarette and said he must be going; but I told him there was no hurry, poured him out another whisky and, deciding to let work go to the devil for a while, one for myself; and filling my pipe I took the chair opposite him.

"I haven't always done this sort of thing for a living," he said presently.

"No; I suppose not," I said, for his speech was that of a man of some education and culture.

"How old would you say I am?" he asked,

"Oh, sixty," I said with brutal frankness.

"I'm fifty. Ten years ago I was manager of one of the best known banking houses in the City. But you don't want to be bothered with my troubles."

"Go ahead," I said; "I'll finish my pipe before I start work again."

"I'd been manager then for three years," he said. "I was happily married, had a pleasant house at Richmond, and my salary enabled us to live a very comfortable life indeed. We had no children."

"One summer morning I was working alone in my office when one of the clerks came in bringing a card with a message that its owner wished to see me on most important business. The name on the card was Mr. Arthur Rankin. We had no customer of that name. I told the clerk to show him in."

"He was a smallish middle-aged man, florid, bright-eyed and

very smartly dressed. He was carrying a strongly made leather attache-case.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Rankin?" I asked, as soon as he had sat down.

"He did not reply, but producing a bunch of keys opened his case and taking a shining yellow substance, the shape and almost the size of a brick, he placed it on my desk in front of me. Seen at such close quarters it looked precisely like a gold ingot. 'Will you examine that, sir?' he said quietly.

"I picked it up. To the touch and by its weight it seemed remarkably like gold, 'Is this gold?' I asked.

"He nodded. 'Will you test it, please,'

"I smiled. 'Not for the moment. I'll take your word for it for the time being. I hope you will not object to a question.'

"Where I got it from? Not in the least. I made it.'

"Realising now with what I had to deal I nodded my head gently and said, 'That's most interesting, Mr. Rankin, extremely so.'

"You think I'm a lunatic,' he said quietly. 'I assure you I'm perfectly sane. Ten days ago that ingot of gold was lead. It is now gold. You can satisfy yourself on that point very quickly. I have worked that change in it.'

"You have discovered the Philosopher's Stone,' I said, with the intention of keeping the affair on a light footing, for I felt sure that if he were not a lunatic (and I was by no means convinced of his sanity) he was a silly practical joker.

"Not at all,' he said. 'I have simply invented a process (it is partly an electrical process) which in a period of ten days or so changes a metallic mass whose atomic weight is 207.220 into a metallic mass whose atomic weight is 197.200: in other words, changes lead into gold.'

"And is this ingot the first you have produced?'

"The first? Dear me, no. I have made—but will you come to luncheon with me?'

"I hesitated.

"At my chambers, sir,' he said, 'there will only be ourselves. I have my laboratory there; it is not more than ten minutes from here,' and he glanced at his card on the desk before me and looking down I noted his address: 15A St. James's Street, W.i. 'My car is outside,' he added.

"I hesitated even more. This was a trifle too unusual for my liking.

" 'I will leave this with you,' he said, glancing at the ingot; 'perhaps you will put it in your safe.'

"While he was speaking I had made up my mind and after putting the ingot into the safe I turned to him and told him I should be happy to accept his invitation.

"It was a very pleasant luncheon. Afterwards he took me to his laboratory, a surprisingly large room, quite forty feet by twenty-five and very lofty. It led into another much smaller room, about fifteen by twelve I estimated, and access to this was through a heavy door with a combination lock. This he opened, throwing back the door, and I could not withhold an exclamation: the room was piled high with ingots; it was almost filled. If they were gold their value could not have been less than four or five million pounds.

" 'You do not believe they are gold?' he said.

" 'It is difficult to believe,' I replied.

" 'Or that I made them?'

" 'That is even more difficult.'

" 'I assure you I did. Presently I will give you something a little more than assurance. As to their being gold, choose half a dozen at random and I will test them before you in the laboratory; or you may test them yourself.'

"During the next half hour I tested over a score of the ingots: they were pure gold.

" 'Are you satisfied?' he asked.

"I nodded.

" 'Now as to the making,' he said; 'do you understand electricity?'

" 'Not more than the average man,' I said.

"He nodded slowly. 'If you were an expert I should have to be more careful.' And then for the first time he smiled and added, 'You will not, I am sure, expect me to give away my process.'

"He then showed me ingots in various stages of their change from lead to gold. They were all immersed in liquid in thick glass containers from which hung many wires fused into the glass.

" 'Well?' he said, peering at me through the thick lenses of his glasses.

"All I could find to say was: 'Astonishing!' and realising its inadequacy I tried to lend it emphasis by repeating it.

" 'And now?' he said.

" 'Yes?' I asked.

" 'Lord Stanway is the chairman of your bank, I believe? '

"I nodded.

" 'Would you arrange an interview for me; and as soon as possible? '

" 'Yes,' I said, 'luckily Lord Stanway is in Town. I will ring him as soon as I get back.'

" 'I should like to see him in the morning if possible.'

" 'I will do my best,' I said.

"I spent two hours with Lord Stanway that afternoon. He agreed to meet Mr. Arthur Rankin the following morning and meanwhile I was to keep the matter to myself. This he impressed upon me most earnestly. Later that afternoon there was an emergency meeting of the directors to which I was summoned and told my story much as I have told it to you." He paused and looked over to me.

"That wasn't the end, surely?" I said.

"As far as I know it was," he said; "for it was the last I ever heard of Mr. Rankin or his ingots."

"They were fakes after all?" I said.

"Not a bit of it. They were pure gold and he had undoubtedly discovered a process for changing lead into gold."

"But," I said, and stopped short as he snapped his fingers and said: "It's as simple as that."

"The explanation?"

"Yes. Consider for a moment. America at that time possessed gold to the amount of five thousand million sterling. France had a thousand millions; we a trifle more. All the banking concerns and big financial houses in the three countries were backed by gold. In other words those three countries held most of the world's gold and their power in world politics was based on those holdings. And here was a man who could make that gold worth no more than lead and apparently was proposing to do so. Isn't it obvious?"

"Hardly."

"He was removed."

"Do you mean killed?"

"Undoubtedly. Do you remember the stories current in the

City some years ago of a man turning up at the head office of one of the big oil companies with a box of white pills; asking for a bucket of water; dissolving a pill in it; filling up the tank of the managing director's car and being driven out to luncheon, the car running on a liquid that he declared could be produced simply and so economically that it could be sold at a profit at a penny a gallon. Remember it? "

" I did hear something of the sort," I said; " but I thought it was just a good tale."

" It was the truth. That man disappeared. He too was killed."

" O preposterous! " I said.

" You think so. Then consider what happened to me. Within six weeks of Mr. Arthur Rankin's murder, for that is what it was, I was sent for to attend a directors' meeting; and there I was confronted with a record of my defalcations extending over the past three years. They were of course all faked. I was told the Bank would not prosecute and, because of my former good service, I should be allowed to resign. There was nothing I could do. Who would believe me? And who, now, would believe my story of Mr. Arthur Rankin? If only I had been bold enough to have blurted out the truth at the time there was a chance I might have been believed, that proof might have been found before all the traces had been covered up. It was too late now. There was nothing to be done. I resigned." He paused and sighed. " Hi-luck followed me and I began to drift downhill until I have come to this." He was silent for a long moment and then he shifted in his chair and said, " I must be getting along now. I feel myself again. Thank you very much." And refusing more whisky or another cigarette or even my assistance downstairs with his bag, he went away.

As I stood at the bar in the Club that evening Conway sauntered over to me. " I'll trouble you for that fiver," he said.

" What fiver's that? " I smiled.

" Do you remember, some weeks ago, we were discussing eminent men's stand-ins who impersonate them on public platforms and other places? "

I nodded. " And I said that no-one familiar with the eminent person or with the stand-in would be deceived."

" Quite. And when I declared I could disguise myself so that you would not recognise me in broad daylight you laughed at me."

I nodded again. "And I bet you a fiver on it."

"And then promptly forgot all about the matter,"

I laughed. "I had till you reminded me."

He laughed too. "Then perhaps you'll pay up," he said.

"Why?"

"You had a visitor this afternoon."

"That's so."

"Who tried to sell you brushes and then fainted into your arms."

"By George!" I exclaimed, "did he try the same caper with you? The artful scamp. Of all——"

"Not a bit of it. I'm simply telling you what happened. Afterwards you took him into your studio, gave him whisky and cigarettes, and he told you some stories." He grinned. "Very tall stories, I might add."

"How the devil——" I exclaimed and then broke off. And then:

"Are you trying to pretend you were the fellow?"

"No pretence about it; I was."

"Bosh."

"Did you miss a tube of cobalt after your visitor had gone?"

"Yes. I spent ten minutes looking for it and cursing."

"You'd left it on your easel?"

"So I thought."

"Is this it?"

I stared. I took the half squeezed-out tube; there was no mistaking it. "Yes," I said.

He grinned. "I took it while you were so nobly tilting the decanter. Hand over that fiver."

"You dog!" I said, feeling for my wallet; "be damned if I didn't half believe your yarns."

"Half believe! You swallowed them whole. Admit it."

I laughed and nodded.

"Of course," he said; "the professional touch; I'm not a romantic novelist for nothing."

MORE THAN FLESH AND BLOOD COULD STAND

HERBERT SLEAGOE, when his first-born was put into his arms, regarded that small sprig of himself with the smile which before their marriage his wife was wont to describe as enigmatic. If, as he watched the red wrinkled face of his son, that smile meant anything at all it was a mild surprise that he felt none of those inspiring, uplifting and intensely moving sensations which a man is traditionally credited with feeling at such a moment. This lack of emotion was, however, understandable in Mr. Sleagoe whose profession (he was editor of a famous daily newspaper) had long since rendered him immune to the things which stir the blood of lesser men. Yet artistically it was fitting that he showed such perfect composure for the most violent excitation, the most impassioned action or speech, could not have done justice to that significant instant not only in Mr. Sleagoe's life but in the history of mankind.

It has been said (I know not how truly) that it is the ephemeral event which casts its shadow before and that matters of vast and mighty import come unheralded. Certainly there was no prophetic hint of the mighty import of the Sleagoe babe; no mystical visions disturbed its mother, either before or after its birth; and if Mr. Sleagoe may be said to have looked into the future this peering was strictly confined to such matters as endowment policies and the determination that from one martyrdom at least the boy should be saved: journalism.

They christened the babe George. His father was not (few editors are) a man of notable physique nor were his features anything more than an odd assortment assembled by the blindly indifferent hand of Nature. Elsa Sleagoe was the sort of woman whom chivalrous young reporters describe as attractive. It would therefore be expecting too much to find Baby George endowed with good looks, as he was in truth a plain child completely undistinguished except for his eyes, and these were not remarkable for any beauty but for the strange fact that born as is usual with blue eyes, by the time he was a year old one eye had changed to brown. Apart from this oddity he seemed, even to his mother,

just a normal child; but if she had been more experienced she would have realised that his quietness, his desire for solitude, his lukewarm attitude to toys, and his inability to speak more than isolated words until he was nearly three, were by no means normal. His father did not think him normal; indeed by the time his son was two he began in his secret heart to fear that he was very definitely sub-normal. Even the child's aunts seemed to have doubts about their small nephew while his two grandmothers hid an increasingly anxious solicitude concerning his intelligence by the use of such trite euphemisms as 'such an old-fashioned little fellow' or 'quite clever people often make a late start, my dear', or 'oh, there's no doubt he's thinking; no doubt at all.'

And in fact that is just what the child was doing. It is not surprising that he had little time for anything else, for there was being presented to him more food for thought than any child (or adult for that matter) had ever been given since that day of questionable beneficence when the Dawn Man first lifted his hands from the ground and went erect, swaying and stumbling along that narrow track which was to lead his posterity to aeroplanes, radio, poison gas, birth-control, dictators, the operating-theatre, film-stars, patent medicines and the canning industry.

But it was not until young Sleagoe was four years old that his father had an inkling of the sort of unprecedented prodigy he had sired. At first the thing was no more than a suspicion, a monstrous suspicion which he fought against with all the subtle arguments of an acute and quite unsentimental mind. To Mr. Sleagoe the thing was an impossibility; he put it in the same category as spiritualism and dismissed it as unworthy of the attention of a sane man. But it refused to be dismissed; it could not be ignored; for there it was indubitably functioning before his eyes. For some time after his appalling discovery he buoyed himself up with the hope that it was just a phenomenal sympathy between young George and himself, that the thing did not hold good for others and would quite probably fade away and have vanished utterly by the time George reached puberty. But not for long was he permitted to cherish this hope; it soon became apparent to him that the boy could exercise his gift, his dreadful gift, upon all and sundry and that in fact he was giving more and more time to such activity, finding therein great mental enjoyment and also, his father surmised, unwholesome mental excitement.

But even after he was convinced of the general application of his son's deadly gift Mr. Sleagoe refused to let it occupy his thoughts, hoping against hope each day that something would happen upon the morrow to show him that the gift had departed and that this unique son of his was now no different from other human beings. But that hoped morrow did not arrive and at last, just after George's fifth birthday, Mr. Sleagoe determined to mention the matter to his wife.

Mr. Sleagoe was in bed, his wife at her dressing-table, when he broached the matter. It was nearly midnight and the time and place were favourite ones of his for a discussion with his wife, since the closure could always be put without offence by saying, "Well, I propose we sleep on it, my dear."

"Have you," he asked, closing the book he was reading, as if a thought had suddenly occurred to him, "noticed anything peculiar about George?"

"*Literally* peculiar, do you mean?" asked his wife, who was Girton and a Doctor of Literature.

Mr. Sleagoe nodded. "Literally peculiar," he repeated.

His wife, who had indeed begun to notice her only child's strange behaviour but had refused to confess it to herself and was certainly not going to admit it to another, played for time and said in a tone which lacked conviction, "I—I don't think so, Bertie: I shouldn't say he is really any different in essentials from other children. He seems quite a strong and healthy child."

"Don't humbug, Elsa," her husband said impatiently: "I'm not referring to his physique."

"You mean his backwardness with his letters and with numbers," his wife continued, pushing a stray wisp of hair under her net. She took the cap off a jar of cold cream and exclaimed, "Do you know, Bertie, I really believe the maids help themselves to my cream; this is the third jar I've had since Easter."

"Well, dammit, we can afford it!" he rejoined testily; "but we were talking about George, or so I believed."

"I thought you'd finished, darling. I answered your question and——"

"That'll do, Elsa I " Mr. Sleagoe sat upright and stared angrily over at his wife's plump white shoulders. How dare she act and pretend with him! "You know as well as I do," he went on, "that the boy's a monster."

She turned round with a gasp. "A monster, Bertie!"

"That is what I said. A monster. A mental monster. Come along, you know it, don't you?"

"Well, Bertie——"

"Pah! of course you do. You know perfectly well that he can read thoughts as easily as you or I can read a book. More easily." He let himself fall on to his pillow. "I've sometimes had a suspicion lately that he knows our thoughts—er—even before we do."

"But, Bertie, how could he?" abandoning her pretence of ignorance.

"*How* I don't know. But the fact that he reads thoughts at all is a fantastic miracle; and having been compelled to swallow that I'm prepared to swallow more. So you *have* been aware of it, how long have you known about it?"

"Nearly a year, although I think I had suspicions quite a while before that. And—and really it's hardly been out of my mind for long ever since. It's terribly uncanny and—and disturbing."

"Disturbing! Good Lord, it's—it's positively devastating. Why, hang it all, Elsa, I'm beginning to be so nervous when he's about that I—I—well, don't you feel something of the sort?"

"Yes; the point is what can we do about it? What *ought* we to do about it?"

"I don't know what we *ought* to do, and I don't care. Who's to say what we ought to do? The position's unique. I've given it a lot of thought but I've come to no decision, perhaps because I kept it to myself. Now we've discussed it something may suggest itself. I propose anyhow that we sleep on it."

Unhappily for young Sleagoe his father was a newspaperman first, and a father, husband, and citizen afterwards; and it was this prime factor which dictated his decision. Here was an unprecedented event in human history; a miraculous story; and it would be exclusive to the paper he served and loved—the perfect scoop, the scoop of dreams. That was the temptation and being the man he was he fell.

He published as an anonymous article the amazing case of his son who was of course not named. Under the sprawling title *Telepathy is here* was an editorial note vouching for the truth of the claims made by the anonymous writer. The story was written with all the skill and cunning of a man whose life had been

devoted to reducing language to an irreducible minimum consistent with clarity; and it got home, it convinced. If the affair could have been left in the anonymity of its beginning the mischief, the greater mischief, might have been avoided. But unfortunately, while the article convinced the public (and even most of the scientific world), it failed to impress rival newspapers (or so they pretended) and these treated it with ribaldry, quickly followed by a contemptuous demand for proofs of the alleged 'prodigious happening whose advent upon our planet has apparently been revealed only to our esteemed if hitherto grave contemporary', as a short leader in one of them put it.

This reception by his rivals nettled Sleagoe and, against the advice of his wife, his more intimate friends and his own conscience, he decided to put all the cards on the table; and a second article not only revealed the whole truth but offered to submit the child prodigy to a panel of men of science for the purpose of a thorough investigation.

The result of the investigation was a triumph for Mr. Sleagoe, proving incontestably as it did that little George was possessed of telepathic power and that he had long been exercising this power, at first unconsciously, upon all those with whom he came into contact. The panel of eminent men of science included a Frenchman, a German, and a Japanese and this fortunate chance brought to light a hitherto unguessed truth regarding telepathy. "Telepathy itself," the panel's report pointed out, "has for years been recognized by the more enlightened scientific opinion as a reality, something which happened quite frequently and almost universally, but unfortunately without apparently being subject to volition. The child George Sleagoe is the first recorded and now fully authenticated instance of this almost universal power being completely controlled by its possessor. It would be easy to exaggerate the importance of our investigations and the panel deprecates the public excitement in the matter and would point out that probably the most valuable result of the examination of the child George Sleagoe is the discovery of the hitherto unsuspected truth that language is no bar to the exercise of the faculty of telepathy; the subject of the examination reading the minds of French, German and Japanese scientists who were present with the same natural effortless ease as he had read the minds of others speaking the only tongue he knew, English."

The really extraordinary thing was that nobody was apparently bothering much what the person most concerned was thinking about it all. He was regarded as if he were an exhibit in a museum rather than a human being, and, indeed, the most remarkable being yet produced by the Life Force. It did not seem to occur to anyone that it was quite on the cards that a being so endowed might also be gifted in other respects beyond the ordinary, that his brain might be an instrument of a perfection hitherto unattained by *homo sapiens*. Even his parents and kinsfolk were no more percipient in this respect than the rest of the world. The boy said nothing, for then, as later, he kept his thoughts to himself; had he not been so gentle and modest a little fellow he might have pointed out the tremendous truth that he was the only person on the globe who could now truthfully claim to be able to do so.

At seven he was a grave-faced, quiet little chap with a charming smile and engaging ways. People used to remark upon his gravity of expression and a contemplative almost brooding look in his odd eyes, and it cannot be doubted that he foresaw and foreknew what his life was to be. But by then it was unpleasantly plain to his parents that his presence was complicating their life to a quite intolerable extent. Their social life was considerably restricted, for few people could face the solemn inquisition of those childish, denuding, all-knowing eyes. And their domestic staff was never the same for two successive weeks.

But this was a mere trifle compared with the excitement of the child's public appearances. The Press, the cinema, and television had made him as familiar a personality as the reigning monarch and at first immense crowds brought all traffic to a standstill whenever the news spread that little George Sleagoe was to be seen. But this mass inquisitiveness did not last long and was in fact rapidly succeeded by a general desire to avoid this disturbingly-endowed freak.

Between his seventh and ninth birthdays he was sent to no fewer than eight preparatory schools from all of which he was removed at the request of the Headmaster. It was the staffs and not the other boys who objected to young Sleagoe's presence in the school, for indeed he got on quite well with most other children and was as popular as it was possible for so unique a being to be. The problem of his education was solved by the engagement of a tutor. It was really only a partial solution, for no tutor, despite the high

salary, ever stayed more than a few months.

He grew from boyhood into adolescence and from adolescence into young manhood without humanity finding, any use to which they could put this uniquely marvellous work of Nature. Instead he was harassed and bothered and chivvied until he was little more than a pariah, and the most lonely pariah in the world's history, for he was absolutely and uniquely solitary. He stood alone; and over against him, spiteful, hostile, malignant, stood the rest of the world. He had neither friend nor lover and by the time he was of age opinion had so hardened against him that no country would harbour him and he became a fugitive over the face of the earth. His continued existence indeed was becoming a world problem when, to the intense relief of everyone, he solved it by a most spectacular suicide. It was spectacular of necessity and not choice, as he pointed out in a message which he left behind as the sole legacy to mankind of the most amazing being ever created. He jumped from an air-liner crossing the Atlantic when about a thousand miles from America. His message explained that he chose this form of ending his life to ensure that his brain should not become available for post-mortem scrutiny, whereby the secret of his dreadful and unhappy gift might have been discovered, for it was abundantly clear that the world was not yet ready to receive that gift. His message went on, "I found that the matters preoccupying the thoughts of mankind could be numbered upon the fingers of one hand and I found also that one thought was everywhere paramount. This revelation at first puzzled me, then shocked me. next amused me, and finally utterly bored and sickened me. There was again the startling contrast between men's thoughts and their utterances, a contrast so profound that I could not escape from the conviction that the chief attribute of the humankind was hypocrisy. In such a world, for a man with my unique gift, with my sense of humour, with my proneness to boredom, and my acute sensitiveness, there was clearly no other way out but the one I have decided to take. Signs have not been wanting that had I not chosen to relieve the world of my unwanted presence the matter might have soon been taken out of my hands. Once again in its long history of blindness and stupidity the world has failed to accept and use for its benefit a great gift offered it in the person of a man. I pray with all my heart that another two thousand years must not pass before a third opportunity comes."

DREAM OF THE REV. AUBREY LOMAS

THE REV. AUBREY LOMAS, Vicar of St. Mark's, Bellingham, stirred in his bed, slowly opened his eyes, closed them again, gently knuckled them, yawned, licked his lips a little distastefully and then, stretching his arms, sat up and stared at the small ormolu clock ticking with an almost deprecating quietness on the dressing-table. A quarter to five. The sewing-party would be gone now or going; they'd certainly be gone by five and he could then go down for his tea, which would give him time to dress leisurely. He felt there was only one thing in the world that appealed to him at the moment more than a cup of tea and that was a stream of water, icy cold, splashing over his head. First, then, the bathroom. He threw back the clothes and realised with an almost pudent shock that he was naked. He pulled the clothes over himself again and leaned bade against the pillow. Now how in the name of decency did he come ... he squeezed his lower lip between finger and thumb, frowned his forehead into enfildades of wrinkles, and stared unseeingly at the hump of his knees beneath the bed-clothes. He must have been more unwell than he'd believed. Unwell. No, away with the euphemism; surely he was man enough to face a fact, however disgusting and dreadful. Drunkenness was the fact. He had been drunk.

Drunk. He, himself, Aubrey Lomas, the Rev. Aubrey Lomas, Vicar of St. Mark's, drunk. And at (for that was what it must have been) two o'clock in the afternoon. It was not his fault. A sheer unavoidable mischance. Well, perhaps not unavoidable, if he'd acted more wisely, had told Mr. Rendle that he wouldn't take anything, that he preferred water with his meals. That would have been true enough. But of course it wasn't quite so simple as all that. When one's host and the three other guests are having wine isn't it rather, well, churlish to refuse to join them? Churlish isn't quite the word. Superior? Hardly. Smug? Not quite that, although it's something of that. But then he was a parson and a parson can say and do, or refrain from doing, things which other men can't. Why in the name of sanity hadn't he told old Rendle he didn't drink. It wouldn't have been strictly and absolutely true for he did take a rare glass of sherry, perhaps half-a-dozen times in the course

of a year; and a little, a very little, more frequently a glass of port after dinner. But it would have been true enough; true in the main if not literally. And it would have saved him this wretched head and vile mouth and that nightmare walk home.

And yet, might not Rendle have been offended? Have looked upon it as a slight upon his wines? Men can be very touchy about such things and Rendle was an old man with an old man's tetchiness, especially where his opinions and possessions were concerned; and a man's wine was very much his own; a sort of combination of opinion and possession; and therefore to flout it was to gall him right on the raw. And Rendle was a nice old chap . . . extremely nice . . . and of course generous. There was the new organ to which he'd given five hundred; and the altar screen and the apse repairs and then the belfry, another four hundred. Nearly as much as all the other benefactions put together. Generous. Yes, that was it. He could not afford to offend him. Was that an unworthy thought? And he might so easily have taken offence. But it was not only that. There was the being different from all the others; the standing aside; as if one were above these pleasant little things; for wine is pleasant, no gainsaying that; one of life's pleasures. Nor is there any sin about it in moderation. It is a pleasure with full scriptural approval behind it.

And so he'd taken wine with the others. And enjoyed it. Thoroughly! no doubt about that. Hock, and so deliciously cold. What were those lines of Keats? *O for a draught of vintage that hath been Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth.* How perfectly that was expressed. Cool. Delicious. And that, no doubt, was what had tempted him to allow the maid to fill his glass a second, a third time. And a fourth. But was it a fourth? No, he couldn't remember. But certainly a third. He could remember that perfectly. It must have been after that that he began to feel . . . why beat about the bush . . . that he became drunk. That was the only word for it and no other was honest. Well, he wasn't afraid of it. Drunk. He'd been drunk. And for the first time in his life and, he hoped, the last. The rest of the luncheon he couldn't remember. He trusted he'd deported himself without giving away what had happened to him. He imagined he had, for even on his walk home he had managed, by keeping a grip on himself, to walk steadily. That nightmare walk home! He'd never forget it. Ten minutes at the most and it had seemed an intolerable age; art.

eternity in which he almost groped his way along the pavement, putting one foot down carefully and then pushing it forward and by sheer will keeping his body from swaying. And then another step and another and all the while hoping he didn't look anything like he felt and praying he'd meet no parishioner who wanted to stop and chat. And how blazing the sun was, and how the pavement threw up the heat into his face already flushed and burning as it was. And how his head swam and, worst of all, how a faint but deadly nausea seemed to be slowly creeping over him.

What a haven of refuge the vicarage seemed when at last he reached it. And Ann; how quickly she'd grasped things and how understanding she was; yes, a good wife is the greatest boon life has to offer a man. Dear Ann. How fine she always was at handling situations. She knew what he needed. Bed. Just that. And she had helped him there quickly and yet so quietly, without any fuss or bother of any sort. And then, with an understanding sympathetic smile, had tip-toed away and left him to sleep it off. He could remember very vividly her smiling at him but not her undressing him. Queer that.

Sleep. That was all he needed. Sleep. The great healer and restorer. But what a dream he'd had. Absurd, of course; grotesque even; but then isn't that what dreams so often are? And indecent too. Certainly indecent. But explicable; absolutely and completely explicable. What nonsense is written about dreams. Nasty nonsense too; all this rubbish about sex; Freud and Adler and Jung; nasty fellows; silly too. Sex the origin of all our dreams. What utter bosh. But isn't that like these scientific men, always looking for the complex when the simple is lying under their noses. Take this silly dream of his. Now where was the sex in that? But of course Freud and his associates would have found it. Nosed it out nastily. Humbugs. Unpleasant too. But what was the simple explanation and the real one? There had been that story at luncheon; who'd told it—er—Cooper? Yes. Cooper of course. About the miller who'd put his shirt on the horse. Quite funny, if a little childish. But the point was that here was the shirt; and into the dream it very naturally went. And then Ann's 'they're all hard at work' as she let him in reminded him it was the Dorcas Guild afternoon and that explains itself. And he remembered that Ann "had said they were making shirts for the forces. The shirt motif again. As for the rest, isn't that a commonplace of dreams, finding

oneself naked out in the street or in a vehicle with other people. All the rest completely clothed. *That* seems to be the indispensable part of all such dreams. Sort of contrast or foil and so enhances the embarrassment one feels. Queer how frequent such dreams are. But always there's a simple explanation. Sex. Pah! Freud and his bosh. Well, high time he moved. A delicious cold sluice under the spray and then tea.

Twenty minutes later the Rev, Aubrey Lomas was sitting at a little tea-table on the verandah. He already felt a great deal better and was finding an appetite for the toasted tea-cakes. He was telling his wife about his dream. He thought he'd tell her as she seemed a little quiet and distraite. It would amuse her, cheer her up. Lucky she'd such a sense of humour. One could tell her a joke and be always sure she'd see the point. "Such an odd little dream I had, darling," he said; "but of course, like all dreams, open to the simplest of explanations. I dreamed I went downstairs wearing only a shirt; I opened the drawing-room door and pulling off my shirt bowed and said to your sewing-meeting, 'here's a pattern for you, ladies ', and tossed it over to them." He smiled at her. "Silly, wasn't it, darling! "

His wife nodded her head slowly but did not return his smile. "Very silly, Aubrey," she said, "but unfortunately it wasn't a dream."

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

NO; IT WAS not the bombing 'plane which ended the war, or the navies, or the soldiers, or the gas; but something much more powerful.

I'll tell you about my share in it; it was like everyone's share more or less; for everyone played some part, if it were no more than talking. And of course that is just what the old history books, the books of my time, never did tell you, what the people were doing and saying and thinking, the ordinary people. It's different now; but the world's different; you wouldn't believe what a wretched sort of place the world used to be; evil and silly and—but there's nothing to be gained by remembering that now; it was how the war ended I was going to tell you about.

I was living at Branton at the time. Branton was a village in North Devon. It was about three miles inland from the sea and about five miles from Darum, a large town with a huge aeroplane factory where I was employed as a draughtsman. I was nineteen at the time and had not been called up for the forces partly owing to my very specialised work and partly because of my low medical category.

I lodged with an elderly couple in Branton, a Mr. and Mrs. White, and had very comfortable quarters. Tom White farmed in a small way and so the rationing never bothered us: there was always plenty of butter, cream, eggs, fowls, fruit and vegetables: in fact as far as eating was concerned there was for us no war. And for that matter in more ways than eating; for you see we'd enough and to spare in the food line and, well, other people, traders and whatnot, had *other* things over and above their needs and what they were supposed to have; and so, human nature being what it is (perhaps I ought to say what it was), people who had something to offer didn't go short of anything, especially in little places like Branton where everybody knew everybody else and had done for hundreds of years, the families I mean. It wasn't deliberate law-breaking; nothing of the sort in intention, and that's what counts with a man's conscience; it was just that the Government didn't mean anything at all to us in Branton; I mean compared with the other people in the village and especially our neighbours and best friends; and so all the Government orders and instructions and threats just went in one ear and out the other; we didn't bother about them; we never had done and for that matter they'd never bothered about us till the war came. And the way they messed and muddled things then didn't encourage us to listen or take heed. God bless you! if we had we'd have had all our eggs gone bad, our butter rancid, our milk sour, our fruit rotted—everything spoilt, ruined, wasted. Wasted. And so we took no notice of Government but went our own road, as we'd always done. Of course we had to go carefully and keep our weather eye lifted for trouble; but we all did that and kept our ears open and our mouths shut; and there was only one policeman in Branton and he was one of us: name of Ted Gammon: real Devonshire.

I was very fond of swimming; quite daft about it and didn't miss many days in the year. Not that it was daft, for it was my swimming built up my health and made the weakling of sixteen into

the strong man of six-and-twenty. Unless the weather were really too bad I used to go for a swim before breakfast for a good three 'parts of the year. I used to cycle there and back; it was a pedal cycle for by then you couldn't get petrol, not even in Branton. And I also used my cycle to travel back and forth to my work; and I frequently went for longish rides in the evening and quite long ones on Sundays or at week-ends. I thought nothing of a hundred and forty miles in a day, for although in a low medical category I was already no weakling.

It was because of this habit of mine of morning'swims that I was, I suppose, as far as Branton was concerned, one of the earliest, if not *the* earliest, discoverer of what had happened during that moonless and cloudy September night. It had been rather a noisy night with the giant cats purring overhead hour after hour; but they weren't dropping anything; anyhow not hereabouts; and that was all people cared about by then; and so few people, if any, had been kept awake beyond a minute or so before dozing off again.

I had to clock in at Darum at eight and so you can guess I'd to leave the house for my swim pretty early. It was in fact still pitch dark, a good hour before the dawn, and a few 'planes, ours or theirs, were still droning about overhead. I never *could* tell from the sound which was which, although lots of people said they could.

I was on my way back to breakfast before it began to get sufficiently light for me to see much by; and then I was nearly at the farm before I noticed anything; I daresay my mind was pre-occupied with something or other. Probably with the girl I was in love with. She was—but that's another story altogether.

And when I did notice something I noticed it several times, quite a lot of times, perfunctorily, half-unconsciously, as you often do, before it hit me slap in the eye, as we used to say in those days, and I was off my bicycle and grabbing and staring. Staring. Staring incredulously as one might stare at some unbelievable monster. Well might I stare! It was, had I but known it, one of those great moments in the history of the human race which mark epochs. Not of course by just staring there in that narrow rutted lane in Branton; but all the staring that was going on all over the country; or would be before another hour. For scattered along the lane over some fifty or sixty yards were pound notes.

I gathered up all I could find, forty-seven in all, and hurrying

indoors showed them to Mr. and Mrs. White, who were busy about their usual early morning tasks.

"Fakes," he said; and I can hear the tone of his voice even now. But I had taken a pound note from my note-case and was comparing it with one of those I had picked up. "It's no fake!" I said excitedly; "look, it's the same in every way, water mark, black vertical line, Peppiatt's signature, everything."

"So 'tis, sure enough," he said, nodding his head and squinting up at both as he held them to the light; "you have a look, Mother." And Mrs. White, having duly looked and nodded *her* head and said, "so 'tis, midea," he went on, "better hop along with them to Ted Gammon and hand them over for safe keeping; that's the law as he won't forget to tell you. Wonder how they got there."

"Blew out of somebody's wallet, maybe," Mrs. White said.

"Or some silly woman's bag," Mr. White said; "the way some women treat money is fair sinful. Easy come easy go I reckon."

"I'll go along to Ted's," I said. "Shan't be more than five minutes so you can put my bacon on; I'll have the eggs fried this morning; two'll be enough." And I was off with the notes.

I didn't expect to find Ted Gammon up but he was and when I handed over my find he made a grimace, rasped his chin with his finger and thumb, and said, "Rum go this is an' all, Dick; d'you know you're the third?"

"The third!" I gasped. "D'you mean——"

"Just what I do mean, Dick," he interrupted; "Charley Emmett carpe here twenty minutes ago with fifteen one-pound notes he'd just picked up by Holt Spinney; and five minutes later Sid Thomas fair rushed in with twenty-six he'd scabbled up at the corner o' Six Acre Field. And now here's you with forty-seven from your own lane." He nodded his head slowly and ponderously: "Point is now how many *haven't* been here."

"You mean——"

But he interrupted: "I mean just that, Dick. Clear as daylight there's been an accident somewhere; hold-up maybe; or bank robbery; and somehow or other the stuff's got scattered all over the shop here in Branton. Now why Branton? That's a puzzler. I'll have a bite o' breakfast and smoke a pipe on it." He began to fill up a form. "Forty-seven, isn't it?" he said; and then, presently, "sign your name here." And with that I hurried back to my own breakfast.

But by the time I got to Darum about a quarter to eight it was plain the thing wasn't just a Branton affair. There were dozens, scores of people who'd picked up pound notes, some only one or two, others ten or a dozen, and a few anything between twenty and forty. And Darum was buzzing with it. Queer no-one tumbled to it, although really, of course, why should they have done? It wasn't the sort of thing any ordinary person would hit upon. But we weren't left long in doubt. Oh, the Government were pretty quick for once. Quick because they were scared; although we didn't know that. Scared into doing some quick thinking and some quick acting. And so on the eight-o'clock news there was an announcement. We'd half a dozen loud speakers at the works and when there was something important coming through over the news they were switched on so we could all hear.

There was something important this time and no mistake. The announcer, as soon as the six pips had sounded, said, "Stand by, please, for an important Government announcement." It was so quiet after that in our big room that someone scratching his cheek sounded like a buzz-saw. And then the announcer said, "The Chancellor of the Exchequer is here to make an announcement." He paused and then said: "Mr. Bannintree."

I don't of course at this distance of time remember the Chancellor's exact words, for he wasn't the sort of man who spoke memorable words. His voice was a fussy little pipe; his manner pompous and his matter usually tedious and more or less incomprehensible; as perhaps it was meant to be. But now he was lucid enough and there was nothing noticeably pompous about him; as for his matter, well, this was what he had to tell us. During the night, over the length and breadth of England, German 'planes had been dropping forged pound notes in large quantities. Very large quantities, he said, but he did not say that the number was millions, hundreds and hundreds of millions; for already the Government must have known that, or guessed it; the real number, over a thousand millions, of course they didn't then know, although they were probably guessing it. And there the Government made a mistake by not taking the country into its confidence. This was, of course, its usual mode of procedure and I suppose it was incapable of acting otherwise, of understanding the people; all Governments were in those days and always had been. Or they didn't want to understand; just didn't bother; after all, they were

the masters; what did the people matter? They could always be hoodwinked.

That was Mr. Banningtree's first mistake; or rather the Government's, for he was only the mouthpiece. And then he made a second, saying that these forged notes were poor counterfeits and could easily be detected. That was a thumping lie; they just couldn't be detected; they were similar in every way to the notes issued by the Government, or the Bank of England I should say, but it amounted to the same thing. It was a silly lie and didn't deceive anyone for long, for it was easy enough, if you'd the nerve, to prove it a lie. And in fact he gave the whole show away a moment later when he said that the Government wished to remind everybody that the uttering of forged notes is a felony and as serious as that of the forgery itself and liable to the same severe penalties which could be penal servitude for life and certainly would not be less than seven years. Indeed, he went on, it could be made in wartime a capital offence, as being treason. This was of course another silly mistake; it merely angered people by its threatening note and made it crystal clear that the forgeries were not the poor things he pretended. And he ended by saying something he should have said at first, leaving all the other stuff out; not that it would have mattered in the end, although of course it might have done; you never can tell with such chancey things. He said the Government put everyone on their honour to hand over to the police every note that had been showered on the country by our enemies. Any man or woman, he said, who puts or attempts to put one of these notes into circulation is helping Germany; is a renegade fighting against his own country, his own flesh and blood; is a traitor and a most despicable one. And then, more and more foolishly, he closed on a threat: if the Government's appeal is not answered it may be forced, in the interests of the country as a whole and of the war effort, to take drastic measures, measures which will be very unpleasant for most of us.

That was on the Tuesday. Nothing else happened that day except talk, although straws were showing which way the wind was blowing. We'd a canteen at the works and I always had my dinner there and quite a good dinner it was for a shilling, provided you were going to get the sort of meal I got at home in the evenings. But that's neither here nor there. I took a pound note out of my wallet in the canteen to pay for my meal and one of the

chaps standing near said: " Sure that's not one o' they Jerries, Dick? " which made everybody laugh; and they laughed again when I said, " Might have been if I hadn't been so blinkin' honest this morning and handed all mine in to our cop."

" On'y your word for it, Dick! " someone else said; and damned if the girl in the desk, a London girl named Kitty Sears, evacuated when the blitz was on, didn't give me a funny look; or so I thought; which is much about the same thing. And as we settled down at our desks after dinner the chap on the next stool who lived in Darum and went home to dinner said he heard some of the shops in Darum were refusing to take pound notes, and there were queues at the banks as long as your arm and at the Post Office.

" Queues at the banks! " I said, " what, drawing out their dough? D'you mean a run on the banks? "

" Not likely. Putting money *in*; and buying savings certificates and all the rest of it."

" Bit rum, that, " I said; " I don't quite get the hang of that, George."

" Can't say I do, neither; bur that's what they're doing. You got much dough at home? "

" About twenty quid or so."

" In pound notes? "

" Mostly. But my landlord's usually got round about a hundred in his cash-box, which he keeps under his bed. Queer old cock but a good sort. Why? "

" Well, if you'll take my tip you'll spend that twenty quid, ol' son, or bung it in the P.O.; and tell your landlord to do ditto. I'm pushing all my little lot into the P.O. this evening. Don't you see? "

" Damned if I do."

" Supposing by to-morrow all the shops refuse to accept pound notes. Eh? *And* the banks and P.O.'s. Eh? "

" They couldn't do it. I mean the banks and the P.O.'s. The Government wouldn't let 'em."

" Not so sure. Anyhow I'm not taking any chances."

That night the Germans dropped a second load. I don't know if it were as big as the first. Never heard. It soon didn't matter, for the blinkin' thing was like an avalanche and once it was started the devil and all was let loose everywhere in no time. But that second shower stirred the Government into a drastic step. Or I suppose it was that. Some reckoned it was and others said they'd

have done it anyhow. The Prime Minister spoke to the country in the eight o'clock news that morning and said that the Government, on the advice of the Treasury experts, had withdrawn the pound note from circulation. He admitted this would mean a dead loss to people who had pound notes in their possession but said that however much the Government might regret this it was unavoidable and the Government hoped and believed the people concerned would support such a loss in the same spirit of fortitude as they had supported other enemy blows. Where there was real hardship, he went on, the Government would give every consideration to those needing assistance; and he ended by assuring the country that everything would be done to minimise the inconvenience and dislocation of ordinary life caused by this typically German stratagem, and that the Government was sure the people would not, in the hope of private gain, make things more difficult than they were bound to be until steps had been taken to restore the financial position.

But it was in fact too late to do anything. I'm no financier and I can't just give you the why and the wherefore; but it was as I've said, just like an avalanche. A mistrust, a sort of real hatred, of paper money swept right across the world in no-time, like some disease in the Middle Ages. Of course all the belligerents followed the German lead and paper currency showered down from the skies wherever there were hands to clutch it. Lots of people said glibly: why don't we all go back to the gold standard? Would you believe it! Even I knew that was all my eye. America had most of the world's gold, for one thing; but that wasn't it; not a bit of it; there wasn't enough gold in the world, not a half, not a hundredth, not a thousandth part there wasn't, to back the world's paper. 'Not worth the paper it's written on.' You've heard that old phrase I'll be bound, for one still hears it. Well, that was just about what it was, more or less. And within three months of that September morning when I scabbled my forty-seven pound notes up in our lane, the whole financial fabric of the world had crashed; smashed to bits; in smithereens. And with that crash the war faded out too. Exactly why I don't know enough about finance and economics and all that to say; but fade out it did, as you can read in the history books if your taste runs that way.

And of course since then there hasn't been a financial system or whatever you like to call it. And no currencies either. No

banks; no—but that's another story and I daresay you know as much about it as I do; or you will when you're a bit older. People say that's why there's never been another war and never will be. But I daresay that's going a bit too far.

THE KITTEN

IT WAS at the Club. We'd had luncheon, and a very good luncheon too: asparagus soup, sole, sirloin, a fruit pudding, cheese savoury; and to drink, the Club's first-rate bitter in silver tankards. So we were feeling pretty good when we took our pipes into the lounge and found chairs round the fire. No-one said anything for quite a while; you know the feeling; sheer physical content; you don't want to do or say anything; just smoke and drowse. How in the name of the utterly inapt we began to discuss tragedy passes my understanding; that we should begin talking at all strikes me now as odd, seeing what we'd stowed away and the comfort of the chairs and warmth of the fire; but to start a controversy; and upon tragedy of all topics. At a guess I should say it was Askew who began it; he's that sort of a chap; of course he's a cigarette-smoker and that makes a difference; you've probably noticed that; they're restless and fidgetty; now your pipe-smoker can stay put for hours on end with nothing else but his pipe; no books, or patience, or jig-saws, or crosswords, or any other of the time-killing, thought-destroying poisons. I always consider that a cigarette-smoker isn't a smoker at all; just a dilettante; a waster of good tobacco which might be put to better uses. But that's neither here nor there. It was tragedy I was talking about. Well, as I say, I don't remember now who began it, if it weren't Askew; nor much of what was said by Holmes and Spender (I was content to listen); but I do recollect quite clearly Bristowe's saying, "The essence of tragedy is that a man's spirit should be utterly defeated, broken, thrown down, beyond all hope of resurgence; it is the overthrow of the spirit, man's inner citadel, the sanctuary of his integrity, which constitutes tragedy. What do you think, Potts?"

Sort of anticlimax, eh? Descent from the sublime to the comic. It sounded even funnier to us because we knew Potts.

Henry Potts. What a combination and how suitable! But can you imagine any parents possessing the name Potts (a butt in itself) coupling Henry on to it. How could any human being do anything, so handicapped? Stop for one moment and try to imagine a Henry Potts being anything notable: Prime Minister Henry Potts, Field-Marshal Henry Potts, Admiral Henry Potts, the eminent author, poet, painter, musician, biologist Henry Potts? Ludicrous, isn't it?

Henry Potts wasn't one of our set. As a matter of fact he wasn't one of any set. He didn't belong anywhere; didn't fit in. To be perfectly blunt and brutal he wasn't the Club sort; he wasn't *any* Club sort. He was the family man type; the domestic rabbit. And the hard-up family man at that. The kind of earnest bloke who skins himself alive to send his brats to schools above his station and then can't stand his corner. A poisonous type from the Club point of view. And if you don't hold that point of view or can't fall in with it, why join a club? It's rottenly unfair to the other members.

Henry was sitting at the corner of the fire-place when we came in; and he looked up from his book and gave us a nod when we sat down and then he went on with his reading and was so quiet and unobtrusive, a way he has, sort of merges into the furniture or the wallpaper, that we forgot he was there. Certainly I did. And then Bristowe, Bristowe of all people (he's one of the Meadshire Bristowes) must jerk him into life and visibility with his: 'What d'you think, Potts? '

Henry closed his book but kept his thumb in it. Now that action alone showed how out of place he was in a club. Most clubmen don't read books at all but if by any chance one does pick up a book he doesn't stick his thumb in it if someone rolls up for a chat; he just lobs it somewhere.

Henry peered at us. Spectacles? Naturally. And pince-nez. Doesn't that complete the portrait? Add a high single collar, a black tie, and thin sandy hair; and there you have him. As I say he peered at us. He'd obviously been half-listening. "Tragedy," he said, "well, I don't know. Things wring the heart but is that tragedy? Little things that don't really matter." He paused for so long that Bristowe prompted him lazily, "For example? "

He rubbed his chin and looked from one to another of us in turn as if he were assessing us. "Perhaps strike you as silly," he

said reflectively, and pursed his lips. "You see it was no more than a kitten."

As much as the 'ghost of a grin from any one of us then would have choked him off for good but we kept straight faces and counterfeited some sort of interest. Must have done for he seemed to gather confidence. "It belonged to my little girl Stephanie. She's ten and quite mad about animals. Has a passion for them. Hungers for them. Mateinal instinct I suppose or something. The kitten was eight weeks old; a little gigger thing; pretty enough but no breed at all; common little thing. You see we'd had a blue Persian before, a magnificent thing, and beside the memory of his splendour the ginger kitten looked a little guttersnipe. The wife suggested we should call him Pleb. But Stephanie would have none of that. The blue Persian had been called Misty. Her name for him. And very appropriate it was. She named the ginger little thing Teddy.

"It was an amusing little atom, full of go and with no-end of spirit and pluck. We've a sheepdog you know. Old English. Big as a haystack she looks in the house. Pip we call her. Well, the moment Pip lumbered into the room the day Teddy arrived the little atom up with its back and spat like a firework and made a clout at the bitch's inquisitive nose. Pip seemed a bit amused and quite willing to be affable but it was a day or two before Teddy allowed her to approach without a firework display. And when finally they'd settled down to amicable relations the kitten's favourite game was charging Pip with something of the effect of a child in a toy car charging a lorry.

"It was the wildest, maddest, most harum-scarum bit of life you can possibly imagine. It was like having a bit of quicksilver loose in the house. Up the curtains to the ceiling and down again; across the room; under the table; over the chairs and up the curtains again. It flashed across and through the rooms like someone flicking a mirror in the sun. Of course it was a bit of a nuisance. Habits none too good. And as greedy as you make 'em. But we got fond of the little beggar. Queer how quickly you do that no matter vvhhat sort of scruffy little wretch it may be. Stephanie of course was just daft about it. Sheer silliness. I don't approve of going to those lengths with animals. But what can you do with a child? Especially a little girl.

"And then my two boys came home from school for their

mid-term. They've a chemical set and they spent the time inventing new explosives as they call them and the floor of their play-room was littered with saucers and tin-lids containing experimental mixtures. And the kitten got at one and ate some of it before they shoosed it out.

" Didn't seem to have done it any harm and we didn't bother; animals seem to be able to eat the most lethal things with no ill effects. And then, the next morning, the little beggar was off its feed; wouldn't look at it nor touch anything to drink. It was a Saturday and I was at home. Later in the morning it began to be sick. And it went on being sick at regular intervals. And every time just before it was sick it uttered a cry; not a miaow; not a bit like that; it was like the scream of a gull, only muted. And yet for all its being such a small cry it seemed to sound all over the house. Perhaps we were listening for it.

" It steadily got worse. It didn't want half an eye to see that. Stephanie was beside herself; you know what children are; asking if we couldn't do something. We've no vet. where we are, so I rang up one at Belton and asked him about it and should I bring it over. He asked what age it was and when I said about nine weeks you could almost see him shrug his shoulders. He said there was nothing he could do if I brought it over; all we could do was to keep it warm and leave it alone but he didn't hold out much hope.

" That evening it began to get groggy on its pins, staggered about and fell over sometimes. And began to look bedraggled with its tail like a bit of wet string. But it kept going somehow or other. But being sick and making that cry every now and then.

" We put a cushion down by the fire and got a hot water bottle for it and took it in turns to sit up with it.

" It was still hanging on to life in the morning. But it wrung your heart to look at it. And it couldn't get off the cushion on its pins. Just rolled off and had to be put back. But it wouldn't die. It hung on to life all the morning and haunted the house. It haunted everyone of us; we couldn't get it out of our minds.

" And about noon it tried to get off the cushion and couldn't and tried to cry and couldn't; just opened its mouth. And then its body began to twitch and Stephanie said, 'O it's dying ! O do something! ' and began to cry. And then it stretched itself a little and was dead and I went straight out and buried it.

"It wasn't as if that ended it. It haunted the house for days with its cry and the memory of the things it did; going off like a cracker at Pip; and shooting up the curtains and down and under the table and over the chairs like a bit of yellow lightning. 'D'you remember,' we'd say, 'how Teddy used to . . .' Silly to make that fuss about a kitten. And all wrong. No sense of values. Wicked, in a way, when you think of all the fine young chaps being killed in thousands over half the world. But there you are; I'm just telling you how it was." He shook his head and sauntered off down the room, taking his book with him.

"Good Lord!" Holmes said, "nice bit of slop you let us in for, Bristowe."

"Sentimental little ass," commented Askew.

I didn't say anything. It was too late. If you admit fellows like Potts into a club, you've no right to complain if they run true to type.

THE PHOTOGRAPH

IT WAS IN PARIS that I first knew General Pouchet. He was living there in retirement after his escape from Moravia following the republican *coup d'etat*; he had been for some years Prefect of Police in the Moravian capital, Bastov. I was able to be of some service to him and we became very good friends, frequently dining and passing the evening together, being both bachelors. Even with me he tended to taciturnity (except towards the end of the evening) and was given to long silences, especially during a meal. These silences he would often break by a comment upon some remark made perhaps ten minutes earlier and now completely forgotten by his companion. Certainly they were invariably forgotten when I was that companion. And therefore I cannot suggest what remark of mine was responsible, one evening, when we were dining together at Forget's, for his breaking one of his silences by saying, "The ordinary run of people are very easy-going; as long as they are not unduly interfered with, have enough to eat and drink and something over for little pleasures, they don't concern themselves overmuch with the affairs of their betters." He paused a moment to drain his glass and then went on, "which is doubtless a likeable

enough trait but, I think, reprehensible rather than commendable."

The waiter had brought us our coffee 'and kummel before he resumed. "The ink on the paper of my appointment as Prefect was scarcely dry when there was a murder which aroused more than ordinary public interest, for the victim was a pretty young singer and dancer whose songs were whistled by all the street boys and whose twinkling toes and shapely legs played some part in attracting the crowd that packed the Winter Garden Variety Theatre during the season. Mimette as she called herself, was not an impregnable vestal but she was by no means a common wanton; she had her lovers, but she kept herself by her art. The case presented one or two interesting features: Mimette and the murderer had shared a meal together in the room and had done themselves extremely well in the matter of drinks; the killing had been done with the telephone receiver which, after battering in Mimette's face and head, had been perfunctorily wiped on the valance of the bed and replaced; and among the litter of odds and ends, very feminine odds and ends, in a large silver-filigree basket in the corner, was a photograph which had apparently been tossed there with the other rubbish. It seemed to be the latest addition to the litter for it was fresh and clean whereas most of the rest was stale and soiled and much jumbled together. It was a fairly safe guess that it had been tossed into the basket during the evening either by Mimette or by her visitor.

"It was by no means an ordinary photograph. In the Winter Gardens one of the amusements was a Hall of Mirrors. You know the sort of thing. Large convex or concave mirrors which grotesquely and unrecognisably distort the body either laterally or vertically. Patrons could buy photographs of themselves distorted in the mirrors and this side-line of the management was a very profitable one. It was one of these photographs which was found in Mimette's filigree basket.

"The photograph was of a man but that was about all one could safely say; for the rest, such was the great distortion, it might have been anyone. But optics happened to be one of my amateur interests and I was not only extremely interested by the find but I had a feeling that something might be learned from it. I had heard it claimed that a really first-class optician (I mean the actual craftsman not the counter salesman) could take one of these photographs and by his knowledge of optics mentally reconstruct an

image of the person as he would ordinarily appear. *Mentally* reconstruct bear in mind, which may not seem to you of great assistance. I was, I will admit, rather of that opinion myself; but for all that there was a nudging little optimist's thought at the back of my mind which kept suggesting that there might be a little more than that in it.

"So I went along to Gamba and Zetti's and saw Arturo Zetti himself. He heard me out and then, smiling, shook his head slowly. 'One would need to have so much data before even attempting such a miraculous feat,' he said. 'There are, for example, the dimensions of the mirror; then the degree of convexity; then the true height and breadth of the person; then his exact, *exact to a millimetre*, distance from the mirror; and other more complicated and tricky matters.'

"'But,' I said, 'if one knew all the data could one construct a lens which would correct all the distortions and show the figure as it actually was?'

"He smiled again. 'If,' he said, 'O yes.'

"'One could even make a camera which would correct the distortions and produce a true portrait?'

"He nodded his head slowly. 'Always assuming our if,' he smiled.

"'May I talk with some of your men?' I asked.

"'By all means. Old Jorge Vevers is as fine a craftsman as you'll find in the world and young Marcu Rozna is a magician; he is also a painter; and when I am told he is a genius I do not contradict/

"So I went to see old Jorge Vevers and found him as difficult of approach as a porcupine and as tight as an oyster. But I gained his interest by telling him I was trying to trace the man who had killed Mimette and I won his heart by inviting him to dine with me that evening at my house. Probably it was not the mere invitation which captured his heart but the meal itself, for I gave him a good one and afterwards kept his glass and his pipe filled.

"He studied the photograph for a long while using every now and again a powerful magnifying glass. Presently he pointed to what appeared to be merely a piece of shadow up near one corner and asked me what I thought of it. I examined it closely, using the glass, but could make nothing of it. He drew a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket and sketched very quickly and expertly

a winged viking helmet surmounting a round shield and then, underneath, a laterally distorted version-of the same drawing. Then he tapped this with his pencil and asked me if it were not rather like the shadow on the photograph. I agreed, if a trifle dubiously, and he then said, ' In the centre of the Hall of Mirrors high up on the wall there are a helmet and shield like this,' pointing to his first drawing. ' And so if this.' indicating the shadow, ' is a distorted reflection of that helmet and shield it will allow us to fix the mirror before which this fellow stood when his photograph was taken. I will go along to the Hall to-morrow and take a few measurements which should help a good deal.'

" ' And you think,' I asked with some eagerness, ' that you will then be able to construct a camera——'

" ' No! no I sir,' he interrupted, with his little slow smile, ' not a camera; a mere makeshift bit of apparatus; what I should call a gadget if I used such new-fangled expressions,'

" ' Well, Monsieur Vevers,' I said, ' I don't care what you call it as long as you succeed in taking a photograph with it,'

" ' I can't promise anything,' he replied, ' but if you will let me keep the photograph for a week I will see what I can do,'

" A week later he called upon me with two photographs: the original distorted one and the one he had taken with his gadget. When he handed it to me I regarded him with momentary stupefaction and then whistled softly. ' You have not shown this to anyone? ' I said.

" He shook his head. * I have come straight here from my developing room,'

" ' You will forget all about it,' I said; ' do you understand? '

" He nodded and after he had accepted a cigar and drunk a glass of wine he took his leave.

" The next evening young Marcu Rozna, the craftsman of genius and painter, dined with me. He was a pleasant talkative fellow, something of a wit, and plainly very curious as to why I had invited him. When later in the evening I showed him the original photograph giving him as much data as Vevers had had to go upon, and asked him if he thought he could paint a recognizable portrait of the man whose distorted image he had before him he laughed and said, ' A tall order, sir, but a most attractive problem and I'll be glad to have a shot at it if I may keep this for a few days,'

" He did not need a week as old Vevers had done; not in fact

half a week; perhaps that was his genius. It was three days later when he called at my office and produced a portrait about half life size. I looked at it for some time in silence and then opening a drawer took out the reconstructed photograph made by old VEVERS and handed it to him. He smiled. 'The same gentleman, sir,' he said; and then, nodding towards his portrait, 'a pretty good shot, sir, if I may say so.'

"I nodded. 'A very fine one,' I said; 'a bull's eye in fact,' I took up the portrait. 'You will allow me to keep this?'

" 'With pleasure,'

" 'And you will be so good as to forget all about it. All. Do you understand?'

" He stared blankly a moment and then said slowly, 'I think I do, sir,'

" When he had gone I propped his portrait up against the wall at the back of my desk and lighting a cigarette leaned back in my chair and for some time contemplated it. It was an easily recognisable picture of Prince Pedro, the heir presumptive to the throne, whose way of life had for some years been one of the major worries of the king and the government.

" And so the murder of Mimette became one more of those 'unsolved' crimes about which the police have to endure no small amount of criticism and even derision," He tapped lightly on the table with the tips of his fingers. Presently he went on: "The point I want to make, of course, is that it ought to be quite impossible to hush up a crime, however exalted its perpetrator; and that it would be impossible if people were more concerned than they are with the doings of their betters. If they demanded an irreproachable way of life on the part of their rulers then their rulers would lead irreproachable lives; for it is true, however unlikely it may sound, that the will of the people ultimately prevails."

" Then," I said; "if a ruler is corrupt the responsibility is the people's? "

He nodded. "Undoubtedly."

"I cannot accept that," I said warmly and began one of those revealing and illuminating little arguments which quite often and very pleasantly rounded off our evenings.

THE TRUTH ABOUT PHILIP GORDON

I AM now the only survivor of the five men who knew the facts in the strange case of Philip Gordon. If I do not write them they will never be written. It may well be asked (and certainly will be asked by most people who read this disturbing disclosure) why I have chosen to publish the truth rather than simply leave it on record to be made public at some future day when all concerned in the matter will be dead. I could give a dozen plausible reasons for my action, probably none true; I say 'probably' because I should find it hard to say what my real motive is. I do not subscribe unreservedly to the principle that truth should prevail at all costs. That lying is sometimes expedient needs no arguing at this period in human history. I am inclined to think that what has swayed me most in my determination to make an immediate revelation is the consideration that a delay of even a dozen years might find Philip Gordon's name so forgotten that my tale would lose much of its force, for it is already clear that Gordon's name, but a decade ago one of the best known in the English-speaking world, is writ in water and that his work will not endure. You can mention him now in a club-room and have someone, perhaps several, say, 'Who was he?' That would have been impossible ten years ago when he died, or indeed for a lustrum after his death. And he built up that almost incredible celebrity in six years.

But let me go a little further back than that and let me also assume that you happen to be one of those persons to-day to whom the name Philip Gordon means nothing at all. Let me go back twenty years. Gordon was then thirty-seven and had just been demobilised with the rank of Captain. He had served in France and Italy and had won the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre. The end of the war found him, as many another, at a loose end; but he had advantages not too common, a small patrimony, a talent, and a charming and very intelligent wife. These possessions are severally not rare but it will I think be admitted that they are in combination.

For the purposes of this account neither his patrimony nor his wife has any great significance but his talent has. Its significance

is indeed paramount. That talent was a gift for storytelling.

It was a gift he had never exploited. Before the war he had been engrossed in his father's business, which was ship-broking; and during his four years in the army he had other things to do. Yet it was in his letters from the front, at first to his own people and then, after his marriage on his second leave in the fall of 1915, to his wife, that this talent had first disclosed itself. And so when he came home for good, with his father and mother both dead and the business in other hands, and the proffered partnership failed to attract him, it was perhaps inevitable that he should turn to writing. Possibly Alison, his wife, suggested it to him. That does not matter. The only point is that since his patrimony was small, a bare four hundred a year, and there were already two children, while both his and his wife's notions of a civilized existence necessitated an income of at least two thousand, obviously he had to find a post, or make one for himself. He preferred the latter, and quite a good one he made.

Quite a good one, but no more than that. Yes, I know that those who remember the vogue of Gordon between the years 1923 and 1929 will laugh at this as a masterpiece of understatement. But I am speaking of the five years immediately succeeding his demobilisation and of them it is the exact truth: in but one year prior to 1923 did he earn from his writings more than five thousand pounds and at least twice he failed to reach two thousand.

For all that he made something of a name for himself. His first novel, as not infrequently happens, was a success; but it went beyond that quite common novice's-luck success and became a hit; but that was probably due to the fact that Arnold Bennett praised it in his weekly article on books. On the strength of that first novel (it was called *John Prendergast*) he found himself for some weeks quite a paragraphed person in the literary weeklies; he acquired a literary agent (a sleek plump young man named Fanshawe) who obtained for him a very good contract for his next three books from Dodman and Paull who had published his first. Fanshawe also suggested to Gordon that he should write short stories and finding he had a facility for these engaging trifles he wrote a couple of dozen before settling down to his second novel. Fanshawe placed all the stories and dropped Gordon a line telling him that his 'shorts' seemed to be just what was wanted and that quite a number of editors had said they would

be glad to have more of them. "Perhaps," the letter ended, "you'll send me another batch before you start your novel,"

But the novel was already started. Gordon's method of work was prosaic enough; there was no waiting for inspiration; he started work at nine and knocked off at noon; began again at two and finished at four. That was all. Easy work and easy hours. And so Fanshawe's suggestion that he should send along some more 'shorts' at once did not perturb him in the least. Nor did he allow it to interfere with the schedule he had laid down; he went on with his novel during the day and two hours each evening, before dinner, he devoted to the concoction and writing of short stories. As he wrote them he sent them to be typed and then on to Fanshawe, who sold them with encouraging ease. By the time he had finished his second novel (*Adam Brockhurst*) he found that he had managed to produce, side by side with it, no fewer than fifty short stories, most of which had been sold both here and in the U.S., where his first novel had been well received but with none of the acclaim or sales it had had in England. It was at this time that he engaged his first secretary. Most writers prefer a woman. Gordon said that with a woman one could never quite rule out a distraction (on the part of one or the other or both) which would lessen the efficiency of the team-work; and so he engaged a man, Dick Roding, who was later to become almost as much of a legend for machine-like efficiency as Philip Gordon himself.

I tell you all these preliminary trifles because, while of no interest in themselves, they acquire it in the light of subsequent events; and in that light they are seen to be the acorn without which the oak could not have grown.

Adam Brockhurst was a failure. The critics not finding it at all like *John Prendergast* disliked it or ignored it. Arnold Bennett, who by this time had, after his fashion, forgotten that there was such a writer as Philip Gordon, did not review it; and the American publisher declined it. Altogether a sad flop. And as if to accentuate things there was a sudden halt in the sale of the short stories; they began to be returned with chilling frequency.

To say that Gordon was undisturbed would be untrue; to be unmoved by failure or success is to be inhuman. And Philip Gordon was, in those days, very human. But it made no difference to his plans. He went away for a month's boating and fishing holiday

with Alison and the two little girls and having thoroughly enjoyed himself came back to Town (they lived then in St. John's Wood) and began work immediately upon a new novel and a fresh batch of short stories. And this time, in Fanshawe's phrase, he rang the bell, both here and in the United States; for that third novel was the magnificent *Helen Stuart* considered by the more literary of the critics of to-day to be his one fine book. 'Here,' as perhaps the most eminent of all of them wrote but yesterday, 'he approached greatness.' Whether or not Gordon did approach greatness in *Helen Stuart* does not matter now; what mattered -very much at the time was that the book confounded the critics who had said that *John Prcndergast* was clearly a Hash in the pan; it put Gordon quite in the forefront of the younger men; it made about five thousand for him in hard cash; and it gave him back in full measure the confidence which had begun to drain away, if only slightly, with the failure of *Adam Brockhurst*.

All this had happened by the end of 1920. During the next three years he wrote and published here and in the United States seven novels. Three collections of his short stories were also published. None of these books made him a great deal of money but they were all quite successful and certainly added to his reputation as a sound craftsman who could be depended upon to produce good work and who might one day write books that were something more than competent craftsmanship. His name was much better known to the general public than his quite moderate success seemed to warrant; but this was probably due to the fact that his short stories appeared regularly in the periodical Press of all kinds, from the daily and evening national newspaper to the monthly reviews. He was now comfortably off; a solid sort of unspectacular comfort. He and his wife went about quite a lot in London and entertained in their St. John's Wood villa modestly enough but so attractively that one could always count upon witty and congenial company there. I first dined there late in 1921 and Philip and I quickly became on very friendly terms; and it was at the same house during the next year that I met the other four men concerned in this strange business: Arthur Serocold, the African traveller; Colonel Douglas Beevers; Stephen Temple, the painter; and Dr. Frank Crane. Crane, while a friend, was also Gordon's medical man. Gordon, as a result of gassing and shell concussion, had brought a very groggy heart out of the war and

was liable to giddiness and faintings as a consequence of any great physical exertion, especially if it were sudden, such as an abrupt dash or leap. And so Crane was frequently in the house. During those years we six men, Serocold, Beevers, Temple, Crane, Philip and I became on very friendly terms indeed, fishing, shooting, playing golf, with bridge at our clubs or at one another's homes. Early in 1923 Gordon bought an old farm in Sussex which he rebuilt and renovated and called *Oaklands*. They kept on their St. John's Wood villa using *Oaklands* for long week-ends, at which times there were frequently half-a-dozen guests and occasionally as many again. The Gordons had now four children, the two last twin boys. There you have a portrait of Philip Gordon at the end of 1923: A happily married man with a charming wife and a young family—in fact a family man; a man of some substance, of considerable success, and of a reputation both here and across the Atlantic rather out of proportion to his achievement. He figured in *Who's Who*; his portrait was in the 1922 Academy; he was always referred to in the Press (and the references were frequent) as 'the well-known novelist'; and he was a popular member of The Savage, the St. James's, and The Sixty-Six. There you have him: successful mediocrity incarnate.

And then suddenly, as suddenly as the clicking of a camera-shutter, towards the end of 1923, he became a phenomenon, beginning those six years of amazing productiveness which was so like the plenty and fertility of genius that for a while it passed among the undiscerning as something of the sort. There is a terrifying aspect to the fecundity of the herring and Gordon's productiveness had something of that quality about it. He had begun to use a dictaphone the previous year and now, in this phase of incredible fertility, he used four; while no fewer than six male secretaries, including the celebrated Dick Roding, had by the end of 1925 been installed at *Oaklands* (much enlarged to house this team of assiduous and excessively discreet helpers). Novels and short stories came from that factory (for such it was) with the endless regularity of mass-produced cars. He had five different publishers over here and four in the United States. His annual royalties jumped from four to five figures and were presently into six. Fanshawe became sleeker and plumper, dropped all his other authors, and devoted himself exclusively to the handling of this Golconda-like literary property. It was said ar-

the peak of the business that Philip Gordon's name was on half the new books published; farcical of course but with its grain of truth, as had the current jokes about 'the week's Gordon' which became 'today's Gordon' and gave birth to such jocosities as 'We have the latest Gordon delivered with our newspaper'.

The critics pooh-poohed the quality of this spate, yet were compelled into a sort of reluctant admiration by its increasing volume and its apparent inexhaustibility. People said the books were all alike; that if you'd read one you'd read the lot; but they continued to buy or borrow them with something of the feverish avidity of the drink or drug addict.

And Gordon himself, what of him? He was perhaps the most amazing, the most intriguing part of the whole extraordinary affair. Earning these huge sums he spent next to nothing upon pleasure or entertaining. He rarely went out and only three times during those six years was he persuaded to attend a public luncheon or dinner. He lived for nothing else but his work. He became a man so changed that the friends and acquaintances of his former days dropped away; a man so utterly changed that his wife left him and took the children with her. It was not that there was another man; nothing of that sort at all; but she could no longer bear to live with him nor see her children in contact with him; and so she cleared out. Not that he minded; he scarcely seemed aware of their going or of their continued absence; he arranged for half his income to be paid over to her and then forgot all about her; or so one might judge by his manner.

And then in November 1929, in London for one of his rare visits, he was walking along Regent Street when he suddenly collapsed and was taken to Charing Cross Hospital. He was dead before the ambulance reached the hospital. But there was more than that about the death; the house-surgeon told Crane that he would have sworn by the appearance of the body that death had taken place quite six or seven hours earlier; moreover, a horrible detail, by the next morning the body was so far gone in decomposition that it had to be buried immediately, Crane's statement that he had attended the deceased for heart trouble for many years rendering an inquest unnecessary. And, as Crane said, just as well too for it would have been a filthy job.

And now the key to this queer business. It is. I admit, far queerer than the story. You may tell me the thing is a lie and

I shall not argue with you. Perhaps it is a lie; perhaps we are all victims of a strange delusion. When I say 'all' I merely mean Arthur Serocold, the traveller; Colonel Beevers, of the Meadshires; Stephen Temple, the painter; Dr. Frank Crane; and myself. Let me relate what happened; or at any rate what we five very ordinary men saw happen, and are prepared to vouch for upon our oaths. Or were, I should say, for I am the only one now living.

We must return to the late September of 1923. Mrs. Gordon and the children were still away at the seaside but they were going down at the end of the month to *Oaklands* where Philip had been installed for the past week finishing a new novel, for he liked working there. The book finished and his wife and family not due for nearly another week Philip suddenly found himself hankering after congenial male society and sent off some seven or eight wired invitations to a long week-end stag party. In the event only five were free to accept and we all arrived within an hour or so of each other in the late afternoon of Friday September the twenty-eighth.

And the thing happened that very evening after dinner. Crane sat smoking and reading; the rest of us were playing bridge. At a pause in the game, while we drank and discussed the last hand, Philip suddenly pushed his chair back and said, "I'll not be five minutes; I've a corking idea for a story; I'll just run up to my room and make a few dictaphone notes, if you'll forgive me." And he was out of the room and we heard him going up the stairs at a run.

Crane looked up from his book and frowned, "Silly fellow!" he said; "I've warned him about capering up the stairs as if he were a mountain goat. He'll go out like a blown candle one of these days."

And as if the thing were a play and his speech the cue for the disaster we heard a crash and a thud overhead and then there was complete silence.

I have forgotten now who reached the room first but Gordon was dead. Crane knelt beside the body sprawled by the dictaphone and after a while looked up at us and shook his head. "He's gone," he said.

I do not remember what happened between that moment and the startling moment when Serocold said, "Do any of you know anything of voodoo?"

We all knew something but it didn't amount to much; but it was enough apparently to satisfy Serocold, for he next asked, " Ever heard of Zombi? "

None of us had and he went on, " Zombi is the supernatural power or essence which enters into a corpse and reanimates it. It is also the name given to the person thus reanimated. He or she is called a Zombi and is often so addressed."

We all stared at him at this but it was Stephen Temple who said, " What do you mean by addressed, Serocold? How can one address a corpse? "

" I said a reanimated corpse," Serocold replied. And then he paused before adding, "I won't ask you to believe me but I assure you I have seen corpses reanimated in Hayti and other parts of the West Indies and have afterwards seen those corpses at work for months on end. I employed one once for six months in my garden and he did as much as the other four boys together. He just lived for work. He had no other interest. You see, he wasn't a human being; just a reanimated corpse; a body without a soul. I assure you it is a fact."

None of us said anything. What was there to be said?

And then Serocold continued. " I was initiated into the secrets of voodoo and taught the technique of this resuscitation. I believe I am the only white man who has ever been entrusted with that power."

We must all have stared at him then incredulously and Crane said, " Have you ever used it, Serocold? " to which he nodded and said, " Twice."

" Successfully?" Temple asked and again Serocold nodded. Then he said to Crane, " I want to ask your permission to let me try with Gordon."

"Reanimate him?" Crane said slowly.

" Yes."

" Bring Philip back to life as a sort of soulless robot! " I said harshly.

" Do you believe in a soul? " he rejoined.

" I believe in something," I said, " but that's as far as I care to go"

He turned to Crane again. " Well, Crane? " he said.

" I don't see why not," Crane replied, looking from one to the other of us half questioningly, half defensively. And as none of us

spoke Serocold said quickly, " All right, then; you won't mind if I ask to be left alone with him? Perhaps you'll wait downstairs? "

" Don't you think it would be better if I remained? " Crane asked.

Serocold shook his head. " No," he said emphatically; " I'm sorry, Crane, but it can't be done."

And so we trooped downstairs and sat waiting. I, of course, didn't believe in the thing and thought the business went beyond the bounds of decency and, I imagine, Temple thought the same; possibly Crane, too. We must have sat waiting and smoking for nearly half-an-hour when a sudden noise overhead set our nerves jumping. And then we heard the door of Gordon's room open and footsteps coming down the stairs. We bunched to the door and met Serocold. He looked ghastly; his collar was crumpled, his face glistening with sweat. " It's done," he said, " and he went straight to his dictaphone and began talking into it in a loud voice which was his and yet wasn't quite. Listen."

There was no need to strain our ears. Plainly enough from the room above us came a voice speaking in measured tones; a loud monotonous voice; a voice that might have been that of Philip talking in his sleep. And it went on and on for hours with but brief pauses, when, as we gathered, Gordon was putting a fresh cylinder into the dictaphone. Something after midnight we all went up to his room. For my own part I was badly scared; probably the others were too. But there was really nothing tangible to be scared about. He looked up as we entered, paused in his dictating and said, in a flat tone, "I'm very busy," and turned again to the machine. His face was almost expressionless. And so we went out again; there did not seem anything else to do.

Well, that's really all; that's the story, and that's the key, or whatever you like to call it. There is one more significant item. At the moment when Gordon collapsed and died in Regent Street on the afternoon of November the twelfth 1929 Arthur Serocold had died from blackwater at Yanga on the Upper Congo. We were able to verify this later and the times synchronised exactly, as far as there can be exactitude in such timing.

THE CRACK IN THE WALL

MY HUSBAND bought *The Grange* just before we were married. It was a fine old Devon house dating from the middle of the eighteenth century and somewhat fallen into disrepair. A strongly built wall about six feet high completely enclosed the house, shutting away its gardens and small orchard from the surrounding fields. The nearest village was Georgeham about a mile to the east.

Shortly after the birth of our first child John, my husband was thrown from his horse and killed and I resolved to remain at *The Grange* and devote myself to my son. He was a beautiful baby and as the years passed he grew into a handsome little lad, as is testified by many pictures I have of him, and especially his portrait painted by Fildes and exhibited in that year's Academy. He was then five and mentally precocious, as was to be expected considering his environment. Besides his own tongue he spoke read and wrote in French and Italian. In English his vocabulary was already extensive and he was reading books not usually tackled by boys until their teens; and indeed by the time he was eight he had read all Dickens, all Thackeray, all Trollope, and most of Scott. But I am running ahead of my story.

It was about the time of his painting by Fildes that I began to notice that in his outdoor playing he not only almost invariably chose the west garden but that he seemed to favour the south side there; so much so in fact that I frequently observed him stooped about some toy or heap of soil at the foot of the south wall, or stretched up against it as if he were meditating its scaling.

One morning that summer at breakfast I said that we were setting off for Lynton the next morning (a Wednesday) and should be away till the following Tuesday and I asked him if he would like that.

"It would be lovely," he said, "but Uncle Dick will be coming on Saturday and so we can't be away, can we?"

Dick was my brother-in-law. He had married an American woman and lived in Suffolk County, Long Island. John, as a little chap of three, had been a great favourite of his but he had not been in England for nearly two years and indeed was so completely in love with his American home and with all things American that

I thought it extremely likely he would never return to England, not even for a visit; and the fact that his wife was a bad sailor lent force to my opinion. And so, when John said so confidently that his uncle would be with us that coming Saturday, it was with a smile as incredulous as it was surprised that I said, "Why, John, whatever makes you say that?"

"It's true, Mother," he said quietly; "I saw the Long Road yesterday and then I knew about Uncle Dick."

"The Long Road," I repeated; "why what do you mean? What road?"

"It's a road I see," he said; "I've seen it now for a long while. There's tall trees on each side and I always——"

But just then Alice came in with a message from cook and I went straight down to the kitchen and when I came back John had finished his breakfast and gone into the garden to play and during the morning with one thing and another I forgot the matter.

Just before tea that afternoon, with all plans made for an early departure in the morning, a radiogram arrived from Dick. It had been sent off from the *S.S. Bardic* in mid-Atlantic and read: Expect to be with you Saturday.

This of course brought back to me John's astonishing remark (the more astonishing by the matter-of-factness of his tone), and I realised, with something of a shock, that in a matter touching so closely the one person I loved in the world I had been so incurious as to allow it to go unexplained. It was a lapse I quickly remedied. I went to look for John.

He was of course in the west garden and playing as usual by the south wall. I gave him the radiogram to read and he just said 'Of course' and handed it back.

"What do you mean by 'of course', John?" I said.

"I told you, Mother. You see I knew. I had seen the Long Road." He came up to me and took my hand in his grubby one and said, "Come along and I'll show you."

We came presently to a part of the wall in which there was a long oblique crack, in one place extending right through the wall. "Look through it, Mother," he said; "what can you see?"

I bent down and looked. "Just the field," I said.

He nodded and as I straightened my back he stretched up and peered through. "Yes," he said, "only the field." And then he

turned round to me and looking up into my face said, "Sometimes when I look through the crack I don't see the field at all but a long long straight road, ever so long with tall trees on each side and stretching as far as I can see," He paused a moment, regarding my face fixedly, and then went on, "And always after I've seen the Long Road, Mother, I know what's going to happen."

"But, John," I said, "how do you know?"

"I don't know how, Mother," he replied gravely; "but something always comes into my mind and I know that is what is going to happen."

"You knew Uncle Dick was coming on Saturday?"

He nodded his head. "I saw the Long Road yesterday afternoon and almost at once I knew Uncle Dick would be here on Saturday. It is always very quickly after I have seen the Long Road that I know the thing which is going to happen. Sometimes even before the Long Road disappears."

"So it disappears while you are watching it?" I said.

"O yes," he replied, "or I don't think I could leave off watching it, because it is so exciting."

"Why," I asked, "are things happening on the road?"

"O no! nothing, Mother," he said; "there's only just the road, but it's terribly exciting. It makes my mouth dry."

On Saturday Dick turned up and stayed a week before he went up to London on the business which had brought him over so suddenly. I said nothing to him about the Long Road and John's astounding look into the future but I was rather worried about the whole thing and asked Dr. Wakefield to come in to tea as I wanted to talk to him. He was a kindly old man and a clever one for all his lack of other diploma than the humble L.R.C.P. He listened attentively and when I had finished he said: "I shouldn't make too much of it. Children have these fancies. The fact that his uncle did arrive on the day is no more than a coincidence; a most striking one, I admit, but I have in my experience met with even more striking ones."

"But," I said, "John says that it often happens and the things always happen afterwards as he knows they're going to."

Dr. Wakefield smiled. "Very imaginative children, and John is one, live so much in a world of make-believe that they are unable to separate the actual from the imagined. John is speaking the truth of course. He does really believe these things actually

happen, whereas they happen only in his imagination."

But I was not convinced and in the years ahead I was to have many proofs of this strange power of John's which was so inexplicably linked with his vision of the Long Road seen through the crack in the wall and which presently I came to believe in as unquestioningly as he did.

I will not recount all the examples he gave of his clairvoyant power; and perhaps it would make tedious reading if I did; but some stand out so vividly in his life, in our life together, that I cannot refrain from relating them.

There was the Sunday morning shortly after his eighth birthday when he came in from the garden and said, with tears in his eyes, "O Mother! Grannie's dead." I no longer doubted his strange power. I was certain that my mother, who lived in Edinburgh, had just died and was prepared for the telegram which came the next morning as we were sitting down to breakfast.

It was a few summers later that he came running in from the garden and upstairs to my room where I was placing flowers in the vases. It was in May and a day of stifling heat. "O Mother," he cried, "we must do something; the village is going to be flooded and children drowned and hundreds of sheep and pigs."

I had not noticed that the sun had gone in and the sky become lowering with great sooty clouds; but even as he spoke there was a tremendous clap of thunder and the rain began to fall in torrents. But the rain that fell on us was a mere cupful to the cascade that poured down on to Skar Spinney on top of the hill a mile out of Georgeham. A cloud had burst over the hilltop and there rushed down the hill towards the village a great wave of brown water, foaming and swirling, twelve feet across and five feet deep. It went through the village like a sickle through grass, carrying away walls, the sides of cottages, barns and sheds; drowning five children and more sheep pigs and other livestock than I can remember.

The next outstanding incident was just before his thirteenth birthday. He was out to tea that afternoon and I was having tea alone and was somewhat disturbed by the most unusual noises from the kitchen: as if a large and very gay party were being held. And so when Alice came in to clear away I asked her about it and she looked confused and said, "I'm very sorry, ma'am, we

didn't know we were making a noise. We're having a sort of—of celebration party."

"Oh," I smiled, "and what are you celebrating?"

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have said anything, ma'am," she said, now obviously much concerned.

"Rubbish, Alice," I said; "tell me all about it. And sit down."

"It was like this," Alice said: "while we were having dinner, Master John came into the kitchen for something and Ted said to him, 'What's going to win the Derby, Master John?' and Master John smiled and said, 'A horse, I suppose; when is it?' 'Why, it's to-day,' Ted said. And then Master John looked at him rather strangely like he does ma'am at times, and he said, 'Will anybody be riding with a red and yellow striped jacket and a red cap?' And Harry said, 'That's Lord Stenelly's colours and his horse is Zephyr.' 'Oh,' said Master John, 'then Zephyr will win the Derby,' and he then went out as quietly as he'd come in and Ted pulled a newspaper out of his pocket and looked at it and said with a laugh: 'And by crumps Zephyr is a hundred to one!' and Harry and Alfred both laughed too. And then cook said, 'I don't care what it is but I know I'm going to have half-a-crown on Zephyr.' And then, ma'am, we all began to talk together and after a time we all said we'd put something on Zephyr and after dinner Ted drove over to Braunton and put all our money on and as you know, ma'am, Zephyr won and so, ma'am, that was what it was all about. I hope you're not angry, ma'am."

"I certainly didn't know Zephyr had won, Alice," I said; and then I smiled and added, "I suppose I must congratulate you all. I do not hold with gambling but the Derby is different; even the King, I understand, makes a little bet on the Derby; and I have heard it said that more than one bishop has been known to do the same, so we'll say no more about it, Alice."

John had had a governess until he was eight, and after that a tutor, Mr. Charles Hines, a very clever and enthusiastic young man who gave every satisfaction. When John reached the age of fourteen I asked the advice of many people whose opinion I valued about John's future education and they were all agreed that he would now benefit by a few years at a good public school. Mr. Hines strongly advised Winborough, not only because of its standing, which was second to none, but because there was a scholarship to it, the famous Reeves-Harlow, whose winning was a coveted

distinction. I agreed to John's sitting for the scholarship but only on the condition that he did not take it up if he won it, for the money was a bagatelle to me whereas it would be a Godsend to someone who really needed it.

The examination was held in June at the school and Mr. Hines accompanied John to Winborough, staying at a hotel for the week; while of course John lived at the school. The result would be known on the first of July. When John returned home after the examination he expressed himself very well satisfied with what he had done and after he had discussed the papers with Mr. Hines that gentleman told me that he was sure John would get the scholarship.

Two days before the end of the month John came in from the garden and sauntering up to me with a smile said: "I haven't got it, Mother."

"What, my dear boy?" I said.

"The Reeves-Harlow," he said.

There was no question of my doubting him; all doubts as to his extraordinary power had been dissipated years ago. "Oh, my dear John," I said; "I *am* sorry."

"I don't know that I am," he said quietly; and then, with a laugh, "I might have got a swelled head. I'm second, with eight hundred and twenty marks. The winner is a nice little chap named Beeching. He got eight hundred and thirty-four. I saw the list put up a few minutes ago. I didn't notice the other names."

Mr. Hines (whom we did not tell, as he knew nothing of John's clairvoyance) went to Winborough the following day so as to be at the school when the list was put up on the Headmaster's board, a ceremony at which relatives or representatives of the competitors could attend. Shortly before luncheon the next day we received a wire from him with the news of John's defeat and young Beeching's success.

There was one particularly curious incident while he was at Winborough and it was the only occasion of his seeing the Long Road away from *The Grange*, at least it was the only occasion which he has ever mentioned to me. He was sixteen at the time. He had a very sharp attack of pneumonia but I was not unduly worried because he had written to me saying he was going to be seriously ill but that he would recover. Later he wrote me an explanation of that letter. He had been out with the O.T.C. It

was November, very cold and wet, and hardly, one would have thought, the sort of weather for field manoeuvres. During the action he was at one time crouched behind a hedge in ambush. The hedge was very thick, and wishing to see through into the stubble field on the other side he poked with his rifle until he had made a small hole and stretching up from his prone position he peered through the hole and saw, not the wet stubble field, but the Long Road. It was on getting back to school late in the afternoon that he wrote advising me that he was going to be seriously ill.

After leaving Winborough he went up to Cambridge and early in his first vacation he said to me one morning (it was July and the year 1939): "I'm not returning to Cambridge, Mother."

I had long ceased to question, or to be surprised at, or taken unawares by, anything John said or did and so I merely said, "Why is that, my dear boy? "

He smiled and said, "Because I shall be in the Army, Mother."

"You mean there's going to be a war? "

"I don't know that," he said; "but I do know that I shall be in the Army by the middle of September; and that probably means that we shall then be at war."

He did not go out to France until the following April. He was then a lieutenant. I had letters from him frequently and regularly for some weeks and then they ceased. About the middle of May I received the official notification that he had been killed in action and a few days later I had this letter:

A,

"As I was John's friend and was with him when he was killed the Colonel has asked me to write to you but I should have written in any case not only because John asked me to just before he was killed but because of the strange way it all came about. We were going up for an attack and John and I were in the first truck. We halted the column in a lane and John and I got out and went on ahead to reconnoitre. At the end of the lane we turned sharp left, and there stretching out as far as the eye could see was a very long perfectly straight road lined with poplars. 'That's the road,' I said to John, 'seems O.K.' 'Yes,' he answered, 'that's the road'; and something strange in his tone made me glance at him. He looked like a man dreaming, or just woken from dreaming. He said no more then and we set off back to the trucks. But before

we got there he said to me: 'Frank, I am going to be killed, and very soon. I want you to write to my mother and tell her the circumstances,' I of course said the usual things about its being one of those false premonitions that everybody has at such times but he just smiled and shook his head. Not twenty minutes later, and only a few miles along the long straight road, we ran into an armoured German column and John was shot through the head. He was killed instantly. He could not, I assure you, have felt any pain. He would not have known anything about it. He was my friend and his loss has been a great blow to me. He was a fine soldier and a very brave one and he will be sadly missed by all of us. I send you our very deep and heartfelt sympathy,"

AT THE END OF THE LANE

THE LANE was so roofed over with trees that it felt gloomy and chill after the bright warmth of the open sky. Underfoot was a damp carpet of last autumn's mouldering leaves. My sheepdog drew in close to me and padded along uneasily at my heels. We presently emerged and making a sharp right turn I found myself to my astonished delight on the grassy summit of a headland which dropped sheer many hundreds of feet to the sparkling sea below. I had not realised, so gradual had been the rise and so long had I been walking, that I must be quite a thousand feet up from the little village in the valley, many miles away, where I had set off after breakfast.

I felt hot and tired and Shep, tongue flacking in and out, was panting fast. The grass up there was thick, dry, inviting; the scene below, under the summer sun, entrancing. I sat down and Shep dropped beside me, sighed, stretched her head out on her paws and closed her eyes. I filled and lit my pipe and sat smoking in great contentment watching the sea and allowing my thoughts to drift idly and aimlessly. It was a lonely spot, the loneliness accentuated by the utter absence of a sail, smokestack, or even a thin trail of smoke anywhere along the horizon; nor was there anywhere the speckle of a single gull.

Given similar surroundings thoughts tend to likeness and my

thoughts there in the sunny quietness, high up above the bright deserted sea, were much the same no doubt as those of all the men long dead who over the centuries had climbed the slow ascent to the headland and had sat there in that solitary spot and contemplated the lonely sea; the same as those of the unborn who, while the land and sea remained, would too climb up there.

I must have been sitting there quite a time, for I had smoked one pipe and begun another, when Shep growled softly. I thought she growled in sleep and took no notice; but the growl was repeated on a deeper harsher note and I knew we were no longer alone. I turned my head and saw a tall gaunt man staring down at us; at us and also it seemed through us. There was an air of uncertainty, almost of distress, about him; and one hand went, as if of its own volition, restlessly fumbling about the buttons of his brown untidy tweed jacket.

"Pleasant spot," I said, tritely enough: but he appeared to welcome the remark for the anxious look on his face was replaced by one of relief; almost, I thought, of quiet excitement.

"I fear I am intruding," he said.

"Not in the least. I was just beginning to think how lonely it was." And after a slight pause I added, "I've been up here quite a while."

He made no comment upon this but sat down some four or five feet away from me and looked out over the sea. Shep opened a slow eye, appraised him a moment, and closed it, sighing and wriggling her muzzle deeper into her paws. His silent contemplation of the sea lasted some minutes. Suddenly, without looking at me, he said, "Have you ever thought——" and broke off abruptly, his hand going up to his mouth in a fluttering gesture. I had now placed him; or rather his trouble, for I knew the symptoms only too well. Here was overstrain; the nerves on stretch to breaking point. Possibly overwork I thought, although I knew how rarely, if ever, overwork is responsible for breakdown. It was more likely to be some nervous tension peculiar to himself over a long period: the sort of thing about which psychiatrists write obscure monographs and on which the ignoble horde of quacks and charlatans wax fat; the psycho-therapists, the psycho-analysts, the psychopaths and like rascals.

He continued to look away from me although I had, every now and again, the feeling that he had darted a swift glance at me.

"Will it bore you if I tell you a story?" he said abruptly; and without waiting for my answer went on, "'a story about myself; a strange story, I think."

"I should like nothing better," I said.

He did not appear to have heard my reply and said, as if talking to himself, "I have kept it to myself too long. It would have been better——" again he broke off and his hand went fluttering up to his mouth. And then: "I am not quite myself," he said slowly, but with a note of tension in his voice; "a little overwrought; but that is understandable; I have been upset, startled." He smiled faintly: "quite bowled over, as you say." And the phrase revealed to me what I had already begun to feel, although he spoke without any trace of an accent: that he was a foreigner. And as if he followed up my thought he said, "I am an Austrian."

I made some inadequate reply to which he did not appear to listen but said, his eyes now turned away from the sea, and looking at me with a remote expression, "I am a haunted man. I have always been haunted. I had come to think there was no escape. But now ..." His expression changed; he made a little gesture with his hands and turned again to the sea.

"It will seem to you so small a thing," he went on presently, "so commonplace. We all have these hauntings in some measure. It began when I was a very young child; and that too is the common experience. I must have been very young, so young indeed that it seems that all my life I have been haunted by this dream, although my earliest memory of it takes me no further back than the age of four; and I can place it so precisely because the memory is linked with an old farm house. It was my uncle's house and I stayed there but once, for some months after my fourth birthday, my mother having died suddenly and my father's health temporarily broken down so that it was necessary for me to leave home for a while.

"In that first remembered dream I found myself in a long, dark tunnel through which, suffocatingly and interminably as it seemed, I struggled, emerging after a drawn-out agony of panic into the daylight to a moment of ineffable relief and peace; but it was only a moment; for suddenly I began to fall terrifyingly through the air as if from some tremendous height. I could not cry out but could only endure the ordeal in a dumb terror; and then suddenly

I was plunged into utter darkness and awoke screaming.

"My screams brought my aunt to my bedside. She was a tall, forbidding woman who showed me no affection, although she may have been fond of me. I stood in considerable awe of her and never confided in her or even talked with her. And so, when she asked me what had frightened me, I replied: 'Nothing,' 'You have been dreaming, I expect,' she said; 'is that it?'

"'Yes, aunt,' I said.

"'What about?' she asked.

"But I could not tell her. I do not know what I feared. Perhaps her contempt or her anger or her laughter. And so I said, 'I don't remember, aunt,' and lay back on my pillow and closed my eyes.

"It may well be that my refusal to give her my confidence was the beginning of my trouble; that if there had been some understanding, some sympathetic and loving ear, to which I could have related that horrifying experience it would never have been repeated and my life would not have been haunted as it has been. For my life has been haunted and by that dream.

"I did not dream it again until many weeks after I had returned home. I awoke as before screaming; but no-one came, my father being sunk in the deep sleep of the heavy drinker and the housekeeper's bedroom being too far away for her to hear. And so for a time I lay awake, living over again its horror, not daring to go to sleep again lest it returned.

"But it was not for a considerable time after my return home that the dream really began to haunt my nights and, because of anticipation, my days. It must have been more than a year, for my father had married again. My stepmother did not like me. She was twenty years younger than my father who was dotingly uxorious about her. I was a very lonely and unloved little boy. And when my first stepbrother was born the contrast between the love and care lavished upon him and my own forlorn condition made wounds in my heart that no years could heal. It was probably then that the real haunting began.

"The dream became more frequent; very rapidly more and more frequent, so that within a year or so it was a rare week without a visitation; and then a rare night. I began to dread going to bed. I began to associate a faint singing noise in my ears, which I frequently heard when I lay my head upon the pillow,

with the dream; to look upon it as a sure herald of the terror to come.

" I no longer screamed when, as the utter darkness closed round me, I awoke. In my waking hours I was a quiet reserved little boy with no-one to confide in, playing by myself and afraid to make a noise that might bring upon me my stepmother's reproof; and when she reproved my father was quick to thrash. And so I suppose that self-discipline which kept me quiet during the day followed me into my hours of sleep and thus prevented that screaming outcry. And in consequence no-one knew of my haunting.

" My health presently began to suffer. I lost my appetite, my colour; I ceased to put on weight; I lost interest in games and in books. Even to the indifferent eyes of my father and stepmother it was plain something was wrong; and being afraid, I suppose, that I was sickening for something that might be passed on to the others (of whom there were now three) they called in a doctor. He was a good doctor and a good man: kind, sympathetic, understanding, fatherly; and had he been called in years earlier I should have been saved. But it was too late. I could not now confide in anyone; the habit of years was beyond breaking. And so I told him nothing. Something doubtless he guessed; but there was little he could do. He prescribed a tonic and wrote out a diet sheet for me and insisted on my being in the open air for at least four hours daily, no matter what the weather. And my health certainly began to improve.

" I owe him more than that, for it was due to a suggestion of his that I was, at the age of ten, sent away to a boarding-school and my next six years were, except for my holidays, comparatively happy ones. That I dreaded the end of terms and eagerly looked forward to the end of holidays perhaps best portrays my boyhood and adolescence; and is certainly the best evidence of the dreariness of my home life.

" All these years the dream persisted and always its power over me of annihilating terror continued unabated. But it slowly changed, or rather grew a little clearer, so that by the time I was in my teens I no longer emerged from the awful tunnel merely into the light of day; but I would find myself in a grassy meadow, apparently upon a hilltop. And once I had seen the meadow I did not revert again to the mere empty daylight.

"I was already a young man before I took in the dream (now of almost nightly occurrence) a further step forward in perception and discovered that I was not alone in the hilltop meadow. I did not for many years see anyone; but I was aware of presences. They did not seem inimical to me but for a long while they added to my terror. I felt, when I thought during the daytime of my dream (and there were days when I thought of little else), that if only I could see those presences the long haunting would be at an end and I should after all these years, these hopeless years, be saved. And then one night, I saw them."

He turned his remotely-looking eyes from his contemplation of the sea and regarded me. "I have told you," he said, "nothing about my life, of my career. They do not matter. They have never been very real. My days were never very real; only my nights. I have never married. How could I? Indeed it has never occurred to me to marry. No woman has ever been fond of me, ever taken notice of me; or if they did I failed to observe it. I did not consult any doctors, mental specialist, psychiatrists, psycho-analysts. I never even thought of doing so. It would have been useless; a waste of their time and my own; for I could not have bared my heart to them; the habit of a lifetime forbade it. You are the first living being in whom I have confided.

"Why should I do this now? Why break this long iron habit, a breaking I should have declared impossible? I will tell you. I said that one night I saw those presences. That is true. It was less than a year ago. And every night since then I have, on emerging from the awful tunnel, seen this grassy cliff top and the sea below and you sitting here with your dog beside you. I have been to England many times for I am a great traveller. Travelling has perhaps kept me from going over the borderland. But I have never before been in these parts. And this morning I set out after breakfast for a long walk and came a little while ago to a lane so roofed over with trees that immediately I stepped upon its mouldering leaves I felt myself within my tunnel and the horror gripped me and I fled along it in the familiar agony of suffocating panic. And then I came out of the lane and you and your dog were here; and for a moment, a long dreadful moment, I was afraid that a new martyrdom was beginning for me and that I was to be haunted by day as well as by night. And then you spoke and my

passion of relief must have shown in my face for I saw it in your eyes."

He was silent after this for a while, again turning his regard to the sea. And then he said: "I think this is what it all has meant. I believe that now I am saved, am free. I believe it is all over." He stood up and smiled at me. And then, suddenly his face changed to a look of appalled horror and he cried out: "Falling! falling!" and putting his hands up to his head and muttering a word I could not catch he pitched forward and fell across my feet. I knew that he was dead.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

SIR HUGH DE SAXHAM, Lord of the Manor of Saxham Parva in the Hundred of Thingow in the County of Suffolk, was at breakfast. Edward the First, a man of fifty-one, had been reigning for eighteen years; had the year previous married his second wife Margaret of France; and had recently expelled all Jews from the Kingdom in circumstances of the utmost barbarity. The Country was at peace. The year was 1290.

Sir Hugh de Saxham was in the middle twenties. He was small for a de Saxham and fair-haired, both gifts from his mother. While at Oxford he had won considerable reputation as a scholar and a poet. He was unmarried.

The Manor of Saxham Parva comprised some fifteen hundred acres, of which two hundred belonged to the six franklins; three hundred were held by twenty bordars; and something over four hundred by the cottars who numbered just over a hundred. There were no serfs, Sir Hugh having manumitted all of them (two hundred and fifty odd) when he succeeded to his inheritance. There were about eighty acres of common land and the rest was the domain, the Lord of the Manor's own holding. The population of the Manor, excluding the Manor House servants, was seven hundred and fifty.

Over these eight hundred or so souls Sir Hugh had almost unlimited and certainly unquestioned power. He could not, since none were serfs, slay one out of hand, in a moment of petulance or caprice; but since all wrongdoers and all accused of wrong-

doing had their cases adjudged by him, his power was in practice absolute. He had many rights and privileges. He could call upon any of those living on the Manor, both male and female, for a wide range of services: ploughing his land; gathering his harvest; dunging his fields; supplying any shortages in his live stock; following him to war and a dozen others. These services were frequently commuted for money payments. One right much prized (and whose service was less frequently commuted) was that of *le droit du seigneur*, which brought to the bed of the Lord of the Manor on the first night of her marriage (if he found her desirable) every bride who lived on the Manor. Whether she were born or bred on the Manor or came from outside to marry a man of the Manor did not affect the right: to the Lord's bed she went on her first night, if he wished to exercise his right; which most did whenever the maid was pretty. Protests were rare: it was the custom. Bridal opposition was rarer. Rarest of all was any violence (verbal or physical) offered to the Lord by the bridegroom. It had happened. Lords of the Manor had on a few occasions been murdered by the young husbands (and at least one had been stabbed in bed by the girl); but the vengeance invariably taken upon all relatives of the murderer was so thorough and so horrifying that it was sufficient to deter all but the most reckless or the most distraught.

Sir Hugh made a good breakfast, eating with appetite and relish four soused mackerel and a cold chicken with a new loaf and much butter and cheese and a pint of ale to wash it down. He proposed to spend the day hawking and it would be many hours before he ate again, perhaps not until the late afternoon, and his stomach was accustomed to huge meals with long periods between.

When the man came to clear away Sir Hugh told him to summon Tom the falconer; and when that functionary came he asked him what birds were in best shape. The falconer, a stalwart good-looking fellow about his master's age, gave him the information and then stood waiting. "Very well," Sir Hugh said, "brine them; be ready to start in half-an-hour; we may not be back till dusk." And then noticing the man's downcast look he added, in a less peremptory, indeed in quite a kindly tone, "What's amiss, Tom?"

"Nothing, sir,"

"Why are you looking like a sick cat?"

" I didn't know I was, sir."

"Well, you are. Aren't you well? "

" Yes, sir, thank you,"

" Then what the devil's the matter with you? Out with it."

" It—it is only—only, sir, that I was to wed to-day."

"H'm. Damned awkward that, isn't it, Tom! "

"Yes, sir—er—no, sir."

" Don't be a hypocrite, man. Don't you want to marry the girl? Who is she? I ought to know but I've forgotten."

The young falconer's face flushed. " It's Jessie, sir, daughter of Richard del Mere."

" Oh, yes. A pretty little maid. How old is she? "

" Fifteen, sir."

" High time she was wed. So you want to marry her? "

" Yes, sir."

" Much? "

" With all my heart, sir," again flushing.

" And to-day? "

"O no, sir! Of course not, sir; it was only——"

" Dry up, Tom. You've been waiting for this day for years. Isn't that so? "

" Yes, sir," his eyes shining.

Sir Hugh fingered his lower lip, a trick of his. " Am I going to put off my day's hawking or are you going to put off the wedding: which is it to be? "

" It's for you to say, sir."

" Not at all, Tom," with a smile; " it's for the lady; bring her to me,"

The young falconer, as he went to fetch his sweetheart, felt no uneasiness with regard to his master, for not once had Sir Hugh exercised *le droit du seigneur* and it was indeed said that he disliked women and had never had carnal knowledge of one. Jessie, a beautiful young girl, small, slender, with dark hair and an olive skin, was equally unperturbed at the summons; and they came back together very happily, quite sure that their wedding would take place that morning and that the night would find them in each other's arms.

As they entered the room Sir Hugh looked up and his glance at the girl was longer and more obviously appreciative than might have been expected in one who disliked her sex. " Well, Jessie,"

he said, " Tom tells me the two of you are prbposing to get married to-day. Is that true? "

" Yes, sir."

" Do you love him? "

" Yes, sir."

" Much? "

" With all my heart, sir."

" H'm. That's what he said. But look here, Jessie, I want to go hawking to-day. Now which is it to be: are you to miss your wedding or I my hawking? "

His smile encouraged the girl and she said softly: " You your hawking, if it please you, sir."

" Good! That's better than Tom. He pretended he wouldn't mind putting off this marriage in the slightest although while he was saying so he was looking like a sick cat. Well, it does please me, Jessie. You shan't miss your marriage. Come here."

She came over to him and he stood up and taking her chin between his finger and thumb he turned her face to the window. " A very pretty bride you'll make," he said, and on a sudden impulse stooped and kissed her mouth. The kiss stirred him. He could number the kisses he had given to maids on the fingers of one hand and not one had stirred him like this. He felt his heart quicken its beat and again he stooped and kissed her mouth. And incontinently, and for the first time in his life, desire seized him. " You have my permission to marry to-day," he said, his glance going from one to the other; and then, looking warmly into the girl's eyes, he said, using the customary formal phrase when *le droit du seigneur* was being exercised: " You will sup with me to-night, my dear."

Such suppers were no mere formalities, ordinary affairs; they were true bridal feasts; except that, unlike the feast which had already been held many hours earlier, there were no guests and the Lord replaced the bridegroom. And a true bridal feast Sir Hugh proposed to make it. He would choose the food and drink himself; after the feast they would have the minstrels in and they should sing some of his own love songs; for this strange young man who had never loved a woman had written many passionate love poems, set them to melodies, and they were much sung by the minstrels and the jongleurs of Suffolk.

It was a pleasant little feast and after a time quite a merry one.

Jessie was less disconsolate than might have been expected. While she drank very little wine, demurely excusing herself as not liking strong liquors, Sir Hugh drank deeply; an unusual indulgence for him which fired his blood and ever and again set his eyes desirously upon the young girl beside him.

One of the minstrels had just finished singing the old French alba telling the tale of two lovers in an orchard under a May moon and Sir Hugh was about to dismiss the entertainers and declare the feast ended when there was a great noise and disturbance outside and his steward entered with many apologies and said that the King had come and desired lodging for the night for himself and for the two squires and three grooms who accompanied him. And on the steward's heels, before Sir Hugh could muster his rather bemused wits to take charge of the situation, the King entered. He was ruddy faced tall and broad, dwarfing Sir Hugh, who hastened to meet him, bowing low and craving pardon for the poorness of the hospitality he could offer.

The King laughed and allowed himself to be led to a couch, "This all seems pretty cosy," he said; "I will sup here." And then he added: "I trust I do not interrupt a bridal."

Sir Hugh explained and presented Jessie to the King, whose eyes twinkled as he pinched her cheek and bade her sit beside him and hold his wine cup.

There was more than a twinkle in the King's eyes: there was warm admiration. A King too was not without his rights and privileges and these were paramount. At any house where he lodged his bedfellow was the host's wife. There was no resentment from the ladies at this service: far from it: the chronicles record that where the service was declined they were deeply chagrined. One may conjecture that kings chose their lodgings with considerable care.

That night Jessie slept in the King's bed and there were two forlorn and dejected young men in the Manor of Saxham Parva. The good old days! Life was fun then for the privileged. It still is. But not quite to the same extent: whether this is to be considered progress or retrogression depends upon the point of view.

IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS

MR. AND MRS. HERBERT TONKS sat at late tea on Saturday afternoon. The tea was late because Mr. Tonks was only just back from Corley where he had been to see his team, the famous Corley United, play the almost equally famous Manton City. Corley was twelve miles from the village of Seton where the Tonkses lived (Mr. Tonks being a hedger-and-ditcher in the employ of the East Loamshire U.D.C.), and he had used his pedal cycle as being the cheapest means of conveyance. That expense may be measured in terms of discomfort as well as of money was certainly impressed upon Mr. Tonks that afternoon, for he punctured when five miles from home (and much the same distance from anywhere); it was raining heavily; and he discovered that someone had borrowed his repair outfit.

He was then in no jovial mood when just before six, with dusk falling fast (but not so fast as the rain), he thrust his cycle into the shed at the bottom of the back-garden and clumped into the kitchen where there was a bright fire and an attractive smell of bloaters.

One glance at his face changed his wife's intended reference to kitchens and pigstyes into, "Oh. Bert, you *are* wet! "

"Well, it's raining," he replied, standing in front of the fire and holding his soaked trousers to the blaze.

She knew the danger and futility of suggesting a change and so said nothing.

After some minutes of sticky discomfort he said, "I think I'll change."

She glanced at his muddy boots and sodden clothes. "Wouldn't it be more comfortable if you changed down here?" she said diplomatically; "I'll bring your things down."

He was now emptying his pockets on to a chair. "P'raps it will," he said. And then, "I'm not going to put on a clean shirt. Bring down my nightshirt and I'll wear that."

"Won't it be bunchy, dear? "

"Not if I wear your dad's trousers. Bring them. Lucky he was big.-

"Poor dad. It was that what killed him. And of course the

drink made him fat, so you might say it was a sort——"

" Oh, cheese it! 'ml going to stand here till I'm cooked. Beer won't never kill me. anyway; don't get enough of it. Put a jerk in it with them duds. Hope you've got me more'n one bloater."

"There's two, dear—big ones."

" And I can do with 'em." He watched his wife close the stair-case door behind her and as he heard her moving busily about in the room overhead his glance went meditatively to the heap of wet clothing on the hearthrug. A rotten day it had been what with one thing and another; first Corley go and lose on their own ground; a thing they hadn't done against Manton City for as many seasons as he could remember. Messed up his pool that had. And then the rain and the puncture. He turned the clothes over with his toe. Take hours to dry they would. Meant he couldn't go along to the *Beehive* to-night. Worst of having only one lot o' clothes besides your Sunday's. Pity the old cock's duds were so big. Couldn't go along to the *Beehive* in them. And a nightshirt. My oath! He wouldn't wear his Sunday's. Lots o' chaps did for Saturday nights but he didn't hold with it. Not to go to the *Beehive* in. Things got upset. Well, he'd have to stay at home that's all. Damn all. Only evening he ever went to the *Beehive*. Couldn't afford any more. Thirty-eight bob a week. Blinkin' starvation wage. Bet they were featherin' their nests up at the Council. Well, it was a good job they hadn't any kids. There was poor old Fred with five. What a life I Never a blinkin' drink and only ten Players a week. He was a bit better off 'n poor old Fred. He could have his two pints Saturday nights and his two ounces o' shag a week—this Empire stuff wasn't bad—only it went quick if you didn't keep it damp with a bit o' tater in your pouch——He found himself getting drowsy in the warmth of the fire and was about to shout to his wife when he heard her coming down the stairs.

Ten minutes later he drew his chair up to the table, took a huge bite out of a thick slice of bread and butter, which he was on the point of washing down with a gulp of tea before starting on one of the bloaters, when the double-knock of the postman sounded on the front door.

" I'll go," his wife said, jumping up.

" That's a fact, you will. Wouldn't get up for the Archbishop o' Canterbury. No letter-box. Nice state of affairs. Perishing

Council houses! Who's it from? " as his wife returned holding up a damp and smudged envelope with a black border.

"Mum."

"Wonder what she wants," He spat out some bones into the fire. "Perhaps she's sending us some of the old cock's dough."

"Not Mum."

"Well," impatiently, "what's she say?"

"I've not finished yet."

"Read the blinkin' thing out."

"Oh, Bert! "

"What? Cor blinkin' bli——"

"Listen. Listen. No," pushing it towards him, "you read it,"

"How can I read it with m' hands like this."

"All right. My dear Alice, I hope you are getting along with the spring cleaning and Bertie's stomach is better isn't the weather dreadful now my dear I've got something to say to you both something I've been thinking about ever since your poor father died I don't suppose it will be long before I follow him I know sixty isn't old but we're not long lived your Gran died at sixty and her mother was only fifty but of course people weren't so healthy then what with all the cesspools and no drains and the smallpox and things well my dears what I mean is I'm not perhaps long for this world and while your poor father left me enough to live on by myself I don't feel I want to live by myself I feel I'd like to spend my last year or two if I'm spared so long with the only flesh and blood I've got now my dear Alice so perhaps you and Bertie will talk it over and let me know what you think of course I will pay whatever you want the money doesn't matter and of course what I have will be yours when I'm gone so if you'll let me know by return I have to give a quarter's notice for the house here that was all your poor father's doing and I could then come to you at the-end of June which would suit me very nicely the country will be looking lovely by then already my little things are coming up in the garden I think I shall sell all my furniture and things that would be best don't you think I'm sure you've no room for them but of course if there's anything you remember and fancy I could bring it with me I remember you used to think a lot of that big blue vase that stood on the dresser in the parlour I've put it away for some time now but it's not cracked or anything and I'd be pleased for you to have it so good-

bye my dear and don't forget to write by return your loving mother."

"Blinkin' blimey! " Bert commented, "she's an old cup o' tea, she is. Blue vase an' all. What's it made of, gold? "

"Well, of course, we couldn't have her things here; we've no room."

" You're going to have her then? "

" It's for you to say, dear."

"Thankee! Ah." He gulped down some tea and wiped his mouth with his hand. "Wants a bit o' thinking about."

" Yes, dear—but Mum wants to know by return."

"Chuck it! She always talks like that. Any old how it can't be done. Tomorrow's Sunday."

"But we ought t' make up our minds."

" Got t' talk it over first, haven't we. Well, what d'you think? "

" I'm all she's got now."

"No fear you ain't. She's got, well, how much *has* she got? "

" I don't know, Bert. It must be enough to live on and a bit over, for Dad didn't do any work for years before he died. That's what killed him, that and the dri——"

" Aw, put a sock in it! It's work what kills. Look how long the rich live. And do they drink? Not 'alf they don't. But if the old cock did nowt for years he must have spent most of his savings. Boozing as he did an' all. How d'you know your Mum's got anything? We can't afford to keep her. Her appetite 's as big as his thirst was and that's saying something."

" Well, I do know something about that. Dad always said he reckoned he'd see seventy-five and he'd made his arrangements accordin'."

" Perhaps he was counting in the old age pension."

"Fat lot o' good that would a' been. He spent that Saturday nights."

" Not if anyone was with him." Darkly, " I remember first time we went to see them after we was married and we went out——"

"Well, he's dead now," interrupted Alice, who had heard the tale ad nauseam; " don't speak nothing but good o' the dead's not a bad plan, Bert."

" You're right. Saves mentionin' 'em. Well, what about it? You was saying about his savings? "

"I said Dad was reckoning to live till he was over seventy and you know as well as I do he was a good business man and fond of comfort. He wasn't going to ran out o' money an' have to depend on charity. So I'm sure he'd saved enough to last till he died."

"An' the devil take your Mum, eh? "

"Mum wasn't likely to outlive him."

"She has, any old how."

"Not if he'd lived till seventy-five. He was only sixty-three."

"What's sixty-three from seventy-five? Eleven. 'Well, say ten. Now from what I saw of your old man they didn't live on much less 'n four quid a week. That's how much a year? Give us a bit o' paper."

"Four fives are twenty."

"What? Twenty quid. Don't be silly. It must be more'n that. This'll do." There was a long pause. "Two blinkin' hundred, you mean. Two hundred a year they must 've been spending. The old soak. Fair makes you sick, don't it! And ten years. What's that? "

"Ten twos are twenty,"

"Aw, shut up! You make every blinkin' answer twenty. You left school too soon. In the twice times. Now just a minute. Two thousand I make it. 'Ere! it can't be that. Two — thousand — quid! " very slowly, with almost awe in his voice. He scanned the figures again. "B' jeeze! it is. That means your Mum's got a couple o' thousand quid."

"An' the furniture. That ought t' fetch another hundred. What d'you think, Bert? "

"Think I Cheese it. Don't need thinkin' about. You set right down now, never mind the blinkin' tea things, and tell Mum she'll she'll be as welcome as — as — as a pint after a kipper. Now go on."

"There's no hurry, Bert. Won't go till Sunday night now."

"You get on with it. And then you hop out and post it and while you're out, as you've got to go out, you can bring me back a jug o' mild and bitter. Two blinkin' thousand! An' take a big jug."

Mrs. Banks arrived during the early afternoon of the last Saturday in June. It had been arranged that she should pay ten

shillings a week. To do her justice she had been willing to pay more and was prepared to offer eleven. But her daughter and son-in-law were firm. "We don't want to make money out of you, Ma," Ben had written; "you just pay for your food. If I were earning better money I wouldn't take that."

The day of her arrival was warm and bright, but it was rendered none the brighter in Bert's eyes by Mrs. Banks's excessively sprightly and almost youthful appearance. As he suffered her embrace his mind was busy with a proportion sum whose known terms were ten shillings a week and his mother-in-law's appetite; another term hovered problematically between a thousand and two thousand pounds; and X, the unknown quantity, represented the expectation of life of Mrs. Banks. In her son-in-law's mood at that moment X was assuming a figure which would in that distant future have brought newspaper men flocking to Seton from all over the kingdom. Mrs. Banks had brought the blue vase with her. "You might have had anything you'd a fancy to, my dear," she said to Alice; "you'd only to say. But there!" looking round at the congested little parlour in which, to pay honour to the occasion, they were to take tea that afternoon, "you wouldn't 've had room for anything, so it's all for the best. Although some of the things went for next to nothing. Something chronic it is the way they cheat you. And how's the stomach, Bertie?"

"'S all right, thanks."

"You're too thin, my boy; you want to put on flesh then you wouldn't feel your stomach, Doctor Beevers told me fat round the stomach 's the best thing you can have. Sort of acts as a cushion. I never had stomach pains and nor did your poor father-in-law and we weighed thirty stone between us. Not that I hold with too much fat. I like a little gentle exercise and now I've come to live in the country I'm going to have some nice walks."

Nice walks were not the only things Mrs. Banks was soon having. She quickly made friends in the village and then began to throw little parties which she held in the parlour. It was true that the guests rarely numbered more than four; true also that she brought in extras such as ham, brawn, sausages and cakes. But four large and hungry women (and Mrs. Banks's preference in friends ran towards those of her own comfortable build) can eat a lot of bread and butter and drink a great deal of tea; and then

there was the extra work and a certain amount of waiting to be done by Alice. A suggestion put forward tentatively by Mrs. Banks that Bert might like to hand things round had been withdrawn long before Mrs. Tonks's complexion had resumed its normal shade.

She also began to gallivant, making frequent trips to Corley, Manton, Clopton and Brayford, from which she either returned loaded with purchases or they followed her a day or so later by rail or post. Most of these purchases were articles of apparel. Mrs. Banks was becoming decidedly dressy. Alice was not forgotten and acquired several gaudy overalls, nor was Bert entirely left out in the cold, for while the cardigan she bought him would have been a loose fit for the late Mr. Banks he succeeded in flogging it for a couple of pints at the *Beehive* to Dicky Small who said his wife would unravel it and make socks for all the family out of the wool. It was found later in the Small's dustbin and neighbours spoke with relish of a row which had kept them awake in strained attention far into the night.

But all Mrs. Banks's jaunts were not for shopping. Many of them were made solely for pleasure and there were few charabanc trips that summer starting from Peall's garage that did not include her among the sightseers. With the coming of autumn and winter she had to seek more indoor recreation, and three times a week she went by 'bus to the cinema at Cooktown, while on at least one other evening, but more frequently two, she gave one of her parties to her increasingly affectionate little circle of cronies.

She was now a rich and fruitful topic of conversation not only in the Tonks's house but in most of the other houses in the village. Opinions upon her were as varied as 'An old corker', 'a jolly cup o' tea', 'a flighty old baggage', 'an overdressed old cat' and 'a deplorable gadabout' (this last being said by the vicar's wife); but if opinions were varied there was one question and one only which was debated as often as the weather: how much was she worth? And, of course, as a corollary: would she leave it all to the Tonkses?

But before the winter was over, in fact before they were a week into December Mrs. Banks was beginning to entertain to tea quite regularly another besides her plump cronies; hardly the sort of person one would have expected in the way of build, for Mr. Harry Johnson, ex-railway guard and bachelor, living on his small

but just adequate pension, was short and wizened, with a slight stoop, pale blue eyes, and a grizzled goatee.

No-one except the two themselves knew just how the thing had come about but the village found it very much to its taste and it was so much talked about that it was impossible for Mr. or Mrs. Tonks or either of the lovers (for Seton had no doubts about Mr. Johnson's status) to enter a shop without causing a significant and embarrassing hush among the other shoppers.

When Alice had first commented upon the new guest in his aspect of lover Bert had been derisively incredulous. "Chuck it! Ally," he said; "why, old Johnson's got one leg in the grave and must be seventy."

"He's sixty-eight. I don't think it's decent at their age,"

"Don't be a fool. You're like all women. You've got marriage on the brain."

"How many times has he been to tea in the last week? Three, isn't it? Well, what d'you think he comes for?"

"A good blow-out."

"Does he? Have you seen Mum's face when she's been handing him a cup o' tea or his third bit o' cake? Well, I have. And I've seen him holding her hand. If you don't see his game you're the only one in the village that doesn't."

"By Gor! if I thought so——"

"Well, you'd better begin to think so."

"I'll go round and see him and tell him I won't have it."

"Fat lot o' good that'll do."

"Then you'd better tell your Mum so."

"It's no good talking like that. We've got to find some way out but making a fuss isn't the way."

"What about buying her a bicycle for a Christmas present?"

"Buying her a bicycle?" with slow bewilderment; "'Ve you gone out of your mind? A bicycle at her age. And weight. And what for, anyhow?"

"Bigger women 'n her ride bikes and older. And didn't she say when she come first she meant to take more exercise."

"I can see her doing it. Don't be a fool. And look how dangerous it would be with the roads like they are these days."

"That's what I *am* looking at."

"Bert! that's wicked."

"Wicked, is it! And what about her? Eats us out o' house an'

home for six months, has you waitin' on her hand an' foot, and then goes an' cheats us out of our rights."

"Anyhow she wouldn't ride it." Slowly and bitterly, "he wouldn't let her."

Bert clenched his fists. "Gor! " he said between his teeth.

With the coming of spring Mrs. Banks renewed her gallivantings. But now she had a cavalier. Shopping with a man in attendance, even if so poor a specimen as Mr. Johnson, was vastly more pleasant than solitary buying. And charabanc trips took on a keener joy with the ex-guard as companion, guide and expositor, a joy she considered cheap at the price of the extra ticket and refreshments. She insisted upon paying for everything. "No, Henry," she had said when these trips began (and it had been necessary to say it once only), "it's my treat. I like to pay for us both. I've plenty and life's short and we never know what's going to happen to us."

And so all through the spring and summer the romance went along upon happy tripping feet (figuratively speaking) to the conclusion upon which the sporting men of the village had long since arranged a shilling sweep, the winner to be the one drawing the date upon which the wedding took place. When the organiser asked Bert if he'd take a ticket the village might have enjoyed (as an *hors d'œuvre* to the real affair) a good old-fashioned up-and-downcr, as the phrase has it in these parts, had not that enterprising sportsman been the village blacksmith. When that same gentleman drew July the fifteenth, which proved to be the date, he won three pounds eighteen shillings but he lost a family reputation for probity which had endured for three generations.

The happy couple went for a fortnight's honeymoon to Burley-on-Sea and returned looking very bronzed and well and, in Mrs. Johnson's case, quite ten years younger.

At nine o'clock on the evening of August the first there was a loud knock at the door of the Tonks's cottage. Alice answered it and returned to Bert, smoking his pipe as he made out his pool form, and said, "It's Mr. Johnson; he says he's got to see you."

"Tell him to sling his hook or there'll be murder done," Bert said, without looking up.

"You tell him."

"What d'you mean you tell him? "

" Well, he looks ill."

" He'll look worse if I start on him. Rlinkin' blimey ! he's knock-in' again." He got up slowly. " Taking advantage of his grey hairs the old—" he said. " Well, I'll see him."

He returned after a few moments, followed by Mr. Johnson, who took a seat without being invited and then snarled, " Oh, very clever, Mr. Tonks! Oh, very clever! but it won't work, see? "

"What won't work?"

"You know what I'm talking about."

" Glad to hear it."

"What 're you going to do about it, *that's* what I want to know?"

" Aw! shut up, Henry Johnson. I tell you I don't know what you're talking about." With a grin. " Mrs. Johnson been trimming you? "

Mr. Johnson stood up and leaned across the table. " You know as well as I do that your mother-in-law hasn't got a penny to bless herself with."

"Cheese it ! "

" Perhaps you've taken it," Alice said coldly.

Mr. Johnson's face flamed. " Swindling's the word," he snarled; "swindling; like it or not."

The truth, or some inkling of it, seeped into Mr. Tonks's mind. He leaned back in his chair. "D'you mean to say the old girl's broke? " he said.

" I mean to say she hasn't a penny piece to her name. She told me so herself only an hour ago. Asked me for a pound. Said it was now my turn as she'd spent all the three hundred pounds she had when she came here. Changed the last note the day we left Burley."

" Strewth! " Bert guffawed, and crashed his fist upon the table.

" What 're you going to do about it? "

" Are you asking me to interfere between a man and his wife, Henry? You ought to know better 'n that."

" I'm asking you——"

"All right, Mr. Johnson," Alice put in quietly; "we'll do our share."

" Glad to hear it."

Alice went out of the room and returned a moment later carrying the blue vase. Her lips were twitching. " We didn't give you

a wedding present," she said softly, "so well give you one now." And she placed it on the table in front of him.

He swept his arm round and crashed it to the floor; and as Bert rose and came towards him he turned and shot out of the room and a moment later they heard the front door slam behind him.

IN A DEVON VILLAGE

IT'S QUEER the things people will do. In fact my experience of life suggests that there's nothing conceivable by the human mind, and possible of performance, that some human being won't do. In other words, some people will stick at nothing to further their own ends; and the most unexpected people too. You just can't predict about human nature. I know that has been said before but a truth sheds more light by repetition: the more you rub brass the more it shines.

With forty years at sea behind me it will be supposed that I have seen some queer happenings and could tell some queer tales. Far from it: looking back now at my years afloat they seem in retrospect calm unruffled and so little variegated by the unusual as to have been almost monotonous. I went to sea as an apprentice when I was fifteen. It was in the *Vega*, the smallest ship of the famous Star Line: she was 5,000 tons. By the time I was twenty-one I held a master's ticket and was fifth officer of the *Sirius*, 20,000 tons, and holder of the Atlantic record for three years: till she lost it to her sister ship the *Hesperus*. At thirty-five I was captain of the famous *Arcturus*, 27,000 tons and the Line's crack ship. I was Commodore of the Line for over ten years, when I retired after taking the 40,000 ton *Capella* on her maiden voyage and regaining for us the Blue Riband. And in those forty years I had, as I say, seen nothing that unduly stirs my memory. Odd little things occasionally, yes. There was the shark, caught on my first voyage, which was opened and in the maw was a pair of women's slippers. But sharks will swallow anything: even the stories told about them. No, the queerest thing I remember happened after I'd retired. I mean queer as an example of the sort of things people will do. And I do not think there can be two opinions about what happened.

I had never married; I had always been of a saving disposition; and I had made several profitable investments: the captain of a crack liner gets many financial tips, not all of them, I confess, as sound as mine proved to be. When therefore the time came for me to leave the sea I was very comfortably off. Not rich, you understand; not by a landsman's standards; but, well, cosy is the word that best fits my situation. And I was still a year or two on the right side of sixty. I proposed to enjoy life: in my own way. I had had it all planned and arranged for years and I proceeded according to plan. And that was how I came to CoomLe, that lovely Devon village; and how I came to be the owner of *Ivy Cottage*, where I lived with the utmost content, extremely well looked after by my manservant Tom Saunders. A local boy, Ernie Senter, came in to help with the chores. We had no women in the place. I did all the gardening: one man's job I can assure you for there were four acres of land, if you include the apple orchard.

Quite soon after I came to Coombe I became on the friendliest terms with Colonel Lesueur who lived in the only sizeable house in the village, *The Firs*. He was a man of considerable wealth, a widower, childless, and some ten years my senior. His habit of life was very unpretentious and he kept only a small staff of servants. Living with him was his nephew and heir Dick Lesueur, then a boy of sixteen and mostly away at his school, Selborne. Colonel Lesueur and I found we had much in common. We were both enthusiastic gardeners; we were keen chess players; we detested golf; and we were passionately fond of music: I had a collection of over fifteen hundred records (it had been my one extravagance) and his must have approached ten thousand. We spent a great deal of time very happily together, sometimes at *Ivy Cottage* but more frequently at *The Firs*. He kept a good table and with his cellar was able to entertain in a way beyond my means and indeed, to be frank, beyond my knowledge. But he was quite as happy at my little place with a chop or a steak and whisky and soda as he was at his more varied and elaborate table.

The years rolled slowly along very contentedly. Young Dick Lesueur left Selborne and went up to Trinity where he stayed four years without taking a degree but enjoying life very much. He was a likeable young fellow and I got on very well with him. His hobby was painting, and later, when he came down from Cambridge, he made it his occupation; profession would perhaps hardly

be the word, although it certainly was in a way his profession, for he was no mere dabbling amateur but had already had two or three pictures- accepted by the Academy and quite a number shown at foreign exhibitions. He had his own suite of apartments at *The Firs* and had knocked out the dividing wall between two of the rooms to make a studio.

Shortly after he came down from Cambridge he made the acquaintance in London of a young woman named Avis Brent who lived in St. James's with her mother, the widow of Sir Arthur Brent who had been a Crown Agent for the Colonies and had died leaving them in rather straitened circumstances. Some time later Avis Brent came to spend a short holiday at *The Firs* and proved herself an extremely pleasant young person. Colonel Lesueur obviously liked her and I thought her charming and both of us considered Dick a very lucky young man: they were obviously very much in love.

During the next year or eighteen months Avis spent quite a lot of time at *The Firs* and I was expecting to have news of their approaching wedding when something quite sensational happened. The Colonel and Dick had a violent quarrel. I never learned precisely what it was all about but I gathered that it had begun with some quite mild political discussion which had quickly become a violent explosion. Colonel Lesueur was, like myself, a Tory and Dick was, in common with many young men from the Universities, especially those moving in artistic circles, what is called Left in his views. Nothing here to quarrel about one might think. It is after all the immemorial way of young men to think and talk that way; a sort of rash of youth; but they soon shed such things and settle into sensible members of the community. But perhaps there was more in the quarrel than mere political differences. I do not know. But it was certainly a violent quarrel; violent enough for Dick to take himself off and the Colonel to declare that he would never speak to him again and that he would leave all his money to charities.

It might be thought that Dick would have gone to London to live, where he would have been more in touch with the artistic world and where too he would have been with his fiancée. But he did nothing of the sort. Now I come to think of it he rarely did what was expected of him. He did not leave Coombe but rented furnished *Rose Cottage*, which then chanced to be unoccu-

pied, and settled down there very happily it seemed with his paints and his rod and his golf clubs. He wasn't short of money; not at first; and as soon as he was comfortably in, and the village had got over the shock, things seemed much the same as ever, except that there was no intercourse between uncle and nephew. I saw no reason why I should not remain on good terms with Dick and frequently spent an hour or so at his cottage. I made no attempt to keep these visits from the Colonel who apparently did not disapprove. And so of course I was in a way a son of link between them and I was not without the hope that one day I might bring about their reconciliation. It was never I think anything more than a slight hope, its slightness always the more apparent whenever the Colonel had occasion to mention his nephew, which was not often but was invariably with bitter resentment. I remember his telling me one day that when he had told Dick he intended to disinherit him the 'insolent young puppy' had informed him that he would have to be very careful how he left his money for wills that were unconscionable could now be set aside solely upon that plea. "I told him," the Colonel said, his eyes glinting angrily, "that he need have no hopes I should make such a fool of myself. The will would not be unconscionable but there would be no penny in it for him."

Soon after Dick went to *Rose Cottage* Avis came down to Coombe again. She could not of course stay at either the cottage or at *The Firs* and so went to *The Plume of Feathers*. But during the month she was in the village she paid several visits to *The Firs* and was hospitably entertained by the Colonel. Dick apparently offered no objection to these visits and in fact it was common talk and belief in the village (and in this I shared) that Dick was hoping Avis would effect a reconciliation. This was of course just gossip; no one had anything to go on and certainly Dick's attitude was by no means conciliatory. Perhaps the story rested on the flimsy foundation that Dick, according to some busybodies, was getting tight for money. It may have been true. I know his pictures brought him very little for I remember his telling me, to my utmost astonishment, that of the five pictures he had had exhibited at the Academy (and one was on the line) he sold one for eighty pounds, one for sixty, one for forty-five, and the other two remained unsold. So, as I say, it may have been true; or just village gossip.

During the next year Avis spent much of her time at Coombe and at Christmas was there for well over six weeks. Everyone of course began to wonder when they were going to be married and whether they would stay on in Coombe afterwards. But nothing was heard about the marriage coming off and I think most of us began to conclude that they simply couldn't afford it.

And then the village had its second shock in the affair: Avis Brent was going to marry Colonel Lesueur. This was no village rumour for the Colonel told me himself and added, shooting me a quick glance: "I suppose you're thinking I'm an old fool."

"May with December," I said, "is traditionally supposed to be a foolish match; but it is the concern after all of the two parties and no one else's business. I see no reason why a man should not take what the gods offer him. It may shorten his life, like any other indulgence, but pleasure always has to be paid for and if one is prepared to pay the price it is an impertinence for anyone else to poke their oar in whether with advice or reproof." Yes, sententious twaddle, I know; but it was all I could think to say on the spur of the moment, for the Colonel's news took the wind out of my sails and left me yawing. It seemed an incredible thing to happen. Apart from anything else he was in the late seventies and she in the earliest twenties. Throughout human history, it is true, old men have, from kings downwards, taken young maidens to their beds; but the practice has always seemed to me disgusting: now one can't tell an old friend he is being disgusting and so, in my agitation, I was reduced to mere blethering.

They went up to London for the marriage and everyone expected that Dick would clear out of Coombe before the 'happy couple' returned from their honeymoon. But he did nothing of the sort: he just stayed on as if nothing had happened, ambling along the lanes pipe in mouth carrying his easel and paints, or his rod, or his golf clubs; and showing no signs of any feeling at all in the matter; facing it out so admirably and imperturbably that before Colonel and Mrs. Lesueur had been back in Coombe a month the village had almost ceased to find anything queer in the affair and had certainly ceased to discuss it.

There was of course a mild revival of interest when young Mrs. Lesueur and Dick were seen strolling down the street together, laughing and talking easily, gaily, and with the utmost unselfconsciousness; but it was realised that this was after all the

obvious and most sensible thing to do; and even when during the following months she occasionally called at *Rose Cottage* it seemed no more than natural and all of a piece with the rest of the sensible behaviour of all concerned. There was - a certain amount of speculation as to whether Dick might now become reconciled with his uncle but as time went by and this did not happen people ceased bothering their heads and in fact soon forgot all about it.

About a year after the marriage Avis presented the Colonel with a son and heir and his pleasure and pride, especially his pride, were so obviously apparent that he positively seemed to glow. Something of an exaggeration perhaps but he really did seem visibly to radiate his happiness. It was a short lived happiness, for he died before the boy was six months old.

And what food there was then for gossip! What would happen now? It was soon clear enough: before my old friend's body had been a month in the family vault Dick and the young widow were consorting together and so brazenly that it required less than half an eye to recognize what that association was.

And they carried their brazenness and their indifference to public opinion to the length of getting married that September, a bare six months after Colonel Lesueur's death. We did not expect them back after the honeymoon, imagining they would find it on all counts more agreeable to live in London; but once again expectation was falsified by the event and back they came to Coombe and settled down at *The Firs*. And there, something under a year later, Dick's second son was born to him. For it had been plain enough to everyone that the first born was also his; plain that is to everyone but the Colonel, so fatuously blind are old men in their dotage.

You see, I hope, what I mean by queer. For quite clearly the whole thing was a planned affair between Dick and Avis: and if such a course of conduct on the part of two young people who are lovers is not queer, then words have no meaning. Queer for English people, you understand. Foreigners, the Eastern races especially, are addicted to the most astonishing practices and have habits and customs one hardly likes to mention; but for two English people . . . surely queer is the only word; and that is putting it kindly.

INDIGNATION OF MRS. PARADOCK

'TALK ABOUT winder-cleaners an' what they see," said Mrs. Paradock; "it's nothing to what we see. When you char for a family they've got no secrets from you; nothing's hid; and if it is you soon find it.

"The things we see and the things we hear you wouldn't believe. I could tell you more funny things about this neighbourhood but it's coming too near home like, isn't it, and name no names and you'll break no winders.

"But I've been in some houses in my time. There was a doctor's. Married man with five children, three away at school. Temper! The way he'd rort on. And tantrums. An' his 'wife was as bad. Stand and slap each other's faces they would. And the language! And never cared who heard. He never cared what he said and did in the house. Went about buttoned-up or unbuttoned, he didn't care. And table-manners. The things he'd do with his false teeth. And the things doctors tell you to do! Chew your food, don't drink with your mouth full and all the rest of it. Why he never chewed anything. Proper bolter he was. An' if it couldn't go down washed it down with a gollop of tea or beer or something. An' let the children eat anyhow. An' winders! If he saw a winder open he went off like a gun. Said there was enough air outside.

"Reminded me of a schoolmaster's house I used to go to. He was a cup of tea if you like. There was on'y him and his wife and they was always quarrelling. You never heard anything like his language. He had false teeth too an' was always taking them out an' putting them down and forgetting them. He was a nailer too for money. Made his wife put down every penny in a book. An' he mended the boots an' shoes hisself. They 'ad a dog but they never bought anything for it; used to send it round to the neighbours hunting for scraps and bones.

"But *he* wasn't such a nailer as a bank-manager where I used to go. Talk about a cheese-parer! Very dressy man he was outside and liked his cigar and went about a lot. Such a nice man. Own pew in the church an' all. But at tome! You wouldn't believe it. The things he wore about the house. All to pieces.

They weren't even decent. And he kept a tight 'old on everything. Wouldn't allow any fires except in the kidgin till seven o'clock in the evening no matter what the weather. And he doled out the coal and kept the coal-house locked and the key in his pocket. An' he wouldn't have a scrap of anything wasted. He'd a wife an' two children, twin girls they was about ten; and his mother living with them, an' what wasn't eaten at one meal had to be eaten at the next. They had marg' instead of butter, scrag joints, an' streaky bacon; all the cheapest stuff you could buy. He once caught one of the little girls putting a few bits o' bread out for the birds. You'd 'a thought she'd been robbing his bank. Couldn't stop her pocket money 'cause they never had any. Know what he did? Fined her half-a-crown and docked it off 'er birthday present. But when they 'ad friends round in the evening! Dinner they called it then, though it was supper other nights. I used to come round to help in the kidgin. Best of everything then. Sirloin an' chickens an' wine an' all dressed up to the nines. An' after they'd all gone he'd cry. I'm not kidding. Cry. Real crying. Because of all they'd et an' drunk. An' for the next week life wouldn't be worth living for the family with 'im watching every mouthful.

" But even he wasn't as stingy as a parson where I once worked. Vicar of, well, no matter. An' he was a rich man. Sent all his children away to posh schools an' kept three maids, a cook a gardener an' a shuvver. An' starved everybody. They was always leaving. 'Cept his wife who couldn't. He spent all day Monday (Mondays being his easy day I s'pose) doling things out to last the week. He had a pair of kidgin scales an' a lot of little bags, an' he worked at it most o' the day. So much butter, so much cheese, so much marg, sugar, salt, pepper an' the rest of it. And he also worked out the bread, milk, meat and bacon, so much for each, 'bout as much as you could get in your eye without noticing it. Sensible rationing he called it and said the Bible showed what could be done with live loaves and two fishes an' working out an' it was a lesson we ought never t'forget. Counting. Always counting he was. Counted lumps of sugar, lumps of coal, pertaters (one per 'ead per day was the ration; 's a fact), candles, matches (used matches 'ad to be kept for fire-lighting); cookie used t'say he counted the currants in her cakes.

" An' he was a rich man. But it don't matter whether you're

rich or not. O' course I wasn't always a char. I been in service in the best families. Real nobs. Right at the top. That's 'ow I met Paradock. First footman he was an' a proper handsome man I'll say that for him. An' we left an' got married an' from that day to the day he died he never done a stroke. I had to work for both. Easy-going he was, I always said. The easy-going sort. Easy going into publics but 'ard coming out. But it was the nobs I was telling you about. Nobs 1 Well, I ask you. You wouldn't believe it. Lords an' ladies an' baronets an' what-nots. The things they say an' do an' eat an' wear when there's nobody about. Table-manners. You wouldn't believe it. Drink out of their saucers. I seen a countess do that. OP lady she was, if you like, but out of her saucer 1 An' blowing it. An' dipping their biscuits in their teacups and rooting round for bits with the spoon. Lords an' ladies and the children too. An' 'abits. Their 'abits. I couldn't tell you some of 'em. Things out o' winders. I knew a baronet what used to stand at an upstairs winder and throw crumbs to the birds on the lawn and then spit at them. He'd stand for hours doing it. You wouldn't think a man 'd have that spit. Cups o' tea they are one an' all, 'igh an' low, wherever you go. It jest shows you doesn't it that we're all of a muchness, all alike, all the same, nobody better'n anybody else," Mrs. Paradock wiped her nose on her apron and gave me a look.

"I see," I said mildly, "that you lean towards the Left, politically speaking."

"Coming up?" which was Mrs. Paradock's quaint phrase to convey incomprehension.

"I mean that you are a—er—Socialist, or perhaps—er—a Communist."

"What me!" indignantly; "not likely I ain't! True Blue I am an' God bless the King an' Queen."

RETURN OF THE BAD BOY

LANDERBY was one of those villages which, if taken up with all its inhabitants by some giant hand and planted down anywhere in the civilized world would have been instantly recognised as

English. There were the four public houses, with their weather-beaten signs swinging over much worn benches; the grey square-towered Norman church surrounded by beeches and elms; the mill and the mill stream with its alders; the Congregational and Methodist chapels; the market-place with its ancient oak-tree, its pump and horse-trough and its sleepy shops; the school with its walled dusty playground; the neat fields and the trimmed hedge-rows; and the piece of common land with a football or cricket match in progress: no other country has their like.

Nor can any other country quite match the inhabitants: Sir Charles Bending, squire, chairman of the council and of the local bench; the Rev. Herbert Lamplough, vicar of St. John's; Mr. Bates, the schoolmaster; Dr. Brown, elderly and conservative; Dr. Smith, young and go-ahead; Mr. Phillips, the dentist; Mr. Mason, the veterinary surgeon; Mr. Sawyer, the chemist; Major Gates and Commander Hoyle, retired from the Services; and Messrs. Brown, Dicker, Snoswell, Peters, Moffatt, butcher, baker, grocer, draper and greengrocer; to say nothing of all sorts of ordinary people who kept the little shops, who were hedgers and ditchers, agricultural labourers, carpenters, mechanics, painters, bricklayers, and so on and so forth; not forgetting Mr. Mark Beasley, the proprietor of the Rialto Cinema which had opened in the same year as this story does: 1928. It should perhaps be added that Landerby was in the North Meadshire Parliamentary Division and had for generations voted Tory almost to a man. Almost. One of the exceptions was Tom Watson, the shoemaker.

Tom Watson was something of a thorn in Landerby's flesh. It was not that he drank or was given to moral laxity; far from it; he was a teetotaler, a nonsmoker, and (a widower of some years standing) so confirmed and vocal a misogynist that his consorting with women was too preposterous a notion to be entertained even by Landerby. No; the thorn under Landerby's nail (at least under that Landerby nail which was clean and manicured) was Tom Watson's opinions. He was a red and he was an infidel and he refused to keep these opinions to himself; and if he did not shout them from the housetops or 'the market-place he was always ready to parade them before the many customers who came to his little shop. They came there it is true for their boots and shoes to be made or repaired but they also came for advice, Tom being something of an oracle, especially in the matter of those rights

which divers English monarchs have graciously or ungraciously bestowed upon the commonalty.

' There are ways immemorially honoured, of getting rid of such thorns in the flesh, but they have grown more difficult to put into practice since the close of the Victorian era; and the most efficacious of those remaining operative, the economic thumbscrew, was impossible of application to Tom Watson for he was the only shoemaker in Landerby and his workmanship was so good and his charges so reasonable that the boot was very much on the other leg, for few days went by that he had not to turn away custom.

When the unlamented Mrs. Tom Watson died, she left her husband not only many unpleasant memories, but a reminder of her former existence he was unable to ignore: a six year old boy, Harry.

Father and son hit it off astonishingly well considering the gap of a generation between them. They were cronies with a real bond of affection uniting them. They dovetailed well. They needed one another: the man someone on whom to spend that love whose ordinary outlet was denied him; the boy someone to replace the mother; someone to lean upon, to look up to, to play with, to admire.

Naturally enough the boy, hearing daily his father's oracular pronouncements, fiery denunciations of things as they were, and wild prophecies of future earthly paradises to come, began, as children will, to voice similar opinions at play with his friends and to show a rebellious spirit at school. Being more articulate than his fellows and big and strong for his age he soon assumed a position of leadership in all their games and by the time he was eleven was the leader of a Gang which met in a cave behind the brickfield, had secret passwords, signs and grips, and conducted, in season, small poaching expeditions and raids on orchards. They were, in truth, a very well-behaved gang and their depredations did not amount to much but Landerby (or that part of it which exercised authority) regarded the Gang's existence as an affront and kept a sharp eye upon its members and especially upon its leader young Harry Watson whose father's shortcomings they were inclined to visit upon him; and in a very short time the blame for most mishaps misfortunes and inexplicable annoyances in Landerby began to be laid at his door.

Authority decided that it would make an example of this rebel

son of a rebel father. One thorn in the flesh was more than enough; but since they could not punish the major offender they would take it out of the minor: as soon as they could find the opportunity: the difficulty was to bring something actually home to him.

And then, just after he was twelve, young Harry delivered himself over to them. He was passing the vicarage garden and noticing some windfall apples and fancying an apple just then strolled in and helped himself in broad daylight. It might have been a laid trap (were not such a thing unthinkable) judged by the sequence of events, for no sooner had he taken the first bite than the vicar and the gardener appeared strategically between him and retreat and despite his protests that it was only a windfall he was locked in the tool shed and Police Constable Peake sent for.

Here was the chance for the example, and the bench took it, saying, by the voice of Sir Charles Bending, that he was an incorrigible young rogue and a bad influence in the village; sentencing him to six strokes of the birch; and promising to send him to an industrial school if he came before them again. His father, in court, protested so volubly and so loudly at what he shouted was a foul miscarriage of justice that Authority was able to charge him with disorderly conduct and sentence him to a fine of twenty shillings or seven days, thus scoring all round the wicket.

Harry, having received his stripes, which he bore stoically, was taken home by his father who after a high tea of eggs and bacon, cream and strawberry jam, admonished him for his folly and gave him some good advice.

"You were asking for it, my boy," he said, "to do such a daft thing as that. You just handed them on a plate what they've been trying to get for years. Let it be a lesson to you. If you must break the law see you don't get caught. But my advice to you, holding the opinions you do, is never to break the law because if you do and are caught then Authority who cannot punish you for your opinions, will take it out of you hot and strong for your offence against the law, however small. You've just seen (and felt) an example of that: you have been beaten and I fined for offences which would have been ignored in others."

Harry took the advice to heart and profited by it and for nearly two years, was, for all Authority knew to the contrary, a law-abiding young citizen, if one with a voluble critical and

offensive tongue. It was the tongue which was to be his undoing for it asked a question during a lesson on democracy by the headmaster Mr. Bates, which that gentleman considered not only subversive but impertinent; and when the young enquirer sought to justify himself by quoting a dictum of his father the outraged schoolmaster took out a cane and forcibly applied the closure. Infuriated by the punishment the culprit became abusive and in the subsequent affray the flagellator slipped and fell and the flagellated bolted from the room and from the school; and from outside (his wrongs blotting out the memory of his father's counsel) directed a fusilade of stones against the school windows with most satisfactory results.

But the heat and ardour of battle quickly cooled and with the return of normal temperature young Harry faced the hard and unpleasant fact that he had again broken the law and that four years in an industrial school lay ahead if he came before Sir Charles Bending. He decided not to come before the squire and as the only way to achieve this seemed to be by quitting Landerby he did so there and then, not even waiting to tell his father (whom indeed, in the keen realisation of his folly, he was ashamed to face), although as soon as he was able he wrote to him.

Until the time when he ran away from Landerby young Harry Watson had known life only as it manifested itself in that very English village. For what life was like in the world without he had had to depend upon the secondhand experience of books, of school teaching, and of what his father told him. He was now to experience it in person and he found it no bed of roses. Haunted by that threat of four years imprisonment in an industrial school he decided to put as great a distance between himself and the Landerby bench of magistrates as possible; and this decision suggested a move out of the country, which in turn pointed to the only means of doing so: joining a ship. And so, being no more than thirty miles from Bidmouth, he trudged there and was signed on without more than the briefest inquisition by the Captain of the freighter *Mossbank* trading with S. America.

He remained in the merchant service two years, going from ship to ship and finding the conditions everywhere the same; so much so that soon after he was sixteen he decided that he had had more than enough of the sea; and being now a grown man in appearance (and a big one) and quite unrecognisable, he thought, as the boy

who had so hastily quitted the country, he decided to try a spell of work ashore and was taken on as a casual labourer at the docks. During the next eight years he followed many occupations: brick-layer's labourer; van driver; lorry driver; private chauffeur; taxi driver; owner taxi driver, at which he bankrupted himself and had to go back to van driving.

By this time Landerby had almost forgotten him as it had forgotten his father who had been dead several years. And then the War broke out, and one day during 1942 Landerby heard on the radio that a Victoria Cross had been awarded to a Private Harry Watson, of the 1st Loamshires. Landerby was certainly interested but not yet actually excited for after all it might not be their Harry Watson. But the next day's papers carried a photograph of the young soldier which everyone instantly recognised. Among the biographical details under the photograph there was no mention of Landerby but merely the name of the town where he had lived for some years before joining the army; Slagborough in Northumberland. The newspaper account mentioned that Private Harry Watson V.C., was in England on leave, and that after he had received his medal from the King he was proceeding to Slagborough to be entertained by that city and to receive its freedom.

Nothing about Landerby! This was too much, and Landerby was not going to sit down under it. The young hero had been born and bred at Landerby and something would have to be done about it. Forceful people in the village bestirred themselves to some purpose and a letter was sent to Private Harry Watson V.C. (c/o The Mayor of Slagborough) hoping he would honour Landerby with a visit and be its guest for a week. The letter was signed by Sir Charles Bending.

Private Watson replied accepting the invitation and saying he would arrive at the week end. Preparations began at once for his reception and it being high summer Sir Charles Bending suggested that 'the gallant lad' should be met at the station by the Reception Committee, with band, and conducted to the grounds of his house *The Manor* where, after the necessary speeches had been made, all who could crowd in would sit down to a cold collation (with beer) in a big Marquee, with Private Watson V.C. and the Reception Committee on a dais at the far end. After the feast the V.C. would be conducted (again led by the village band)

to *The Royal George* where accommodation had been taken for him.

Everything went as planned. Private Watson, a tremendous fellow with an engaging smile, was obviously delighted with his welcome and when Sir Charles Bending rose to speak leaned forward in his chair with the utmost interest and attention. Sir Charles spoke for some considerable time and in the course of his speech referred to Private Watson as 'this gallant young soldier;' 'this fine young hero;' and 'a son whom Landerby is proud and happy to honour.' The Rev. Herbert Lamplough followed and piled further eulogisms upon the head of the honoured guest; and when it came to Mr. Bates the schoolmaster's turn that gentleman declared it was his proudest thought and would be his proudest memory that Private Harry Watson V.C. had been a pupil at the school of which he had the honour to be headmaster. Various other eminent gentleman and not a few eminent ladies also made speeches; and then the crowd, restive under this spate of trite twaddle, began to roar: *Speech Harry!* and continued to roar it until the hero rose from his chair with a smile and a wave of his hand for silence.

"Friends," he began, when the storm of applause had died away, "I am very happy to be back in Landerby and very proud to receive such a welcome from you. I have been away a long while but it is true to say that not many days went by when I did not think of the place where I was born and I'd only to shut my eyes to see it as plainly as I can see it now. Yes, my friends, I often thought of it. I thought of its green fields and its trees and the stream down by the mill where I often caught tiddlers as a little chap." There was loud and delighted applause at this homely touch, but Private Watson hardly waited for it to subside before continuing: "I thought of the old church among the trees; and the birds building their nests in spring and all the fruit trees in blossom. And I thought of the football and cricket on the Common and I remembered how Ben Adey scored four goals against Chorley and how Sid Potter took nine Hadley wickets for six runs." The applause at this was thunderous; there were cries of 'good old Sid' and 'good old Ben' and the two sportsmen, both of whom were in the crowd, blushed fierily but were plainly delighted at being singled out for mention by Landerby's gallant and famous son.

Private Harry Watson V.C. paused a long moment and allowed his glance to wander from the crowd to the Reception Committee beside him. And then his glance left the Committee and returned to the crowd. He squared his shoulders. He seemed in the last minute to have grown enormously, until he was like some magnificent giant of romance surrounded by pigmies. He cleared his throat.

"And there were other tilings I remembered," he went on; "the time when parson here sent for the police because I took one of his windfall apples. And I remembered how Sir Charles Bending sentenced me to be birched and how Police Constable Peake birched me, laying them on with all his strength and giving me seven instead of six. And there was the thrashing Mr. Bates gave me because I asked him a question. That was the day I ran away."

The silence that had fallen was broken here and there as someone exhaled a gasping breath; but apart from this no sound was to be heard; no sound but the speaker's voice. And towards that big upstanding figure every eye was turned in strained, in fascinated, and in some cases in appalled attention.

"Yes," the even voice went on, "I remembered those things and often I thought of them. I thought of them as I hurried along the road to Bidmouth on that first night away from my home and the father I was never to see again. I thought of them on many a bitter night at sea; and often I thought of them in the years after I had given up the sea and worked ashore. And always when I thought of them I swore that one day I would return to Landerby and pay back in the same coin the people who had done these things to me." His figure seemed to expand to gigantic proportions and his voice rose menacingly. "I would sock them, whatever it cost me; sock them good and plenty." He paused. Such was the utter silence of his auditors that a solitary lark, a mere speck high above their heads, seemed to fill the sky with song.

And then he smiled. "But I have changed my mind. I am going to forget those things and let bygones be bygones. And so, ladies and gentlemen, it only remains for me to thank you again for your welcome and for the kind things you have said about me." And with that Private Harry Watson V.C. resumed his seat.

Round about ten o'clock that night, in the bar of *The Royal*

George surrounded by friends and well-wishers, his voice was heard raised in good-humoured protest:

"No," he was saying, "no more tonight, thanks all the same. My dad was a strict T.T., and so'm I almost. Three pints is my limit. Three pints. That's enough for me. I did have four pints once. About two years ago. Chap persuaded me. And I nearly killed someone. That's how it is with me. Three pints O.K.; four pints and I'm not responsible. So don't none, of you persuade me or I won't be answerable for my actons."

At least one auditor listened to this protest with mixed feelings. It was Mr. Bates the schoolmaster, sitting in a distant corner with a half empty glass of stout before him. For nearly forty years he had called in at *The Royal George* for his nightly glass of Guinness and the habit of years was too strong to be broken; and so he had come tonight despite his fear of an embarrassing encounter with Private Watson. It seemed to him that the hero's remarks were directed at him and an uneasy sensation began to take possession of his mind. He drained his glass, rose quietly to his feet and made for the door, his stooped back and faintly shaking head suggesting considerable agitation.

That agitated departure of Mr. Bates from *The Royal George* was typical of the atmosphere in Landerby during the remaining six days of Private Watson's stay. It was felt more strongly by some than by others and to the commonalty was, it must be admitted, rather in the nature of excited and hopeful anticipation than tremulous agitation. It was noted that Sir Charles Bending that week ranged considerably further afield in his daily ride than usual; that parson Lamplough and schoolmaster Bates were seen about far less frequently than was their habit; and that retired P.C. Peake was not seen at all. But on balance it was probably with relief rather than with any stronger emotion that Landerby learned on Private Watson's departure that after the war he was returning to distant Slagborough and that his native village would in all probability never see him again.

SONG HIT

SOL MURRAY, world famous composer of a dozen song hits, sat at his piano. On his knee sat a blue persian kitten which purred an obligato to his thoughts. He was eating an apple crunchily for his teeth were nature's and not the delusive makeshifts of the dental parlour.

The door opened hurriedly and there came in Al Gordon the almost equally famous librettist whose moving verse had so often been linked with the master's music. "Grand," he said as he entered; "grand, magnificent, perfect."

"What is?"

"My dear old Boy that bit you were playing as I came up the stairs."

"How did it go? "

"No good asking me, old Boy. It's all a mystery to me. But sort of tra-la-la-la, la-la-de-dee. You *must* remember it."

"Can't say I do. Must have been half dreaming. Lost chord sort of thing. Seated one day at the organ and all that. Wouldn't be this I suppose? " And he played a few bars.

"That's it, old Boy! " excitedly; "er—er—almost."

"More like this? " Playing a few more bars.

"That's it. Absolutely it. Gosh it's great. A smash hit. O it's marvellous! "

"Wait a minute. How's this? . . . and this? " and he began to hum as he played.

"Superb, old Boy. It's better'n *Old Man Moon*, better'n *Dreaming*, better'n *Mist in your eyes*, better'n *Tears on your Lashes*."

"Just a minute. Let's see how it goes now. Now how's that? Not too bad? Feel inspired? "

"Play it again, old Boy. Marvellous; marvellous. Lemme which it. How's this? "

"Not quite. Listen."

"Ah. Play it once more, old Boy. Now: how's this? "

"O.K. Let's have it again. Listen first. Now go ahead. Fine. D'you get anything? "

"I'm going to. They'll come. I'm getting the feeling." He

began to hum the melody. "Marvellous. Inspire a corpse. I'm beginning to get sumpin, old Boy. They're coming. I'll beat it," 'making for the door. "You can depend on me, old Boy."

Three hours later Al Gordon was restlessly pacing what he called his den. His wife entered. "Not disturbing you, am I darling," she said.

"No. O no. Not a bit. What is it?"

"There's no sole. Would you like plaice?"

"What? O anything! Anything!"

"Won't words come, darling?"

"Nothing. Listen to this," whistling the melody. "Great, isn't it. Marvellous. An' not a word. Not a darn word. I've dried up. I'm finished."

"Perhaps if you had a cup of tea and a cigarette, darling. . . . Shall I bring you a cup?"

"Bring me a cup o' Prussic acid. Just listen," whistling, "and I can't find a word to that. I'm finished." He rumbled his hair and glared. "Done for. Sucked dry."

His wife went out and closed the door softly behind her. He continued his restless pacing for some minutes. Stopping suddenly in front of a shelf of books he stared at it unseeingly and then taking a book haphazard, he began fretfully turning over the leaves. Presently he stopped and began to read. For several minutes he was still and apparently utterly absorbed; and then he moved over to his desk chair taking the book with him.

A year passed and during those twelve months *Awakening* with words by Al Gordon and music by Sol Murray had become a world smash hit, breaking all records. Few inhabitants of the globe could have been unfamiliar with its melody; and even its words were known to millions:

*, ' wish I could tell
Tell you how much
You mean to me
Mean to me Baby
But perhaps you
Perhaps you can guess
When I tell you
Tell you Baby*

*That all my life
All my life Baby
Before we met
Seems but a dream
Or a tale of old
And only now
Only now Baby
Because you love me
Have I begun
Baby to live.*

They had been sung sobbingly by all the male crooners and with singular inappropriateness by all the females. There was not a band in the world which had not played *Awakening* to saturation point; nor a radio station which had not sated the air with it. The number of records made of it would, superimposed, have reached the moon; or at least would have taken one out of earthly earshot.

Sol Murray and Al Gordon were lunching together. There was champagne on the table but the meal must not for that reason be considered in any way as in the nature of a celebration. They drank champagne. Champagne was their drink.

Mr. Al Gordon wiped his full lips. "I've often thought, old Boy, how queer it was about *Awakening*. You know; when I heard you playing it as I was coming up your stairs and you'd forgotten it."

"Half forgotten it," Mr. Sol Murray smiled; "but I soon remembered. I thought it a bit crude."

"No. Marvellous, old Boy; even then; from the word go. When I heard it as I came up the stairs I knew you'd found another. And you didn't know you were playing it. 'Strordinary."

"As a matter of fact I wasn't."

"You was—weren't, old Boy!" staring.

"No. I'll tell you what happened. I'd the kitten on my lap and I'd put an apple on the piano, on the keys. The kitten took a fancy to the apple, gave it a pat with its paw, sent it rolling along the keys and ran after it. That was what you heard, my dear old Chap. I'll admit I thought it a bit crude but when you got so hot about it I changed my mind. I gotta hand it to you, old Chap, you gotta flair for a tune. Absolutely. And that was the fiist half dozen bars of *Awakening*. The best part of the melody

if it comes to that. Not, old Fellow," with effusive magnanimity, "it would've been anything without your words. First class. Definitely. I knew we'd a winner as soon as you brought 'em along."

"Thanks, dear old Boy. And it was funny how I came to write them. You know what Nesta is for buying old junk; old books and what not. And leaving 'em in my den. Well, after I'd been knocking the old pan against the wall for four or five hours without so much as a line I picked up one of her antiques. Old book. Bound volume of a rag called the 'Gentleman's Magarine.' Some name. Yeah. And dated 1798. Yep. All that time ago. Didn't know printing was invented then. I was turning over the musty leaves and came across a story. Sort of sloppy romance. And there was a dame in it writing to her boy friend. In the letter I came on this bit." He fumbled in his pocket, drew out a wallet, and from it extracted a carefully folded piece of paper. "Listen to this old Boy. I copied it out at the time, word for word: 'I wish I could tell you how much you are to me my dearest one. All my life before we met seems like a dream or some old tale and only now, because you love me, have I begun to live.' Soon as I read that, old Boy, I knew I'd got sumpin' and I set to. I took that bit o' hooley and turned it into poetry and then I added some real genuine sentiment and that was that,"

"Nice work. I was talking to Tod yesterday and he gave me our latest figures. As far as I remember 'em they're eighty-five thousand dollars from sheet sales in America and twenty-one thousand pounds British Isles; radio fees fifty thousand dollars America, four thousand pounds here; recordings sixty thousand dollars America, ten thousand pounds here. Grand total nearly two hundred thousand dollars and thirty-five thousand pounds. At the present dollar rate that's roughly eighty thousand of the best for two good boys. Pretty fair."

"Not so bad. If it wasn't for this damn income tax swindle."

"Iniquitous. Just about leaves us enough for drinks." He raised his glass. "Here's to the next one, my dear old Chap."

Mr. Al Gordon raised his glass; they clinked and drank. "May it be as big a winner," he said, with a solemnity that was only slightly marred by a hiccup.

"I think it will be," said Mr. Sol Murray with equal solemnity. "When you get great poetry——"

"Thank you, dear old Boy."

"Great poetry matched with—er——"

"Great music, old Boy, gre^{at} music."

"Thank you, my dear old Chap; great poetry married to greeti music the result's a winner every time. Bound to be. Sure thing."

"Sure thing," echoed Mr. Al Gordon a little drowsily.

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

SIMEY DOUGLAS was vanman at Batley's Emporium, the only big shop in Hadley-Peveril. It was a good post and Simey might have had a comfortable little sum in the bank if he had wished. But he did not save money; the thought may have occurred to him but if it had it had been lightly dismissed, with the mental query: what do I want to save money for?

He preferred spending it; and if he spent it on himself there was no one else to spend it upon; and if much of it went on personal adornment, why not? He was but six-and-twenty and well worth adorning, being six feet tall, of athletic build, with a comely face and a humorous expression. He liked to pass an hour or two every evening at *The Goat in Boots*, a free house, where there were table skittles, shove ha'penny, darts, the best beer in the neighbourhood, and the lively company of his friends. Soak was the last word which could fairly be applied to him; two or three glasses of beer a night with perhaps four on Saturdays was the extent of his conviviality although he frequently paid for considerably more being always ready to stand a round and not bothering whose turn it was. Certainly not a soak as his fresh complexion and clear eyes made plain; and moreover he was captain of Hadley-Peveril's football team and their cricket team's fast bowler, while at the annual sports held on the Common he had won the mile for the last four successive years. Such exploits are denied the boozier. He was not even greatly fond of beer; he liked it and the company into which it brought him but he drank chiefly, as he would have put it himself, to wet his pipe. He preferred the company of young men to that of young women and

would have probably agreed, had it been suggested to him, that he was a man's man, and would have been astonished had he been told that that was the sort young women liked.

Hadley-Peveril was fortunate in its girls. There were many pretty ones; some very pretty; and the prettiest of them all was Elsie Southernwood. She had kept house for her father, John Southernwood the shoemaker, and when he died he had left her the cottage and a snug sum in the bank; and with this and her dressmaking Elsie was very comfortable indeed. She was twenty-four and had long had her eye upon Simey with matrimonial intentions. This is not to impute unmaidenliness to Elsie, or to womankind, for many a personable young man, potentially a good husband and father, would have remained in the wilderness of singleness had not some nice and determined young woman cast a matrimonially intent eye upon him.

But Elsie had hitherto not quite made up her mind. She was deterred by just that quality in him which endeared him to his men friends: his conviviality. Statistics put it on record that not only are shoemakers the most temperate of men, but that five in every seven are total abstainers. Statistics offer no explanation of this odd fact and it will serve no purpose to seek one. Had John Southernwood been asked why he was a teetotaler he would certainly have had an answer ready for, again like all shoemakers, he was ready of tongue; but it might not have been the real reason since it is just possible he was not aware of it as you, sir, are not aware why you are afraid of spiders or you, madam, why the sight of a harmless and gentle toad makes you shiver with aversion. It is enough that John Southernwood had been a staunch teetotaler all his life and that he had brought up his only child Elsie to follow the same strict regimen.

But at last Elsie decided that it was time she and Simey were married. It may be that her decision was hastened by a minx from London who came to Batley's Emporium as cashier: a red-haired minx too with green eyes, just the sort to be dangerous to a silly good-natured simpleton (it is regrettable that these epithets were Elsie's) like Simey. And so Elsie made arrangements for marrying the man she had long since chosen. But she had not the slightest intention of abandoning her rigid teetotalism; or of marrying a man who did not hold the same views as she did and carry them strictly into practice. The upshot of her

decision was that in February Simey signed the pledge and in June they were married. All women will know how this was done.

It was the happiest of marriages. Simey found Elsie more than compensated for the loss of his beer, the convivial evenings at *The Goat in Boots*, and for the chaff of his friends. For chaff him they did. At first tentatively, hesitatingly, even nervously since Simey weighed thirteen stone and had once at the fair, knocked out one of the professional boxers at the booth. He was also inclined to be a little quick-tempered. But love had obviously mellowed and softened him for he took all their chaff (and some of it verged on jeering) with a quiet if perhaps somewhat sheepish smile and passed on without even verbal retaliation.

Elsie had two elderly maiden aunts, the Misses Jane and Agnes Southernwood, who lived in Royston Parva, the next village and whom she had for several years been in the habit of calling upon after church on Sunday evenings, often weekly and never less than once a month. Royston Parva was not quite two miles from Hadley-Peveril and the walk was a very pleasant one across meadow paths and through quiet lanes. The Misses Southernwood while not actually bed-ridden or even semi-invalids were extreme valetudinarians and rarely went out. They had not been able to attend the wedding, being laid up, Jane with her periodic rheumatics, and Agnes with her intermittent lumbago; and previous to the marriage had only met Simey twice and then they had been in bed and he had been modestly bidden to halt upon the threshold and converse through the half-closed door.

And so when, on the third Sunday after they had been married, Elsie suggested to Simey that they should walk over after the evening service and see the old ladies he agreed if not with enthusiasm yet with the feeling that it was certainly time he got to know better Aunt Jane and Aant Agnes, as he was admonished to call them.

The two Miss Southernwoods were up and about; indeed quite sprightly. They made their visitors most welcome and it was very apparent they were very much taken with Elsie's husband and thought their niece (he would have been astonished to learn) an extremely fortunate young woman.

The three women discussed with eager animation all those topics which women handle with such pleasant malice and about

which they are so intimately knowledgeable. Simey in the main contented himself with listening, but now and again, when the subject matter moved into some more masculine province, or his opinion was asked, he joined in, and was listened to with flattering attention.

Presently Aunt Agnes went over to the sideboard, opened the door, and took out a bottle, four wine glasses, four plates, a plum cake, and a cake knife. Simey groaned at heart. "Jehoshaphat," he muttered to himself, "Batley's Ginger Cordial or I'm a Dutchman."

Aunt Jane cut four large slices of the plum cake while Aunt Agnes filled the four glasses with a pale golden liquid. "You'll like this, Simey," Elsie said; "it's Aunties' parsnip wine."

"Nine years old," said Aunt Jane.

"Eight, dear," Aunt Agnes said; "we finished the 'nineteen-twenty last Sunday."

The two old ladies raised their glasses. "Long life and happiness and all blessings to you both, my dears," said Aunt Jane, and Aunt Agnes smiled and nodded her head. And when they had drunk (or rather sipped) Simey gave their good health and he and Elsie drank that.

They all continued to sit eating the cake and sipping the wine and chatting. The talk grew very animated; very animated indeed. Presently the glasses were empty. Simey, a pleasant glow in his stomach, watched the three women in wonder. He felt the thing was beyond him. Surely they must know what it was that was putting the easy smiles on their lips, the brightness in their eyes, the chatter on their tongues. But apparently they did not. They had not, it seemed, the remotest notion. Queer creatures women were. But nice. Extremely nice.

"It's beautiful wine," he said.

"There!" Elsie cried delightedly; "I knew you'd like it."

Aunt Jane and Aunt Agnes beamed and said he must have another glass. His eyes went questioningly to Elsie who said, "That's right darling, it'll do you good." Simey thought it would too; and later on allowed himself to be pressed to a third. It was half past nine and the moon well up before they set off for home. Simey felt good.

After they had got in Elsie began to lay the supper things and Simey said suddenly, "I'll just stroll out as far as the old Pound.

Shan't be long, darling." He went out whistling *Now the day is over.*

Some forty yards or so along the quiet road he met George Baker, one of his friends. "Hallo ! Simey," George said facetiously, "how's the lemonade market?" There was a sound like the snapping of a piece of kindling and Simey strolled on while Mr. Baker sat on the ground fingering a painful jaw and wondering if it were broken. Simey had a number of other encounters during that brief walk but to describe them would be tedious repetition.

As he sat down to supper Elsie said: "O darling! you've cut your knuckles."

"Jehoshaphat!" Simey said with a grin, "so I have; must have barked them against the wall. It's nothing."

Elsie fussed over him, insisted on washing his hand and bandaging it with a clean handkerchief and later, when they were upstairs getting to bed she was very sweet, easing his coat and shirt sleeves over his poor hand. And was suitably rewarded.

It was quite wonderful, and a credit to human nature, how fond Simey became of the two old ladies at Royston Parva. No Sunday was allowed to go by without his and Elsie's evening stroll over to see them; and how much Aunt Jane and Aunt Agnes appreciated this affection was seen two years later when they died during the influenza epidemic and left everything jointly to their niece and her husband.

As Elsie was going through the oddments which came with the furniture she found a little red notebook labelled *Recipes* and opening it turned over a few pages idly and then said: "O Simey! here's the recipe for Aunties' parsnip wine: take six parsnips, clean, peel, and mash . . ." When she had finished she said, "I must make some; you'll like that, won't you, darling,"

Simey nodded. "It's a grand wine."

"It's so good for you," Elsie said; "such a fine tonic."

ETERNAL TRIANGLE

SCHOOLBOY FRIENDSHIPS are ephemeral things. It is the rarest few which survive into manhood. This may be due less to boyish fickleness than to the fact that leaving school usually means complete separation; with the width of a country or perhaps a Continent dividing former cronies: and so the association fades and finally dies.

It was perhaps because there was no such severance that the close friendship between Frank Collyer and David Bellerby endured. They had first met as ten-year-old new boys at St. Michael's Preparatory School. They were well-matched physically and mentally; went up the school together; and spent their holidays alternatively at one another's homes. Collyer lived at Eastbourne where his father was a solicitor; Bellerby, whose father was a doctor, at Dartmouth. Both families were well-to-do (there being money on the distaff side in each) and the careers of the two boys had been more or less planned; at least as far as the University.

They went together to Harborne School where their friendship grew with the years and at eighteen they went up to Cambridge, both to Trinity. Their bent was the same and their intention was, on leaving Cambridge, to adopt a literary career. Collyer during his first year at Cambridge published a book of verse which was well received by the critics and sold several dozen copies. The following year Bellerby's first novel was published, was extremely well reviewed, and sold nearly half the edition of five hundred copies.

But long before they left the University they had done much better than this. Collyer's first novel had made quite a stir and three impressions were sold; while Bellerby's third novel won a literary prize in America and the film rights were bought by Universal Pictures Incorporated. The two young men seemed well launched upon their chosen career and quite a little distance too upon the road to fame and fortune. And their friendship was stronger than ever: a link of steel between them.

It was as nearly perfect an association of two kindred spirits as is possible to very imperfect humanity. They were physically

much of the same type:—tall, rather burly, fairish. They liked and disliked the same things. Their minds seemed to run on such similar tracks that those experiences (fallaciously ascribed to telepathy) were constantly occurring to them. Their minds were indeed as closely attuned as those of identical twins. The probability was therefore (almost certainty, in fact) that they would fall in love with the same type of girl. And this happened during their last term at Cambridge. Unfortunately, it was not merely the same type of girl but the same girl.

It was in May week that they first met Diana Selwyn. She was the niece of Dr. Brandon, the Master of Peterhouse and an extremely pretty girl, slim, olive skinned, black-eyed, red-lipped, passionate. May week with its traditional revelry, aided by the romance of moonlight and river, is a great hatcher of love-affairs, many of no greater duration than the Mayfly's nuptial dance and few lasting out the summer. But occasionally the attraction was of more enduring stuff and persisted beyond the glamour of the moonlit river into the revealing and often chilling daylight; and the lighthearted flirtation became the passionate love-affair. So it was with Frank Collyer and Diana Selwyn. But so it was also with David Bellerby and Diana Selwyn.

Over head and ears in love with the same girl. The old dilemma. The Eternal Triangle. And what of the girl? Whom did she favour? One more than the other? Did she love them both? Can a woman love two men equally at the same time? There arose many such questions and all were asked by the friends and acquaintances of the two young men. It was easy to ask the questions: it was another matter to find the answers. Perhaps no one knew them; not even Diana; certainly Collyer and Bellerby did not.

When they came down from Cambridge they shared chambers in Piccadilly; and, with generous allowances from their fathers and a growing reputation in the more fashionable circles of literature, they prepared to enjoy life in all its permissible aspects. Miss Selwyn, who lived with her parents in St. James's, was ready to co-operate with them; and very soon the three, the two young men and the girl they loved, were by no means the least notable members of a brilliant circle of young people, most of whom were moneyed, many of whom were gifted, and all of whom were or could be charming.

It was a pleasant world; this world of beauty and youth, of gaiety and wit, of considerable artistic performance and of great • artistic promise. And if most of these promissory notes drawn upon future fame were never to be honoured, so much the better for plodding mediocrity with patched elbows and neither school nor university.

It was the members of this happy circle that most often put these difficult questions to one another and who continued to put them with increasing interest as first one year passed and then a second without the matter being settled once for all by Diana's making a choice. The three frequently went about together; but just as frequently either one or other of the two men would be the evening's only cavalier. The two were of course known as David and Jonathan and their long friendship much admired, discussed, and wondered at. How long this fifteen-years friendship would continue to bear this usually insupportable strain was also much discussed and wondered at. The worldly wise said that it was bound to break sooner or later, for should Diana's choice of one of them not break it, the marriage inevitably would. What the three chiefly concerned thought about it all no-one knew; although several, claiming to be in their confidence, said they did; or hinted that they did; or by carefully-prepared silences allowed it to be inferred that they did. The ultra-romantic declared that this was one of those perfect (and how rare!) associations in which three human beings have an equal love for one another and in which there is no room for such base emotions as jealousy. The cynical pointed out that if this were so then Frank Collyer, David Bellerby, and Diana Selwyn could not possibly be human beings; and as this was so manifestly absurd the thing was bosh. All however were agreed that something was bound to happen. It did.

One autumn evening Collyer and Bellerby were sitting round the fire before going up to dress. They were attending a dance at *The Opal Club*, and Diana had rung up that morning to say she had a slight attack of influenza and would not be going. She had insisted that they should not stay away because of that and said she should demand a long and picturesque account of who were there, with whom, and what everyone did or failed to do.

Collyer yawned. "I don't feel inclined to go to *The Opal* if Di's not going to be there," he said; "poisonous place."

Bellerby nodded. "Howling wilderness. Let's dine at home for once. In fact I was hoping you'd propose it."

The serious note in his voice caused Collyer to glance over to him quickly and say: "What's in the wind? "

"Well, Frankie," a little awkwardly, "I think—er—don't you think it's about time we settled things? "

"Yes; more than time," Collyer said, his tone equally serious; "but let's leave it until we've a good meal under our waistcoats; and for the occasion I suggest Solera No. 34, Louis Roederer 1928 and Courvoisier Napoleon. Or any suggestions? "

Bellerby shook his head with a faint smile. "I never tamper with perfection."

"Right! " Collyer said; "I'll tell Mrs. Lambert," and he turned to the house telephone.

It was just after half-past nine that Collyer said "Thank God for bellies. Let's have our coffee by the fire." Ten o'clock had struck before Bellerby said, talking a little indistinctly over his pipe stem: "Well, old boy, what are we going to do about Di? I'd clear out and give you the field but I know you'd no more hear of it than I would for you."

Collyer nodded through a cloud of smoke. "Queer to think that a hundred years ago we'd have probably fought a duel."

"Would we? I don't think so, Frankie. I can't see myself fighting you in any circumstances."

"Only my fun," Collyer said. "But what the devil *are* we going to do about it? It can't go on like this much longer. It's—it's disintegrating; and that's just precisely how I'm beginning to feel,"

"Beginning! my God! One of us must clear out, Frankie; up stakes and roots and push right off to the antipodes or some other ultima thule and not wait upon the order of his going."

"Agreed. But in respect to the antipodes I enter a caveat. There *are* places I'd prefer. But go ahead. What's to do? "

"As we've often done ever since our St. Michael days: toss for it. Are you game? "

"Yes. Shall I toss? " And at Bellerby's nod he drew out a florin and tossed it into the air, Bellerby calling heads as it spun upwards.

The coin came down tails and Bellerby put out his hand and said, his voice not quite steady, "My congratulations, dear old boy; and I hope——"

But Collyer made a little gesture with his hand and said: "I can't do it, Davie. I can't after all these years see your happiness chucked away on the single spin of a coin. We'll make it best of three,"

"By God! I oughtn't to let you," Bellerby said; "but—but go ahead."

Collyer spun up the coin and again Bellerby called heads and heads this time it fell. They grinned faintly at each other as Collyer tossed up the coin for the third time. Bellerby once more calling heads, and heads once more it was.

"I'll be damned if I do, Frankie!" Bellerby said, his face flushing and his eyes shining. "We'll make it three out of five."

"You toss and I'll call," Collyer said, handing him the coin.

"Up she goes then," Bellerby said and Collyer called 'tails'. And tails it was.

"Two all!" Collyer said; and then, as Bellerby was about to toss up the coin once more, he said: "It's no use, Davie, we'll never settle it this way. Chuck it on the fire and I'll play you a game of chess."

"Not—not for Di!" Bellerby gasped.

"O good God no! Clear the brain. Bring counsel."

"All right. But why waste a florin. What's the matter with the hospital box?"

"Burnt offering."

"To whom? Venus or Hymen?"

"Gawd knows, old fellow. To Minerva perhaps."

If to Minerva then the oblation certainly brought wise counsel before the evening was done. They decided to go away separately for a fortnight to think things over; Collyer would go to his people at Eastbourne; Bellerby to his at Dartmouth. And on the morrow, after lunching together at *The Ivy*, they set off for their respective homes.

Two mornings later, just before nine o'clock, Collyer strolled across the tarmac of the Croydon airport towards the waiting room. There were twenty minutes before the big airliner *Columbus* left for New York, a thin cold rain was falling, and he thought he'd prefer to wait under cover. As he pushed open the door he saw Bellerby standing looking out through the window at the great ship now shaking and throbbing as her engines began to warm up. There was no one else in the waiting room. Bellerby turned

and saw Collyer, Neither young man spoke. Each seemed for the moment incapable of finding a word, any word, right or wrong.

And then Collyer said: "What's afoot, Davie? "

Bellerby nodded. " Precisely, Frankie; what is afoot? "

" Dammit, let's sil down and get this clear. You're going by *Columbus*'? "

" Yes. And then on to Hollywood. It's as good a place as any. I've often thought I might do well there."

" You're leaving the field to me."

" That's right, dear old boy. But how the devil you knew I was leaving this morning . . . "

"I didn't."

"You didn't!"

"No, old fellow. I'd decided to leave the field to *you* and to add to the coincidence Hollywood was also my destination."

" Well, I'll be damned! " Bellerby said; " but you'll not go now, Frankie. You're the better man. I leave the field to you. I feel it's you she loves. And hang it all! I won—er—lost the toss."

" I can't accept such a sacrifice, Davie. And I—I believe you're mistaken. I feel sure it's you."

Bellerby turned in his seat and faced his friend. "And what about you? " he said; " do *you* love her? That's the point."

" Do *you*, old fellow? " "

" To be perfectly candid, Frankie, I don't; not as I used to; I'm still fond of Di, of course; but, well," shrugging his shoulders, " that's about all."

Collyer grinned. " That goes for me too, Davie. Rum, isn't it! "

" Damned rum."

" So we'll both clear out."

"To Hollywood?"

"Why not? I think we might do very well there; might collaborate with scripts."

" Sounds grand. You don't think it's a bit low-down? "

"On Di? Good Lord, no! She'll be married long before our first picture's being shown. She's a pretty little thing and just the sort that appeals to most fellows. She's not quite my type."

" Nor mine, dear old boy."

A bell began to ring warningly and the two friends left the waiting-room. And then, arm-in-arm, they walked leisurely towards the waiting plane.

THE ETERNAL POLYGON

ENID SOAMES was thirty-five. She was a tall, handsome, rather feline blonde with large surprised blue eyes and the white fine skin of her type. She had been married ten years to George Soames (Soames and Cartwright, Brokers, of Mincing Lane) who was rich enough to give her most of the things for which she thought she craved, with the exception of children. Soames was ten years older than his wife; a burly fellow who kept his weight down with squash, riding and golf; enjoyed what is called rude health; was well-turned out, good-looking and very popular with most men; while those women who found him attractive (and they were admittedly a minority) found him almost alarmingly so.

And suddenly Enid Soames began to suspect his fidelity. She had no evidence beyond inference; but this was so strong as to make suspicion a certainty; for George, who had hitherto always been an ardent lover, a perhaps too tempestuous bedfellow, became now in literal truth a sleeping partner and nothing more; and Enid, well aware that an incontinent amorist of five-and-forty does not suddenly become an ascetic, drew her own disturbing conclusions. She pretended to herself that what really angered and hurt her most about the thing was the deceit, the wretched underhand atmosphere; if only George had come to her and owned up she would not have felt the stab so keenly; but this horrible clandestine business. . . .

All right. Since George could bring himself to treat her so despicably she need feel no compunction in lowering her standards to his level. If he were ignobly, basely deceitful, she would be ignobly, basely inquisitive; if he were a cloaked Casanova, she would be a tip-toeing Paul Pry; she would in short employ a private detective to ferret out (horrid phrase, so horrid that for a brief instant she faltered in her determination) the inmost secrets of this unhappy liaison.

Mr. Alban Quarles bore no resemblance to the detective either of romance or reality; perhaps that was his most valuable asset. Unlike many of his kind he had never been in the police force; he was a smallish, sandy man; at first glance one might have guessed him a village grocer; and a second glance might have

encouraged most observers to hazard the opinion that he was also a sidesman at the local Primitive Methodist chapel.

Enid Soames thought him a horrid little man, just the sort she would have expected to be engaged in his abominable undertakings. He also repelled her physically; as he talked he extruded tiny bubbles of saliva at the corners of his mouth, and when these had grown to proportions threatening a deluge he saved the situation (whether consciously or unconsciously Enid could not tell) by a noisy sucking intake of the breath. Yes, distinctly a horrid, repellent little man. However, he promised with the supremest confidence to do what was required of him and Enid, consoling herself with sophistical quibbles regarding means and ends and instruments of good and evil, showed her gratitude in the most solid fashion by giving him *carte blanche* in the matter of expense. She indeed displayed such indifference to the financial aspect of the affair that it cannot be doubted that Mr. Albert Quarles concluded he was on an unusually good thing and that it behoved him to remain on it as long as he plausibly could. Before they parted he suggested she should call to see him in a week's time when he hoped to have something to tell her. "It will be best, Mrs. Soames," he said blandly, "if I follow my usual practice and do not telephone you with regard to subsequent interviews but make arrangements for these each time we meet. I do not—er—" and he smiled and nodded, "quite trust the telephone as a means of communication in delicate matters."

When Mrs. Soames called at his office a week later Mr. Quarles was in an exceedingly self-satisfied mood and as he talked enthusiastically of his quest his salivary extrusions bubbled and frothed with menacing liveliness. He had indeed quite a lot to report and as she listened Enid Soames marvelled at his unsavoury cunning and aptitude in the chase. "I think, my dear Mrs. Soames," he said, "that it is possible already to say with considerable certitude that your husband is carrying on an illicit love-affair with a woman. She is a married woman, small dark and pretty; quite young; about your own age I should guess. She is the wife of Mr. John Todd, of Todd and Hoopdriver the brewers. Her name is Bertha. So far so good!" and he nodded his head, sucked in his bubbles and smiled in a fashion for which Enid Soames later found the exact adjective: *lubricious*. "I have not

yet," he continued, "and you will not I am sure expect it, discovered them in flagrante delicto. Such discoveries are not easily made. Love seeks solitude, even darkness for its final embraces," and again he allowed that smile to crease his mean little face. "But we are making progress. Oh, yes, I assure you. Your husband was away from home the whole of last Wednesday night."

"He was in Manchester on business," Enid Soames said. "His firm have a branch office there. He caught the ten o'clock morning train to Manchester and returned by the noon train next day."

"He returned by the 4.15 p.m. train on the Wednesday," corrected Mr. Quarles. "He dined with Bertha Todd at *The Frolics*, a discreet little restaurant off Soho, and afterwards they drove down into Sussex where they stayed the night at *The Galaxy Roadhouse*."

"As husband and wife?" Mrs. Soames asked, catching her breath.

"Alas, no. They occupied separate rooms and registered as Mr. George Owen and Miss Bertha Fayre. But my dear Mrs. Soames their rooms were adjacent—er—need I say more."

"I think perhaps you'd better."

"Admirable! I am all for complete frankness. I hate equivocation and euphemism. I gathered from my investigations that the staff of *The Galaxy* by a quite miraculous dispensation of, shall we say the little god Cupid? Yes. The staff then, as I say, become conveniently afflicted with total blindness and deafness between the hours of midnight and five o'clock a.m." The lewd smile creased his chaps for an instant. "In brief, my dear Mrs. Soames, there is at *The Galaxy* between those hours much coming and going hot-foot in the service of Eros."

"That proves nothing," Enid Soames said sharply, her glance straying disgustfully over his self-complacently smiling face.

He nodded his head. "Admittedly; but the inference is strong. However, let us not bother with inferences. Proof, proof in the legal sense is rightly demanded, by you no less than by the law; and it shall be forthcoming. I suggest we meet again a week from to-day. And—er—" drumming with podgy fingers upon his desk, "perhaps you would wish to pay expenses as we go along; or possibly," and he paused and regarded her coldly-alooof expression genially, "you would prefer some other arrangement."

Mrs. Soames opened her bag and took out her cheque-book but he uttered a little cry of protest, and affecting vast concern said, "No! nol my dear lady; not i cheque; dear! dear! "

"My husband does not pry into my affairs," she said sharply.

He nodded his sandy head and allowed a faint twinkle to play in his small close-set eyes. "No gentleman does. But nevertheless no cheques. I prefer, I much prefer, indeed I make it an axiom of my business, banknotes. Perhaps next week you will——"

"How much do you require?" she interrupted icily. "Will fifty pounds be sufficient?"

"Ample, quite ample. And I hope that by then I shall be able to give you the fullest proofs." He smiled and sucked in his bubbles. "The fullest and most detailed proofs."

But the following week Mr. Quarles was unable to supply those full detailed proofs and the blandness of his manner had a faint tinge of deprecation, despite the reasonableness of his explanation that Mr. Soames had not slept away from home since their previous interview. "Not of course," with a wave of his stubby hand, "that this precludes—er—evidence of the sort we are seeking." The lewd smile put in a fleeting appearance. "Cupid's rule is not solely confined to the nocturnal hours. For example," with a slow nod, "your husband and Mrs. Todd last Thursday afternoon took a punt at Henley and went up the river and finding what I may call 'a sweet and bosky shelter meet for love' they remained in its pleasant and concealing shade for two hours." His glance caught and held that of Mrs. Soames and he slowly shook his head. "They kissed but I must regretfully add that apart from this they exercised a most provoking self-control. But, my dear Mrs. Soames, there is no need for anxiety; no reason for you to distress yourself; I can assure you most confidently that any day now, I might say almost any hour, the necessary evidence will be forthcoming." Suddenly he smiled broadly and the effect of so unusually frank an expression was to give his next words a quality of interest apparently quite unmerited. "In the course of my investigations with regard to your husband and Mrs. Todd I have come across a matter which while not, to a man of my experience, in the least unexpected has its—er—amusing aspect. But perhaps, my dear Mrs. Soames, you are not interested."

Here was the moment of temptation and Enid Soames fell, yet despising herself for her base inquisitiveness, and unhappily aware that she thus incontinently leapt down to the moral level of the abominable Quarles. "Not particularly," she said slowly and coldly: "and I certainly do not desire to——"

"Oh, nothing of the sort!" with a wave of his hand in an abrupt almost reproving expression, behind which he grinned inwardly at the gulp she had given at the bait; "just merely a matter of somewhat amusing human interest; very human."

"Well? "

"Mr. John Todd is having an affair with a young woman; a young married woman, a Mrs. Deane, Claire Deane." A salivary chuckle escaped him. "So human and so amusing, is it not! But of course that is neither here nor there and you are not concerned with Mr. Todd's affairs. But how amusing! It might of course be of some advantage to probe the matter a little further; to obtain evidence in the matter of Mr. Todd. All is grist that comes to my mill. Professionally of course. And indeed it may be quite impossible to steer clear of what I may describe as Mr. Todd's trail while following that of your husband and Mrs. Todd. But of course, my dear Mrs. Soames, if you feel that since you are paying my fee . . ." he paused, glanced at her, and waited as if for her to speak. And once more she fell and this time with less mental conflict, so true is it that pitch defiles; and found herself a moment or two later committed, without having quite realised what she was saying, to a keen interest in (and a financial backing of) an investigation of the amorous exploits of Mr. John Todd and to whatever further trails that pursuit might lead.

It led a long way and it lasted a month, during which Mr. Quarles (still without the final complete proof of George Soames's infidelity, the indubitable in flagrante delicto he sought) reported to Mrs. Soames weekly, disclosing piece-meal a chain of illicit love-making which so captivated her interest that she trampled her conscience underfoot and urged him on (tacitly rather than openly, yet nevertheless enthusiastically) to more and more spectacular feats of prying; for that amorous concatenation made it clear that while John Todd was making love to Claire Deane her husband Arthur (of Deane's the banking people) was dallying illicitly with Kitty Sears the wife of Fred Sears (Sears and Cart-

wright, Solicitors). It might have been thought that, brought up abruptly against the law in the person of Mr. Fred Sears, Quarles would have hesitated to pursue his erotic researches further. But not at all. The chase was his life-blood, to say nothing of his livelihood. He pushed on with his inquisition and unearthed the exciting fact that Mr. Sears was running down to Brighton for occasional ardent week-ends accompanied by a young married woman named Joyce Cooper whose husband Geoffrey Cooper, an ophthalmic surgeon was, to Mr. Quarles's joy (both natural and professional), hotly engaged in wooing the favours of a young and lovely brunette named Sylvia Blaydes.

That was as far as Mr. Quarles's investigations had gone when he made his sixth report to Enid; and he was surprised (startled indeed) and chagrined when she expressed in quite unmistakable terms her wish to settle his account and to end her connection with such a degrading state of affairs. Mr. Quarles, a student of human nature, realised by one glance at her face that she meant what she said, bowed to the inevitable, pocketed his fee, and ushered her out.

"Darling, I was *too* scared. Imagine it! just one step further and that wretched little ferret would have discovered us! " Enid whispered that night to Tom Blaydes as they lay joyously embraced, while below their bedroom window the tiny waves ran lapping softly over the justly-celebrated sands of Sapton-super-mare.

THE TENANTS OF THE WHITE COTTAGE

BRAMPTON was one of those small country places which, while not quite aspiring to the dignity of township, would have felt itself slighted at the designation village. Decidedly it was not a village. It had no mayor; but it had a Town Hall and a Market Place, to say nothing of half-a-dozen streets and roads and as many lanes. There were also St. John's Church; a Congregational Chapel, a Baptist Tabernacle; and a Roman Catholic Oratory. It had no Woolworth's but there were a Co-operative Stores; a Sixpenny

Bazaar; a Maypole Dairy; and a Lipton's., Finally there were a Cinema, *The Rialto*; and a branch of Parley's Bank.

At the last census the population of Brampton was slightly under two thousand. Nothing happens in a village which is not common property before the day is out, but while so sweeping a statement could not be made justly of Brampton, there was in fact, little that went on which was not sooner or later pretty generally known. Brampton had its social strata (else it would not have been English); but the strata were porous rather than impervious, absorbing (surely if slowly), tales and rumours and scandals and passing them on to the stratum above or below. It is true that there were a few social watertight compartments. There was *The George and Dragon* which was the preserve of the top-drawer; the other drawers sharing *The Black Bull* and *The Lord Nelson*. There were *The Constitutional Club* and *The Golf Club* whose members were the Somebodies; while *The Labour Club*, catered for the Nobodies. There was a similar cleavage between The Freemasons' Lodge and The Oddfellows' Club. And it would be unreasonable to expect the Rev. Charles Spencer-Haye, vicar of St. John's, to be on anything more than patronising terms with the Rev. George Smith of the Congregational Chapel or the Rev. Herbert Heath of the Baptist Tabernacle. Still, allowing for these slight variations, the people of Brampton might not unfairly be considered socially homogeneous. Any differences would certainly not have been noticed viewed from the surface of the Moon; nor indeed from the tower of St. John's.

And so, when young Mr. and Mrs. Beverley came to Brampton and rented furnished, *The White Cottage* at the bottom of *Ivy Lane* down by the brook, they were freely discussed by everyone; for there was no one of a social grade far enough above them or below them not to find them and their affairs interesting in the way that only those people and things are interesting which come intimately and closely into like hearts and homes.

Obviously young Mr. and Mrs. Beverley had been but recently married and, just as obviously, they were very much in love. She was small and slender and fair and those apostles of the generalisation who roundly declare that little fair women always love big dark men, would have to admit an exception, for Mr. Richard Beverley was also small and slender and fair; there was in fact, little to choose between them in the way of height and weight.

The generalisers may retort that this similarity of type, in place of their pet contrast, was the reason why the affair went awry. For of course it went awry or there would be no story. No-one wants to hear a story about a happy marriage. Unhappiness is so much more intriguing than contentment. But in this matter of similarity of type the probabilities are that this had nothing whatever to do with the shipwreck of their marriage. Other reasons must be sought. Brampton sought and found them in plenty.

There was Dick Beverley himself. He was the artistic sort; 110 profession but very gifted; a gifted painter; a gifted sculptor and modeller; a gifted musician; a gifted versifier; but not quite gifted enough to make any money out of these arts. Or perhaps too gifted (as his whole attitude to life implied) for it may be admitted that geniuses occasionally starve. But not often.

Not that there was any likelihood of Dick Beverley starving, Mrs. Beverley having a very comfortable banking account, as no-one could know better than I who have been manager of Parley's Bank at Brampton for the last twenty years. And it was all in a current account on which she drew monthly 'Pay Cash' cheques almost invariably presented by her husband who had no account with us, nor, I imagine, with anyone else.

And that state of affairs was doubtless a probable cause of the rift; for it was one no self-respecting man could endure for long without a feeling of humiliation and I blame Mrs. Beverley for not realising this. People, especially young people, frequently declare that if a man and a girl love one another it does not matter who has the money. An admirable sentiment in theory but it does not somehow seem to work out in practice. The financial side of the association (and I speak from professional knowledge) is a rock upon which so many marriages founder. No doubt the ideal arrangement would be for both parties to have the same income; but since this is impracticable (and probably not even possible), people have to rub along with makeshifts.

I must admit that I do not think his complete dependence upon his wife's purse humiliated Dick Beverley. He certainly showed no signs of such a feeling and he always had plenty of money in his pocket. In a way I suppose (putting love on one side) he earned it, for they kept no maid (the cottage being very small) and he was quite the handyman and most domesticated, which was perhaps odd for an artist. Possibly that demonstrates how bogus

his gifts really were. He certainly did most of the work of the cottage; including the cooking about which he boasted.

But his gifts were not entirely bogus. Let him be given his due. We had a Dramatic Society of which they both became members and from October to March we put on weekly performances at the Town Hall. Not only did Mr. and Mrs. Beverley quite frequently play parts, but Dick painted most of the scenery, arranged the scores for the orchestra, and for our plays from the Greek he designed and painted the masks. Doubtless his work had no great merit artistically but it was better than anyone else could do in Brampton and of course he was delighted to do it: it gave him a standing in the town he could not have obtained in any other way.

They had been living at Brampton about four years when the first whispers began to go about that things weren't quite as they used to be at *The White Cottage* (which, by the bye, belonged to me). You know how it is; nothing definite; nothing that's actually been seen or heard, and yet a sort of general intuition that things have gone wrong or are beginning to go wrong.

Naturally enough it was said at the time, and has been said many times since, that if they'd had children things wouldn't have come to the pass they did. People always say that. It is the human thing to say. And it happens also to be the right thing and the popular thing to say. The right thing, because procreation should be encouraged. And the popular thing, because no sentiment is more dear to the hearts of people than the one concerning baby hands serving as links. Perhaps, as a bachelor, I ought not to express an opinion but it has always seemed to me that the power of baby hands in this respect is overrated. I admit that I speak as one not particularly fond of children and not at all fond of babies. Very much the contrary in fact.

However, baby hands or not, it soon became plain enough that Mr. and Mrs. Beverley were no longer the loving couple they had been. And it was Dick Beverley who made it plain; so plain that you could not miss seeing it if you wanted to. Not that anyone did want to. He had from the beginning been a member of *The Constitutional Club* and both of them were members of *The Golf Club*. He also frequented the exclusive *George and Dragon*. But he had always been very abstemious. He always said all true artists were; they had to be if they wanted to create, as nothing so

destroyed the creative powers as drink. That was his Gospel. I had always heard differently; that great artists in fact were often great boozers. But no matter. Dick Beverley's opinion was as I have said. And certainly he practised what he preached. For a time. For those first four years.

But now he began to drink; if not heavily, steadily; and in any case far more than was good for him. And being a gregarious soul this soon meant that on any evening in the week (not excluding Sunday), you could be pretty certain of finding him between eight o'clock and midnight in the saloon bar of *The Constitutional Club*, or that of the *George and Dragon*.

That is the way of many marriages. Passion cools; love flies out of the window; the man makes his way to the saloon bar. And there, as far as my knowledge goes, it ends; for, as a bachelor, I do not know what the woman does or says. In such cases the marriage is not completely wrecked; the ship is still afloat if with its timbers so sprung that the pumps have to be kept working. Many men seem content to substitute liquor for love as the basis of life but without abandoning their marriage as a going concern: a business concern. Perhaps their wives are equally content with the arrangements and find a hobby as engrossing as their husbands'.

But Dick Beverley was not that sort of man. He had proclaimed not infrequently, both on and off the stage, in the days of his married happiness, that love was the supreme experience; something to live for; and, if need be, to die for: woman was in fact life's greatest prize. And there doubtless spoke whatever there was of the artist in him; for while it may be a moot point whether or not artists are crapulous fellows there is no denying their fondness for women; and the greater the artist the more fond; or, as one of them has himself put it: the greater the artist the greater the lover. And so, there apparently being no love for him in *The White Cottage*, Dick Beverley sought it elsewhere. And found it; as one usually finds things when one seeks them diligently enough.

Brampton of course soon knew all about it; knew that the new love was a young widow living at Hailsbury some twenty miles to the north; knew that she was a fast creature; knew that she and Dick Beverley were always about together in and around Hailsbury and that he was spending money on her 'like water'. And

knew a dozen other things besides. And wondered how long it would be before Mrs. Beverley ('the poor young thing') found out and what she would do about it.

Mrs. Beverley seemed a long while before she did find out; nearly a year; or so Brampton guessed. And the town founded its guess upon the fact that for nearly a year after everyone in Brampton knew all about it, things went on as usual at *The White Cottage*: and outside it as far as the social round of its inmates was concerned; and that then, quite suddenly, there was a change. It was a change so drastic that it could not pass unnoticed and it seemed obviously ascribable to Mrs. Beverley's having learned what was happening. She ceased to go out with her husband; she rarely indeed went out at all, refusing invitations and cutting out all her own little hospitalities. Her very character seemed to change. She had been gay, smiling, talkative, ever ready for a chat with calling tradesmen or the postman. But now she barely exchanged a word with them and never a smile; nor was she heard singing about the place as in the past, when indeed passers by would often stop to listen, for she possessed a soprano voice considered very good by people who should know, although not to everybody's taste; my own, for example. But then I never did care much for the female soprano voice, holding that the boy soprano's is an infinitely more beautiful instrument. I do not think I should greatly repine if all females, and all males over fifteen years of age, were forbidden to sing except in the privacy of their homes.

Brampton, in an access of sentimentality, ascribed this abrupt change (almost indeed a metamorphosis) in Mrs. Beverley to a broken heart; wondered why she didn't 'leave the wretch', especially as she held the purse; and then, with a further and more honied access of sentimentality, explained her apparent refusal to do so by her still being in love with him. And how often you see that sort of thing, said Brampton: as nice and pretty a little woman as you'd want to meet, in love with a drunken scamp with an eye for every woman but herself. But, Brampton also said (and said it hopefully), it can't go on like this; something's bound to happen; stands to reason. Whether or not it stood to reason, something certainly happened. Nor was it very long after the change had been noted in Mrs. Beverley: three weeks at the outside.

Quite a number of things happened during those weeks. There

was the registered parcel which the postman brought with the afternoon post. The parcel was addressed to Mr. Beverley and the postman knocked and waited. He kept on knocking and waiting for over ten minutes, he said, and then gave it up and left the cottage and was back on the road when he saw Dick Beverley coming along from the other direction and waited for him. When he gave him the parcel he explained that he couldn't make anyone hear at the cottage and Beverley said that probably his wife was lying down and that she might have been in bed as she'd not been very well lately. Whether or not that was true Mrs. Beverley was all right and about the house the next morning, for she took in the milk and the letters; and with a smile too.

There was the 'Pay Cash' cheque which Dick Beverley brought to the Bank towards the end of that time. There was nothing unusual in that but the amount was a little startling. What that amount was I cannot, obviously, divulge; but I may say that it was for nearly the whole of Mrs. Beverley's credit. That was not the Bank's business; the cheque was in order and what a customer did with her money was not our concern.

Nothing of this was, of course, known outside the Bank, but there was quite enough happening to keep Brampton talking. On the Thursday morning, Dick Beverley went off carrying a suitcase and caught the 8.25 to London, which stopped at Hailbury. Later in the morning he was seen in Hailbury at *The Ship* with his woman (as Brampton referred to her and in a tone impossible to reproduce); and late that afternoon the two boarded a train for London. They were seen by more than one of our townfolk, (Mr. Sykes the vet. and Miss Glasenby of the R.S.P.C.K. shop were two); and it was agreed that Dick Beverley now carried two suitcases and his woman a small one.

Brampton hadn't had time to chew the flavour out of this when he had an even tastier morsel. Early on Saturday morning, Mrs. Beverley, carrying a small suitcase and dressed for travelling, walked down to Shuker's Garage, took a taxi to the station, and caught the London train.

A week went by and neither of the Beverleys came back. And then a month went by without anything being heard of them. The rent was paid up to the end of the year, and so I was not bothering. After all it was not my business or anyone else's in Brampton. But I confess that I was not without some interest,

and curiosity over the affair and as the months passed I (no doubt in common with most of my fellow townsmen and women) wondered what had happened and began to watch the newspapers for reports of divorce cases; and not finding the one we were looking for some of the more sentimental among us declared the Beverleys had come together again and would quite probably come back to Brampton one of these days.

Time went by and the interest waned. I let *The White Cottage* to a middle-aged author and his young wife who stayed two years. I was beginning to find property owning (for I owned also *The Manse* a larger cottage about fifty yards away) somewhat of a nuisance. I will admit that when the middle-aged author and his wife left there was an unpleasantness. It was about the furniture and the condition of the walls and ceilings. I asked for a hundred pounds to cover damage to the furniture, dilapidations; and the cost of repapering, whitewashing and painting: a very moderate sum. Mr. Bruthers (that was the fellow's name) refused to pay a farthing. He was violent and most personal and indeed conducted the affair upon such a gutter level of abuse and profanity that I would not discuss it with him any further and was, in fact, glad to see the back of him.

It was this more than anything else which decided me to sell the two cottages and I called that very day on Brooker the House-agent in the High Street.

It was just at this time that there began to be a lot of talk in the town. I have forgotten to mention the new arterial road which had just been finished and ran obliquely through Brampton, cutting it into two almost equal parts. There had been a great deal of opposition to the road but nothing could be done about it. And now all day and most of the night a constant stream of cars and lorries passed along it and it was an everpresent menace to-dogs and to children. I lost a fine young red setter within a week of its opening and Crosby the chemist lost his retriever. Some children were also killed.

The talk in the town was not about the road. That was all over and done with. The talk was of a roadhouse which, the rumour went, a rich London Company was going to build in Brampton. It was to be a big gorgeous place with a swimming pool and so forth. I was dead against it. I thought this the last straw. I believed, and was not afraid to say so, that such places

encouraged immorality; and while, as a man of the world, I am prepared to agree that we are only young'once and that the holiday spirit must be catered for, I submit that fun and enjoyment are the cleaner and the healthier when they do not offend the proprieties. No; I did not want one of these sumptuous and voluptuous (yes, *voluptuous*) great places at Brampton; and as a member of the Town Council I could make my wishes heard and felt.

I knew opinion on the Council was very divided and I expected the voting to be close. But before the evening of the meeting a new aspect of the matter was put before me and I voted for permission being granted. Only a fool refuses to change his mind. I had a visitor. I admit he came from the interested Company. I admit also that he wanted to buy *The White Cottage* and *The Manse*, as the sites they occupied were considered ideal for the swimming pool and he offered me a, well, an extremely good price. That did not influence me one iota. But what did was an aspect of the matter which had not occurred to me. He pointed out how few were the amenities in Brampton for young people and how the roadhouse would make good this lack by giving everyone the opportunity to enjoy the healthy delights of swimming, dancing and music under the very best and safest conditions; and at a price within the reach of all; or at any rate of most.

And so the thing went through and the work began. And it was during the demolition of *The White Cottage* that the discovery was made. Or rather *after* the demolition, for it was while they were digging down deeply under its site that the remains of a body were found.

The body was that of a young woman and there was little else but the skeleton; certainly not enough to identify her. Fortunately, however, there was evidence in her mouth which established the fact beyond any doubt that she was Mrs. Beverley: this was some fine bridgework done only a few months before her death by Mr. Hoyle of Hailsham. A very good man; my own dentist in fact.

And while this was being established, and afterwards, Brampton (every man, woman and child) was discussing the event morning, noon and night and wondering and hypothesizing and declaiming. I never had any doubt in the matter myself. I was as sure of what had happened as if I had seen it with my own eyes. First of all this: when Brampton noticed how suddenly Mrs. Beverley had changed, the poor young creature was already dead; mur-

dered by her husband who then proceeded for the next three weeks to impersonate her, his skill as an actor and a painter enabling him to do this safely. Possibly he made and wore a mask. But that is a mere detail; a bit of guesswork. He then either forged her signature on a cheque, or had got hold of a signed blank cheque previously, and drew out her money. I might add that a careful examination of the cheque under a powerful lens neither proved nor disproved the forgery; all that we could say was that the signature *might* have been forged by a fine draughtsman. We preferred however to continue the assumption that it was genuine, to avoid a financial complication which will be obvious to anyone moving in banking circles.

His wife dead and her body deeply buried under the cottage and covered with quick lime, Beverley then ostentatiously left and with his woman took the London train from Hailsbury. But he returned secretly to the cottage and staged the departure on Saturday morning of Mrs. Beverley. A cunningly planned and perfectly executed crime which, but for my providential sale of *The White Cottage*, would never have been discovered. Not that its discovery led to the arrest of Dick Beverley. So far he has gone free and as it is nearly ten years since it happened the chances of running him to earth are now rather remote. He is doubtless living very happily somewhere or other with his woman. Of course he may by now have done away with her too. But not by the help of impersonation, for she was dark, almost swarthy, plump, and quite half a head taller than he. Still, the brain that devised the one plan would not be at a loss to devise another equally clever.

That I received two thousand four hundred pounds for *The White Cottage* and *The Manse* was not nearly so pleasing to me as the fact that their sale was not only instrumental in clearing up a mystery but has helped to provide clean and wholesome enjoyment for the young people of Brampton. And not only for the young people, either.

INSPIRATION

CALDWELL HAD WRITTEN asking me to dine with him at the *Fairfax Restaurant*. This surprised me without pleasing me, for the *Fairfax* was, I knew, much frequented by artists. I do not know a lot about art and very little about artists (and that little not greatly to their credit) and had the choice been left to me, the *Fairfax* would have been the last restaurant I should have chosen. However, I couldn't afford to offend Caldwell, (I was, in fact, depending upon him to get me out of an awkward financial corner) and I supposed one could talk business at the *Fairfax* despite the artistic fraternity and their loud talk which, I have always been given to understand, is their main characteristic.

And certainly there was more than enough noise as Caldwell and I took the table the waiter indicated. And there was loud laughter too (and by its raucousness, not unconnected with bawdy stories I venture to say) and thigh and shoulder slapping and an atmosphere which may have been convivial and artistic but was decidedly poisonous with smoke.

That noise was the background to our meal. I like to eat in silence or, at the most, with no more than an occasional exchange of remarks; and if there must be music I can tolerate it if it is soft remote and good. And by good I mean music with a tune in it. As I say, that noise was a background, obbligato is I believe the musical term, to our meal. And since the noise rose and fell, (but much more often rose than fell) it meant that I now and then missed what Caldwell was saying. I might have been stone deaf for all I could hear when the geniuses (for doubtless they were all geniuses) guffawed in chorus. This did not matter a great deal when he was (for some unknown reason) chatting of art and artists but when later we got right down to fundamentals and money was at stake it was maddening.

It was, fortunately, during his artistic ramblings that the door opened and a rather striking if absurdly flamboyant fellow came in. He was I should say a man in the middle fifties, but well preserved; a massive fellow with a mane of silver and tawny hair and a beard similarly parti-coloured. He was overdressed in the floppy tweedy garments favoured by his kind. He glanced round

the room with a patronising smile as if he owned it and had created it as well as the rest of the universe. Obviously a genius.

"That's," said Caldwell, mentioning some name which I did not catch for the uproar of greeting which was apparently directed at the newcomer. But if I'd caught the name I didn't suppose it would have meant anything to me and so I did not bother to ask Caldwell to repeat it.

"Marvellous career he's had," he went on, "marvellous . . ." and again I missed some words, as I have indicated by dots; and as this seems a good device I propose to adhere to it throughout this brief story.

I heard Caldwell's voice through the din and gave him what attention I could; or tried to appear as if I were doing so, not being able to afford to offend him, damn him. ". . . born in London," he was saying, "nearly sixty years ago in the Tottenham Court Road; and from his eighth year to his sixteenth he went as a day pupil to the well known *Latimer Court School*, then situated at the back of Pall Mall. And he used to walk there each morning and walk home each night. I wonder what the modern . . .

". . . and the thing that impressed him on those walks, impressed him and inspired him; was, in fact, the great inspiration of his life and career (and those are his own words) . . . the work of the pavement artists. He used to stand entranced watching them at work; forgetful of school if it were morning, or of the meal awaiting him if it were afternoon. I have heard him say that these fellows with their stretch of pavement, their bag of crayons, and their old cap or hat resting beside them, these artists (for he insists on the word) cast a spell over him which never lost its power.

"It was his greatest joy to come upon one of these fellows just about to start business for the day. Forgotten was school or anything else and there he would stand stock still, engrossed, utterly absorbed, and watch . . . fascinating to hear him describe it.

"First would come the cleaning of all the pitch with a piece of dry sacking. Then, having selected the paving stone for the first picture, the artist would seat himself and the not-too-clean fingers would go picking among the bits and pieces of crayons until a sky blue was found, When a dozen or so quick strokes would be made and the colour then rubbed in to cover the surface evenly with an exquisite heavenly shade. A few dabs with white and the

grimy fingers' magic rubbing created little fleecy clouds sailing across the sky. Then came the field below, with trees and a stream and a red-roofed farm house. Finally, a flick of the rag, the masterpiece was complete, and the artist moved along on his haunches to the next stone. . . .

"It was a fascination which never palled, never staled. He passed from boyhood into adolescence, but always these shows of the pavement held him enthralled. In holidays in strange towns and cities he sought them out, devoting to watching and study (for he studied them assiduously, especially their textures: it was in fact . . .) those hours the other members of his family or his circle of friends gave to the pleasures of bathing, sailing, fishing and golf. And when, during his later teens, he began in furtherance of his father's excellent plans for his career, to take his holidays abroad, he pursued in Paris, in Lisbon, in Rome, in Berlin, in Madrid, Athens, Vienna and as far afield as Moscow, what had now become the passion of his life.

"There was a species of this work at which he never looked; never gave to it any more than the swiftest passing glance. I refer to crayon or charcoal drawings or even paintings done upon boards and propped up against the wall, with nothing done on the paving stones except the scrawled and dubious legend: *All my own work*. Such shows, as I say, held no interest for him. It was not that they compared unfavourably with the others (although they did), or that he suspected their authenticity. Not at all. They simply did not exist for him. Unless the work were actually done on the paving stones it did not interest him, did not exist as far as he was concerned. That was the prime essential and of course . . .

"If you can get him to talk about his early days (and that is not always easy) he will tell you many adventures he stumbled on in pursuing his quest; and he will make no secret of the fact that these pavement shows were the 'inspiration of his life and of his spectacular and magnificent career."

"I suppose he exhibits in all the salons and academies of the world and is a number one top button genius," I said, rather overpowered (not to say bored) by this flood of reminiscence and panegyric.

Caldwell looked puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't follow you," he said; "whom d'you mean? "

"I didn't catch his name," I said; "but the artist you've been

telling me about," and I looked over towards the bar where the big tweedy flamboyant fellow was still loudly holding forth.

"Artist," Caldwell said, "artist; whatever put that idea into your head? That's James Venables, the millionaire founder and proprietor of Universal Paving Stones Incorporated."

INSTINCT

I WANTED to get to Chelcaster and my own car being laid up my friend Bossington offered to run me down in his. Bossington is a very clever young man and is in one of the Ministries. His car is much better than mine but then I had to pay for mine myself. But that's neither here nor there and I'm certainly not one for muzzling the ox when it treadeth out the corn. I think people should grasp their opportunities; after all if they don't somebody else does so the general standard of morality is not raised by their self-denial.

It was January but quite a soft warm day; the sort of weather you wouldn't get anywhere else in Europe in January. Bossington, about twenty miles or so this side of Chelcaster, suddenly exclaimed: "By George; that's a pretty sight," and slowing down drew in to the side of the road by a big field in which there were many sheep and newly-born lambs.

We sat for some time watching the spectacle. There was a fence around the field; the car was no more than two or three feet from it; and many of the lambs crowded up to the fence staring at us inquisitively and twitching their noses.

"Tame, aren't they," Bossington said; "now I wonder at what age fear of man, or at any rate suspicion of man, creeps in. You see the same sort of thing with young birds in a nest and no doubt with all young things."

"Except fish," I said.

"You don't think fish then, eh?" Bossington said.

"Sure of it."

"Being born by the sea," Bossington said: "you should know. By George! look at that! the little beggar having his elevenses I mean. What's that fastened to his back?"

"The skin of a lamb," I said.

"Queer that, isn't it?"

I felt the delightful glow of superior knowledge suffusing me. It is not a sensation I often enjoy. "O not a bit," I said. "The ewe has lost its lamb and the lamb has lost its mother; so to deceive the old lady into supplying the required nourishment they tie her dead lamb's skin on to the orphan."

"By George!" Bossington said; "sort of emergency ration card."

"Taking advantage of instinct," I said.

"It's a wonderful thing, instinct," Bossington said, letting in the clutch. He was silent for a full minute and we had left the field far behind when he said, "Do you believe we, I mean human beings, make such use of instinct or has it been civilised out of us? Of course certain actions are instinctive; but is instinct still strong enough in us to override reason or—or logic, or calculation, or whatnot?"

"I should think so," I said; "only we call it intuition, don't we?"

"You're probably right. By George! I believe we caught that hen. Did you feel a squelch?"

"I don't think so,"

"We won't go back. There doesn't seem to be anyone about and it wouldn't be edible anyway. I could tell you an odd tale about instinct; if it wouldn't bore you. Sure? Don't mind saying so; we've been friends long enough for that."

I wondered how long that was but did not put it to the test. "Nothing I should like better," I said; "fascinating subject instinct."

He nodded, a little absently, as if collecting his thoughts or mustering his memories. "It happened nearly twenty years ago. I was fourteen at the time and a bit of a handful. My father and mother both had ideas on education and had sent me to one of the ultra-modern Liberty Hall schools. You know the sort of thing I expect."

"Bedlams," I said.

He nodded. "Fortunately I proved too apt a pupil and after setting fire to the Headmaster's house I was expelled and my parents then had a change of heart and I was sent to a more orthodox establishment and soon found my feet; after I'd found a number of others applied to my rump."

"My parents must have thought me an insufferable little beast

for they avoided my company during school holidays either by managing to be away from home themselves or by arranging for me to spend the holiday with relatives. Luckily we possessed a crowd of relations as one experience of my company was more than enough and hopes were not expressed about a second meeting. There was however one exception, an uncle Tom and aunt May who lived in Devonshire. They were a middle-aged childless couple and thus had sentimental notions about children which even a close acquaintanceship with one was unable to destroy completely. Uncle Tom had a comfortable medical practice and he was senior visiting surgeon to the local cottage hospital. It was my aunt rather than my uncle who was so sentimentally inclined towards me and had it been left to him I doubt very much if I should have paid them more than one visit. As it was I spent four successive summer holidays there, from my eleventh to my fifteenth years. But the fourth was the last.

"During the last holiday I frequently accompanied my uncle to the hospital when he made his daily visits and I soon became so free of the place that I was allowed to go pretty much where I liked without anyone bothering about me; and I got on something more than merely good terms with a young probationer nurse for I was big for my age and looked much older.

"I strolled one morning into the small ward where the new babies were kept in their cradles. There were four of them there, all boys, all less than two days old, and all looking to me exactly alike. Labels with their names on were tied on the cots.

"I took up one label, read it, let it fall, and then, as a thought struck me, I began to giggle. A few moments later while I was holding one of the other labels the door opened and the young probationer nurse came in. Her name was Beatrice and I called her Bee. 'What are you up to?' she said, 'some mischief,'

"I've changed the labels," I said; "isn't it a lark!"

"You've changed the labels," she exclaimed and her face went white.

"Yes," I said; "it doesn't matter, does it?" She did not answer but her face told me that it did matter and not a little either.

"Oh Dick! how could you have been so mad!" she said, her face still white, her expression appalled.

"But I wasn't bothering. 'Pooh!' I said, 'their mothers 'll know 'em,'"

" Don't be so stupid ! " she exclaimed; "jif they did do you think we should need to use labels. Oh dear! How could you be so stupid! "

" Cheer up;" I said, " I'll put 'em back."

" Can you? " she said; " are you sure? "

" Of course," I said. " I remember just how they were," and I untied one of the labels. I remember it had Baby David O'Neill on it. And at that moment my uncle Tom came in.

"Hello! " he said, "what are you doing here? " And he glanced quickly from me to Bee; and then his glance went to the label in my hand. " What the devil are you doing with that? " he snapped.

" Nothing," I said morosely.

" Nothing? " he said; " don't talk like a fool." I saw his glance go to Bee's white face. " Damnation, boy! " he said, " have you been monkeying with those labels? "

" No," I said.

" Don't lie," he said harshly; and at this I turned to him and said defiantly, " All right, I have; I've changed the lot and I was just going to put them back. Now I shan't,"

"You will," he said in a menacing half strangled whisper, his face congesting.

" We glanced at one another for what must have been a full minute and then I turned to the cot and tied Baby O'Neill's label on again.

" Is that the right cot? " my uncle asked.

" Yes," I said, "—er—I think so."

"You think so! " he cried.

" It's your fault," I replied. " I did know, but you've driven it out of my head; I don't know t'other from which now? "

" You damnable whelp." He turned to Bee. " Do you know Miss Rayden? " But she shook her head and seemed on the point of tears.

" What's the fuss? " I said. " Their mothers 'll know 'em. By instinct," and I gave him a grin.

" Shut up! " he snapped.

"Well," I said, "if they won't then that's what you'd better -do: shut up and say nothing about it and nobody 'll be the wiser."

" Get out of here," he said. " Get out. Now."

" For a moment I thought of defying him but my holiday had

over a week to go and there was the regatta at Bridmouth I wanted to see. And so without more ado I went.

"The rest of the story I got partly from Bee and partly from my aunt. Instead of taking my advice and saying nothing and trusting to luck as any ordinary man would have done my uncle did the darn silliest thing possible. Said it was his duty. Queer how often they seem to coincide. He told the four mothers what had happened, begged their forgiveness, and suggested they might be able to put things right. And apparently they were all smiles, told him they were sure they could, and that he was worrying himself unnecessarily.

"And so the four mothers were taken into the ward where the cots and babies were and another sort of judgment of Solomon was staged. It didn't go off without at least one breeze. During what I might call the first round both Mrs. O'Neill and young Mrs. Creavey, the curate's wife, claimed Baby David and Mrs. Creavey said she was sure it was her Ronald as he was the image of his father. And at this Mrs. O'Neill said, in a sort of snaky hiss, 'Are you saying, Mrs. Creavey, that my child is the image of your husband?' But things finally calmed down and the affair was brought to a happy conclusion with everyone satisfied. A real triumph of instinct."

"So they all got their rightful babies," I remarked.

"Oh. I wouldn't care to go as far as that," Bossington said, swerving to avoid an imperturbable cat sauntering across the road. "You see I'd never really changed the labels. I'd said it merely to spoof Bee and then when my uncle intruded and called me a liar I carried on with the yarn just to get level with him. Pleasant brat I must have been in those days. Queer thing instinct. You're looking thoughtful, old Boy."

"Well," I said, "as it happens my four children were all born in hospitals."

"Ah," Bossington said; and then, after a long pause, "ah; makes you think, doesn't it! "

THE ENCOUNTER

REDFORDE settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "You know," he said, "a doctor's job tends to give him a poor opinion of humanity; he is perpetually up against the worst side of men and women."

"And the best too, surely," said Grinwode; "suffering ennobles,"

"Rubbish," Redforde said; "suffering exacerbates, degrades, breaks down the defences and the decencies, and at its worst dehumanises man into a wild screaming animal."

"For example?" said Poulton.

Redforde shook his head. "No," he said; "I refuse to butcher my feelings to make authors' holiday. When I observe the amount of leisure you fellows enjoy and the fat incomes you apparently earn I'm tempted to abandon medicine for literature."

"From hocus-pocus to mumbo-jumbo!" Cosgrave laughed; "so small a step you'd not notice it."

"You'd be in good company," Grinwode said; "Smollett, Doyle, Maugham, Brett Young."

Redforde smiled. "Leaves from the Diary of A Doctor I've thought of taking the plunge with."

"Been done," Grinwode said; "Doyle, I believe."

"Or Leaves from a Doctor's Case-Book," said Redforde.

"Been done!" Grinwode laughed; "can't think of the chap's name."

"Autobiography's the vogue," Poulton said; "It's easy money. You slip the leash off all your inhibitions, confidences and decencies, take out your fountain-pen, and let it rip. Call it Dear Doctor."

"I'm sure that's been done too," Redforde smiled; "but if the money's so easy I shall-have to think about it. As professionals perhaps you can tell me where one begins an autobiography."

"The womb," Cosgrave said; "pre-natal influence and all that."

"All fol-de-rol," Poulton said; "that vein's worked out and none too soon. Is there anything more boring than clack about brats and prep, schools and all the manifestations of infantility? When I write my autobiography I shall begin with my twenty-first birthday."

" Your childhood being unmentionable ! " Grinwode laughed.

" Unfortunately," Redtorde said, " if you leave out childhood and schooldays you withhold the key to the enigma."

" The child father to the man and so forth," Cosgrave said.

Redtorde nodded. " Always true. A vast rich province barely explored at all. A life-time's study for a million research workers. I remember when I was at school (I was at Wellborough) among the other new boys of my first term was a youngster named Arthur Manville. That was not his name but it will serve. He attracted my attention immediately because he was put into the same form and sat next to me. And sat next to me meant touching me, for there were still in use at Wellborough, for the lower forms, the long desks, like pens, which dated back to the Georges. But it would not in any case have been long before I, in common with everyone else in Lower School, noticed him. He was striking in appearance, dark, tall and infernally good-looking. But it was not merely his looks; a striking appearance is not so uncommon as all that. Nor his cleverness. There were not a few brilliant boys at Wellborough. Nor that he seemed to have read everything; nor that he loathed games and jeered at them and yet was the finest swimmer and diver the school has ever had or probably will have. We weren't so unfamiliar with oddities as to single out Arthur Manville for special attention because of his.

" But all of these attributes of Manville's taken together made a sum total you might think large enough to account for the peculiar place he soon occupied in Lower and presently in the whole school. No. It was more than that. A great deal more. I said a moment ago that he was infernally good-looking. I used the adjective intentionally. He was infernally good-looking; devilishly good-looking. That makes you smile. You think I'm exaggerating, romancing, as one is apt to do when harking back to childhood. But I assure you I'm not. If only you could have seen Manville you would know how apt the word is. And if you were to ask me to give you another one equally apt, I should suggest, with complete indifference to your derisive glances at each other, sinister. There you are: infernal, sinister—the very language of melodrama, the Murder in the Red Barn, Pepper's Ghost and so on and so forth.

" All right. I grant you it. But you didn't know Arthur Manville. And now I'm going to disappoint you." He smiled. " Truth

is the amateur's handicap; he doesn't feel strong enough to violate it, whereas the professional, the expert, can handle the most blazing, the most staggering lie and get away with it. Every man to his trade. I could do an appendectomy while eating eggs and bacon. Manville got up to no shocking capers. No torturing; no sadism; none of the nasty business so popular in novels of school life; not a bit of it. He was much nearer a model of all the excellencies. He worked hard; and when a clever boy works hard, well, it's dam' rough on the rank and file, the ruck. And so he sailed up through the school leaving us in a long-drawn-out procession in his wake. He also made something of a stir with his swimming and diving. And he presently edited *The Wellburnian*.

"A meritorious, a spotless record. It was all that. Add to it that he was never in trouble, never given a detention or what we called a Wednesday. Perfection incarnate; the embodiment of the schoolmaster's dream. And at Wellborough then there was a deal more thrashing than would, I imagine, be tolerated these days. Prefects used both the cane and the slipper and the Head was a flogger of the old type. And Arthur Manville went scathless through four and a half years.

"Was I his friend? Not a bit of it. We were on a mildly amicable footing during that first term and then, as I say, he shot away from us, and very soon was beyond our orbit. He hadn't any friends. Not one. Not a single crony. You would think it was impossible for a boy to pass through a big school like Wellborough without making a single friend. Arthur Manville did that. Not one. Not one single boy out of the four-hundredodd that he showed the slightest preference for. That was it. He didn't want a friend; didn't feel the need for one; simply didn't care tuppence-ha'penny for anyone. And barricaded himself against all overtures. For of course, there were overtures; scores, hundreds probably; and they would at first be frequent; boys are gregarious animals; they" can't understand lone wolves.

"And then Manville went up to Oxford, to Balliol, with three exhibitions. Yes, three. Enough to see him through comfortably. And he left behind at Wellborough a nasty taste in the mouth. You think I'm exaggerating; being unfair to him; perhaps venting a personal spite. Not in the least. It was just that. And it was all of a piece with his infernal good-looks, his unsociability, his perfection of behaviour and avoidance of punishment; and also, oddly

perhaps, with his brilliant achievement as a scholar and swimmer. Be that as it may, there it was and it leaves the enigma of Arthur Manville without a key."

"If there were one," put in Grinwode.

"There always is. At Oxford, and now I can only give you hearsay and that but a trifle, for I went to the Sorbonne and afterwards took a London degree. At Oxford Manville distinguished himself and on coming down collared quite a plum in the Foreign Office and then went into the Diplomatic Service. He seemed set for a great career, with honours, orders, titles and what-not. And then quite suddenly he blew up. A very hush-hush business but apparently pretty unsavoury. No-one knew quite what it was; or those who did know kept it under their hats. Anyhow Manville disappeared and that was the end of him as far as this world was concerned.

"After I had taken my diploma I wanted to see the world and having no ties, nor desiring any (I have never married, you know), I took several posts as ship's surgeon, sometimes on English liners, occasionally on Italian, but mostly on French. I like French boats——"

"No nonsense about women and children first I " put in Poulton with a chuckle.

"A gross libel. But after some years I tired of the life and looked for a post ashore. I obtained the appointment of resident medical officer at a large prison; it was at—well, let me say abroad and leave it at that. When I arrived to take up my post I found I could not have chosen a more ill-opportune moment to arrive, for there was to be an execution on the morrow and I should have to be present. It had been a particularly shocking murder, a triple affair, young children.

"Unless you have experienced it, I don't think you can have any conception of the tense atmosphere in a prison the night before an execution. Everyone's nerves are stretched to snapping-point, even the old experienced hands. Death seems already to have invaded the place, quietly and unobtrusively, yet a very real presence, or as real as any other ghost; and if you've ever been in a haunted house where manifestations indubitably take place you'll know what I mean. And it affects the other prisoners even more than it does the staff. I should! guess that a quite astonishing number don't sleep at all on such a night; or but very fitfully.

For myself, I didn't sleep a wink and that is not the usual hyperbole but the plain fact. And it is also the plain fact that the man who was to die did sleep, certainly for the first four or five hours of the night, although he was restless afterwards.

"The execution was for eight o'clock and I got up at seven, bathed and shaved, and drank several cups of hot coffee laced with considerably more brandy than I should recommend.

"At ten minutes to eight the prisoner came out of his cell accompanied by the executioner and his two assistants. And feeling like nothing on earth I walked along the corridor to meet them. And——"

"And the prisoner was Manville!" broke in Cosgrave.

"The prisoner? I didn't know him from Adam. It was the executioner who was Manville."

"You led us up the garden very nicely," laughed Poulton.

Redforde smiled. "Not at all. You led yourselves up the garden. I painted for you a perfect portrait, psychologically, of the sort of human being who, given the circumstances, might become a public executioner. You gentlemen, with your incurable writers' itch for the romantic and the melodramatic, missed all the cues and jumped to a completely preposterous conclusion."

Cosgrave grinned. "I believe you invented the fellow."

"Of course. Perfect types don't exist in Nature."

STRAINED RELATIONS

MRS. PHILIP SHELTON was angry, exasperated, hurt. She was a woman of some culture, commonsense and sensibility, and had doubtless often in her married life discussed that perennial topic 'the ingratitude of children' and agreed that the proposition was so universally true as to be axiomatic. Such a conclusion, however strongly held, occasioned her no more misgiving or disquiet than any other downright statement of abstract truth. It did not come near to her; it was like saying death is the common lot; she rendered it momentary lip-service and gave it no further thought. Had someone said to her, 'Then you expect your Ernest to be ungrateful for all you have done for him,' she would have said, 'I don't expect Ernest to be any different from other children,

either now or when he has grown up,' And she would have believed it, as is the human habit until the real thing, the concrete thing, the harsh ugly reality, steps over our doorstep, confronts us, laughs at us mockingly, and confutes us. Here was her only son Ernest at six-and-twenty displaying that universal ingratitude all parents pretend to expect; and instead of regarding the situation with philosophic calm and resignation she was filled with the most resentful and self-pitying emotions. After all she had done for him. . . .

What had she done? It made a brave display but was it more than a son or daughter might justifiably expect? Left a widow when the boy was four she had devoted herself to him and to his career. But in a world where women will devote themselves to cats, dogs, parrots, canaries, and crapulous old relations, what great merit is there in dedicating oneself to an intelligent and engaging little boy, especially when he is blood of one's blood?

True enough she had devoted herself almost entirely to his interests and while this entailed some self-sacrifice it was merely of time, and her self-denial was limited to some restriction of social engagements. There was no working of fingers to the bone; no tightening of a metaphorical belt that the boy might not go hungry; no wearing of old clothes or leaking shoes that he might be warm and dry. The late Philip Shelton had been comfortably off, very comfortably, even for Medstowe, which with its Vanes, its Leighs, its Daltons, its Treshams, its Rawdons and its Forsythes (to name but a few of its well-to-do county families) was considered to be the wealthiest small township in the whole of Downshire. And so at the pleasant age of twenty-seven Mrs. Philip Shelton had found herself the possessor of a large house (*The Elms*) in Medstowe, a pretty cottage on the Cornish coast, and investments which produced about eighteen hundred pounds a year: and her husband's will, drawn up a week after their marriage, gave her not merely a life interest but entire possession. A case might well be made out (on behalf of the unborn) for legally prohibiting men from making their wills during a period of such rapturous uxoriousness as the first few weeks of marriage, were it not for the fact that cooling passion can quickly add a codicil or, even more quickly, destroy the document. Whatever Mr. Shelton's intentions may have been towards his son he never carried them out and his widow was left as sole owner and dispenser.

Until he was ten Ernest had a governess, a Miss Jane Wardrop, a woman of such breeding, learning and refinement that the staff of *The Elms* held her in much greater awe than they did their mistress, who was by no means given to attempts at bridging the vast gap between employer and domestic servant.

When it was considered time that the mild sway of the petticoat should give place to the more virile trouser Ernest proceeded to the famous St. Jude's Pieparatory School where he remained four years before becoming an alumnus of the equally famous Shelbridge Public School. Thence to Merton College, Oxford, where he passed three very enjoyable and rather expensive years, coming down at the age of twenty-two without, it must be admitted, having taken a degree. But he had made several fashionable friends; he had for one term edited *The his*; he had contributed a sonnet to *The Spectator* and three items of charavaria to *Punch*; he was very personable and a good mixer and it was quite expected by his contemporaries at Oxford that a successful literary career awaited him, if only as a publisher's reader. Altogether the care and money lavished upon Ernest by his mother (vicarious as the one and unearned as the other may have been) might be considered as certainly not wasted.

But Mrs. Shelton had more than this to congratulate herself upon, for between mother and son there was deep and strong feeling. They had always spent the holiday-times together, even throughout his Oxford days; and the very loving and perhaps over-demonstrative little boy of the governess days had grown up into the affectionate young man, almost as assiduous in his attentions as his father had been in those halcyon days which had produced the invidious last will and testament.

Since leaving Oxford Ernest had lived with his mother and had shown no desire to leave his very comfortable home. His literary promise had come to no more than a half-dozen or so poems and two or three rather bodiless short stories in the literary reviews, and a thimbleful of bits and pieces in *Punch*. There was no particular reason why he should struggle for a career in literature or indeed in anything. His mother made him an allowance of five hundred a year; he had cosy, even luxurious, quarters; he was popular in Medstowe society; and he was completely lacking in ambition. Finding lite flowing so easily and so happily it is not to be wondered at that he hesitated to enter that arena where men

with the economic knife at their throats (or, more aptly, at their stomachs) will fight with teeth and nails, lacking more lethal weapons, for their bread and butter. And his mother did not want him to enter any arena which might take him away from her; life was very pleasant as it was; why alter things? why toil and sweat for what was already in his possession? As for fame, what was it but a phantasm?

And then Ernest fell in love with a young woman bearing the mellifluous name of Jocelyn Loveday. And Miss Loveday was as delightful as her name, and enchantingly pretty. Unfortunately she was not of the social position of the Sheltons; her drawer in the social chest was considerably lower; she was a school teacher; a board-school teacher—what horror! And her mother, who had once been a nurse, received paying guests.

Mrs. Shelton took the absolutely right line over the wretched affair; she was most sensible about it, feeling sure it would blow over. But it failed to blow over and while Medstowe waited gleefully for the announcement of the engagement she passed from anxiety to exasperation, thence to anger, and finally to a self-pity which in her secret heart charged her son with the blackest ingratitude.

The dreaded news came at last; and if it were at least from her son's own lips that it came she failed to find balm for her hurts in that small mercy because of the casual almost off-hand way he had dropped the expected bolt.

It was at dinner-time and they had been discussing (as had every other dinner-table in Medstowe, or in Downshire for that matter) the dreadful affair of young Ronald Collshott who had committed a particularly atrocious and unsavoury murder, been taken in flagrante delicto, and now lay in the county jail at Chelcaster awaiting that trial whose verdict was a foregone conclusion. Medstowe's interest, perhaps excessive, was pardonable, for Collshott was Medstowe born and bred and had only left the little town some five or six years earlier to take up a post in Hooper's Grocery Emporium in the county town.

And abruptly, long before the topic was exhausted of its succulence, Ernest had scattered his mother's thoughts to the winds and stirred her emotions into great agitation by announcing that he proposed to marry his pretty little school-teacher that July, a bare three months ahead.

Mrs. Shelton, after the shock had lost something of its first poignancy, gathered all her forces and prepared to put up a fight; but a sensible, reasonable fight. "Are you sure you know your own feelings?" she asked.

"Perfectly, Mother."

"And you realise just what you are doing?"

"I realise that if ever there were a man who did not deserve such stupendous luck, I'm that man,"

"Ernest, I am not going to attempt to drive a bargain. I respect myself and love you far too much to dream of doing so. When you were twenty-one and I made your allowance up to five hundred a year I told you that on your marriage it should be increased to a thousand. That promise I shall honour. You know that."

"Of course, Mother."

"But Ernest, my dear boy, let me beg of you, let me implore you as your mother, not to make this utterly unsuitable match. And your poor father were he alive would, I am sure, join his pleas to mine."

Ernest leaned on the table, opposing his fingertips and looking into his mother's face said quietly, "He was not my father."

He might have struck her across the mouth from the outraged expression of her face as she stared at him. unable for a moment to find speech.

"And," he went on evenly, not taking his eyes from hers, "you, my dear Mother, if you will forgive the paradoxical phrasing, are not my mother." He put up a hand. "We're neither of us mad. The explanation is simple enough. Four hours after I was born the nurse on duty at the nursing-home mistook your babe for that of another patient born about the same time. She discovered her error within half-an-hour, but by that time the Mayor was paying a sort of state call; everyone was flustered and bothered; and not daring to drop such a pebble of discord into the stream of the Mayor's almost fulsome praises of the Home, the Matron and the Staff, she decided to say nothing and hope for the best."

"Who told you this preposterous story?"

"The nurse herself."

"The nurse herself?"

He nodded. "Jocelyn's mother."

"I don't believe a word of it. Do you think a mother would not know her own child?"

He smiled faintly. "They don't, you know. Mrs. Loveday assures me that it is a thing which happens with far more frequency than people realise, or would believe,"

"Well, I refuse utterly to believe it. What proof has she?"

"You know that queer little birthmark of mine in which we have——"

'Nonsense, Ernest. Are you going to tell me that you base this incredible——"

"It is not in the least incredible. That mark is a sort of heirloom in the family; the other family; the family that got your babe while you got theirs; it was the first time it had missed (or rather seemed to have missed) a son for generations. You must believe it. It is absurd to refuse to face facts; and it is not in keeping with your character."

She stared at him. "And is my son alive?"

He nodded.

She stretched a hand across the table and took one of his. "You are my son," she said; "you are my son to me; why drag this up out of the past? Forget about it. We will both forget about it. Give up this foolish marriage and let us go abroad for a long holiday,"

"I am willing to forget it and indeed see no point in revealing it; but I thought you ought to know. As for giving up my marriage with Jocelyn I would sooner give up life itself, melodramatic as that may sound,"

Her eyes searched his face. Anger at this calm statement of his intentions began to master her. "If you are not my son," she said coldly, "then you have no right to expect anything from me, and the promise I gave to you is null. Can you marry on nothing? How will you support a wife? Supposing I claim my son and make over to him the money that has been and was to have been yours—what then, my boy?"

"You will not do that, Mother," he said, "if you will still allow me to call you so,"

"You seem very sure," she said, an inflexion of hardness in her tone.

"I am sure," he said slowly, hesitated, and then went on, "you see the other babe was Ronald Collshott."

THE WATCH

THE REV. ALFRED MEARS, Curate of the London east-end parish of St. Edmund's, Shorefields, picked his way along a muddy sidestreet leading to the main road where he would catch the tram which passed his rooms. It was little after four o'clock on a November afternoon but the gathering dusk had joined with a thin fog to summon early darkness. Although he stepped carefully, avoiding puddles, horse-droppings, and garbage, the action was barely conscious, for his mind was busy. The hour through which he had just lived had been an emotional ordeal and something of its agitation was still upon him. He was six-and-twenty and had been curate at St. Edmund's since he was ordained but in those "few years he had by the sincerity and simplicity of his life so endeared himself to" the parishioners, that when, his health breaking down, he had, on medical advice, accepted a curacy in Devonshire, there was real regret among those to whom he had ministered and a desire to make him some gift as a memento of his work amongst them and as an expression of their good wishes for his future welfare. And so in the Parish Hall that afternoon, with the Vicar, the Rev. Claude Lacy-Bolingbroke, presiding, and before an audience of over seven hundred, mostly women, he had bidden his farewell (finding his voice a little shaky) and been presented with a gold watch and albert. The vicar before handing it to him had opened its case and read out sonorously and with a beaming smile the inscription: Presented to the Rev. Alfred Mears by the parishioners of St. Edmund's, Shorefields, with every good wish for his future happiness.

The watch was now in his vest-pocket, the albert in place and occasionally reflecting the murky light from the lamps he passed, for the weather was warm and muggy, the Parish Hall had been almost stifling, so that he was glad to leave his ulster unbuttoned.

But it was not only the recent ceremony which was so occupying his mind. He had been greatly worried of late about his work for which he was no longer certain he had a vocation. So distressed and dismayed had he become by the doubts crowding into his mind that he had unburdened himself to his vicar. The Rev. Claude had listened attentively, now and again nodding his head,

or smiling blandly, or saying, 'Quite, my dear fellow;' and at the end had given him a glass of sherry and a cigarette and had assured him that it was a phase through which most earnest young men passed (had he, not himself done so!) and that much of it was due to the state of his health.

The curate had found himself much comforted by this assurance and had been able in the following weeks to keep such unpleasant thoughts well under control; but as he stumbled along the dirty street in the thickening darkness, he found, perhaps because the emotional stress of the afternoon had made a breach in his ramparts, the old unhappy doubts and fears flooding back.

A quickly-moving body collided with him, jerking his mind back to the realities of the moment, and knocking him against the wall; a hand (or was it a hundred hands?) went swiftly over his body; there was a tug and a wrench and then the diminishing sound of running feet being swallowed up in the darkness.

An hour later the sneak-thief (whose name was Percy Forde, Perce to his few, his very few intimates) sat in his bedroom, locked, contemplating the day's haul. It was a good one, unusually so for November when people were tightly buttoned up, and his eyes glittered at the heap of stuff lying on the dirty coverlet. 'Worf firty quid if it's worf a farden', ran his thoughts; and then he scowled; 'be lucky if I get more'n a fiver for it out of the old Sheenie.' He picked up the watch and chain and pressing the spring opened the case and slowly read the inscription. He read it three times aloud as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes and must call in his ears to corroborate. And then he ejaculated, 'Blinkin' blimey! Little Mearsey. Pinched 'is blinkin' watch and never reckernised 'im. Must be the watch they had the w'ip rahnd for. Blinkin' blimey, wouldn't 've done it f'r anyfink. Nah w'at 're we goin' t' do abaht it? "'

Mr. Percy Forde abandoned himself to cogitation. He was sincerely sorry. He liked Mr. Mears, although he had met but thrice (including the recent encounter), and had in fact contributed two shillings to the fund, a fact which he now remembered with a grin. But the grin was fleeting. It wasn't a grinning matter. It was ruddy serious. Little Mearsey going away for keeps and a dirty dog pinching his ruddy keepsake afore he got out o' the ruddy parish. What would he think. Done the dirty on Mearsey

'oo was as nice a little bloke as you'd *meet* from the Bow Palace to Aldgate Pump. What was he going to do about it? He'd got to do something. But what? Return the watch: Easy to say it, but not so blinkin' easy to do it. The ruddy rozzers had a hundred traps set for soft fools who tried that sort of sloppy caper. Not a thing he'd dream o' doing. Not in the ordinary way. But Little Mearsey! Well, he'd have to think o' somethin'. Meanwhile, decided Mr. Perce Forde, he would retain the watch.

Dramatic turning-points are not uncommon in life. History's pages teem with them, from Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus to the young Clive with the loaded pistol at his head. The stealing of Mr. Mears's presentation watch was such a point in the life of Mr. Percy Forde. He gave up sneak-thieving and found work, a break with the past which was achieved only after a tremendous struggle. That initial battle was the hardest; once it was won the road, although difficult and painful, was at least straight; he could see ahead; he knew now where he was making for; and if that destination were far distant and apparently impossible of achievement it was a star by which he set his course.

He meant to return that watch one day and he meant to be able to point to this hoped-for achievement and to say proudly yet humbly: 'This is what it did for me.'

And so in pursuance of his ambition Mr. Forde not only performed and gladly performed the distasteful task of finding work and doing it for nine hours a day, but he performed another and even more distasteful task: he attended evening classes; he, Perce Forde, who at the Board School when a boy had held the record for truanting ('dolly-wagging' in the vernacular of Shorefield), had never got beyond Standard Four, and at fourteen had left to the undisguised pleasure of the staff and with scholastic endowments which would have been poor for a ten-year-old. He, Perce Forde, went back to the hated thiee R's at the age of twenty-four.

Up-hill work; hard to do; and harder still to bear the amusement of his former associates. This amusement was not vocal for it was still not quite clear how much of the old Adam remained in Perce and he had formerly been pretty handy with his 'dukes' and not above the use of knuckledusters.

A year went by and he found a better post on the other side of London, south of the river, a district where Percy Forde and his former exploits were unknown and where the spectacle of a

studious young vanman attending evening classes excited no comment either derisive or admiring.

He began to forge ahead, getting better posts, and, as he put it, a strangle-hold on the three R's, to say nothing of such other matters as history, geography, biology and, after some years, Latin and Greek, for his appetite grew with eating, as the French proverb has it regarding the grosser delights of the flesh-pots.

In time, when he was about thirty, he attracted the attention of the local rector, a man of wide scholarship, who, becoming interested in this display of authentic hunger for knowledge, offered to coach him and paid for him to have lessons from a professor of voice production. This combination of hard work and good-will was so successful that by the time Mr. Percy Forde was five-and-thirty, he would at least have passed muster among the literate as one of themselves.

And then he revealed his ambition to his benefactor: to take Holy Orders. The good rector was by no means astonished and warmly encouraged the project and in another five years the miracle was achieved, the metamorphosis complete: Perce Forde the Cockney sneak-thief was become the Rev. Percy Forde, B.A., B.D. With the rector's blessing he departed for a parish in Liverbridge, Lancashire.

During all these years he had kept warm and dear in his heart that other ambition, to restore the watch to its rightful owner when the time was ripe. That time had now come. But the difficulty was to find the man he had robbed. The name of Augustus Mears no longer appeared in Crockford, so that it was plain he had left the Church; and Mr. Forde, in his less optimistic moods, feared he had gone abroad, for he remembered that there had been some talk in Shorefield at the time of the presentation of Mr. Mears's going upon some foreign medical mission or service. In moods of depression he even admitted the possibility of his death. But such moods were rare. In the main he kept a good heart, convinced that one day they would meet again. He kept the flame of this belief burning brightly; he believed that faith could not only move metaphorical mountains, but, if held strongly enough, actual ones.

And while he tended this secret flame he worked hard in his parish, earning great praise from his vicar, a word or two of encomium from the bishop of the diocese, and not only the res-

pect and love of the parishioners but quite a small name as a preacher of power and eloquence.

His reputation grew. He was moved to a larger parish. A year or so later he moved again, this time in the parish of St. Sulspice's, Blackmere, as vicar. It was a wealthy parish and a very comfortable living. He was a popular vicar and his reputation as a great preacher brought people from other parishes to hear him, so that whenever he occupied his pulpit the Church was packed and all the aisles were crowded with chairs.

As the years went by with the restoration of the stolen property still unmade he began to be haunted by the fear that he might lose that watch and decided to send it to his bank for safe-keeping. But before he could carry out this wise if belated resolution what he dreaded happened. His house was broken into and the watch, with several hundred pounds' worth of other property, was taken.

The next morning the burglar, in his bedroom, a good hundred miles from Blackmere, sat by the side of his bed regarding with a contented eye the heap of booty upon the coverlet. He picked up the gold watch and opened the case. He stared at the inscription with incredulous eyes. And then he muttered: " Good Lord! my watch; how in the devil's name did it get there! "

THE END OF THE QUEUE

IT WAS ONLY a small Indian frontier affair; the sort of thing which happens half-a-dozen times a year and does not get into the newspapers except perhaps in a couple of lines tucked away below an advertisement for silk stockings or for a new miracle-working gland extract. But in this instance Lieutenant Sidney Hargreaves, the young officer in charge of the detachment of Sikhs, had covered himself with more than the normal amount of glory and was recommended for the V.C. More important still there was not in England at that particular moment a murder, divorce, heavy-weight boxing-contest or even a society wedding to chronicle and the newspapers therefore had to make do with what small potatoes Fate offered them. And so Lieutenant Hargreaves's exploit received almost as much space in the national Press as had been

given the previous week to that really hot news-story concerning the slapping of a film-star's face by an aggrieved (and tipsy) ex-welter-weight champion.

The newspapers found quite a lot 'o say about the gallant young lieutenant and while a deal of it was apochryphal the stirring quotations from Kipling and Newbolt were very apt and striking. Some of the papers indeed printed in full (by permission) Newbolt's poem *He Fell Among Thieves* which recounts an incident on the Afghan frontier and many of their readers, perhaps excusably, confused not only the exploits but the names and retained the impression that a gallant young officer named Newbolt had won the V.C. in a hold-up.

A few authentic facts did, however, find their way into print, the chief being that Lieutenant Sidney Hargreaves had been born in the big Midland city of Bundesbury, educated at Rossall and Sandhurst, had played rugger (once) for England and was a bachelor and an orphan.

Bundesbury, said most of the newspapers, must to-day be proud of its heroic son. Bundesbury was and the Mayor (Alderman Henry Sparrow, sole proprietor of Sparrow's Universal Bazaar and Emporium) summoned an extraordinary meeting of the City Council to consider how best that pride might display itself. "And not only pride," said Alderman Percy Coates (of Coates's famous Bundesbury Pork Pies), "but gratitude, for it's a fine ad. for Bundesbury." Mr. Coates was indeed wondering whether a cunningly-worded letter to the gallant young soldier might extract from him the information that in his boyhood he had devoured scores of Coates's Pork Pies and to their wholesome succulence he ascribed his strength and valour. But this matter the aldermanic pieman kept discreetly to himself.

At this extraordinary meeting there were present The Mayor, five aldermen and nine councillors and, as will be apparent, fifteen projects were discussed. Those received with most favour were a statue in the city square, the endowment of a Hargreaves bed in the hospital, a bronze plaque in the Town Hall, the lieutenant's portrait in oils (by a local artist) for the Council Chamber and, most favoured of all and the one finally decided upon, a Civic Reception (with band), a banquet and a presentation of the Freedom of the City. Alderman Percy Coates rose to ask if the banquet would be in the nature of a cold collation and further, if there

were an 'r' in the month, would pork-pies be given the place of honour. The question was ruled out of order although disorder would have been the apter word for there were many loud asides concerning ptomaine poisoning and the notorious doings of Jerry the ghoulish pieman of Fleet Street. The matter being at last settled the Clerk to the Council was empowered to write to Lieutenant Hargreaves acquainting him of Bundesbury's intentions and requesting to know the date he would arrive in England.

Lieutenant Hargreaves wrote a very modest and soldierly reply desiring the Clerk to thank the Council for their too generous praise and for the honour they were proposing to bestow upon him and giving an approximate date for his arrival in England, adding that he would wire in good time the Tain by which he would travel to Bundesbury. A postscript drew attention to the fact that it would first be necessary for him to attend at Buckingham Palace before coming on to his native city.

But the north-west frontier of India has a way of upsetting plans and the lieutenant's leave was twice postponed. However, he kept the Clerk informed of the state of affairs and when finally he arrived in England, some six weeks later than he had at first expected, he wired the Council from Southampton notifying his arrival and the following day, a Wednesday, wired to say that his train would reach Bundesbury at 11.15 on the Friday morning.

The young soldier's businesslike way of dealing with the affair might well have given the impression that he regarded it all with the most perfect sang-froid but the truth was that he considered it a pretty fearful ordeal, far more terrifying indeed than the one which had gained him his distinction.

As the train approached the great city he comforted his shrinking nerves with the hope that the lapse of time would have wearied most of the citizens and that probably there would be just The Mayor and a Councillor or two and a few casual onlookers. But as the train drew into the station his heart thumped and his stomach manifested the most uncomfortable symptoms. Flags and bunting were everywhere; banners and bannerets flapped from a hundred strings; vast streamers stretched right across the eight platforms bearing such embarrassing greetings as *Your City Greets You, Bundesbury Welcomes You, Bundesbury is Proud of You*. A brass band blared above the noise of hissing steam and massed cheering. He could see beyond the jostling crowd The

Mayor, Mace Bearer and many Aldermen and Councillors in all the splendour of their immemorial habiliments.

As the train jerked to a standstill he congratulated himself upon the fact that he was in an end cairiage and would have time to pull himself together before the dreadful moment came when he would have to face that clamant multitude and those awe-inspiring figures in their overwhelming finery. He had a wild second of panic during which he contemplated flight but conquering this he stepped out of his carriage and walked slowly up the platform between the two trains, for there was another train just in on the other side.

His platform was Number One and a row of taxicabs were drawn up beside it, their drivers standing up and craning their necks. He caught the eye of one of the men, shrank a little, fearing he was recognised, and then, licking his dry lips and smiling wanly he said, "Er—rather—er—embarrassing, all this fuss."

"Not it! " grinned the taxi-driver; "they all like it; meat and drink to 'em."

With a feeling of relief the lieutenant realised that he had not been recognised. He played with the notion of revealing himself and compromised by saying with a nervous little laugh, "Er—I—er—think Lieutenant Hargreaves is going to—er—find it somewhat embarrassing."

"'Oo? " asked the taxi-driver.

"Lieutenant Hargreaves," more firmly and distinctly.

"'Go's he? never 'eard of im."

"Why—er—he's the—er—cause of——"

"'Alf a mo', mate! 'alf a mo'! there she is,"

"Who? " his voice rising in bewilderment.

"'Oo? 'Oo? Blimey, why Ella Bates, the Movie Queen. Cool good ol' Ella. Mayor's just shaking 'ands with 'er. 'Ooray ! Blimey, ain't y' got a cheer? 'Ooray! 'Oo-blinkin'-ray! Jest back from 'Oilywood. Born 'ere, Ella was. 'Ooray! "

Lieutenant Hargreaves grappled silently with the situation and then said quietly, "Er—perhaps you'll drive me to the Connaught Hotel."

"What? Cheese it, cully; 'ave an 'cart. I want to see a bit more of our Ella." He jumped down from his cab and before moving away through the press of people said over his shoulder, "Shan't be long, ol son. Hang on a bit. Jest goin' for a squint

at Ella. She might give the crowd one o' her songs. *Love me in the sunset* or *'do like tripe on Tewsdays*. She's a proper sort is Ella; one o' the best."

Lieutenant Hargreaves decided to walk to the hotel and as he edged his way through the riotous crowd packing the station and overflowing into the streets he considered the matter carefully and not without some amusement; and finally concuded that he would stay the night in Bundesbury and call upon the Mayor in the morning.

That evening he looked up the Mayor's private address in the directory and about half-past ten the next day called at The Manor House only to be informed by a maid that his worship was at the Town Hall. Determined to pursue the affair to the end and get out of it whatever fun there was he proceeded to the Town Hall, handed his card to a clerk and asked to see The Mayor. The clerk, a pallid, fair-haired young man with pale-blue staring eyes and a mechanical grin glanced from the card to its owner with no sign of interest. He took the card, however, and went away and some five minutes later Lieutenant Hargreaves found himself seated opposite Mr. Henry Sparrow who, as soon as he had grasped things, was endeavouring with profuse apologies to make the best of a difficult position. He suggested a banquet and presentation on the following Monday but the lieutenant regretfully refused as he had to leave for his home in Scotland that evening, but he assured his worship that he would take the will for the deed and was grateful for the proffered honour although he would be unable to accept it.

"Very nice of you, very nice, *I'm sure*," said The Mayor, with a vast exhalation of relief. And then he went on confidentially, leaning forward in his chair, "You see, it's like this, Mr.—er—er—Mr. Hargreaves; your postponing of the thing sort of put things out and—and—well, jest you listen to these." He opened a drawer and drew out a sheet of typed paper. He flapped it, cleared his throat and said, "During the last five weeks Bundesbury 'as—er—has given civic receptions to the following—er—eminent ladies and gentlemen: The Prime Minister; General Sir Alfred Capper; Mr. Sol Rex and his Boys; Lady Susan Pumfrey; Miss Clara Copley the great soprano; Jock McKay the Heavy-weight Champ; and four or five others whose names I dessay you don't know. And of course Our Ella. And what's more, Mr.—

er—Mr. Hargreaves, we've 'ad—er—had the papers full of the Dodson Murder and the big fire at Birmingham and that nasty business at the 'Otel Himperial and then there was that Roper scoundrel's trial and the suicide of: the Jubilee Bridge here and what with the 'flu epidemic and the rest of it well there, things kind o' got forgotten as you might say. O' course that's no excuse and there was your telegrams and I can promise you I'll have that enquired into. Someone's going to get a rap over the knuckles you can take it from me. But I do 'ope—er—hope you'll see——"

" Oh, that's *quite* all right," Lieutenant Hargreaves broke in with a laugh; and then, to ease the situation and enable him to withdraw on the jest, he added, " not exactly *veni vidi vici* was it, sir! "

" Ha! ha! " roared his worship; "you're right, sir; you're right; it wasn't! "

Later, recounting the interview to his wife, The Mayor remarked, " Took it very well he did really, my dear. Went out all smiles. Although he *did* say something in French about his V.C. which I thought wasn't in good taste. But there I must excuse that I suppose. Dessay for all his smiles he felt a bit 'ipped."

FINALE

CYRIL WENSON was a hypochondriac. He affirmed that this dreary condition was congenital but while the more vocal of the psychologists might have supported this view the majority would have repudiated it and rightly, for there is no hypochondria in the womb. The cause of that grey depression which perpetually haunted him was doubtless (unices one pooh-pooh the psychologists altogether—a quite defensible standpoint) some occurrence of the earliest years of his childhood; but what that occurrence was only omniscience can be certain—hence the fun of being a psychologist. All the mere human chronicler can do is to state known facts and leave the inferences for those who delight in such problems as $x + y = z$. He was an only child and a posthumous one. His father died at the age of sixty-one and his mother was forty when he was born; she benefited under her husband's will to the extent of two-

hundred-and-fifty pounds a year as an Annuity terminable at her death.

Mrs. Wenson was an emotional woman who combined a superabundance of affection with that most uncomfortable of all itches—the itch to boss. It would be unfair to say that she had loved and bossed her husband into an early grave for he had had one leg in that undesirable freehold since his forties; but it is more than probable that the other leg followed its partner with a feeling of coming into haven not after stormy seas but rather after a protracted and uneventful voyage in a stuffy flea-infested cabin.

Her husband having escaped from the prison of her affectionate dominance she was able to devote her attention to the only other inmate and this she did, dedicating her life, as her thought often ran, to his service. It seemed to her an ideal dedication with none of the upsets and disappointments she had experienced with her husband who had at first striven to keep his head above the flood of devotion and domination to such good effect that she frequently bore the marks of his frantic struggles; that the marks were spiritual and not physical made them none the more easy to endure.

But with the babe fresh from her own womb there was no old Adam (or so she supposed) to strive with and outroot. Here was virgin clay for the potter; smooth unsullied wax for the engraver.

She was, however, to find that even in Cyril there was a bit of the old Adam, an iron core from which life struck sparks; but they were never very hot or brilliant sparks and she soon snuffed them out. She loved and cherished and bossed her son and he allowed himself to repose upon this maternal fondness as upon a feather bed until by the time he was fourteen his emotional life had so little existence outside his mother that it would be but a slight hyperbole to say that she had re-absorbed him into her womb.

They lived in a small but rather austere-looking house where everything was nice, nice furniture, nice carpets, nice pictures and nice knick-knacks. Very early in life Cyril learned to treat these nice adjuncts with an almost sacred respect. He would no more have thought of climbing on to one of the chairs or of coming into a room with his feet unwiped than he would have mentioned the functions of his body except by the euphemisms which were, with his prayers, the earliest things he learned at his mother's knee.

No insanitary dog or unhygienic cat threatened horrid maculation of Cyril's home nor was there ever a violation of that sanctuary by such upsetting invaders as white mice, guinea-pigs, tortoises, parrots, canaries, rabbits, minnows, newts or even the blandly inoffensive goldfish. There was once a brief invasion. One September evening a snuffling, peering, nosing hedgehog slipped out of the bushes at the side of the garden and darted and paused its jerky way across the lawn. Cyril, alone at the time, put down to a saucer of bread-and-milk for the little beast, which was gobbling it down with unseemly noise, when Mrs. Wenson came round the corner of the house wearing her gardening gloves and carrying a pair of shears. The hedgehog scuttled off at her loud and angry exclamation and she talked to Cyril so long and earnestly and movingly about the poor little children who would have gone down on their knees and thanked God for that bread and milk that he cried bitterly and ever after hated hedgehogs as robbers of orphans. So deeply touched had he been that for several evenings he lay in wait for the hedgehog with the poker but without any luck. His mother fortunately was unaware of that piece of wickedness, which she would have ascribed to the old Adam; if it were it was one of the last sparks which Cyril produced.

Cyril was barely in his teens before he began to be aware of that load of depression which was to be his companion through life. At first it was not entirely an unpleasing^ possession; it made him different from other boys; it marked him out as not of their kind; of this he was glad, for he had no great opinion of his fellows and was uncomfortable in their presence. He had no original thoughts or feelings about them; along the pathways of his mind and through the channels of his senses intruded his mother's guiding, controlling hand. He did not so early in his career call himself a hypochondriac for he was unaware of the word, although his scholastic attainments were well ahead of those of his class-mates. He did not think of finding a namp for it at all; it was just a condition peculiar to himself and while distressing was not without its compensations. His schoolfellows certainly did not know the word but the lack did not worry them; they made do with simpler words and called him a long streak of misery.

His mother was ambitious for him and for a long while played hopefully with the idea of one of *the* three professions—the law, the Church and medicine. The difficulty was the expense and

that, even if he won scholarships, was insurmountable because of the decision she had come to at his birth to save out of her annuity a hundred a year so that if only she survived until his twenty-first birthday he would have that patrimony of which his father had robbed him first by dying untimely and second by tying up his money in an annuity. To this decision she adhered even though it meant the abandoning of her ambitions for Cyril. It was, for her peace of mind and happiness, just as well she did so, for Cyril displayed few signs of ambition himself. He certainly won a scholarship, when he was eleven, to St. Edmund's Grammar School; but his spur had been merely a desire to get away from the school-fellows with whom he had spent the past five years of his life. He was beginning actively to dislike them and he was prepared to make an effort to replace their silly vacant mocking familiar faces by entirely new ones. He knew no change could possibly be for the worse since all boys were unlikeable and strangers would not possess the weapons hurtful by long familiarity with the many chinks in his armour. He made the effort, obtained his scholarship and remained at St. Edmund's Grammar School, where as a scholar he was satisfactory if undistinguished, until he was eighteen, when his mother obtained for him a post in the local branch of Kennedy's Bank. The day before he began his duties there she had a long interview with the Manager at which Cyril was not present.

It was about this time that he began in his thoughts to make use of the word hypochondria to describe his condition; but several years were to pass before he translated his thoughts into words and referred to himself, not without a touch of gloomy satisfaction, as a hypochondriac and a congenital one. Long before this, during in fact his first year at Kennedy's Bank, he had suddenly in a fit of more than usual depression, paused as it were in his drift through life to regard himself, his days and his environment as objectively as was possible to his temperament. And the result of that searching scrutiny was not a condemnation of himself but of life which, in a somewhat incoherent mental summing-up, he declared was not worth living. Existence as he knew it and experienced it was intolerable. The inevitable conclusion from such reasoning was but a short mental step and he there and then took, it: the only way out of the unendurable cage of life was suicide. He faced that conclusion, welcomed it and took a strange comfort

in it. Thereafter he was a being doubly apart from his fellows: he was a hypochondriac and he proposed to commit suicide. He was for a while almost happy in a contemplation of his gloomy condition and the way of escape from it. All that now remained was to fix a time to remove himself from a world where he was quite plainly an unwelcome misfit. It was at this point in his self-communing that he realised with a shock that all was not to be plain sailing. It was borne in upon him that suicide was not an isolated action; even with a man utterly alone in the world it was not that but was more like (and here his mind groped for an image and accepted the first one handy) more like a stone tossed into a pond and sending out a series of ripples which broke out of sight and with unpredictable results. But when a man had ties, ties of affection and even more of duty, the act became impossible. His suicide would strike more than one terrible blow at his mother; it would deal a mortal blow at her love and a scarcely less dreadful wound to her pride and her social self-respect. No! he felt he could not so brutally jump headlong out of his troubles and leave her to face the music. And so he put aside the alluring plan of immediate self-annihilation and for his mother's sake determined to support the insupportable until her death should release him from his obligation. He took comfort from the fact that he would not have long to bear the burden, for his mother was sixty and her health failing. Five years at the outside should bring him manumission; well, he could wait that; had he not already waited nearly twenty years? For in his mind his past life now seemed nothing more than a waiting for death. He began to look upon himself as one enduring the slow martyrdom of life for his mother's sake.

When he reached the age of twenty-one his mother did not make over to him his 'patrimony' which had accumulated to the cosy *sum* of two thousand five hundred pounds. Instead she determined to save for him even more of her annuity and to this end cut down expenses as far as was consistent with appearances and endeavoured to keep both of them upon his small salary.

When he was twenty-six his mother became seriously ill and from the doctor's grave view of the case Cyril gathered that his martyrdom was drawing to an end. Calmly he made his plans; he would see his mother buried: make arrangements for the disposal of his effects and then relinquish a life which had never been to him more than a sorry gift. For the last three months of

her life Mrs. Wenson was bedridden and helpless; and her son, but little less helpless in the face of such an upheaval, appealed to the doctor,*who suggested a resident nurse. Cyril grasped eagerly at the suggestion and a capable young woman of seven or eight and twenty, named Dora Fane, installed herself in the house and took over the reins which she handled with a grave masterful efficiency which the young man found very comforting. She was a great expense and was a considerable problem, for she demanded a maid to do the housework and Cyril, while his mother lived, had only his monthly salary of eleven pounds. Even had he wished he could not ask his mother for money as she was rarely sufficiently conscious.

The crutch upon which he had leant since birth being broken he naturally and inevitably looked for another. He had "not far to look. More and more he began to lean upon Dora Fane, and that very efficient young woman showed herself by no means averse from accepting the position.

The last crisis of his mother's illness left her weak, very near to death, but in full possession of her faculties. During the morning of the day she died she had a long talk with her son and told him that she was happy to be able to leave him nearly four thousand pounds invested in gilt-edged securities which would ensure him an income of one hundred and sixty pounds a year. This, with his salary at the bank, would enable him to live in comfort. She warned him never to be tempted by rascals to sell out his investments and then, before bidding him a last good-bye, added rather mysteriously that she hoped to safeguard his future in other ways besides the purely financial. She told him then to send the nurse up to her as she had something important to say to her. Dora Fane came at once and did not leave the sick-room until late that evening when Mrs. Wenson died in her sleep.

And now the belated hour of his release having come Cyril found he was unable to take advantage of it. He was uncertain what his feelings were towards Dora Fane; they were assuredly comfortable ones; they mildly excited him and decidedly rendered the sense of loss less poignant. He liked her, liked her very much. Love? Well, he knew nothing about that as far as he was concerned but it seemed quite plain that Dora Fane loved him and was prepared to take his mother's place. It was a question of life or death. Which was he to choose? Death with its release

from this intolerable world or life which meant marriage? But he refused to consider it so simply as that. No, ran his thought, it is not that at all; if I had only myself to consider I should not hesitate a second but unhappily another human being has become involved in the problem, a very capable and affectionate human being; have I not a duty now to her? Can I possibly be so brutal ... so went his thoughts and their current flowed to its inescapable conclusion.

A year after his mother's death he and Dora Fane were married and for a brief while life assumed a faintly rosier shade. It was, however, but a brief opening in the clouds and before another year had passed the old gloom and depression again encompassed him. He felt himself caught in a trap, the trap of life, from which he had by his marriage shut off the only way of escape, for suicide was once more out of the question. His wife loved him; his death, and such a death, would be a shattering, an overwhelming blow; he could not inflict it upon her. And so once more he took up his cross, hugging his martyrdom, his sole pleasure his hypochondria, about which as the years passed he grew more and more vocal. And in his worst hours he still squeezed a drop of comfort from the thought that in the last resort there always remained suicide.

He came to lean upon his wife as he had leant upon his mother. She absorbed him into her masterful self so that her controlling hand was apparent in all his actions, directed his thoughts, guided his feelings. He became little more than a projection of herself which she released for a brief while and then drew back into herself.

As the years went on his hypochondria fed upon itself and grew fat until it was all of him; and once more he faced the fact that life was utterly intolerable and he must end it. He had now been married nearly fifteen years. Fifteen years of martyrdom added to all those which had gone before. He could bear it no longer. But he forced himself to endure it for his wife's sake. His death, and so shameful a death, he felt, would be a blow from which she would not recover. By her love she nailed him to the cross of life as his mother had done before her.

But now life began to afflict him grievously. His health began to fail. He had severe monetary losses, for he had sold out his

securities and started to dabble in speculation; not of his own will, for he had none. His work suffered and he was several times, reprimanded and finally warned that it might be necessary for him to retire upon a small breakdown pension.

And so at last he reached the end of his tether. He had borne more than a man should be asked to bear. He must escape from life whatever the consequences to his wife. He had suffered this long and torturing martyrdom for love's and duty's sakes. He could suffer it no more.

And so once again he made his plans. Between three o'clock and five every Sunday afternoon his wife went up to their bedroom to sleep. It was then he would do it. The day he had chosen came. He went upstairs to see she was comfortable; told her to have a nice nap; bent over her and kissed her forehead and tiptoeed out of the room. He waited half-an-hour and then going into the kitchen closed the windows and doors, placed a cushion in the gas oven, turned on the taps and lay down. He suddenly remembered he had forgotten to lock the kitchen door or to leave a warning message; but now he could not bother; already he was sinking under the nauseating influence of the gas.

He felt his consciousness slowly leaving him and closed his eyes. He heard, as if from a vast distance, a noise and tried to open his eyelids but found he could only partially raise them. But it was sufficient for him to see the door slowly open. He saw his wife's face staring down at him. He lay there through an interminable stretch of time awaiting her outcry. He could neither move nor call out. Through the darkness now fast gathering about him he watched her mouth move in a strange slow smile. He saw her head gently withdraw and the door close as the final dark shut down over him.

